Incorporating Research Based Strategies to Empower Educational Staff in Supporting Students with EBD

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Abstract

Creation of biases and stereotypes has led to individual and institutional discrimination of students who are emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD). The lack of supports and under utilized research based techniques by educational staff has major implications on the success of students with EBD in various settings. Providing appropriate interventions to students with EBD will assist in building student's self-esteem and increase capacity. Moreover, school staff can directly impact the student's value-expression function providing a perception of acceptance in the school social culture increasing positive student engagement (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2000, Nieto & Boyd, 2008). The purpose of this article is to provide the history of EBD and educational laws, discuss importance of collaboration and role of the Multi-Disciplinary Team, and discuss three recommendations to improve the outcomes of students identified as EBD.

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Students with disabilities have the legal right and privilege to be educated without discrimination in the public school system (P.L. 94-142, 1975). In essence, all students are entitled to free appropriate public education, despite the nature or extent of the students' disability (IDEIA, 2004). However, Coleman and Weber (2002) reported that many students with special needs may not be treated equally. Moreover, McConaughy and Ritter (2002) asserted that students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are one of the most underserved student populations. Additionally, Osher and Hanley (2001) cited that students with EBD continually receive inadequate services and Sugai (2000) indicated that between 1-5% of students with EBD account for more than 50% of behavioral incidents within the school setting.

Currently, there is an extensive amount of research, strategies, interventions, and assessment protocols specifically designed for students identified as EBD (McConaughy & Ritter, 2002). Despite the amount

of time, energy, money, resources, and research conducted on enhancing the educational and social outcomes of students with EBD many schools and school districts across the nation continue to face difficulties assessing, managing, maintaining, and educating this student population (Cook, Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2007; Osher & Hanley; 2001).

Based on an extensive review of the literature it is questionable how many of these strategies are being used to educate students with EBD. Additionally there appears to be a dearth of literature related to students with EBD from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Obiakor, 2007).

The purpose of this article is to provide:

(a) a truncated history of EBD and educational policies

(b) an overview of the role of the Multi Disciplinary Team

(c) culturally and linguistically (CLD) appropriate assessment protocols. In addition, three recommendations are provided to support and improve the educational and social outcomes of students identified as EBD.

Historical Perspective

Historically individuals with disabilities were the most oppressed and abused population because of their illness (Burton & Kaplan, 1965). From a historical perspective, Coleman and Webber (2002) reported three distinct stages for individuals with disabilities:

- Segregation Phase (Early middle ages to 1600's)
- Transition Phase (1700's to 1800's)
- Service Phase (1900's to present)

Our generation - Service Phase - has an opportunity to gain a better understanding of individuals with disabilities. For example, prior to 1975, many landmark court cases such as the Mills (1972) and PARC (1972) decisions lead to federal mandates including The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142, 1975). P.L. 94-142 designated rights for students with disabilities to receive FAPE. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education (2007) reported that The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and The Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) specifically stated general and special education (SPED) teachers must meet the definition of "Highly-Qualified" in order to provide services to students receiving SPED services.

Although P.L. 94-142 has been reauthorized and there has been a vast amount of research conducted to enhance the educational outcomes of students identified as EBD, professional educators continue to face various issues working with this student population (Coleman & Webber, 2002). Specific issues included (a) ambiguous terminology and arbitrary classification systems, (b) inadequate federal definition, (c) limited consensus about evaluation protocols, and (d) unequal participation of Multi Disciplinary Team members in the decision-making process (Coleman & Webber). Subsequently each issue continues to hinder the academic and social success of students with EBD.

Supportive Educational Team for Students of EBD

Aside from the numerous complications while assessing and educating students identified as EBD, Multi Disciplinary Teams continue to encounter problems when identifying students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Although the intentions of IDEIA was to represent "all students" Osher, Woodruff, and Sims (2001) indicated students from CLD backgrounds--with behavioral issues--are more likely to be treated unequally and are prone to be served in more restrictive classroom settings and separated from their general education peers when compared to peers from the majority culture.

There are also concerns regarding the vague and questionable definition of EBD (Webber & Plotts, 2008). The definition states:

Emotional Disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors

(b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers

(c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances

(d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression

(e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (34 C.F.R. Sec. 300. 7 (c)(4)).

In conjunction with the definition, students identified as EBD tend to be more challenging to work with due to their impeding and aggressive behaviors (Weber & Plotts, 2008; Reitz & Dekovic, 2005). To address these concerns many professionals within the field of SPED continually seek research-based practices (Shavelson, Phillips, Towne, & Feuer, 2003; Smith, 2003) in order to provide individualized and beneficial services for students identified as EBD (Webber & Plotts). Additionally students with EBD typically receive services that focus on their individual educational, social, and emotional challenges (Wagner & Friend, 2006).

Collaboration is an important attribute of any agency that attempts to foster knowledge and equity for their unique student population (Meadows, 1996; Webber & Plotts, 2008). Decker (2001) reported that participation in partnerships and collaborative ventures should ensure that the student will achieve educational success and be provided appropriate services he or she requires. Further, service providers can empower students and their families with the knowledge they will need to attain a better quality of life (Decker, 2001).

Each person on the Multi Disciplinary Team contributes valuable information and guidance by developing and implementing the educational and social-emotional goals and objectives that will be included in the student's Individualized Education Plan (Giangreco & Edelman, 1996; Giangreco & Edelman, 1999; Meadows, 1996). It is through these "extra efforts" by the individuals who provide

supports to students with EBD, that positive, appropriate, and valuable services are provided to this student population (Decker, 2001).

Collaboration can be challenging and time consuming. Decker (2001) emphasized the importance of setting the tone among professionals who need to collaborate. Rainforth and England (1997) provided the following strategies for positive and effective collaboration to take place:

- Parity must be established among team members.
- Team members should strive for common goals.
- Contribution and responsibility should be equal.

These strategies should aid in the enhancement of services that are provided to students identified as EBD.

General and special education teachers play an active and vital role in each student's educational career (Crowley & Wall, 2007; Idol, 2006). Educators have the tremendous responsibility of modeling appropriate behaviors when working to achieve a specific goal (Tierno, 1996). Most importantly educators need to assist students with EBD understand the significance of how their behavior impacts his or her non disabled peers (Pierce & Schreibman, 1995).

Educational staff should be familiar with and utilize the following principals to provide students with EBD appropriate and beneficial supports:

- Be knowledgeable about low-incidence and high-incidence disabilities (Fitzpatrick and Knowlton, 2007; IDEIA, 2004; NCLB, 2002).
- Be knowledgeable about social-emotional, speech and language, and physical development of students (French, 2003; Webber & Plotts, 2008).
- Be knowledgeable about and incorporate culturally sensitive and appropriate classroom and behavior management strategies (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton; Webber & Plotts).
- Be knowledgeable about school district policies and federal laws governing special education (i.e. NCLB, IDEIA, etc.) (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton; Webber & Plotts).
- Be knowledgeable about school district standards and benchmarks; for aligning the special education curriculum with the general education curriculum (French).
- Be knowledgeable about and implement technology in the classroom (Cartledge, Kea, & Ida, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2005; French; Webber & Plotts).

It should be noted that each principal--noted above--coincides with IDEIA (2004) and NCLB (2002) definition of "highly qualified" teacher (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton; U. S. Department of Education, 2007).

Current Educational Trends for Students with EBD

Students identified as EBD may often exhibit impeding externalizing behaviors such as bullying, defiance, outbursts, hidden acts of destruction, and difficulties in communicating (Webber and Plotts, 2008). These behavioral concerns increase the risk of isolation and rejection by peers, faculty, and staff and decrease the students' self-esteem (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2000; Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2007; Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). Additionally these behavioral patterns often lead to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and loss of privileges (MacIntyre & Tong, 1998; Pincus, 2000). Ultimately schools that

are less prepared to address the unique educational and social needs of students with EBD are more inclined to practice exclusion than inclusion (Achilles, Croninger, & McLaughlin, 2007; Fitzpatrick & Knowlton).

Suspension and expulsion are widely used to exclude students who present problem behaviors in school setting (Achilles, Croninger, & McLaughlin, 2007). According to Bakken and Kortering (1999) students who are disengaged in the school setting face academic failure, social rejection, and increase the probability of dropping out. Students with EBD are more likely to be placed outside of inclusive classroom settings and experience the highest disciplinary rates of any disability (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002; Achilles et al.). Table 1 delineates findings by The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (2002) regarding the adolescent suspension rates of three special education classification areas.

Table 1: Adolescent Suspension Rates

Disability	*Percentage of Suspension*
Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	44%
Learning Disabled	17%
Other Health Impaired	21%

Highly Qualified Teachers

According to Rebell and Hunter (2004) there have been numerous state court cases claiming school districts hire mediocre teachers and provide inadequate training. Additionally Webber and Plotts (2008) asserted that teacher burnout and turnover rates increase the number of inadequately trained educators providing inappropriate services to students who require specialized instruction. Osher and Hanley (2001) reported the following concerns for students with EBD "Generally [these students] receive inadequate services and achieve poor educational and community outcomes, which school and community factors play a key role in producing" (¶ 1). Despite the positive assertions of NCLB (2002) it appears that highly qualified teacher standards are not adequate to provide appropriate educational or support services to students with EBD.

NCLB (2002) defined highly qualified teachers as having at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution, full state certification, and competence in the subject areas (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Fitzpatrick & Knowlton 2007). Competence is determined by state assessment of core academic subject knowledge (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton). However, Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, and Soodak (2006) noted specific conditions that permit special education teachers to:

- Implement positive behavior support.
- Consult with highly qualified teachers in core academic subjects.
- Select appropriate instructional accommodations and curriculum.
- Teach study skills and re-enforce instruction to students from a highly qualified general education teacher.

Positive Teacher Traits

Students will often more actively engage in their learning by attendance, participation in activities, and demonstration of appropriate behavior. "Effective communication is the basis of developing an environment of mutual respect between students and teachers" (Brown, 2005, p. 1). McIntyre and Battle (1998) listed personal and professional traits that are important for teachers of students with EBD. Aside from the ability to remain calm during a crisis these traits included:

- Fairness
- Sensitivity
- Empathy
- Persistence
- Humor
- Enthusiasm

McIntyre and Battle stated that "personality traits and respectful treatment of students emphasizing intimacy, acceptance, interpersonal connection, empathy cooperation and a sense of community can have implications for identification and programming for EBD students" (p. 5). Additionally teachers can increase students' willingness to learn by developing trusting relationships with their students (Brown, 2005; Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2007; Protheroe, 2005).

An Agenda for Improving the Student Outcomes of Students with EBD

The following recommendations are centered on creating and fostering positive learning environments by providing methods and techniques for educators to enhance support for students with EBD. Application of these should improve student educational, emotional, and social outcomes through (a) improved teacher training with specific strategies and techniques; (b) open communication techniques utilizing responsive therapy, motivational interviewing, and active listening skills; and (c) promoting the use of critical thinking skills.

Recommendation 1: Supplementing High Qualified Teacher Standards Focusing in Special Education: The President's Commission (2002) reported that only 41% of public school teachers felt prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities while only 21% felt very well equipped.

Presently, most universities with teacher education programs only require one-to-two courses in special education (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2007). Typically, these courses provide an overview of disabilities and their characteristics. We advocate more detailed instruction on special education techniques through an additional 2-3 credit hour course in addition to a separate 2-3 hour course to review of IDEIA (2004). These courses would increase the knowledge base of disability characteristics, strategies, interventions, and understanding of SPED law enabling teachers to be better prepared for students with exceptionalities in all classroom environments. (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton).

Recommendation 2: Developing Trusting Relationships with Students, Families, and Staff Using Open Communication Skills: Educational services to students are ultimately carried out through human relationships; the need to strengthen research-based knowledge and discussions related to this issue should be a priority (Brown, 2005; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). According to Protheroe (2005)

knowing that a respected adult cares about the student's interests and concerns may provide such students with the emotional support needed to focus on learning.

Development of open communication creates improvement in value-expression function, self-esteem, and empowerment of the student with EBD in the educational setting (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2007, Nieto & Boyd, 2008). Below are summaries of open communication strategies. Model 1 is responsive therapy. Model 2 is motivational interviewing. Model 3 is active listening.

Model 1: Responsive Therapy: According to Gerber and Basham (1999) responsive therapy utilizes the following three phases:

- **Phase 1:** Analysis or clarification phase in which student and teacher cooperatively construct awareness of issue.
- **Phase 2:** Decision phase where student and teacher consider intervention strategies and decide on course of action.
- **Phase 3:** Application phase in which student and teacher implement learning-based intervention.

Responsive therapy works on developing a trust-based working relationship between the student and teacher, thus, enhancing the student's self-awareness of issues and improves problem solving skills (Gerber & Basham).

Responsive therapy uses select microskills including: (a) broad, indirect leads, followed by (b) invitations for further responses, (c) mirroring techniques such as paraphrasing, (d) reflection of feeling, and (e) description of situation to assist in developing trust between student and teacher while aiding the student in self-evaluation of the situation or their behaviors (Gerber & Basham, 1999). Invitations for disclosure should include such comments as: "Tell me more" and "Give me examples" (Gerber & Basham). This is the process of empathic listening to gain understanding of the student.

Mirroring techniques provide the student with feedback on teacher's understanding of their viewpoint which allows opportunities for clarification or additional input (Gerber & Basham, 1999). Mirroring techniques provide an opportunity for the student and teacher to compare perceptual awareness of the issue and appropriate intervention (Gerber & Basham). This intervention contract outlines the expected responsibilities of both the teacher and the student which holds both parties accountable (Nieto & Boyd, 2008).

Model 2: Motivational Interviewing is a multistage sequential model of counseling (Gerber & Basham, 1999; Muscat, 2005). A student goes through six phases of change (a) precontemplation, (b) contemplation, (c) determination, (d) action, (e) maintenance, and (f) often relapses with repetition of the process occurring several times (Corrigan, McCracken, & Holmes, 2001; Gerber & Basham; Muscat).

Motivational interviewing takes the approach that the issue (e.g. violent behavior, off task behavior, etc.) is the self-defeating behavior (Gerber & Basham, 1999). The student can be made socially aware his or her self-defeating behaviors are a barrier to obtaining their desired goal and the subsequent change is due to the discrepancy that they noted with assistance by the teacher (Clark, Walters, Gingerich & Meltzer, 2006; Corrigan, McCracken, & Holmes, 2001; Gerber & Basham). Below are the five phases to motivational interviewing:

- Empathy expressed by the teacher through reflective/active listening.

- Discrepancy developed through discussions with teacher on present behavior and its impact on desired goal.
- Avoidance of arguments with confrontation focusing on behavior and not student character. Avoid use of confrontation-denial and "yes/but" dynamics.
- The teacher "rolls" with resistance. New perspectives are invited by not imposed with continued self-responsibility for selection of solution to reach goal is reinforced.
- Teacher supports self-efficacy by expressing confidence in student's ability to cope specific challenge (Gerber & Basham).

Using both models of open communication should develop trusting and respectful relationships between students and teachers. The accountability or responsibility for positive change is centered on the student with active encouragement and support from teachers (Clark et al. 2006; Corrigan, McCracken, & Holmes, 2001; Gerber & Basham, 1999; Muscat, 2005).

Model 3: Active listening is one of the most frequently used elements in counseling-based approaches to support students in telling their story and to identify issues by "first providing an instructional context in which the child feels comfortable and trust(ed)" (Hutchby, 2005, p. 307). Hutchby provided practical techniques for individuals engaged in active listening including empathic listening, reflecting, and summarizing of accounts. Truly listening to students is critical to help foster positive student/teacher relationships (Brown, 2005). According to Kelly (2007) there are seven steps to active listening:

- Look at the person, and suspend other things you are doing.
- Listen not merely to the words, but the feeling content.
- Be sincerely interested in what the other person is talking about.
- Restate what the person said.
- Ask clarification questions once in a while.
- Be aware of your own feelings and strong opinions.
- If you have to state your views, share them only after you have listened.

Additional steps included verbal and non-verbal signals. Using "I'm listening" cues including disclosures, validating statements, statements of support, and reflection/mirroring statements (Brown, 2005; Kelly, 2007; Thompson, Grandgenett, Grandgenett, 1999). Positive feedback of non-verbal cues included good eye contact, facial expressions, body language, silence, and touching (Brown; Kelly). This presents a caring attitude to the student during communication giving the student a "voice" in the classroom. In addition to establishing a respectful relationship through open communication, it is important to teach students with EBD the skills of problem solving.

Recommendation 3: Promoting Critical Thinking Skills in Pedagogy: Critical thinking skills are crucial in providing students the necessary tools to identify issues and problem solve solutions (Acker, 2003; Nieto & Boyd, 2008). "Educational research suggests that the most effective teaching occurs not when students simply acquire useful knowledge but when they enhance their ability to evaluate information critically and are better able to apply what they have learned creatively" (Trigwell, 2001 as cited by Acker, 2003, p. 218).

Critical thinking is considered disciplined thinking that requires use of self-regulation and is practiced by accepting or rejecting arguments based on purposeful, reasoned judgment, not assumptions or feelings (Boghossian, 2006). Effective teachers make their lessons meaningful by establishing relevance to life experiences (Acker, 2003, Boghossian, 2006). The best teachers regard their students

as active participants in the learning process and expect them to accept that role (Acker; Halx & Reybold, 2005). The American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report (1990) detailed six core elements of critical thinking:

- **Interpretation:** Comprehend and express meaning or significance.
- **Analysis:** Identify the intended and actual inferential relationships.
- **Evaluation:** Assess logical strength.
- **Inference:** Draw reasonable conclusions.
- **Explanation:** State the results and justify one's reasoning.
- **Self-regulation:** Monitor one's cognitive activities.

It is a teacher's role to cultivate and sharpen critical thinking skills of students (Halx & Reybold) "The best way for school leaders to raise student achievement is by placing more emphasis on teaching for meaning" (Wenglinsky, 2004, p.35). Development of critical thinking skills provides students with EBD with tools necessary to problem solve situations which increases their ability to create better solutions and outcomes.

Utilization of responsive therapy, motivational interviewing, active listening models, and critical thinking skills helps students with EBD develop trusting, open communication between student, teacher, peers and parents. By applying each of these techniques students with EBD can improve self-esteem that encourages active participation in their education and enhances their decision processes. Application of each strategy has shown to improve appropriate behavioral and social skills of students with EBD.

Summary & Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to provide readers with the definition and history of emotional behavioral disorder. In addition, an overview of educational policies and laws was provided to demonstrate the support structures available for students with EBD. A discussion of current educational issues and trends was provided to emphasize the importance of application of more appropriate researched based strategies to assist this student population. Description of the importance of Highly Qualified Teachers utilizing Positive Teacher Traits to develop positive learning environment for students classified as EBD. Finally, the authors provided three recommendations emphasizing additional training, development of positive, trusting relationships using open communication skills and engagement in more critical thinking skills to ensure students with EBD are supported in positive educational environments. Promoting collaboration between student, teachers and parents supports students classified as EBD in developing skills to improve academic and social outcomes.

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