



# The Message from the Pioneers in EBD: Learning from the Past and Preparing for the Future

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*A Feature Article Published in*

*TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*

*Volume 5, Issue 4, March 2009*

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## Abstract

The Minnesota Conference for Teachers of Children with Emotional and Behavior Disorders (EBD) hosted a panel discussion in the fall of 2005 to reunite pioneers in the field of research and publication who shaped the early instructional practices of educators working with disturbed and disturbing youth in schools. The distinguished researchers and practitioners reflected upon the development of policies and practices in addressing the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Each panelist discussed the continuing need to identify and implement effective strategies and protective safeguards for these children. An emphasis was expressed for the work to be continued forward in aligning theory, research, and practice; sage advice for practitioners working with all children and youth with disabilities.

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## Keywords

emotional and behavioral disorders, EBD

## SUGGESTED CITATION:

Albrecht, S. F. (2009). The message from the pioneers in EBD: Learning from the past and preparing for the future. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 5(4) Article 4. Retrieved [date] from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/teplus/vol5/iss4/art4>

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The passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (EAHCA, 1975), now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandated a free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities in America's schools. Long before that federal mandate, however, theorists, researchers, and practitioners sought effective ways to define, identify, and treat individuals presenting cognitive and behavioral disorders. Descriptive and prescriptive models developed through years of research and application shape the current educational programs of students with disabilities. The education community is beholden to the pioneers in special education who developed the research-based intervention methodologies which influence today's practices and demand continued vigilance to evaluate practices against outcomes.

The quest to understand, define, and identify characteristics and effective treatments for children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) pervades the historical literature describing research and practices (Kauffman and Landrum, 2006; Zionts, 1996). Cruel treatments associated with the need to release demons from the disturbed individual gave way at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to moral treatment associated with kind and humane rehabilitative methods. Medical studies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of "insanity" and "madness" began to define mental illness and its reciprocal association with "idiocy," or mental retardation, although treatment in institutions— and, finally, in public schools by the end of the century— tended to warehouse or eject disturbed and disturbing

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children. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a proliferation of study of children in the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, and education resulting in advocacy, research publications, training programs for educators, intervention programs based on conceptual models of understanding and treatment and, ultimately, federal legislation requiring access to meaningful education programs for all students with disabilities.

The influential work of contemporary researchers and educators in the field of EBD as highlighted in Table 1 was featured in two panel discussions, the first one in 1988 describing intervention programs developed from their research and the second gathering in 2005 reflecting on progress made and efforts still needed. The 2005 panelists addressed questions that challenge teachers and parents of children with disabilities and emphasized the continued need for practitioners to study, review, validate, and implement effective research-based practices, a common need across all disability categories.

The distinguished panel gathered in 2005 at the inaugural Minnesota Conference for Teachers of Children with Emotional and Behavior Disorders had been dubbed the "pioneers" in the field of EBD in recognition of the ground-breaking work they have done and continue to move forward in their careers as researchers and educators. For many of them, their chairs at this table had been reserved for the past 17 years when they were seated as members of the original panel convened in 1988, the culminating event of the International Symposium sponsored by the Minnesota Educators of Emotionally/

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Behaviorally Disordered and the Minnesota Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (Braaten, Wood, & Wrobel, 1989), to discuss their research and recommendations for addressing the needs of children with EBD. At that time, moderator Frank Wood led the panel of Eli Bower, Nicholas Long, William Morse, William Rhodes, Frank Wilderson, and Mary Margaret Wood through an examination of theoretical and applied studies in identifying and treating children with EBD. This time, conference chairman and panel moderator Sheldon Braaten welcomed Frank Wood, Judith Grosenick, and Eleanor Guetzloe to the table with Rhodes, Wilderson, and Wood, extended well-wishes to Long in his overseas travel, and eulogized Bower. The voices of Morse and John Johnson were brought to Minnesota from their homes and family obligations through telecommunication.

The video recordings of the original conference and the 2005 panel (L'Herault, 2006) reveal the professional camaraderie the panelists shared in describing their experiences in meeting the obligation to make treatment decisions founded in evidence-based practices. While the panelists represented differing theoretical points of view, they all expressed disparaging comments about the plight of children with EBD and a common passion for accepting the educational and political challenges presented in implementing preventive and proactive efforts for assuring access to educational opportunities for students with EBD.

The 2005 panelists had been asked to compare their work in the 1960s and 1970s against the current status of educational programming for students with EBD. Their discussion was no different from the one in 1988, as evidenced by the life-long commitment these pioneers have made to advance the

cause of children with EBD. Several are actively involved in research. Some are putting the knowledge of promising practices to work with troubled youth in troubled communities. Some are approaching retirement as a process while another has crossed that threshold as a destiny. The panelists projected their energy for the lessons learned from past experience; they acknowledged the satisfaction derived from their efforts as well as the tolls paid from their frustrations. Asking “what is to be done?” for children experiencing social, emotional, and behavioral challenges was a continuing question; it persisted through their comments as summarized below.

This time, however, the panelists made clear to the audience that the responsibility for action— for putting theory into practice— is shared between the pioneers and today’s practitioners. Answers to questions regarding definitions of effective teachers, effective curricula, and successful students still remain for those of us working with children with disabilities to find. In our work in schools and communities we must build stronger bridges between research and application. The way has been prepared for us by our distinguished colleagues.

*William Morse*

Morse observed that the field of EBD has not changed much over the years. Acknowledging the current predominance of behavioral theory, Morse noted that we are all conditioned by where we live and what we see. From his vantage point in Florida, Morse witnesses some wonderful teachers. But he laments the plight of children in the inner cities, predicting that if they are not alienated when they come into these environments, they will be when they leave. He feels sad for those kids for whom “we have sold their birthrights” in big cities where they are faced

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with drab classroom experiences by similarly characterized teachers.

Looking ahead, Morse opened the challenge for research to study what is going on *at* the classroom door and *inside* that door. He cynically noted the newly appointed presidential commission charged with improving mental health, concluding that if this commission is like others before, nothing short of divine intervention will yield productive results. We must acknowledge the crisis state of mental health intervention for children today. Attention must be given to schools. This is where children are; this is where intervention should take place.

Morse offered the political and practical question that framed the panelists' comments: What will we do?

#### John Johnson

Johnson described his ongoing work in the District of Columbia to address the "urban grief" that he, like Morse, has observed in inner city youth. For the past twenty years, Johnson has championed the City Lights project (a comprehensive support program for adolescents with EBD, addressing their academic, vocational, emotional, social, and therapeutic needs), which provides services to Black youth to counter the neglect, pain, and anger he has observed so many to have experienced. Johnson noted that the staff members dedicated to working with these youth were trained not necessarily from traditional sources but more likely through their experiences within the project.

Johnson expressed distress over the drain of resources into costs stemming from legal challenges brought under the IDEA, ref-

erencing the recent case before the Supreme Court addressing the question of responsible party when parents want the school to defend the appropriateness of a child's IEP. The cost of litigation usurps resources that could be much better spent on programs to ease the hurt and pain of today's inner city youth.

What will we do? While successes are punctuated with funerals and incarcerations, Johnson sees the opportunity for hope and healing in projects such as City Lights.

#### Mary Margaret Wood

The only woman on the original panel, Wood reflected on her tenacity then and now to acknowledge the contributions of women in what was here-to-fore a male-dominated field. While men were discussing theory, assessment, and treatment models, she noted that women were questioning what teachers and therapists should be doing for children with EBD. These questions persist today.

Wood examined the application of theory to practice by considering the definition of effectiveness. According to the current No Child Left Behind statute, effective teachers are defined by the academic achievement levels of their students. Wood contrasted this absolute standard defined by prescribed levels of expected performance against the mandate of the IDEA which determines the effective student to be one who makes progress toward his individualized goals.

Wood defined effectiveness as related to placement and curriculum. One may question whether a teacher is any better prepared to work with students with EBD in a self-contained or inclusive general education set-

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ting. Wood observed the overcorrection resulting from the Regular Education Initiative to take children from more to less restrictive placements. More recently, the current three-tiered model of levels of intervention recognizes that one size does not fit all when considering placement and curriculum. While accepting the validity of a continuum of options, the question of defining a teacher's effectiveness remains, particularly when addressing the significant needs of the few students identified at the tertiary level of intervention. Teachers must be trained in clinical practices *and* educational practices to address the needs of students.

What will we do? Wood suggested that we are out of sync with ourselves as we try to define what we are doing without definitions of what we want. We do not know what makes an effective teacher, and we cannot take time out from teaching to find out.

#### William Rhodes

Rhodes began his reflections with humorous deference to Wood in accepting responsibility for his part in the early male-dominated profession of EBD. He continued in his remarks to personalize the challenges families face when trying to counter the hurtful and harmful experiences their children have internalized. He described the ongoing efforts of his own family members against the resistance of his great-grandson to all kinds of therapies including counseling and pharmacological treatment. Rhodes noted with some encouragement that slow progress was being made, thanks to the efforts of dedicated teachers in his current school. Rhodes' anguish was echoed in his resignation that even with 50 years in the field, he could not help this troubled youngster.

What will we do? Rhodes noted that research continues to examine the characteris-

tics of effective teachers and effective treatment for children with EBD.

#### Judith Grosenick

Grosenick recalled being the "newest kid on the block" when the panel met in 1988 and expressed her sense of awe at being seated at the table with those who have shaped the field of EBD. She described her life since retirement five years ago as one of peace and serenity, and her comments to the group delineated the contrast between that quietude now and her years of work with children with behavior disorders.

Grosenick called to mind descriptors of students with EBD who were regarded as unlikable, unwanted, and untreatable and who exhibited increasing rates of violence, suicide, and (for girls) eating disorders. Treatment strategies shifted from individual to ecological intervention, leaving teachers with primary responsibilities for curricula and paperwork with a lack of resources and increasing isolation in the teaching profession.

What will we do? Grosenick referenced a line in a movie depicting operatic legend Maria Callas as saying, "I once had a voice; I enjoyed that voice. But I don't have a voice anymore." Grosenick's voice at this table is a reminder that a career devoted to behavior disorders is a demanding one, and it requires sanctuary and attention to personal peace. There must be new voices to take the place of ones fallen silent.

#### Frank Wilderson:

Wilderson highlighted the shift from the therapeutic approach of Life Space Intervention to a behavioral approach and the need for retaining the former. To change behavior from maladaptive to adaptive requires a change of locus of control. LSI provides the most advantageous position to recognize

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when a child is vulnerable and out of control and has the best chance of conducting the child back to control which is what the child really wants. A strategy readily accessible to teachers, LSI helps children understand behaviors and their antecedents and their own ability to alter the route between the two. What is lost in the characteristic generalization of a behavioral model is the opportunity to help children understand their feelings, identify where they come from, and learn how to change those feelings to *prevent* rather than merely to treat the behavior.

What will we do? Wilderson calls for levels of intervention beyond the classroom. LSI can help parents understand how to intervene when their children are in crisis, and programs of support such as Big Brothers Big Sisters provide a ready model of the application of LSI into community-based intervention.

Eleanor Guetzloe:

Guetzloe disclosed her early frustration in attempting to deal with problems for which she could not find answers: first, suicide and depression and then violence and aggression. Focusing on resilience and protective factors and getting students involved in community projects hallmarked a notably positive approach. However, Guetzloe lamented that the profession really has not come that far. Students with EBD are still in trouble; mainstream teachers do not want them in class and the students are not happy there. These same problems plague educators over and over again.

What will we do? Guetzloe suggested that a continuum of placements for students with EBD is necessary. Instruction provided

by culturally competent teachers, teachers who understand their own culture as well as those of others, is critical. Practitioners must insist on knowledge of the work of their predecessors while continuing to find the most effective strategies and sharing them with contemporary colleagues.

Frank Wood:

Wood addressed two issues, one of political reflection and one of aligning practice with research. Wood observed that the original IDEA may not have passed today as federal support is quite limited. We are a wealthy society, yet fear we will not have enough. National generosity is called upon for various disasters, but not for our own who lack resources.

Wood reported the disconnection between research and practice, noting that teachers resist implementing empirically validated practices while researchers fail to take classroom teachers' resistance into consideration.

What will we do? We have a professional obligation to try new things and to test interventions with the goal of improved professional practice. In judging the effectiveness of teachers, we need to consider teachers' application of research-based practice.

From the moderator:

1.) Do you think mental health and education will ever find common ground and actually work together, and will it be worth the effort?

Morse: Fritz Reidl took the lead in this when he observed actual living situations within the mental health context. Perhaps the government will say that we have to do some-

**We have to do something to bring mental health to where it is needed, and that is where kids are – in schools. Maybe then there will be some change.**

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thing to bring mental health to where it is needed, and that is where kids are – in schools. Maybe then there will be some change.

M. M. Wood: Teacher certification places emphasis on academic content versus the role of the teacher as a therapeutic educator. Advocacy at the state licensure level must recognize this need for educator learning and clinical insights into therapeutic practices.

Wilderson: Teachers must have a background in the basic science of the practice. In addition, teachers need access to a person in a fall-back position with immediate supervision and consultation available to them so they do not lose confidence and fail to intervene.

Johnson: Mental health treatment with a reliance on medication treatment may be an area where teachers need to intervene. Teachers need to look at data about how kids are growing up and managing their circumstances. Teachers need resources of data and consultation to preserve their own mental health. We must be wary of the mental health initiative and deal with circumstances such as racism, indulgence, and affluence rather than focus only on a DSM diagnosis.

From the moderator:

2.) Thinking of success stories, what can you share with us to close this evening?

M. M. Wood: I can tell you about a student. The staff entered into dialogue with this student about a topic of his interest. In the course of that conversation, stories drifted into ones about his own life, at which point the student said, “I knew you liked me, listened to me, and were behind me.” Now that student is self-motivated and self-directed.

Johnson: Success is sitting right here at the table. Models were developed [by our colleagues here] although they were not al-

ways popular at first. Look at who has given us the ideas. This is the success that will have to be replicated in the future.

The video recording of the 1988 and 2005 panel discussions is available from the Behavioral Institute for Children and Adolescents at [www.behavioralinstitute.org](http://www.behavioralinstitute.org) (L’Herault, 2006).

*In Memoriam*

William C. Morse

October 23, 1915 - January 25, 2008

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**Table 1: Contributions of the Pioneers in the research and treatment of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD)**

Publication dates cited	Pioneer (Panel year)	Contribution
1959 - 1961	Eli Michael “Mike” Bower (1988)	Identified a stage continuum of behavioral examples, from disturbing to disturbed, from normal problems to fixed and recurring symptoms of emotional difficulties, from general school placement to residential setting (Bower, 1959).
		Authored the original federal definition continued today of emotional and behavioral disorders which was intended to be inclusion of emotional, behavior, and social problems regardless of label such as autism, schizophrenia, socially maladjusted, and conduct disorder (Bower, 1960).
		Identified the importance of taking preventative action and identifying students early rather than waiting for them to fail, dropout, commit a delinquent act, or develop more serious illness (Bower, 1961).
1958, 1964-1965	William C. Morse (1988, 2005)	Articulated the need for a continuum of placement options; a broad range of academic, vocational, and social activities; and well-trained and supported teachers (Morse, 1958).
		Studied conceptual models in programs across the country that guided teaching practices for children with EBD with the conclusion that the various models were characterized by a lack of specificity and consistency (Morse, Cutler, & Fink, 1964).
		Importance of having a skilled teacher available to support a student in crisis using <i>Life Space Intervention</i> (Morse, 1965).
1969	John L. Johnson (2005)	Distinguished the educational needs of African American and other children from ethnic minority groups, particularly those from inner city and economically impoverished environments (Johnson, 1969).
		Reported that some African American students were misidentified with EBD, leading to attention to disproportional representation of ethnic minority youth in special education (Johnson, 1969).

1965, 1991	Nicholas J. Long (1988)	<p>Outlined a process for the teacher to serve as a mediator among stressful event, the student’s behavior, reactions of others, and the student’s feelings (Long, Morse, &amp; Newman, 1965)</p>
		<p>Co-authored <i>Life Space Intervention</i> with M. M. Wood, an instructional method to teach students to solve a crisis by understanding the behavioral reactions and feelings of those involved, including themselves (Wood &amp; Long, 1991).</p>
1965, 1972-1975	William C. Rhodes (1988, 2005)	<p>Worked with Hobbs and others on Project Re-ED which were schools emphasizing an ecological approach to teaching, learning, skill-building, and addressing social system variables (Hobbs, 1965).</p>
		<p>Directed the Conceptual Models Project which led to <i>A Study of Child Variance</i> consisting of four volumes: theories, interventions, service delivery systems, and predictions of future conceptual models and interventions regarding programming for children with EBD (Rhodes, 1975; Rhodes &amp; Head, 1974; Rhodes &amp; Tracy, 1972a, 1972b).</p>
1970, 1979	Frank H. Wood (2005)	<p>Directed the Advanced Training Institute for Trainers of Teachers for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children and Youth in the early 1970s at the University of Minnesota which: continued the discussion begun by the Conceptual Models Project; generated major publications on theories, services, and training to address problem behaviors of children and youth in schools; and supported doctoral students and postdoctoral opportunities (Kauffman &amp; Landrum, 2006).</p>
		<p>Identified six elements that should be addressed in the definition of EBD, including the contribution of the environment to disturbance, the operational differentiation of disturbers from non-disturbers, and the utility of the definition for benefit to those labeled (F. H. Wood, 1979a).</p>
		<p>Emphasized the need for developing social competence by learning social skills, including those related to academic achievement in school (F. H. Wood, 1979b).</p>

1979, 1983 - 1989	Judith K. Grosenick (2005)	Directed a federally funded national needs analysis and leadership training through the University of Missouri (Grosenick & Huntze, 1979).
		Documented the unmet needs of children with EBD, articulated questions regarding educational programs and appropriate curriculum needed, including mainstreaming support, and noted complications presented by a definition of EBD that excludes a group of students when no justification for separating social maladjustment and emotional disturbance is available (Grosenick, 1989; Grosenick, M. George & N. George, 1987; Grosenick & Huntze, 1983).
1989	Frank Wilderson (1988, 2005)	Emphasized the role of the clinical professor in pre-service teacher training programs and the critical need for the university to provide opportunities for teacher candidates in observation and intervention (Braaten, Wood, & Wrobel, 1989).
1991, 1996	Mary Margaret Wood (1988, 2005)	Co-authored <i>Life Space Intervention</i> with Long, an instructional method to teach students to solve a crisis by understanding the behavioral reactions and feelings of those involved, including themselves (Wood & Long, 1991).
		Recognized that children progress through stages of skill development leading to social-emotional competence with the environment having a profound effect on an individual's development through these stages (M. M. Wood, Davis, Swindle, & Quirk, 1996).
		Emphasized the importance of learning social skills in an inclusive environment which provides appropriate peer models and practice of new skills in natural setting (M. M. M. Wood et al., 1996).
1992, 1998	Eleanor Guetzloe (2005)	Advocated for educational strategies to address aggression and violence through comprehensive school plans, behavior management strategies, curriculum modifications, and a continuum of treatment and placement options (Guetzloe, 1992).
		Identified variables contributing to aggression and violence and strategies for teaching nonviolence responses (Guetzloe & Rockwell, 1998).