

2016

# Equipping Teachers to Meet the Needs of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Christie McDuffee Elam  
*Walden University*

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Christie McDuffee Elam

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2016

Abstract

Equipping Teachers to Meet the Needs of Students with Emotional and Behavioral

Disorders

by

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MA, Walden University, 2006

BS, Crichton College, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2016

## Abstract

The increase of students with an emotional and/or behavioral disorder (EBD) and the increased time they are in the regular education classroom presents multiple challenges for untrained regular classroom teachers. At the local site it was noted that leadership needed a deeper understanding of the practices used by the teachers with EBD students. The purpose of this study was to identify educator's descriptions of effective instructional strategies when working with EBD students. Using Vygotsky's theories of defectology and zone of proximal development as the framework, the guiding questions for this study focused on training, instructional strategies, and behavior management tools that teachers deemed successful in the inclusion classroom. Data were collected using a case study exploring the design with purposeful sampling strategies for participant recruitment. Two focus groups with 14 regular Kindergarten through fifth grade classroom teachers were conducted along with personal interviews with 5 behavior specialists. Data were analyzed using open and axial coding with iterative re-categorization strategies. The findings highlighted effective teaching strategies that focused on improving the overall educational experience in the inclusive classroom by targeting improvement of academic performance, social skills, communication techniques, and behavior management strategies. This study focused on a positive social change by positioning teachers to create a successful educational environment for all students. The study's project provided a culminating professional development project that presented the various strategies discovered during the data collection and analysis process.

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## Dedication

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). First and foremost, I owe all honor and glory to the Lord for giving me what I needed to complete this doctoral endeavor. He has given me the support system, such as my wonderful family, friends, and colleagues I needed to accomplish this goal. This doctoral project study...my work...my life is dedicated to Him.

## Acknowledgments

To Dr. Finkenberg, thank you so much for “hanging” with me all of these years. You have truly been an encouragement and support by always being available for phone calls, texts, e-mails, and whatever else it took to help answer or address my questions or concerns. Dr. Lord, thank you for unending support of this last stretch. Dr. Christie, thank you for your support and professional input on this project study. I appreciate your wisdom. Thank you to my fellow colleagues, my administration, and my students for believing in me and holding me up. A special thank you to Mandy, Katie, Judy, and Elizabeth, for being peer support and reviewers of this research.

To my husband and gift from God, Tony, thank you for continuously giving me the encouragement I needed. To my daughter, Marissa, your concern for others that don't quite fit in has encouraged me to find a way to help all students. Braelynn, the story of how you became my daughter gives me hope every day that God is in control and that miracles do happen. Mom and Dad, thank you for teaching me that I can do anything I set my mind to and by being that tremendous source of encouragement. A special thanks to you, Mom, for proofreading my study. Thank you to my sisters and their families for always being there willing to help me reach this goal. I also want to acknowledge the support and love I received from my family-in-love, including my mother-in-law, who made eternity her home before I finished this goal. To my church family, I thank you for your understanding when I wasn't always able to be there as your preacher's wife and for constantly supporting my endeavor to earn this doctorate.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Due to an increase in inclusion practices, general practitioners are faced with meeting the unique challenges of students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (EBDs), as well as meeting the academic needs of all students. According to Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, and Olorunda (2009), there is a lack of teachers, both regular education and special education, who are fully equipped to meet the needs and challenges of this particular population. This case study was conducted to determine effective teaching strategies that regular classroom teachers can implement to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their emotional or behavioral struggles.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The problem analyzed in this project study focuses on regular education teachers, in an elementary school, who lack effective teaching strategies when educating students with EBDs. Educators must be given the proper tools, or teaching strategies, in order to be successful in addressing the academic needs of students with EBDs (Oliver & Reschley, 2010). According to Allday et al. (2012), students with an EBD are often included in regular education classrooms where the teachers have not been trained on the differentiated teaching strategies that are most effective to meet the unique challenges they present. Staff members and fellow colleagues at the local setting confirmed that educating this particular population brought unique challenges to the classroom in which they felt ill-equipped to handle manifestations of EBD including, but not limited to, outbursts that disrupted instruction, refusal to cooperate, and the absence of social skills

needed for cooperative learning (██████████, ██████████, ██████████, & ██████████, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

With a population of 857 pupils (Elementary Schools.org, 2013), the setting of this project study was at an elementary school located in a small town with a population of 5,822 (Zip Code Detailed Profile, 2011). At 61%, over half of the students receive free or reduced lunch, guaranteeing the school's status as a Title I school (ABC Elementary School: Students & Teachers, 2014). Among the total number of faculty and staff, there are 36 regular education teachers with two resource teachers and six special education paraprofessionals (Faculty-Staff: ABC Elementary School, 2015). Of the 36 regular education teachers, one has a special education endorsement added to his or her license (Faculty-Staff: ABC Elementary School, 2015; TN.gov, 2015). The lack of specially trained endorsed teachers, who are equipped with effective strategies for working with EBD students, creates a challenge when meeting the school's mission to provide all students with the necessary tools for a successful future (Mission: ABC Elementary School, 2014).

Cassady (2011) stated that if regular education teachers were trained to handle the unique needs of EBD students, then this population could be effectively educated in a regular education classroom with a teacher who was confident of his or her practice. According to the staff at the local setting, although the phenomenon of teaching EBD students affects all regular education classrooms, there is not a source of expertise that is available that can guide and direct these teachers (██████████, personal communication, May



22, 2015). Due to high stakes assessment, professional development that occurs is focused on math or reading strategies.

Another contributing factor at the local level is the continual state mandates that increase the time that EBD students are in the regular classroom versus being pulled out to receive math and reading instruction in a smaller special education setting (Department of Education, 2013d). One out of 36 regular education teachers in this setting is endorsed to teach special education students (Faculty-Staff: ABC Elementary School, 2015; TN.gov, 2015). The increase in the time that EBD students spend in the regular classroom leads to a greater urgency of teachers being properly trained with effective strategies that create a more positive educational experience for the EBD student and regular classroom teacher.

There are two main populations that are affected if educators are not properly trained; the first is the EBD student and the second is the regular education teacher. The extent to which the other students are affected depends on the severity of the emotional or behavioral manifestations, as well as the teacher's response to those manifestations. The first primary population affected is the student with an EBD. The manifestations of such a disorder can cause the student to experience emotional breakdowns and increased behavioral problems (Allday et al., 2012). If the student's needs are not being met in a regular inclusion classroom, then the student can become disheartened with the overall educational process and their academic needs may not be met.

The other primary population affected is the untrained regular education teacher. Meeting the needs of even just one or two EBD students in the regular classroom can

present difficulties. This teacher can become aggravated not only at the behavioral disruptions and manifestations, but also by the fact that as educators they do not have the skills to address disturbances that may impact instruction. These challenges are compounded by the fact that high stakes assessment scores take into account every student's achievement score, regardless of a disability (State Department of Education, 2013c). The parents of EBD students are also affected by the fact that educational personnel may not be trained to effectively handle the needs of their child. A negative educational experience may cause additional problems at home and with other classmates.

### **Rationale**

#### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The rationale for choosing this problem comes from a need that has been expressed by both faculty and administration alike that preservice training and subsequent professional development training sessions have not been adequate in providing effective teaching strategies to regular education teachers when meeting the needs of EBD students at the local setting. Educators at the local setting of this study are finding that with a population of 857 pupils and a pupil/teacher ratio of 17 to 1 (Elementary Schools.org, 2013), with 17% of that population needing special education services (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015) as provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The demographics of the regular education classroom are changing. The inclusion of students with EBD is in accordance with IDEA that states that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, which is

considered to be the regular education classroom (State Department of Education, 2013c). However, 35 of the 36 regular classroom teachers at the local setting lack sufficient training in order to be granted an endorsement to teach special education students (Faculty-Staff: ABC Elementary School, 2015; State Department of Education, 2015). The budget established by the State Basic Education Program (BEP) only provides funding for a single one-on-one assistant for every 60 identified students (State Department of Education, 2013e).

In addition to the lack of personnel, 2014 state achievement data from the local setting shows that students being served by IDEA scored 15% below their peers in reading and math, 27% below in science, and 21% below in social studies (Great Schools, 2014). Although other factors may have played a role in this gap, equipping regular education teachers to meet the needs of this population is imperative.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), there are approximately 1 million and a half children under the age of 18 in the state, who have been classified as having a disability. The number of students being served in local state's schools under IDEA shows an increase from a little over 104,000 in 1990 to over 124,000 in 2012 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013a). At the Special Education's Response to Intervention (RTI) Conference in March 2013, it was reported that all students with disabilities, including those with the most severe disabilities would be included in the standardized testing mandated by the state (State Department of Education, 2013d).

A regular education teacher also faces the proposed change that the standardized test scores of students with disabilities will be calculated in the teacher's individual effect

Value Added data, or the score that indicates a teacher's effectiveness on their students (State Department of Education, 2013d). The State Department of Education also stated that the regular education teacher would be responsible for 100% of a student's growth score if an assistant was present in the room, rather than a licensed special education teacher. The changes made to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education can cause frustration amongst the regular education teacher who may not be equipped to meet the challenges presented by students with an emotional or behavioral disorder (State Department of Education, 2013d). According to Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker, and Riedel (1995), the character and possible problems that will surface must be considered if students with EBDs are going to be included in the regular education classroom. Addressing behaviors that may hinder learning, as well as preparing them for state mandated standardized tests, is one such consideration that when searching for effective educational strategies should include academic modifications, social collaborative techniques, and classroom management strategies (Interviews, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, 2016).

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

The evidence from the professional literature not only verified the increase in students with EBDs and their increased time in the regular classroom, but it also verified that regular education teachers lacked training to address these challenges. According to the National Institute of Health (as cited in Merikangas et al., 2010), one out of eight children, from the ages of 8 to 15 qualified as having an EBD. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) compared the prevalence of students with an emotional disturbance and

autism from 1976 to 2008. In 1976, children from the ages of 3 to 21 with an emotional disturbance numbered 283,000 with no record of children with autism; however, in 2008 this same age group had 420,000 children identified with an emotional disturbance and 336,000 with autism (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Dikel (2012) found that approximately 18% of children and adolescents have some sort of mental health disorder. This would indicate that approximately three students in every classroom of the local setting are impacted by such a disorder.

This overall increase of children with either an emotional or behavioral disorder leads to an increase of this population in the individual regular education classroom. According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2013b), in 2011, half of students with an EBD spent over 80% of their school day in a regular education classroom, which is up 30% from 5 years ago. Dikel (2012) concurred, stating that most students with EBDs, even the severe cases, are not served by special education services, but rather in the regular education classroom. Although the number of students with EBDs has increased, it is not clear what additional faculty training has been provided or is needed, especially for those who are not certified in special education.

It has been determined through personal communication that the staff of this local setting is concerned about the lack of knowledge and training on how to handle the unique challenges of this population. This concern was supported by Allday et al. (2012) who stated that students with EBDs bring unique challenges to the classroom. Regular education teachers need more training on meeting the needs of these students (Albrecht et al., 2009; Alter, Brown, & Pyle, 2011; Goodman & Burton, 2010; McDaniel, Duchaine,

& Jolivette, 2010). Kern, Hilt-Panahon, and Sokol (2009) stated that this type of research and examination is needed and important so that teachers can determine their own pedagogical strengths and weaknesses when educating EBD students. In turn, this provided valuable information on the type of training teachers need to be successful in the inclusive classroom.

### **Definitions**

*Serious emotional disturbance:* Refers to any student whose behavior did not match that of their peers (Smith, 2010). Although the term, *serious*, was dropped from the definition, the term, EBDEBD, is still used to classify individuals whose educational success is impacted by some form of emotional or behavioral instability (Smith, 2010). Students with EBDEBDs can exhibit problematic behaviors in regard to their activity level and/or attentiveness (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013). Although many different disabilities, such as autism, are classified under the umbrella of an EBD, characteristics of the disorder can be exhibited by both externalizing behaviors, such as aggressive or defiant behaviors, or internalizing behaviors, such as depression (Smith, 2010).

*Inclusion:* Used in this study when referring to students with an EBDEBD being included in the regular education classroom. The State Department of Education (2013c) stated that inclusion is used to describe the practice that all children, regardless of disability, should be educated in the classroom they would most typically attend. This should be done to the greatest extent possible and should provide the least restrictive environment as guaranteed by IDEA, which is considered to be the regular education

classroom where students can be educated alongside their peers (State Department of Education, 2013c).

*Zone of proximal development:* Viewed as the range between the exact current level of a student's academic ability and the next level that exhibits that particular child's potential academic ability (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). As represented in this study, the zone of proximal development would need to be fostered in the regular education classroom in order for students with EBDEBDs to be successful.

*Point prevalence:* Refers to individuals who experience some form of an EBD at a specific point in their lifetime (Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012b). This could be anything from a chemical imbalance to depression caused by a tragedy. Cumulative prevalence refers to an EBD that is present over the course of an individual's lifetime (Forness et.al, 2012b).

### **Significance**

This project study is significant because determining teaching strategies for inclusive classroom teachers creates a successful educational experience for all students regardless of the presence of a disability. Students have a right to a positive school experience that nurtures their whole person regardless of their disability. This study is also significant to the regular education teacher who seeks effective strategies for all students, but lacks the proper training to handle the unique challenges of EBD students.

This research is significant to the parents who want their child to learn from trained teachers who understand the unique characteristics of their child. The educational community will find this study significant as it encourages a positive experience for all

involved in the inclusion classroom. Society will find this study significant because it will attempt to discover positive changes for a population that is growing in significant numbers. A positive and effective school experience for students with EBDEBDs can impact the entire outcome of these students' lives.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

The guiding questions for this study focused on discovering teaching strategies that have proven effective when educating students with challenging emotional and/or behavioral needs. The secondary research questions focused on specific strategies that meet particular needs of this population. The following research questions were used to guide this project study:

1. What are effective and noneffective teaching strategies to use when educating EBD students?
  - a. What are strategies that improve reading and math skills?
  - b. What are effective teaching strategies to improve social skills?
2. What communication techniques are successful to use with EBD students?
  - a. What communication is best to use when decreasing unwanted behavior?
  - b. What communication is best to use when increasing desired behavior?
  - c. What communication technique is best when fostering collaborative work between classmates?
3. What behavior management strategies minimize unwanted manifestations of an EBDEBD?
  - a. What facilitates using this strategy?



- b. What are the benefits of this strategy?
- c. What are the precautions when using this strategy?

### **Review of the Literature**

The available literature on the subject of educating students with EBDs in the regular education classroom, as well as the implications for those teachers, is diverse in focus and theme. The first section in the literature review provides information on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and how it serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Vygotsky's theories explore the cognitive (thinking) abilities of students who are different from their peers and considerations that educators need to explore when teaching these students; these theories can be used as the theoretical framework when exploring effective instructional strategies with EBD students. The second section in the literature review presents strong documentation on the increased prevalence of EBD students, the various unique needs of these students, as well as the need for professional development in order to meet those needs.

Many inferential connections were made analyzing the literature for the review. For instance, the theoretical framework is based on Vygotsky's theories relating to special education. These theories are the cornerstone of the inclusion philosophy (Cesar & Santos, 2006). In this literature review an inferential connection was made between the literature connecting Vygotsky's defectology theories (Gindis, 1999) to inclusion of EBD students specifically. Another inferential connection was made in the section on prevalence of students with EBD in the regular education classroom. Journal articles, mentioned later in the literature review, supported the fact that inclusion of this

population was growing and was a challenge, but current statistics on the exact numbers of students with EBD was found on statistical data government websites.

Research was gathered using a variety of methods. Scholarly journals were accessed using the online library at Walden University and the EBSCO and ERIC databases. Keywords such as *emotional behavioral disorders*, *inclusive education*, and *teaching strategies* were used to find articles specific to this study. Research was also gathered through government and health websites as to the data that represented the problem. Keywords such as *emotional behavioral disorders*, *prevalence of EBD*, *manifestations of EBD*, *regulations inclusion EBD*, and *teacher qualifications EBD* were also used to gather data and reach saturation of the literature and resources. Multiple books were also consulted that experts recommended on the subject. Additional sources were found using information from the reference section of sources that were used.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this project study is based on Vygotsky's theories of defectology; however, this theory is complicated in nature and only portions of this study represent the complex thoughts of Vygotsky. Defectology is described as Vygotsky's research and methods in regard to the special education population (Gindis, 1999). It is important to note that although defectology has a negative connotation in English, there is not an equivalent word for the Russian translation, and literally means a study of defect (Gindis, 1999). The term, defectology, came as a result of the differences that Vygotsky noticed in the almost 7 million children who were either physically or

emotionally impacted by the violence of World War I and Russian dynasties that devastated the Russian population (Smagorinsky, 2012).

According to Smagorinsky (2012), it is possible that Vygotsky's Jewish heritage played a role in viewing the differences in humans as a positive aspect, rather than something that they should be separated by. Although the origin of Vygotsky's ideas are not completely known (Smagorinsky, 2012), and the theories are sometimes difficult for someone to comprehend, especially when there are changes in translation (Gindis, 1999), it is clear that Vygotsky's motive for researching the cognitive abilities of students with disabilities was to improve the educational quality for such students.

According to Gindis (1999), Vygotsky's ideas are rather new in the United States, as the theories on the connection between cognitive development and practice in regard to special education students were not translated into English until 1993. Vygotsky presented a different aspect where a student's disability should be viewed as a developmental process rather than the negative characteristics of the disability (Rodina, n.d.). Vygotsky's theories are based on the ideas of absolute achievement (the completion of academic tasks successfully) and relative achievement (the span representing the academic growth) and how they impact the special education student (Vygotsky, 2011). According to Vygotsky (2011), special education students have been viewed as not being able to learn because the absolute achievement was not at the level the educator thought it should be; however, Vygotsky claimed that educators should be more concerned with the relative achievement and seek to find ways to discover and foster that achievement level.

According to Gindis (1999), there has been a significant rise in the belief of Vygotsky's theory, especially as it relates to the cognitive development of a child with special needs (which would include the EBD population). Gindis explained an educational framework shift from Piaget's theory of a students' academic level increasing as maturation increased to Vygotsky's theory which proposed that a students' cognitive level increased as they received scaffolded learning. Vygotsky (as cited in Gindis, 1999) explained this educational support as a method of meeting the students' needs and providing individualized differentiated support according to their own academic level. In order for learning to occur, an educator must know the cognitive abilities that have already matured in that child and foster those, while still providing support in order for that child to grow in mental ability (Vygotsky, 2011).

A major portion of Vygotsky's theories on defectology included fostering a student's zone of proximal development (Gindis, 1999; Shabani et al., 2010) in order to increase their zone of actual development, or what they are able to accomplish on their own (Vygotsky, 2011). The zone of proximal development is described by Vygotsky as the specific, current, academic level of a student and the level just above that level, which represents the child's potential academic performance (Shabani et al., 2010). It represents the cognitive tasks and abilities that are not mature at that specific point, but will mature in the future with the correct amount of support, which would include collaboration between special education population and general population (Vygotsky, 2011). Gindis (1999) stated that teaching in the zone of proximal development could uncover the hidden potential of students that is important for identifying a future academic plan.

Vygotsky warned educators that trying to teach a child outside of this zone, either by giving them work that was too easy or too difficult, could be lethal (CITE). Vygotsky disputed the stereotype that special education students did not have the cognitive ability to have absolute achievement, but proposed instead each individual child has their own zone of proximal development in which they can achieve academic success (CITE). This success is accomplished when what the student can do with help becomes what they can do on their own and tasks that presided in the gap between zone of proximal development moves to their zone of actual development (Shabani et al., 2010).

Collaboration between peers (Vygotsky refers to more intelligent peers) was a main component in the scaffolded learning that was required to increase a child's absolute achievement level (Vygotsky, 2011). Shabani et al. (2010) stated that students gain more academic knowledge when working with a group of peers, as ideas, skills, and social normalcies are internalized by those involved. Vygotsky stated:

It has not occurred to the mind of the most profound of scholars that what is indicative of the child's intellectual development is not only what he can do himself, but probably more so what he can do with the help of others. (p. 203)

Cesar and Santos (2006) stated that Vygotsky's view of collaboration is to be used as a method of establishing more successful inclusion classrooms. Vygotsky (as cited in Gindis, 1999) believed that the collaboration of peers could reverse a mental disability by producing a different method for social development, and in turn increase their zone of proximal development ensuring academic success.

Vygotsky's theories are being used to restructure practices for the classroom (to include the special education population) that include using the zone of proximal development and collaboration among peers in the regular education classroom (Gindis, 1999). This defectology theory is used as a catalyst for more inclusion (Cesar & Santos, 2006), which in turn places more responsibility on regular education teachers to be qualified to teach all students, including those with EBDs. Using Vygotsky's theories should ensure "inclusion based on positive differentiation" ( Gindis, 1999, p. 34) where all students are recognized for their varied current level of ability, as well as their mental, emotional, academic differences, and encouraged to nurture their potential academic ability through inclusion (Gindis, 1999).

The information given above justifies the reason for the study. I am seeking clarification on the strategies that regular education teachers need in order to educate students within their zone of proximal development, despite the challenges of an EBDs. Vygotsky's theory especially applies to these students. However, if teachers are not adequately trained on how to determine the zone of proximal development and teach to that zone where children can accomplish tasks on their own, as well as in a collaborative setting, then the child will not receive the education that is due them. Gindis (1999) stated that Vygotsky understood the cognitive processes of special education students and that educators today must recognize the characteristics of disabilities and find ways to counterbalance the challenges that come with those disabilities in order to successfully educate them.

The selected theoretical framework confirmed the need for more research on the training, including the specific skills and teaching strategies, that educators need in order to effectively educate EBD students. I sought to determine the teaching strategies regular education teachers need in order to ensure that EBD students are in their zone of proximal development, as well as having their zone of actual development fostered by collaboration with peers within the inclusive classroom.

### **Current Literature**

The current literature provided a sufficient basis for this study and justified the need for a study to be conducted on the strategies teachers need to educate students with an emotional/behavioral disorder. The increased prevalence of students with such disorders amplifies the unique challenges that these students present to the regular education teacher. It also signifies a need for teacher training when educating these students; however, the literature does not provide specifics on strategies and skills that need to be implemented.

**Prevalence of EBD (EBDs).** The literature provided a glance into the aspects of students with EBDs here in the United States, as well as cross-culturally. Chakraborti-Ghosh, Mofield, and Orellana (2010) compared and contrasted the aspects of EBDs across the globe and found a great variance in the definition and perceptions to this group of students. The general consensus was that these students were educated, for the most part in a segregated setting, except in the United States where Public Law 94-142 provided more educational opportunities (CITE). Many underdeveloped countries have not even recognized EBDs as a malady worthy of focused concentration, but rather these

students are lumped together with other special education students (Chakraborti-Ghosh et al., 2010).

Statistics at the national and state level provided a glimpse of the numbers of students with EBDs that is equally important when analyzing the literature for current trends. Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) and the U.S. Department of Education (2011) confirmed an increase in the number of this population on a national level. Data from the U.S. Department of Education was especially staggering, stating that the number of students with an emotional disturbance numbered 283,000 in 1976–1977; however, children and adolescents on the autism spectrum was not even a subcategory. In 2008–2009, this same population increased to 420,000 children/adolescents with EBDs and 336,000 children/adolescents with autism that were being served in a federally supported program (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This 32-year time span has shown an increase of 473,000 additional children and adolescents that must have their unique needs met in the educational system. Forness et al. (2012b) noted that a large percentage of EBD students are underidentified; therefore, many statistical data references are inaccurate indicating lower percentages than those that are actually present.

These statistics are confirmed by sources such as the National Institute of Health which stated that 13.1% of children, ages 8 to 15, had an emotional disorder without impairment, and 11.3% of this same age group had a disorder with severe impairment (Merikangas et al., 2010). Merikangas, Nakamura, and Kessler (2009) determined that over the past year, one-fourth of children or adolescents face a mental disorder. One-third



will experience a mental disorder over their lifetime (Merikangas et al., 2009). Forness, Kim, and Walker (2012a) presented the analysis of prevalence which identified 25% of the students in regular education classes have some form of EBD. The majority of these students do not receive special education services, such as participation in a pull-out program or attending a specific class for EBD students, which means that these students are being educated entirely in the regular education classroom (Forness et al., 2012a).

The Digest of Education Statistics (2013b) affirmed that in 2011–2012, 50% of students with autism spent 80% of their day in the regular education classroom, whereas 55% of students with emotional disturbances spent 80% of their day in the regular education classroom. This statistic is confirmed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) that stated that almost 60% of students with disabilities spend 80% of their educational day in a regular education classroom.

Forness et al. (2012b) examined a variety of studies determining point and cumulative prevalence using the following definition of an EBD: “oppositional defiant or conduct disorders; attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); depression, mood, or anxiety disorders; and schizophrenic and psychotic disorders” (p. 4). The point prevalence, or the number of students that have EBD at specific intervals, was 12% in studies conducted after 1990; cumulative prevalence, or the percentage of students, under the age of 16, who have had some form of EBD over the course of their childhood, was at 38% (Forness et al., 2012b). Although Forness et al. noted that sex and race do not play a factor in the prevalence of an emotional disorder, a significant covariate was that of socioeconomic neighborhoods, where 21% (lower income), 18% to 21% (middle income)

and 11% (high income) of children were identified with EBD compared to 12% of the overall total population. The cause of this discrepancy is unknown, but could be related to the availability of support for the various socioeconomic groups, as well as the support that is available or unavailable to each economic subcategory (CITE).

**Manifestations and needs of EBD students.** The manifestations and needs of students with EBDs vary as much as the students themselves. For an educator, it is vitally important that these manifestations and needs are determined and then addressed. The United Kingdom recently passed a government law stating that all teachers must be taught to identify and address the needs of all students, including special education students (Goodman & Burton, 2010). The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2014) stated that recognizing and comprehending the manifestations and needs of students is a vital part of providing a suitable education for all students. According to Smith (2010), defining EBDs can be challenging and the definitions can be subjective. The diagnosis requires the student to display the actions of an EBD for an extended period of time and at a particular severity level.

Some of the challenges that students with emotional and behavioral disorders face include that of academic, social, and behavioral struggles (McDaniel et al., 2010). Most educators have had students who have exhibited the manifestations of someone with an emotional disorder such as verbal outbursts, defiance, negative exchanges with other students, or physically harmful behaviors (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012). Farley et al. stated that these manifestations can even be exhibited in students who do not truly have a disorder, but are experiencing a temporary emotional crisis, which is referred

to as point prevalence, whereby the conditions of an EBD is only experienced at one particular point in a student's life.

The main goal of educating any student is ensuring their academic success. According to Kern et al. (2009), students with EBD demonstrate the lowest levels of academic achievement over any other disability group. Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson, and Oliver (2011) conducted research under the assumption that students with EBDs were generally placed in self-contained classrooms where the student to teacher ratio was lower, a paraprofessional was present, and the physical structure of the classroom was minimized. Maggin et al. compared the academic progress of EBD students who were placed in such a self-contained classroom compared to those that were in a general education setting; the demographics of the student participants were varied as well where 96% of the students in the self-contained classroom had been identified as needing special education services, whereas only 29% of the students in the regular education classroom were special education students. Although the hypotheses of this study claimed that students with EBD would excel academically in a self-contained classroom, the research results showed that students in the regular education classroom scored higher (Maggin et al., 2011). The limitations of this study included the fact that the population was not equally studied. The study was not comparing students with EBDs in a self-contained classroom to the same population in the regular education classroom. The research results proved that students with EBDs do not necessarily excel academically when pulled out of the general education classroom (Maggin et al., 2011).

According to McDaniel et al. (2010), students with EBD struggle with reading achievement, which can later cause destructive in- and out-of-school consequences. It is imperative that teachers assist students in correcting this negative aspect of a child's education. McDaniel et al. researched the impact and effectiveness of a reading strategy called the corrective reading method where the participants of this study admitted that this strategy was effective in promoting academic achievement in reading; however, educators still dealt with negative behaviors that are often associated with emotional and behavioral disorders.

The reading difficulty that often accompanies EBD also impacts students' ability to effectively and accurately perform math functions. According to Alter et al. (2011), one consistent challenge that an educator has is to meet the academic needs of students with EBDs, especially when it comes to solving math word problems; in addition, these students are often faced with the most serious life consequences more than any other disability. Alter et al. tested the impact on math achievement that a problem-based conceptual approach would have over the traditional algorithm approach, and the results were overwhelmingly positive that students with EBDs respond better to teaching strategies that focus on solving the problem rather than focusing on the end product and getting the correct answer.

Additional manifestations and needs of students with EBD include that of a social or behavioral nature. Forness et al. (2012b) noted that EBD always has some form of behavioral manifestation associated with the disorder. For this reason, even though EBD students are placed in a variety of classroom types, it is imperative that regular education

instructors establish behavioral expectations for these students (Kern et al., 2009).

Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013) conducted a study in Lithuania on the behavioral and social manifestations of EBD, and classified the disorder as being a “heterogeneous group of disorders,” (p. 62) where official diagnosis was not made until two of these classic manifestations were exhibited. These manifestations can lead to serious consequences for the student and those around them. Smith (2010) stated that of disabled adolescents living in correctional facilities, 45% of them have an emotional disorder and 42% have a behavioral disorder.

Behavioral disorders represent those actions where activeness and/or attentiveness are present and are usually accompanied with an increased level of running, movement, hollering out, short attention span, and lack of focus (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013). This part of the disorder is often identified first because it impacts those around them due to the nature of the manifestations (Smith, 2010). Beare and Torgerson (2009) stated that aggression, including acts of violence, has increased in severity and frequency against both school personnel and fellow students. According to Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013), in order for a student to be classified as having a behavior disorder, the actions must continue longer than six months and could include the following manifestations: “anger, irritability, petulance, rudeness, impoliteness, rejection of authority, low tolerance of frustration, attacks of anger, lack of responsibility, lack of sympathy, show no shame, and lack of insight” (p. 63). These actions are performed consistently and repeatedly and can be evident as young as preschool (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013). These externalizing

behaviors, as described by Smith (2010) can take the form of aggression that has the possibility of the adolescent being referred to the juvenile justice system.

The Division of Mental Health Services connected to the state's Department of Education (2013a) stated that mental health issues can impact all aspects of a student and can cause serious problems that lead to a plethora of academic and social issues. An emotional disturbance is partially defined by a child's "inability to learn which cannot be explained by limited school experience, cultural differences, or intellectual, sensory, or health factors" (State Department of Education, 2013b, p. 1). These internalizing behaviors, as labeled by Smith (2010), are usually accompanied with their inability or failure to socialize with their peers or others in an appropriate manner. Students with emotional disorders will show the disorder in ways such as: "Worry about one's own behavior and education, avoidance of regular activities, constant sadness, irritability, sensibility, loss of previous interests as well as tiredness and stress" (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013, p. 63). According to Smith, emotional disorders can be difficult to identify because depression in children looks different than it does in adults and cause the child to feel a variety of emotions that will impact their learning; in addition, eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia, and the intense obsession with weight and beauty can also indicate an emotional disorder.

The manifestations of EBDs described above can cause social needs for students that struggle with EBD. The State Department of Education (2013b) stated that the definition of an emotional disorder includes an individual's incapacity to socialize with their peers or others around them, as well as unacceptable forms of behavior when no

reasonable cause is present. Rose and Espelage (2012) studied the social factors associated with students who have an EBD and the prevalence of bullying or other negative social responses. Rose and Espelage stated that educators must recognize and manage the specific characteristics that are associated with each individual's disability such as the association that EBD has with bullying, fighting, and/or victimization; however, it was noted that aggression displayed by these students could be attributed to a confusion of socially acceptable forms of communication. Smith (2010) stated that socially maladjusted children can also exhibit these same problems, but they are not labeled as students with special needs and therefore the responsibility of meeting their needs lies even greater on the teacher.

**Lack of teacher training.** There is a shortage of both regular education and special education teachers who are trained and qualified to work with students that exhibit the challenging behaviors of an EBDs (Albrecht et al., 2009). Special education teachers must have adequate teacher preparation and classroom management skills in order to meet the unique needs of these students (Oliver & Reschley, 2010), which would lead to the assumption that regular education teachers, in an inclusion classroom, also need this similar training. According to Oliver and Reschley, the excessive behavioral problems exhibited by students with EBD calls for educators to be proficient in handling the difficult behaviors, eliminate the academic complications of the disorder, and uphold inclusion efforts. Forness et al. (2012b) stated that a lack of support for educators allows them to be "woefully underprepared" (p. 12) to meet the challenges of those students who

have been identified as having an EBD, as well as those who have not been identified, but exhibit similar manifestations of the disorders.

Gage, Lewis, and Adamson (2010) examined the literature presented in the *Behavioral Disorders* journal over the past 35 years as it relates to EBD. Gage et al. found that the journal topics have been a reflection of what is occurring in the educational system and topics with the greatest frequency including topics like underprepared teachers, shortage of personnel, improving teaching, high expectations, aligning curriculum, staff development and school technology. In the 1990s, a large number of articles were focused on mainstreaming and inclusion; since that time, the number of articles on teachers conducting a functional behavioral analysis has grown in frequency (Gage et al., 2010). The numbers of articles addressing the training of teachers has declined since 1995; but, Gage et al. stated that this did not accurately represent the continued need for teachers to be trained through ongoing professional development sessions in order to improve an educator's skills on meeting the needs of all students.

Multiple researchers stated that in order to address the problem of teachers' need for training to handle the challenges of EBD students, information needs to be gleaned from those educators. Albrecht et al. (2009) stated that efforts need to be made to discover the challenges that teachers face and then properly train them to handle such challenges. The academic knowledge that EBD students need to gain is another area where teachers need to express their opinion so that changes might be made to pre-service and teacher training (Manning, Bullock, & Gable, 2009). This is due in part to the lack of inconsistent standards and requirements that are expected from the EBD



population, while teacher accountability for such requirements remains consistent (Manning et al., 2009).

Additional information needs to be gathered on the attitude that teachers have towards their students with EBD. Educators must be trained to examine their own feelings about EBD students and change any attitudes that might tend to blame the child for their behaviors (Kern et al., 2009). According to Kern et al., once educators determine their attitudes about this population, they can begin to discover and develop teaching strategies that will meet the needs of EBD students. Usually, the complexity of the child's disorder and the type of disability can affect an educator's eagerness and confidence in educating that child (Cassady, 2011).

Regan (2009) stated that educators need to improve the way they think about students with EBD. Vygotsky (as cited in Gindis, 1999) stated that educators need to view the disabilities of special education students as strengths, or "positive differentiation" (p. 34) rather than a compilation of all the negative attributes of a disability. It was also noted that just because classroom management techniques were delivered in preservice programs, it is not until the teacher is able to experience the challenges of a diversified classroom that attitudes, strategies and methods will be formed and implemented (Regan, 2009). Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013) noted that a lack of the educator's professional demeanor creates a communication problem with EBD students and can cause difficulty as the student begins to cope with their behavioral difficulties; in addition, the educator's attitude about these students could be destructive, including the attitude that they do not belong in the regular education classroom. Alisauskas and

Simkiene revealed 28% of educator's statements dealt with the fact that these students needed another type of service, while 27% of educator's statements admitted the strain of consistently and constantly recognizing effort/lack of academic/behavioral effort for these students, which showed that teachers lack motivation and skill to properly educate EBD students and create a productive environment for them.

The lack of uniform state standards and teacher evaluations has caused a great variation in teacher education programs when it comes to preparing teachers for teaching students with EBD (Manning et al., 2009). Abernathy and Taylor (2009) stated that the missing component in teacher education programs is the lack of communication skills where teachers can talk to EBD students about their disability and their needs allowing students to become informed of their disability, take ownership of their education, and become their own self-advocates as they get older. Abernathy and Taylor determined that teachers of students with behavioral and emotional disorders did not have the willingness or the skill to talk to their students about their disability and how it impacts their education. Preservice teacher education programs focus on the basic steps of identifying a student to be referred for special education services, but little focus is spent on how to assist these students in the regular education classroom (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). Allday et al. (2012) stated that EBD students, or those that may be at risk, are incorporated into the regular education classroom, and typically those teachers are not trained on the characteristics or interventions that are associated with emotional or behavioral disorders. and are overwhelmed by the challenges brought about by this challenging group of students.

Another problem in the training of educators is the lack of support at the governmental level to gather necessary data, as well as establish appropriate accountability from teachers with EBD students. Merikangas et al. (2009) stated that the U.S. government needs to collect data on the “magnitude, course, and treatment” (p. 12) of specific mental health disorders that impact children and adolescents in order to establish policy that is beneficial for this population. Researchers have also presented the dilemma of many American regular education teachers struggling since the inception of high-stakes assessments, where they are held to a higher level of accountability with test scores, yet students that are struggling with EBD are expected to meet the same expectations as the other students in the regular education classroom (Chakraborti-Ghosh et al., 2010). Chakraborti-Ghosh et al. stated, “If students with EBD are placed in inclusive settings, it is imperative that this is done responsibly with appropriate supports that include culturally competent professionals” (p. 167). The teachers in the United States are not alone in this predicament. The United Kingdom’s approach to this lack of training was to implement the policy, Every Child Matters, which mandated teachers to meet the need of every student; however, the participants in this study indicated that although the law was implemented, they still had problems gaining the support they needed to meet the needs of EBD students (Goodman & Burton, 2010).

Stormont, Reinke, and Herman (2011) also recognized the need for more training for teachers educating students with EBD, which was evidenced in their research of special educators when it was discovered that out of 10 evidence-based interventions that have been proven effective with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the

participants were only aware of one of the 10. Stormont et al. (2011) stated that even if teachers are not the implementers of the interventions, they still need to be aware of these strategies that have been proven effective with these students. Stormont et al. revealed the need for more research on the preparedness and knowledge of regular education teachers in regard to educating the EBD student.

Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson, and Oliver (2009) stated that even paraeducators, who have taken on a supportive role in educating EBD students, should have specific roles, receive training, obtain an evaluation, and collaborate with the regular education instructor. Receiving this training requires both the regular educator and paraeducator to become familiar with terminology associated with these disorders. Many times, the information that would be beneficial to educators is presented in academic journals that are filled with language that would not be easy for the teacher to understand and implement (Farley et al., 2012) and would require additional training to comprehend the information. Allday et al. (2012) stated that their research proved that professional development and training can be an effective strategy in training regular education teachers. With the increased prevalence of EBD students, comes the realization that families and regular education teachers are left without answers and assistance in order to give this ever-growing needy population the support they need and deserve (Forness et al., 2012b).

### **Implications**

The implications of this study could be beneficial on a wide-scale and used in several different ways. The research will contribute to an understanding of the local

problem by determining the challenges, as well as effective and ineffective teaching strategies when working with EBD students. Guidance from professionals determined specific teaching strategies that are successful when educating this population. This knowledge alone will bring about an awareness of the problem in order to seek out methods to train regular education teachers on strategies and methods that will be beneficial in the inclusion classroom.

The participants were able to clarify specific challenges that were presented and insight as to the training that needs to occur in order to provide assistance with these challenges. Participants also provided more insight as to effective and non-effective teaching strategies when working with the EBD population. As the research developed, the focus group discussion provided a better understanding of specific challenges and the need for effective teaching strategies that could be used in order to address these challenges. The interviews with the behavioral specialists also provided valuable information on training that needed to occur to support regular education teachers. All of the qualitative data collected can be used to determine professional development training sessions that will target specific training for educating students with EBD in an inclusive setting. Preservice education programs can also use this information to guide their education curriculum. Regular education teachers entering the educational community will benefit from this study by being prepared with the specific skill set required to educate students with an EBD.

## Summary

Regular education teachers need to be equipped with effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of the growing EBD population. The challenges of these students being included in regular education classrooms are not only a problem in the local setting of this research, but also on a more global level. Data from governmental sources, as well as research presented in literature, confirmed that the increased prevalence of students with EBD is indeed a reality. The literature further confirmed that the level of training for regular education teachers to handle these unique needs is lacking, and the task of educating this special population can be very frustrating. The following methodology section of this study is an explanation of the specifics of the study as I sought to find support that is needed by regular education teachers in order to effectively educate all students. This common phenomenon was explored in an attempt to make education, in an inclusive setting, provide and enable success for all students. The third section is the culminating project that was derived from this study. The final section will include reflections of the research process.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The data collected for this study provided rich narrative description on issues, concerns, and teaching strategies that were both effective and noneffective when educating students that exhibit manifestations of an EBD. A qualitative study was conducted gathering data through multiple interviews, including a focus group interview and individual interviews. Merriam (2009) stated that if an educator wanted to improve the practice of teaching, collecting data through a qualitative design was the most appropriate design to use. The major goal of this project study was to improve the quality of teaching by equipping regular educators with support that make educating EBD students effective for student and teacher alike. The study was built on the theoretical framework of ideas presented in Vygotsky's theories of zone of proximal and actual development. Data were collected, analyzed, and presented in the format of a qualitative study in order to provide strategies that would equip teachers to meet the needs of EBD students. These strategies are presented in the form of a professional development session (Appendix A).

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The qualitative research design used in this project was the case study method. Although a case study can have a varied definition, it is used to describe the intense study of a bounded system with the boundaries to be defined by the researcher (Glesne, 2011). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) stated that sometimes case studies are used to study individuals or groups of people; however, it is the most common methodology used to

study a phenomenon. The problem presented in this study was the lack of effective teaching strategies that regular education classroom teachers have to teach EBD students. This previous statement was considered to be the case study proposition derived from personal and professional experience; such a proposition helps to establish the boundary that classifies the bounded system of the case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because the case study method explores a phenomenon in a bounded system using rich description (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), this qualitative research method was the most effective to study teacher training and effective strategies for students with EBDs.

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), the case study should be the methodology implemented when several factors are present. The first is the presence of a phenomenon that needs further exploration, and the second reason for using a case study is when the research takes place in “its natural context bounded by space and time” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 15). The collection of research data took place in the school environment that was bounded by specific classes and school year, as well as the proposition listed above. A case study is also rich in detail and description because data are collected in various formats (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Typically, a case study is examined through various sources of data that provide an extensive and “longitudinal examination” of the phenomenon (Glesne, 2011, p. 22). The data were collected for this project study using a longitudinal examination by interviewing a group of regular education teachers, as well as five Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA). The questions were similar in nature and all based upon the guided research questions. The



study benefited from two different professional groups answering the questions based on their professional skill set.

Selecting from the various types of case studies, this particular research exemplified the intrinsic case, where the research topic was of interest (Creswell, 2012) and the research study results will be used to improve teaching professional practice (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The fact that the effectiveness of the classroom setting impacts a number of educational stakeholders, addressing the needs of untrained regular education inclusion teachers is a research topic of interest to many groups of people. This particular project study was initiated because of a personal interest in the problem, as well as the personal communications from local educators that expressed frustration and the desire to be better equipped to meet the needs of EBD students.

The case study was chosen based on the study's unique characteristic that human experiences are studied in regard to a shared phenomenon. The case study is unique in that it focuses on either a specified time or group of people (Lodico et al., 2010); in this instance, it was the regular education teachers and EBD students that were paired within a certain school year at the study site. The case study was also chosen because, according to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), case studies are more "exploratory than confirmatory" (p. 16), and using a case study allowed various aspects of educating the EBD student to emerge as the data collection developed (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In the focus group interview, participants chose to enter into the data collection additional aspects related to this phenomenon. This area of concern was able to be used in generating discussion with the behavior analysts who provided specific strategies that

could be used to address those challenges that were represented in the focus group interview. Using the case study allowed for such a diversion due to its characteristic of permitting exploratory data collection measures.

The case study was chosen over other qualitative research methods for several reasons. The grounded theory qualitative method was not chosen due to the fact that the research was not seeking a theory to be proven or disproven (Lodico et al., 2010). The ethnographic method focuses on the study of a particular culture or group of peoples, which eliminated it as my choice for the qualitative method for this study (Merriam, 2009). A narrative qualitative method was not chosen because the intent of the research was not to study the lives of multiple peoples (Creswell, 2009). With these considerations in mind, the case study was chosen as the most appropriate qualitative method for this research study.

### **Participants**

The method of sampling for this project study was the purposeful sampling technique of network or snowball sampling. The sampling intentionally invited individuals to participate in order to comprehend a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Lodico et al. (2010) defined snowball sampling as gathering a group of participants who share a common characteristic or experience, who then in turn invite others with the same common characteristic to join in the study. The sampling group then becomes larger and larger as more participants are identified as meeting the criteria for the study (Merriam, 2009). After receiving Walden University Institutional Review

Board approval (2015.12.28 11:24:29 -06'00'), steps to secure participants for the study ensued.

### **Focus Group Interview Participants**

The study's data collection process began with the participant recruitment by presenting a letter (and addendum) of cooperation to the local board of education, as well as to the local administration requesting permission to conduct research (Appendices B and C). Once permission was obtained from both parties, a time to present to the entire staff was discussed and agreed upon with the local administrator. During a teacher inservice meeting, the purpose of the study and specifics of the focus group interview were presented. Questions were addressed and each regular education teacher was given a copy of the approved informed consent (Appendix D). A follow-up e-mail soliciting questions about the study was sent, as well as a clarification e-mail addressing concerns represented in response to the request for participation (Appendix E).

Fourteen participants elected to participate in the focus group interview. Two pieces of identifying information were requested on the informed consent form. The participants' years of experience varied, as evident in Table 1. However, the participants all had the common factor of not having a special education endorsement on their teaching license.

The criteria for the purposeful sampling included regular classroom teachers who taught Grades pre-K through 5. Due to the fact that inclusion was the practice at the local setting, it was assumed that the regular education teachers have students in their classroom that fall under the specifics of the IDEA; therefore, purposeful sampling was

chosen in order to identify regular education teachers who were struggling with effectively educating students with an EBD. The participants were voluntary and represented a greater population of educators present in the local setting.

Table 1

*Participant Experience and Special Education Endorsement Status*

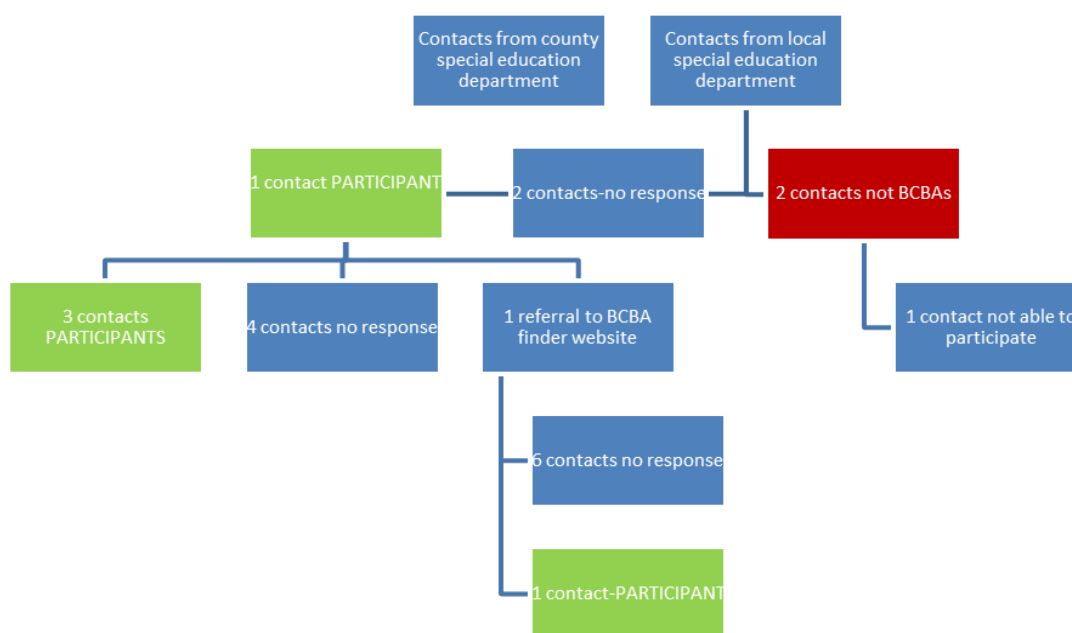
Participant	Years as Classroom Teacher	Special Education Endorsement on license
Participant 1	7	No
Participant 2	19	No
Participant 3	7	No
Participant 4	15	No
Participant 5	7	No
Participant 6	29	No
Participant 7	15	No
Participant 8	30	No
Participant 9	15	No
Participant 10	20	No
Participant 11	24	No
Participant 12	20	No
Participant 13	11	No
Participant 14	24	No

**Board Certified Behavior Analyst Interview Participants**

Simultaneously, the special education departments both at the local setting and at the local school board, were contacted via e-mail (Appendix F) requesting the names and contact information for behavior therapists that had been used throughout the local county. Note that the term, *behavior therapist*, was used. I later discovered by clarification from a behavior analyst that the term was being used incorrectly and that in fact behavior analysts needed to be interviewed, not therapists as they hold no certification. I used the purposeful method of snowball sampling to locate certified behavior analysts. Five names and e-mail addresses or phone numbers were provided by the local special education department. No response was received from the county special

education department. The snowball sampling proved effective in that the analysts then recommended other analysts and resources and more participants were located for the study. Of the 21 requests that I submitted for participation in the study, five resulted in a completed interview, member-checking, and transcript review process. The organization chart in Figure 1 represents the effects of the snowball sampling.

I sent each BCBA contact an e-mail presenting the project and asking for their consideration in participating in the study (Appendix G). The potential participants were also asked to reply with the name and contact information of any other behavior analysts that might be willing to participate in the study. A follow-up phone call was made to determine potential participation and address any questions in regard to the study. Once the participant stated their intention to participate, I emailed an approved informed consent form to them prior to the actual interview (Appendix H). These forms were either completed electronically and e-mailed back or they were presented during the actual interview.



*Figure 1.* Snowball sampling results: Behavior analysts.

The behavior analysts' backgrounds and experience working with elementary school aged children varied. Although confidentiality was maintained, I gathered basic unidentifiable information on their experience working with elementary school students. BCBA01 had experience working in the elementary school with students who have been diagnosed with EBD and oppositional defiance disorder (ODD). BCBA02 had served as a consultant for elementary schools working with EBD students who are at risk of failing due to academic problems. This analyst did note that not all students with challenging behaviors have been classified as EBD. BCBA03 worked with schools by performing assessments on students to figure out why they are having difficulty in the classroom.

This analyst then assists the school in finding a way to make the environment more productive for the student. BCBA04 had set up numerous classes taking into consideration the needs of EBD students. They also established some behavioral programming to modify problem behaviors. BCBA05 only worked with elementary school aged students. Most of these students had been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. This analyst had served as a special education teacher and had experience educating EBD students that exhibit behaviors that hinder their success in the classroom.

Purposeful sampling was the method I used to identify regular education teachers who were struggling with effectively educating EBD students, as well as licensed behavior therapists who may have had experience working with this population. A disadvantage of snowball sampling was not knowing exactly how many participants would actually participate in the study (Creswell, 2009). A smaller number of participants would have justified a more in-depth study of particular strategies that either worked or did not work with the EBD population, but a larger number of participants would provide a larger scope of strategies that could be used over several grade levels. Those that did participate represented the larger population of those regular education teachers that are concerned about educating EBD students, as well as the larger number of BCBA's that have experience working with behaviorally challenged students. The entire success of this case study depended upon securing this type of sampling that all shared the same experiences working with emotionally and behaviorally disturbed students. The participant search was considered a success, as 19 professionals participated in the

collection of data. Fifteen teacher participants was initially the target, but 14 participants contributed to the study; in addition, the targeted goal of five behavior analysts was met.

For the teacher participants, a researcher-participant relationship already existed as I was a staff member at the local setting at the time of the study; however, I did not hold an administrative or supervisory role over the participants. This relationship was further established by assuring participants that all data collected would ensure their confidentiality. The purpose of the research was clearly explained, and I gained informed consent prior to the collection of data. The benefits of the data collection and the case study were also explained to the participants. The location of the data collection was at the school in a location that was familiar to the participants, which increased the comfort level and likelihood of participation.

The participants were ethically protected, as recommended by Creswell (2012), by respecting the location of the study, securing permission from administration and participants, and not disrupting the typical setting during data collection. Permission was obtained by the administrator, and participants were given details of the the study and the data collection and analysis process. Each participant was assigned a code as to maintain confidentiality. As data were collected, it was coded protecting the identity of the participants. Member checking and transcript review was used for participants to flag any identifying information that was present in the transcript prior to data analysis. In addition, the participants were asked to ensure that the interpretation of the data collected was accurate and represented their responses with precision.



### **Data Collection**

The data collection was executed in two stages: The first set of data was gathered during the focus group interview and the second was collected over five different interviews with BCBA's. The initial proposal for the project study also had a third component of the data collection where individual classroom observations and follow-up interviews would be conducted with willing participants from the focus group interview. However, it was determined through the collection and analysis of the focus group interview that the participants did not have any observable effective teaching strategies. The effective measures that were discussed during the focus group interview concentrated on the individualized relationship that a teacher could have with a student caring for their basic needs (e.g., food, medicine, etc.) After consulting with the project committee, it was decided that the classroom observations and follow-up interviews would not produce any further data for this project.

The interview method of collecting data was chosen because interviews provide the thoughts and feelings of the participants rather than just the actions of the participants as collected in the observations. The case study research method depends on the collection of such data. The data collection instrument, for both means of data collection, included semistructured interviews with questions that I formulated. Both sets of interviews began with structured and less structured questions that allowed flexibility (Merriam, 2009) so that if the participants chose to discuss another aspect of the research topic, they were able to do so.

## **Focus Group Interview**

The focus group interview occurred in a setting that was very familiar to the participants as a place to gather for meetings and training. Collecting data in the natural setting follows suit for a case study (Lodico et al., 2010). The interview was captured using a digital voice recorder to be used for accuracy that would be verified during the member-checking and transcript review process.

A prestructured protocol was followed during the interview providing a scripted introduction, definition of EBD, interview questions, and conclusion. This protocol was used as the base for the interview and transcript. The interview was constructed with a semistructured design focusing on the experience of educating students who exhibited the manifestations of EBD in their classroom. To maintain uniformity in the definition and manifestations of EBD, a statement from Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013) was read in order to establish a foundation of the manifestations which would be addressed in discussing effective teaching strategies.

The participants were then asked if they had any questions about the actual definition of a behavioral disorder, as used for the purposes of this study. The first question examined the participants' experience working with students that exhibited the manifestations mentioned in the definition. After only one participant shared and some wait time, I clarified that experiences could be shared about educating students with the manifestations even if the student did not have an official EBD diagnosis. Once participants began to share, clarification questions were asked such as, "Why do you say the anger? What do you mean the anger?" Participants were then asked how the EBD

population has impacted their academic instruction, which generated a rich discussion on the frustration that occurs when trying to meet the needs of so many individuals in one room. The responses to this question led to a follow-up question about their opinion of their own efficacy in meeting the needs of this population.

The line of questioning then shifted to effective strategies that the participants use when educating this population. A review of some of the earlier individualized strategies that were mentioned were reiterated in the question, so that repetition would not play a role in the response. Referencing the definition from Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013), the next question sought effective communication strategies in order to decrease unwanted behavior. The responses to these questions indicated that the effective strategies used to deter unwanted behavior could not be generalized to an entire population, but were rather individualized. A follow-up question was asked to clarify if that is indeed what the participants were stating.

The next few questions asked participants to provide effective strategies when trying to promote social interaction between students. These strategies could be to encourage all students to work with each other or encourage a reluctant EBD and regular education student to work collaboratively. The focus group interview ended with a question asking the participants what further training they felt was needed to effectively educate the EBD population.

### **Board Certified Behavior Analysts Interviews**

The interviews with the BCBA's took place at a time and location that was convenient to each participant. After the participant stated their intention to participate in

the study, an informed consent form was e-mailed describing the data collection and analysis process. A time and interview method (person-to-person, e-mail, phone) was determined. Of the five interviews, one interview was face-to-face, two interviews were conducted via e-mail, and two were completed over the phone. Audio recordings via a digital voice recorder were obtained for three of the interviews. An interview via e-mail did not lend itself to a digital recording.

At the onset of the interviews, the participants and I either reacquainted ourselves with each other or introduced themselves to each other. A semistructured interview was used in order to allow for flexibility in the direction of the interviews. The interviews began with a statement about the purpose of the study and how the data collected during the interview would be used to strengthen pedagogical practice when educating students that exhibited manifestations of EBD. The same definition of a behavioral disorder that was provided to the participants of the focus group interview was also presented to the BCBAAs, as stated in the five BCBA transcripts. The first question asked what the behavior analyst agreed or disagreed with in regard to manifestations that may be exhibited by students who are classified as EBD. In some cases a clarifying question was asked in regard to the time frame (6 months) that students must exhibit the manifestations before they are diagnosed as having a behavior disorder.

The next question established the participant's background with working with elementary school students that were diagnosed with EBD. The response to this question provided insight on the remaining data that were collected. The participants were also asked what they felt was the greatest challenge that a regular classroom teacher had when

educating an EBD student in the inclusive classroom. Using the flexibility of the semistructured interview design, the BCBA was then informed of a concern presented by the regular education teachers in the focus group interview. This concern prompted a direct line of questioning about rewards and consequences for unwanted behavior. The BCBA's were then asked about effective strategies that could improve academic performance in both reading and math. Strategies that foster positive social interaction, as well as communication with their peers was the focus of the next three questions. Throughout the interview, all of the BCBA's had already discussed an effective strategy for behavior management. The next question specifically addressed effective behavior management strategies. This included inquiries about when and how to use the strategy and the benefits or precautions needed to implement the strategy. As used in the focus group interview, a restatement of the strategies already mentioned were provided as to avoid restatement of data.

The last three questions dealt specifically with training teachers to effectively educate this population while taking into consideration their needs. The questions are as follows:

- What is some advice you would give a regular education teacher that had no formal training?
- What is something you think every teacher should know about educating students with EBD?
- If you were to conduct a professional development session on teaching EBD students, what would be the main points of your presentation?

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role during the data collection was to facilitate the discussion about educating students with EBD so that the participants would feel free to share their own experiences and knowledge. I have a reputation among the participants at the local setting as being a teacher leader. The shared concern about the lack of effective teaching skills helped promote a relationship conducive to gathering unbiased data about this subject.

The role of the researcher with the BCBA's was one of professional exchange. This group of participants took their time to share strategies that would assist a population that they had a vested interest in as well. This mutual respect was evident as the participants shared their knowledge and expertise with me as I sought to strengthen educational communities for this population.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of data analysis was to gather the information from the literature review and combine it with the data collected during the focus-group interview, as well as the behavioral analysts interviews (Merriam, 2009). In order to conduct a thorough analysis of this information, a computer assisted qualitative research analysis software program, NVIVO (QSR International, 2014) was used. The transcript from the focus group interview and behavior analyst interviews, as well as over 50 academic journal articles relating to the strategies discovered in the interviews were imported into the NVIVO software to determine themes. A total of 18 main themes and 46 subthemes or nodes existed. An example of the themes and subthemes (respectively) included: antecedent strategies: classroom organization, positive classroom environment, routine

structure, and student jobs/chores. After each data collection phase, the data were processed in a timely manner by importing the transcript or journal article into NVIVO and coding it into themes that were already present or creating new themes presented by the data. The timeliness of the data analysis process helped maintain confidentiality of the participants as names were discarded and replaced with deidentifying information.

A written transcript was produced from the data collected during the focus-group interview and the follow-up interviews. Prior to discovering and coding themes, I used the validation technique of transcript review and member checking whereby each of the 14 focus group participants, as well as the behavior analysts were asked to validate the data for accuracy (Creswell, 2012). Each participant had the opportunity to dispute any portion of the transcript and ensure that any discrepant issues were eliminated from the research. Of the 19 member-checks and transcript reviews, there were no sections that a participant asked to have deleted from the transcript. I did eliminate one story that was told during the focus group interview, as the details would have breached confidentiality of several of the participants. Notation of this was made in the transcript and was discussed with the participants involved.

Triangulation of the data from the focus group and behavior analysts' interviews, member checking, transcript review, and the use of peer debriefers also helped ensure accuracy of the findings as multiple sources of information were used to collect the data, as well as the fact that multiple entities verified the data for accuracy, confidentiality, and interpretations of the data. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that a researcher keep field notes to monitor any personal perspectives of bias that may have caused the research to

lose credibility. Peer debriefers were also used in order to help examine for evidence of researcher bias, breach of confidentiality, as well as help determine the direction of the project study. The peer debriefers are colleagues of mine that have extensive background working with special populations, including students with behavior issues. However, the peer debriefers are not in an administrative or supervisory position. To account for any discrepancies, all similarities and differences discovered in the data collection or the data analysis will be presented in the data analysis results section. All data collected were analyzed using coded themes and presented representing the true responses and observations of the participants, even when/if the results were discrepant from the purpose and direction of the proposal.

### **Data Analysis Results: The Foundational Groundwork**

Each phase of the data collection process began with ascertaining the definition of an emotional and/or behavior disorder and how the manifestations associated with EBD impacted a general education classroom. This background knowledge was important in laying a foundation for the strategies that will be discussed later in this results section.

Each data collection phase began with the following statement being read:

According to researchers Alisauskas and Simkiene (2013), in order for a student to be classified as having a behavior disorder, the actions must continue longer than six months and could include the following manifestations: “anger, irritability, petulance (which just means being an annoyance), rudeness, impoliteness, rejection of authority, low tolerance of frustration, attacks of anger, lack of responsibility, lack of sympathy, show no shame, and lack of insight” (p.



63); these actions are performed consistently and repeatedly and can be evident as young as preschool. (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013)

During the behavior analyst interviews, the question was presented whether or not the analysts agreed or disagreed with the list of manifestations, as well as the 6 month time frame before a classification of EBD was determined. Of the five behavior analysts, four of the analysts agreed with the list, but had cautions, stipulations, additions, or disagreement with portions of the definition. BCBA01 agreed with the statement but issued caution that just because a student showed some of the manifestations listed, those manifestations did not necessarily justify an EBD diagnosis. This participant also clarified the statement by saying that manifestations would be prevalent for a longer period of time, like 6 months, and would be present in multiple situations and locations.

BCBA02 agreed with the statement, but had some stipulations to add stating that specific actions being performed needed to be specified along with the manifestations. According to BCBA02, the list represented a wide range of behaviors, but the analyst made an important note that according to the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* not all behaviors on the list needed to be present for an EBD diagnosis to occur.

BCBA03 agreed with the definition, but added further manifestations to represent students on the autistic spectrum. These additions represented the lack of social skills and appropriateness in social situations. This also included sensory processing disorders that could prove challenging to a regular education teacher.

BCBA04 agreed with the statement that the manifestations were an appropriate representation that EBD students may exhibit; however, the analyst pointed out that the statement makes it appear that because a student exhibits the manifestations it indicates that the student is eligible for an EBD diagnosis. BCBA04 also commented that on the contrary, a student with EBD may exhibit those manifestations. According to the analyst, the behavior effects do not initiate the EBD cause; the EBD cause initiates the behavioral manifestations, linear cause-effect needs to be considered, rather than a circular pattern.

The fifth BCBA indicated that her behavioral background led the focus to be more on the specific behaviors rather than the manifestations. According to BCBA05, targeting and changing the behaviors should be more of a focus rather than on a list of subjective manifestations.

The last piece of foundational groundwork that was laid during the data collection process was to determine some of the greatest challenges to a regular education teacher. Table 2 represents some of these challenges as presented by the participants during the focus group interview.

Table 2

*Challenges of Educating EBD Students*


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<b>Challenges</b>
Misbehavior due to basic needs not being met (food, clothing, etc.)
Inconsistencies with behavioral reinforcements (positive & negative)
Negative student reaction to change in routine
Anger and aggression (throwing items)
Lack of parental support
Controlling or manipulating possible behavioral triggers
Balancing reinforcement fairness in the classroom
Extensive documentation
Academic deficiencies
Personal thoughts/feelings toward the EBD student
Struggle to meet their needs

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The five behavior analysts also shared their opinion of the greatest challenges that a regular education teacher faces when educating a student with EBD. This led to discussions about strategies that would minimize those challenges. These strategies will be discussed in further detail, as well as in the literature review and project.

Table 3

*Inclusive Teacher's Greatest Challenges and Strategies to Minimize*

Source	Greatest Challenge	Strategy to Minimize
BCBA01	Devoting the attention that is needed to the EBD student when there are so many other students in the classroom can be difficult.	Ensuring that everyone has a task or job to complete. Initiating a self-management sheet or formal behavior intervention plan where the student marks their own behavior. Establishing proactive or antecedent modifications.
BCBA02	EBD students do not respond to punitive (public denouncement) as other students would.	Employing antecedent interventions such as routines that occur before the instruction or transition. Teaching students to identify their own emotions and perform a replacement behavior.
BCBA03	The nature of having students who are on the autistic spectrum can present a problem because they are not on the appropriate academic level.	Exhibiting a sense of compassion and understanding with students. Accepting the differences and "idiosyncrasies" that are present. Providing alternative work products more in line with their performance level.
BCBA04	The EBD student requires a significant amount of the teacher's time. Distribution of teacher's time across a classroom is not sufficient for the EBD student; therefore disruptions and unwanted behavior occurs.	Establishing group centered contingencies, such as the Good Behavior game. Delivering consequences on an effective and timely manner (as evident in the Good Behavior game).
BCBA05	Teachers lack training or experience effectively meet the needs of EBD students. Behavior strategies are not implemented correctly in the classroom. Students don't receive the counseling they need.	Coaching and training need to occur with teachers on "expectations, assessments, and other strategies to implement in their classrooms". Including active feedback and coaching would help address the challenges in educating EBD students. Encouraging peer relationships.

### **Data Analysis Results: Effective Teaching Strategies**

Participants in both data collection phases (focus group interview and behavior analyst interviews) were asked questions that addressed the following guiding research question: What are effective/noneffective teaching strategies to use when educating EBD students? Data were collected that revealed several general methods or strategies that needed to be used in order for an inclusive classroom to be successful. The themes that emerged in regards to these strategies are as follows: (a) appreciate the student as an individual, (b) develop appropriate teacher/student relationship, (c) engage in professional development/further training on various aspects of educating EBD students, (d) implement antecedent (proactive) measures, (e) provide explicit and consistent expectations, and (f) secure stakeholder support.

#### **Appreciate Student Individualization**

Appreciating and respecting the unique characteristics of each EBD student was a theme that continually presented itself throughout the study. Although there is much focus on the manifestations, there was also concern, especially from the behavior analysts, that these students be considered individuals before the manifestations they may exhibit are considered. BCBA04 stated that every teacher should know that there is a real cause for a student's behavior, and that's just "not the way that kid is." The analyst went on to say that educating that student means recognizing the unique and individual antecedents (poor home life, lack of medication, argument on the bus on the way to school) that may initiate their poor behavior. It was noted that this does not excuse the behavior, but a teacher must recognize the individuality of a student's situation before

attempting to strategize other issues. BCBA03 stated, “I think sometimes people get caught up in the diagnosis that a child has and forgets that they are just a child first, and so teachers need to be very careful not to get their list of students for the next year and automatically assume ‘Oh no, this is a kid with an emotional disorder.’” The behavior analyst also made note that when a teacher knows their students, then they are able to use that information to their advantage. BCBA01 stated that EBD is a real issue and that even though maybe the parents did not always respond to behavioral problems appropriately, the student is not just acting out because they are spoiled. The teacher needs to be aware that many times the behavior is a causal relationship from something that happened previously, and it may not have even been in the classroom. For this reason, BCBA01 encouraged teachers not to take negative verbal outbursts personally. In recognizing the student’s unique situation, their likes/dislikes, and behavioral triggers, strategies can then be individualized for that student that addresses the real cause of the behavior.

Individualization also occurs in establishing an effective teaching strategy. TCHR03 commented in the focus group interview that blanket strategies are difficult to pinpoint because the child has unique needs/concerns that could be causing the behavior. Another focus group interview participant recalled a story of a student who was acting out in the classroom, only to discover that the child’s mother was deceased and no one knew about it. TCHR10 admitted that their students go through so much and have so much baggage that they bring to the classroom. Some of the participants described making home visits and driving by student’s houses and recognizing that as teachers, they do not always have a good grasp on the home-life situation. The focus group interview

participants also expressed concern that discovering the aspects of a student's life can be challenging due to the number of students in the class. As stated earlier, this was the greatest challenge that BCBA04 identified.

### **Develop Appropriate Teacher/Student Relationship**

Developing an appropriate teacher/student relationship is important when trying to win-over the EBD student. The participants of the focus group interview recalled stories of students who presented challenging behavior problems, but were able to form a relationship with the teacher. Some of these students then came back to the teacher and thanked them for being so patient with their behavioral issues when they were younger. TCHR 07 in the focus group interview stated that the misbehavior and aggression that a student had, specifically towards school property, no longer existed after she took the time to form a relationship with him. TCHR 12 shared a story of a student whose behavior problems became manageable after she formed a relationship with this student and discovered that the dynamics of the home situation were troubling and the child was simply hungry.

BCBA03 stated that teachers who showed compassion toward their EBD students were instrumental in the success of the classroom and the student's educational experience. This relationship allows the teacher to help other students understand the child's differences and fosters acceptance of those differences. The analyst also stated that having this relationship causes the teacher to have more understanding when the student needs to have time to cool down or refocus. BCBA01 encourages the teacher to have a few moments of teacher-talk time with the student before the class begins. This

allows the teacher time to find out about the child's previous evening and morning and address any issues that may later cause behavioral outbursts or triggers.

### **Implement Antecedent (Proactive) Measures**

According to BCBA01, antecedent or proactive measures require a manipulation of the environment in order to decrease the likelihood that unwanted behavior would be triggered. This could be anything from allowing a behavior problem student to perform a certain task every day, rearranging the desks so that the student is physically removed from a potential problem, and proactively setting up rewards. This analyst also stated that simple things like moving the pencil sharpener can prevent behavioral triggers. BCBA02 stated that antecedent behaviors could be simple steps such as clarifying transitional routines or providing guidelines to students when they feel themselves getting angry. Rewarding positive behavior that occurs as a result of the antecedent behaviors will send a message to the other students that these behaviors are acceptable increasing the likelihood that the behaviors will be repeated. BCBA05 expressed that if teachers and schools would address behaviors before they occur and take a proactive measure, then the school experience is more likely to be a successful one. This includes having a "sound classroom management plan that addresses the needs of most of the other students in the class." According to BCBA05, this will allow students with EBD to successfully conduct themselves in a social situation because they were provided structure and moderation of their behaviors.

The way that a classroom is organized is another example of an antecedent modification. BCBA01 encourages teachers to make note of how well EBD students



share materials. If this is a problem, allow the student to have their own set of books or crayons or whatever else may present a problem if required to share with another student. This includes having a set place for the student's belongings so that they are not compromised by other students. These actions can prevent a trigger of unwanted behavior problems. According to BCBA05, visual schedules and seating charts allow the EBD student the structure and proactive modifications they need to be successful in the inclusive classroom.

BCBA02 stated that providing a positive classroom environment can be accomplished by establishing routines that are very structured including "pretransitional and instructional cues." BCBA01 stated that an educational environment that is effective is going to have a routine and schedule that is consistently maintained and followed. If an EBD student is part of a classroom that is chaotic and unstructured with a teacher that is underprepared, then behavior problems will ensue. This thought was also brought up in the focus group interview as a participant shared a story about the behavior problems that occurred with one student when things were not consistent due to her absence. BCBA01 also encouraged teachers to know their students well enough to know if they are going to need time built into the routine for a personal conversation with the teacher. If so, a stop and go sign should be utilized so that EBD students know the appropriate time to approach the teacher to talk.

According to BCBA01, routines and expectations for maintaining those routines should be high and consistent exemplifying the purpose of behavior analysis whereby behavior is shaped. BCBA03 expressed the concern that sometimes students with

behavioral problem have not started out in an inclusive classroom and are unaware of the typical “school behaviors” such as how to line up in a straight line. The analyst encouraged teachers to be mindful of that and then spend extra time with that student teaching them how to follow those routines and expectations that are present in the classroom. BCBA05 stated, “They need structure. The more consistent you are the better it will be for both the teacher and the student. It sounds simple but you don’t need an elaborate scheme to make it work. Just be consistent.”

### **Provide Explicit and Consistent Expectations**

Building on the previous section, BCBA01 encouraged teachers to set boundaries and make sure that those boundaries are explicitly explained to the EBD student. The analyst stated that every educational stakeholder that works with that child needs to be trained on the expectations and consequences and be consistent in following through with those expectations. According to BCBA01, it is advisable to initially offer choices to EBD students and then stand firm when the students try to manipulate the expectation or consequence. The data collected during the interview with BCBA02 concurred with this advice by presenting the point that expectations should be provided up front, explained without distraction, repeated by the students, and then rewarded when those expectations are met. The analyst also encourages teachers to provide prompts and guidance throughout the class in order for the student to remain successful at meeting the expectations that were presented.

According to BCBA02, consequences do not have to be substantial, but they must be provided immediately both for positive and negative compliance. It was also stated

that a teacher should not hesitate to administer consequences from the very beginning, even if that means the first day of school because establishing and consistently enforcing the expectations will allow the students to be successful. BCBA04 expressed the need for very clear expectations to be presented. In other words, it is not acceptable to say “I want the student to be more social.” The expectations are not clear. The analyst stated that teachers should use specific wording in order for the students to be very clear about the expectations.

According to the behavioral analysts, once the expectations are set, it is important to be consistent with the consequence. BCBA03 stated that about 80% of the time when they are called into a school to help establish a better academic environment for EBD students, it is discovered that the child is being asked to do something and then the staff is not consistent in following through with making them do it. This then makes the student think that the word of the staff means nothing, and they can do whatever they want because the consequences are not going to be consistent. The participants in the focus group interview shared that this was something they struggled with because they were trying to avoid a behavioral challenge. One focus group participant stated that even though they know they have lost daily battles with maintaining consistency that they look at everyday as a new opportunity to enforce the expectations set.

### **Secure Stakeholder Support**

BCBA01 stated that, “A good relationship with the parents is key.” They went on to say that communication with the parents can include letting them know the boundaries and expectations that are set up at school and encouraging them to set similar boundaries

at home. The participants of the focus group interview also expressed the need for parental involvement, even to meet the needs of the students such as making sure that they have their prescribed medication available for them to take daily.

According to BCBA01 it is important to have the backing of all the staff in the school when meeting the needs of EBD students. Maintaining the support of all stakeholders helps maintain the consistency needed to make sure the student meets the expectations presented to them.

### **Recognize Need for Professional Development/Further Training**

A concern that was raised in the first literature review, as well as the data collection was that of teacher efficacy in meeting the needs of EBD students. TCHR08 stated, “But we cannot effectively deal with these children because we are not taught how and we do not know the root of their problem.” TCHR10 expressed concern that parents are under the impression that teachers are trained to meet these unique needs; several other participants reiterated that teachers are not trained to meet these needs. Other participants made comments such as: “It is helpful to have lots of strategies in your toolbox, but you never know what will work for them” and “We need a psychology degree.” Another participant shared a concern that they were afraid of making matters worse for the EBD student because they were not trained. BCBA05 concurred that the greatest challenge is that teachers are not properly trained and/or they haven’t had sufficient experience educating these students under the watchful eye of active feedback and coaching. The analyst described how teachers need to be trained on what to expect

from an EBD student, as well as assessments and follow-up strategies that could be implemented in the classroom.

### **Effective Strategies to Improve Academic Performance**

There is an achievement gap among students receiving services under IDEA at the local setting. The research question that guided the collection of data for this section is as follows: What are strategies that improve reading and math skills? The participants in the focus group interview had very little data to present on this matter, as most of the focus was on the behavioral aspect of educating these students. The interviews with the behavior analysts produced some effective strategies; however, the data collected were surface level with admonishments from the analysts to research specific strategies mentioned. The strategies for improved academic performance will be explained in further detail in the literature review in the Section 3. The themes identified through this data analysis are as follows: (a) increase active participation, (b) recognize gaps and barriers that hinder academic success, and (c) use a direct instruction method of teaching.

#### **Increase Active Participation**

BCBA03 stated that students with behavioral issues, especially those with autism, are more successful if the instructional material is presented in an active and engaging format. According to the analyst, behavior problems can occur when students are given a significant number of worksheets, versus the learning occurring through fun games and hands-on-activities. BCBA02 also made a point that behavioral problems occur when the teacher lectures or “talks too much.” The analyst suggested a 20/80 instructional method whereby the teacher gives instruction 20% of the time and the students practice the skill

80% of the time. According to the analyst, teaching in small units where the skill is modeled by the teacher and guided practice is completed under the watchful eye of the teacher is an effective strategy. The analyst claims that this method will “maximize learning and minimize down time thereby controlling behavior.”

### **Recognize Gaps and Barriers That Hinder Academic Success**

According to BCBA02, the first step to meeting the academic needs of students with EBD is to identify the achievement gap for both reading and math. The analyst stated that the number of words a student can read or the number of math calculations that can be completed per minute can be ascertained through a curriculum based assessment method. The teacher should determine which prerequisite skill should be assessed based on that student’s level of achievement and not so much on grade-level expectations. When the analyst was asked if this could be related to Vygotsky’s zone of actual and proximal development (the theoretical framework of this study), the response was positive but with a clarification. The process described by BCBA02 represented how a teacher would identify the disconnect between the curriculum and the current academic level of the student. According to BCBA02, the zone of proximal development of a student provides the teacher with information on what part of a current level skill the student has not mastered. BCBA01 also suggested using the teacher talk time to perform a one-minute probe in order to determine what skills are lacking. The analyst stated that it is important to determine the exact academic area or skill of weakness due to the wide breadth of skill based standards to be achieved.

Once the achievement gap details have been identified, modification of the teaching needs to occur. BCBA01 proposes that even simple measures such as having students highlight words in the text can be beneficial. The analyst also mentioned again that making sure the teacher provides positive reinforcement for positive behavior during the instruction provides attention and acceptance that most EBD students seek. BCBA03 recommended that teachers consider modifying the work that is expected from the students based on their current level of academic performance. According to BCBA03, having a successful inclusion environment will encourage the EBD student to push themselves to reach the level of their peers.

#### **Use a Direct/Explicit Instruction Method of Teaching**

According to BCBA04, Project Follow Through (an educational initiative by Lyndon B. Johnson) sought to find the most effective method of educating students who were low performing. BCBA04 stated that although the initiative became very political, the results were overwhelming that direct instruction was the most effective way for low performing students, such as EBD students, to succeed in the classroom. The “fast paced, highly sequenced, fully scripted” instructional program of direct instruction makes this the most effective strategy to use to increase academic instruction according to BCBA04. Behavior students respond positively and fewer behavior problems occur because the lesson moves at a faster pace and the choral responding that is indicative of direct instruction allows all students to participate in the presentation of the instructional content. BCBA05 stated that the academic strategy that she recommends is based on the individual and the “function of their specific behavior;” however, direct instruction is one

strategy that is recommended by the analyst along with peer-assisted learning, active responding, and self-monitoring.

### **Effective Strategies to Improve Social Skills**

Social awkwardness or lack of social sense is a concern in the inclusive classroom, according to BCBA03. There was one main theme that surfaced in the data analysis and that is to provide opportunities for peer engagement. BCBA02 recommended that social interaction occur through activities that would require students to cooperate with each other. The analyst gives the example of the class being broken into teams so that the students can experience a friendly competition during an academic game or collaborative activity, such as the Good Behavior game.

According to BCBA02, students could work together in groups of two, or dyads, and follow a peer tutoring model. BCBA05 also recommends using a peer-assisted learning method whereby students are paired with each other and provided reinforcement. This peer interaction would show both the EBD student and their peers that learning together can be fun. Once this interaction is successful, it can be used during instructional time. A peer social group or social skills group was also suggested by two of the behavior analysts. According to BCBA01, the students could socialize together and form relationships that are positive.

BCBA05 stated that in order to form a positive relationship between peers, conversations need to occur with the class fostering acceptance of everyone regardless of their behavior. TCHR03 stated that this type of peer conversation has proven effective in allowing the students to understand that everyone is different. According to this



participant, one particular EBD student now has a group of girls that help keep him focused and on track with his school work. It was also stated in the focus group interview that this type of positive social interaction is important since the peers of the EBD student have been audience to poor behavioral decisions on the part of the EBD student.

### **Effective Communication Techniques**

The next set of research questions guided the data collection in order to determine effective communication techniques. The following research question and sub-questions were addressed: What communication techniques are successful to use with EBD students? What communication technique is best to use when decreasing unwanted behavior? What communication technique is best to use when increasing desired behavior? What communication technique is best when fostering collaborative work between classmates? Some of the data collected that answers these questions overlap other sections.

According to BCBA03, using effective communication techniques vary according to each individual child. The analyst goes on further to say that the level of communication used with a student with EBD, especially autism, should match the student's level. In other words, if a student speaks in four word phrases, then four word phrases should be used to communicate with that child. The behavior analyst also stated that speaking to students in calm yet firm voices is the most appropriate method. One focus group participant suggested using a whisper voice to calm an EBD student down.

TCHR13 recalled a communication strategy used with a student whereby eye contact was made and a tally mark placed on the board to indicate a negative behavior.

Effective communication techniques could also be used when students are communicating with each other. BCBA05 stated that once again using peer-tutoring or modeling could be an effective tool to foster communication skills in students with EBD. According to BCBA05, students could role-play effective communication techniques.

Effective communication techniques are also needed if the EBD student is reluctant or unwilling to cooperate. According to BCBA02, “Any public denouncement will likely trigger counter control measures which means increased level of combativeness risking property destruction and physical aggression not to mention verbal assault.” The analyst recommends allowing the student to “save face” in front of their peers and issue the corrective feedback privately. It was also stated that the educator should focus on what the student does, rather than on their vocalizations; in addition, data should be collected during these times to document the effectiveness of the behavioral measure.

### **Effective Behavior Management Strategies**

The word that had the highest frequency in all of the data collected, according to the NVIVO software, was the word, “behavior.” The majority of the themes revealed during the data analysis dealt with the issue of decreasing unwanted behavior and increasing appropriate behavior in the EBD student population. The data collection instruments contained questions that sought to find data to answer the following research questions: What behavior management strategies minimize manifestations of an EBD? What facilitates using this strategy? What are the benefits of this strategy? What are the precautions when using this strategy? The data was analyzed and four major themes were

discovered: (a) employ behavioral modification strategies, (b) establish group contingencies, (c) foster practice of student self-management, and (d) use behavioral tools.

### **Employ Behavioral Modification Strategies**

According to BCBA05, the role of a behavior analyst is to individualize modification strategies based on an individualized function of their behaviors. BCBA01 stated that in order to implement a behavior modification strategy the teachers need to know what prompted the behavior in the first place. Asking questions to determine the reasoning behind the behaviors gives the analyst an idea as to the function of their behavior. According to BCBA05, behaviors are usually maintained due to reasons such as avoidance, access to activity or something tangible, and access to something sensory.

Employing behavioral modification strategies include providing consequences and reinforcement. According to BCBA02, a routine should be established early that provides a “high degree of structure” when issuing consequences to wanted or unwanted behavior. The analyst continued by saying that consequences/rewards could be as minor as a head nod (positive) or asking the student to go to the end of the line (negative). It was also encouraged that teachers should not focus on every mild disruptive behavior, but instead make a “pivot praise” which commends a group or student who is engaging in appropriate wanted behavior. This serves as a reminder to the student engaging in unwanted behavior of the behavioral expectations.

One concern with some participants in the focus group interview was that students were sometimes rewarded for completing tasks that other students were not rewarded for,

such as an EBD student rewarded for keeping their hands, feet, and objects to themselves. The plan then allowed the student to play on the computer 15 extra minutes at the end of class if appropriate behavior was exhibited. The participants explained how this presented a problem with the other students in the room. When this piece of data was shared with the behavioral analysts, they agreed that is not an effective way to modify behavior. According to BCBA02, "Effective behavior change focuses on a movement and defines what should be done. The contingency should focus on what the student needs to do to earn a reward in addition to what behavior will lose the reward." It was also suggested that the teachers become creative with their rewards including rewards such as allowing an EBD student to retrieve material for the next step in the lesson or allowing them a short break rather than something that would be so evident to the other students. One participant in the focus group interview did remind the other participants that students should be taught that "Fair is not always equal." This goes back to comments made by other participants in the interviews, where conversations are encouraged with the peers of the EBD student in order to discuss the purpose behind different methods of reward.

Another effective behavior management strategy is that of positive behavior reinforcement. One participant in the focus group interview described how fear was a common practice that was used to make children behave. TCHR13 stated, "Negative reinforcement is not normally effective with EBD students." The data collected from the behavior analysts supported the ineffectiveness of using negative reinforcement as a behavior. According to BCBA02, "Punitive procedures in some cases escalate behavior as a control mechanism rather than decrease them." The analyst also warns that using a

public denouncement has the possibility of triggering a combative reaction that could lead to physical aggression.

### **Establish Group Contingencies**

Several of the behavior analyst interviews revealed that establishing group contingencies is an effective strategy to modify the behavior of an entire class. According to BCBA04, a group contingency allows the teacher to deliver consequences to an entire group, rather than one individual, and assists in “delivering consequences effectively and in a time efficient manner.”

The Good Behavior Game is one such group contingency method. BCBA02 considered the Good Behavior Game to be an effective way to allow students to work together and engage in friendly competition. BCBA02 and BCBA04 described how the teacher breaks the students into groups and then identifies target behaviors that the teacher wants visible and those that should not be visible. A baseline number is then chosen and every time one of the target behaviors is exhibited, such as talking out, then a tally mark is placed under the group’s name. If students remain under the baseline number then a group reward, such as 5 extra minutes of free time or preferential seating, is delivered. There are variations on the game just as BCBA02 recommended writing the baseline number on the board, but BCBA04 recommended keeping the number a secret from the students until the game has been completed.

### **Use Behavioral Tools**

In data collected during the behavior analyst interviews, it was recommended that teachers use behavioral tools such as administering a functional behavioral assessment

and then creating a behavior intervention plan. BCBA01 stated that a behavior plan has the potential of working very well with EBD students, but everybody that works with that student needs to be “well versed” on the plan and implement it properly. The analyst also commented that if a student has already been diagnosed as having an EBD that a behavior intervention plan should already be in place.

### **Foster Practice of Student Self-Management**

Fostering self-management techniques in students was another effective strategy presented by the behavior analysts. According to BCBA01, a student could mark their own behavior on a sheet and then receive a reward according to the number of tally marks, stars, or checks that were on the sheet. The analyst elaborated on this topic by saying that by using a self-management sheet, the amount of time is broken down into smaller portions making it easier for the child to be successful behaviorally. In other words, the student would not have to wait an entire week to receive rewards/consequences but would be rewarded on a more frequent and consistent basis.

### **Interpretations of Interviews**

The following interpretations represent the data collected and analyzed during the focus group interview and the five behavior analyst interviews. All interpretations have been verified for accuracy and preservation of confidentiality by the participants themselves through the process of transcript review and member checking.

### **Interpretation of Focus Group Interview**

The overall tone of the focus group was one of frustration. Teachers are frustrated that EBD students seem to “take over” their classroom making instruction extremely

difficult. Teachers are frustrated that they do not have the proper training to handle the manifestations of this population. Teachers are frustrated because they do not feel they have an adequate support system to help them deal with these students. One challenge was that behavior plans often included rewarding EBD students with tangible items (e.g., use of iPad, cokes, candy) that either reinforced the negative behavior or presented a fairness issue with the other students.

Although teachers have had some success with effective strategies working with these students, most (if not all) were based on the student's individual needs, such as providing food, ensuring proper medication is administered, and giving them attention and love. It was noted that you must get to the root of the student's problem, and try to understand their background (i.e., where they live, home dynamics, etc.) There was not one blanket strategy that would apply to the entire EBD population. Following are some of the strategies that were proven effective in particular situations. One strategy that seemed effective for a student was to have peer tutors or peer models; however, that worked for one student but not another. Communicating changes in the schedule or routine proved effective for one student. Visual cues for misbehavior (e.g., tally marks on the board) proved effective for one student. It was reiterated that effective teaching strategies are proven effective for one student but cannot be generalized to the entire population. Teachers stated that more help needs to be provided to both the student (on a psychological level) and to the teacher (teacher support and training).

## **Interpretation of BCBA01 Interview**

Make sure that the manifestations are consistent before attempting to label the student with an emotional or behavioral disorder. EBD should not be confused with a child's reaction to a stimulus in their environment or personality conflict with the teacher. A regular education teacher can feel overwhelmed when educating this population because at times it may feel that the student is controlling the classroom. To combat this it is extremely important to maintain structure with EBD students and this can be accomplished by assigning each child in the class a chore, implementing a self-management sheet, and conducting teacher talk-times. Another effective strategy is a behavior intervention plan where every staff member is fully trained on the plan and implements it with consistency. Encouraging parents to be consistent at home with these students is very important as well. Conducting 1 minute reading or math probes can have a dual positive impact by assessing the academic strengths/weaknesses of the student, in addition to giving them one-on-one attention that is often craved. A buddy peer system is effective, and it is appropriate to have conversations with the child's peers about accepting each other's differences, as long as, the child is not targeted or ridiculed during these conversations. Designing proactive and antecedent modifications can be helpful to the regular classroom teacher by determining things that may set off the student, such as sharing or noise, and eliminating or minimizing those triggers to avoid a negative reaction. It is important to have a conversation with the EBD student after an episode discussing the antecedent and their reaction to it. Many times they may not be aware of their actions during an emotional or behavioral meltdown.



Giving the student time to calm down and become more rational can be very effective in understanding what made the student upset. It is imperative that an educator follows through with consequences that are spoken to the student. Failure to do so can lead to an attitude of winning and control of the classroom. Teachers should remember that EBD is a real issue, and that they should not take a student's reactions personally. There is often something in the child's life or past that has caused this reaction, and it would benefit the teacher to discover the real issue. Maintaining a schedule, structure, and consistency is a repetitive theme to any effective teaching strategy that a regular education teacher should use with EBD students.

### **Interpretation of BCBA02 Interview**

When referring to the manifestations listed in the introduction, it is important to be clear about the specific actions that are present. It is also noteworthy that an individual does not need to exhibit all of the manifestations listed in order to be considered as a student with a behavioral and/or emotional disorder. The data collected in this interview are from a behavior analyst who focuses on the functions of an individual, rather than treating a diagnosis. One challenge that a regular education teacher might face in an inclusive classroom is the "uncontrolled" variables such as the way other students interact with the EBD student. Another challenge would be to make sure the regular education teacher does not use punitive procedures in a public manner such as telling the student in front of the class that a parent or administrator is going to be called because of their lack of compliance. This punitive action, or public denouncement, often escalates negative behavior, and can result in increased aggression that can lead to property destruction,

physical hostility, and/or verbal assault. Establishing routines that occur during transitions and prior to instruction can help minimize these challenges. In addition, teachers can implement self-management techniques so that the EBD student is taught to regulate their own behavior, even to the extent that they recognize a rise in frustration and ask to be removed from the “trigger” causing the frustration.

In considering the academic needs of the EBD student, a regular education teacher should identify the student's current level of performance, strengthen any skills needed to be successful, and focus more on informal assessments rather than grade-level performance. Strategies that focus on collaborative efforts, such as peer-tutoring, group projects, and games (both academic and behavior games such as the Good Behavior Game) are effective methods to increase positive social interaction. When communicating with an EBD student, a teacher needs to set clear expectations and be consistent with the consequences of those expectations while providing guidance and support to ensure success. Modeling the skill such as *I do. We do. You do.* can provide a structure that is consistent and engaging for the student.

When considering strategies that may impact behavior, it is important to have an attitude of meeting individual students' needs rather than ensuring that everyone is given the same thing. It is also effective to proactively focus on consequences for positive behavior rather than negative actions that may occur. Approaches to change behavior should emphasize increasing appropriate behavior rather than decreasing inappropriate behavior. Teachers should attempt to give four praises for every negative comment that is rendered. A large component of implementing an effective behavior plan is

communicating behaviors that are expected and the rewards that will occur when those behaviors are exhibited. Although students need to be aware of consequences for negative behavior, this should not be the only focus of an effective behavior strategy. Corrective feedback should occur privately, such as away from the class or where just that student can hear. Educators should use a variety of rewards/consequences including simple actions that help shape behavior. This could include telling the misbehaving student to go to the end of the line. Students should be constantly reminded of behavior expectations. The verbal response of students should not be used to determine if a behavior strategy is effective, rather the effectiveness should be measured in change to student behavior. Consistency and collection of data is vital once behavioral expectations have been presented. Antecedent interventions are easier to implement because consistency of consequential interventions can be more difficult to sustain.

Inclusive teachers need to establish routines very early and then consistently and immediately enforce those routines by administering whatever reward/consequence was explained to the students. This consistency needs to occur from the very first day. To ensure that students understand the routine and consequences, it must be discussed frequently with students giving examples/non-examples of the appropriate behavior. Negative behavior can be minimized, while academic success maximized by a structured, highly engaging academic classroom.

### **Interpretation of BCBA03 Interview**

One manifestation of EBD that could create significant problems for a regular education teacher is a student's inability to appropriately respond in social situations, as

well as, experiencing difficulty processing sensory input, especially if they are on the autism spectrum. Responding to and participating in a regular education classroom can be challenging for these students as they respond to certain triggers, such as changes in sensory experiences or the academic and social expectations. One of the greatest challenges for a regular education teacher is meeting the many various needs of all students in an inclusive classroom. When a teacher can have compassion and understanding towards the unique needs of his/her students, then the inclusion classroom seems to be more effective. All students in the class should be taught this compassion and tolerance for differences and an understanding that not everyone is the same or will be treated (consequences, etc.) the same.

Teachers should search for positive reinforcements that will benefit the entire class not just the student on a behavior plan. General education teachers should be open to strategies that do not fit the norm, such as allowing a student to walk around the class before the lesson begins or adjusting the setting of the classroom to meet the unique needs of EBD students. Alternative assignments, interactive activities, and peer models/tutors should also be considered when teaching in an effective inclusive classroom. Peer tutoring and modeling can help students in the classroom by creating and promoting social interaction. The functioning level of the student should be considered and matched when communicating with the EBD student. When needing to correct negative behavior, it is important to be calm and firm and avoid yelling or other actions that could cause a greater negative response from the student.

It is also important to remain consistent when asking and expecting students to perform any task. Don't give in just because it is convenient or less trouble. Replacement behaviors should be a main focus as teachers help EBD students find alternative actions to negative actions; teachers should then make sure they encourage students to use those replacement behaviors as students monitor their own behavior. The individuality of a student should be considered, as well as, the fact that they are just children before prejudging a student based on a diagnosis. Knowing a student's background, as far as expectations that have or have not been previously taught, can assist the teacher in establishing expectations for that classroom. An effective inclusion classroom where students with EBD are an active part can help all students improve their academics.

### **Interpretation of BCBA04 Interview**

Although the list of manifestations seem fairly accurate, it is important to realize that these behaviors are not caused by the disorder EBD. "Diagnosing" or labeling a student as having an EBD should not come due to the existence of manifestations; however, linear causes or antecedents such as the learning history or genetics should be examined.

A major challenge to the teacher of an EBD student is the extra amount of time that needs to be spent with that child in order to make them successful. This is due to the interventions that need to occur that require more time, therefore, time management is a consideration when educating this population. Group contingencies, such as the Good Behavior Game, allow the teacher to modify behavior on a group level, rather than focusing on one specific behavior plan. There is sufficient research proving this game as

an effective management tool to use with the inclusive classroom, including long-term effects. Details of the game are provided in the interview transcript. The premise of the game revolves around very specific observable target behaviors that allow the teacher to instruct the students on what behavior should be seen/heard and what behavior should not be seen or heard. Instructions provided to students need to be very specific rather than broad statements, such as “Be a good citizen.” The teacher needs to tell the student exactly what behavior they are looking for and include examples of that positive behavior.

Another way that social interaction can occur is by using the “Hero Procedure” where a specific student is selected to perform specific social tasks, such as providing words of encouragement to five students. This student then becomes the hero of the class because the entire class is rewarded from his/her positive social actions. The main point is that the expectations are very clear and precise. This helps eliminate any arguing or miscommunication that may occur that would possibly lead to an escalation of negative behaviors. Other than these strategies it is difficult to give specific strategies for students until more information is provided. Once it is determined the antecedents to the behavior, then a more specific strategy can be ascertained.

Direct instruction and the DISTAR program are two teaching strategies that can be used to increase academic performance in both reading and math. These strategies are also research based as being effective. These methods were part of an initiative by Lyndon Johnson that sought out effective teaching strategies for low performing students with behavior problems. When classroom instruction is provided slowly without

opportunities for students to chorally respond, then negative behaviors tend to increase. Direct instruction helps eliminate this slow pace of the instruction and provides all students with an opportunity to play an active role in the learning. It is also noted that many teachers decrease the amount or rigor of the work provided to EBD students in order to avoid push back from these students. Direct instruction places everyone on the same track with the same amount of work and rigor. A classroom that is structured should show a decrease in unwanted behaviors. Best case scenario, the positive behaviors would be generalized to other classes but unlikely that it would transfer to the home due to a variety of contingencies present.

Teachers of EBD students should know that these students have a real cause for the reason they act the way they do. It is not just the “way that kid is,” there is an underlying reason that the behaviors are evident. Identifying those behaviors can provide the teacher with background that may cause them to be more understanding and provide the student with strategies that will allow them to be successful in their behavior. This does not mean that the behavior is caused by the teacher or has anything to do with school; however, the teacher is unaware of what has occurred earlier in that child's life that may have caused them to exhibit the unwanted behavior.

This note was added by BCBA04 to be included in the interpretation:

I'd agree with everything. My only addition is to the last paragraph where I'd suggest that even though the teacher may not have caused the behavior, antecedents, or the consequences, the teacher can control whether or not these behaviors are maintained or stopped in the classroom. It is up to the teacher to

develop a classroom that promotes positive behavior and minimizes unwanted behavior. Even when those behaviors may have started for reasons outside of the teacher's control.

### **Interpretation of BCBA05 Interview**

A behavior analyst focuses more on behaviors that can be increased or decreased rather than changing the manifestations that occur as a result of EBD. Although the manifestations are prevalent, the behaviors themselves are what need to be focused on not the manifestations. Both social and academic behaviors can interfere with a student's success in the classroom. There are several challenges of educating an EBD student in the inclusive classroom: untrained teachers, behavior strategies and behavior plans not being implemented as intended, and students not receiving the proper counseling. These challenges precede other challenges that may cause disruptions in the classroom, sometimes to the point of academic instruction coming to a stop. A lack of teacher training can sometimes exacerbate problems that are already present.

Specific strategies are difficult to generalize to an entire EBD population; but, specific strategies need to be personalized to specific behaviors that need altering. Some strategies that have been proven effective include direct instruction, active responding, and self-monitoring. A regular education teacher can promote social interaction by incorporating peer-assisted learning and social skills groups. Pairing peers teaches students that every student can have fun and reiterate that all students have something to give. Social skills groups can allow the teacher to monitor interactions before pairing them for academic based group activities.



It is important to have a set schedule of reinforcing positive behaviors. An educator can determine what positive reinforcements to use by distributing an interest inventory or preference assessment. Teachers should not assume that every child likes the same things. Educators should explicitly teach the rules where they are created, posted, taught, modeled, and reinforced consistently. Explicitly teaching the rules will help all students be more successful in the classroom. Providing structure in the classroom will help EBD students balance their emotions, which will allow them to appropriately respond to social situations. Having a structured classroom management plan that assists the other students in the classroom will allow the EBD students to be successful. The more structure that can be provided before negative behaviors occur will aid the teacher in having a more successful year because routine has already been established. Proactive measures are better to use rather than reactive measures. Structure and consistency play a large role in the success of educating EBD students. BCBA05 added this addendum to the interpretation, “This looks great. The only part I would add is that when we look at the individual's behaviors we seek strategies that address not only the behavior but choose those strategies based on the function of those behaviors.”

### **Discrepancies With Goal of the Research**

There was much discussion about the difficulty of having a positive attitude about EBD students and the way in which they disrupt the progress in the classroom. Participants’ frustration was obvious as they discussed how much instructional time was wasted when they would have to deal with problem behaviors. This was of great concern because of the high-stakes state testing, and the realization that these students were not

going to make gains on that test. Admissions were shared of allowing the EBD students to do less than expected or showing inconsistency in behavioral plans for fear of a behavioral challenge. The participants also expressed lack of support that they felt were appropriate for the success of their classroom. It was also voiced during the focus group interview that the participants sometimes feared future actions of particular EBD students, and they experienced physical effects of knowing they had to deal with particular EBD students or their parents.

It was expressed during the focus group interview that they did not see that a formal behavior intervention plan was an effective tool, due to the fact that it rewarded the EBD student for doing something that other students were not rewarded for and that caused problems with their peers. They also felt that it gave the EBD student a sense of entitlement such as, “You are supposed to give me candy because I did not throw anything today.” It was also discussed that a behavior intervention plan also had the potential to enforce negative behavior just so a child could be rewarded by being asked to do something totally different than the other students. The example was given of a student who was allowed to play games on the iPad during recess because they did not know how to control themselves with other students at recess. The participants noted that this encouraged negative behavior.

### **Conclusion**

Examining the practice of educating students with an EBD benefited from the use of the case study qualitative research method. Using a system of interviews, my goal was to discover specific teaching strategies that teachers needed to implement in order to be

effective teachers of students with EBD. The data analysis was completed using a computer-assisted program that will allow connections to be made from the literature and the data collected that would not otherwise have been made. The project, results, and final product will be beneficial to EBD students and their teachers, not only at the local level but society in general. The themes of effective strategies fell into five categories:

- Foundational groundwork
- General teaching strategies
- Strategies to improve academic performance
- Strategies to improve social skills and communication techniques
- Behavior management strategies

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

In this section, I present a design for professional development as the culminating project derived from the results of data collected and analyzed from this study. The professional development sessions will focus on strategies that general education teachers can use to enhance their effectiveness educating students with an EBD. The project also takes into consideration that the research and study were designed around the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's idea of zone of actual and proximal development and the idea that students' disabilities should be viewed as a "developmental process" rather than the negative characteristics of the disability (Rodina, n.d.). Providing educators with strategies that foster the developmental process is the major purpose of this research and study.

The strategies presented in the project represent some of the most challenging aspects of educating a student with an EBD. The project contains PowerPoint presentations, video segments, training handouts, and role-playing scenarios all designed to explain, model, and practice strategies that are effective when educating EBD students. This section is a description of the project, including the targeted goals and the rationale of choosing a professional development project to share these strategies. The roles and responsibilities of educational stakeholders will be presented along with the impact that each of these stakeholders has on the success of the educational experience for EBD students. The section will close with a description of the evaluative methods that will be implemented to assess the effectiveness of the project in the local setting and beyond.

### **Description and Goals**

General education teachers, EBD students, peers of EBD students, and other educational stakeholders would all benefit from a professional development session geared at sharing effective strategies with general education teachers. The problem outlined in Section 1 of this study presented the phenomenon of an increase in inclusion practices that leaves general education teachers meeting the unique challenges of EBD students, in addition to the academic needs of all students. Data collected from the focus group interview confirmed this challenge; however, data collected from interviews with behavior analysts and information from the literature review has provided effective strategies that general education teachers can implement in their classroom in order to meet the academic, behavioral, communication, and social needs of EBD students. These strategies are presented through the means of professional development sessions.

The goal of these sessions is to increase pedagogical practice in regards to meeting the multifaceted needs of EBD students. The objective of this study was to provide general education teachers with concrete strategies that can be used to eliminate behavior problems, while increasing academic achievement, communication practices, and social skills, particularly with the EBD population. It is my wish that the impact of this project will allow teachers and students to encounter a positive educational experience where routine and consistency prevail in the strategies that are used.

Although the broader goal of this project is to provide teachers strategies that have been proven effective with the EBD population, there are multiple subgoals that are present in the study as well. It is not the intention of the project to ensure that every

general education teacher focuses on all of the subgoals, which are further explained in the literature review, but that the teacher will focus on one or two strategies in which they can be successful and implement those first. As an effective practitioner, it is the ultimate objective that the general education teacher will become comfortable with all of these strategies enough that they can use them to meet the individualized needs of all students. The table below describes the goals, subgoals, and examples of strategies to meet those goals.

Table 4

*Goals, Subgoals, and Examples of Strategies*

Goal	Subgoal	Examples of strategies
General teaching Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Appreciate student individualization</li> <li>*Develop appropriate teacher/student relationships</li> <li>*Implement antecedent measures</li> <li>*Provide explicit and consistent expectations</li> <li>*Recognize need for professional development and further training</li> <li>*Secure stakeholder support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Recognize students have individual needs</li> <li>*Organize classroom with individual student's needs in mind (sensory disorder issues)</li> <li>*Present and model explicit rules and consequences</li> <li>*Make sure everyone is on the same page with a student's behavior plan</li> </ul>
Academic Performance Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Recognize gaps and barriers that hinder academic success</li> <li>*Increase active participation</li> <li>*Utilize a direct instruction method of teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Conduct one minute probes to determine academic weaknesses</li> <li>*Provide instruction in shorter segments with lots of modeling and time for active practice</li> </ul>
Behavior Management Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Employ behavioral modification strategies</li> <li>*Establish group contingencies</li> <li>*Foster self-regulation and self-management techniques</li> <li>*Utilize behavioral tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Use positive reinforcement</li> <li>*Implement the Good Behavior Game</li> <li>*Conduct a formal behavior analysis (a version more suited for general educator use)</li> </ul>
Social Skills & Communication Techniques & Strategies	(This is an overall section that focuses on allowing students more time to interact with their peers.)	*Peer tutoring

The professional development will be provided over 3 days with each day containing 5.5 hours of presentation. The material presented will follow the pattern shown in Table 4. The sessions will include activities that will present the strategies in an

engaging format that will model the effective teaching strategies outlined. This will include time for role-play, modeling, and self-reflection. Multiple methods of instruction will be used in order to make the professional development sessions engaging and meaningful.

### **Rationale**

The rationale behind this professional development addresses the problem presented in Section 1. The data collected during the focus group interview revealed that regular education teachers do not feel equipped to meet the challenges of the EBD population. This supports the information presented in the first literature review that stated that only 35 of 36 regular classroom teachers at the local setting have a special education endorsement (Faculty-Staff: ABC Elementary School, 2015; TN.gov, 2015) and there is an increase in time that EBD students spend in the regular education classrooms (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013b). This lack of pedagogical practice was confirmed when teachers shared personal feelings and stories that exemplified the lack of teacher efficacy.

Professional development sessions were chosen because that was the most effective genre to present strategies that would be beneficial to general educators. During the data collection phase, the participants of the focus group interview confirmed that teachers needed more training on strategies they could use, and the data collected during the behavior analyst interviews also indicated that regular education teachers lacked the skills needed to be effective with the EBD population. Material can be presented in a professional development session in such a manner that general education teachers can

openly discuss the challenges of educating an EBD student, while learning strategies that are modeled and even practiced. The collaborative nature of a professional development session also makes it the most effective project genre because teachers can collaborate on specific ways that the strategies can be implemented (such as modifications to their classroom). The professional development genre also allows the participants to role-play strategies that will increase their confidence in using the strategy.

### **Review of the Literature**

According to White, Houchins, Viel-Ruma, and Dever (2014), teachers in general education classrooms that educate students with EBD do not have a wide range of evidence-based interventions to use. Harjusola-Webb, Hubbell, and Bedesem (2012) remind us that students with disabilities are to be educated in the least restrictive environment where they are educated with their peers; however, the authors also stated that in order for this to be successful, effective strategies must be determined in order for teachers to address the challenging behaviors of students with EBD. Although some progress has been made to this extent, there is still great concern that students with EBD are not receiving the assistance they need in classes due to the avoidance of stigma related to the disorder and much needed support not being provided for the sake of inclusion (Farmer, 2013). The following literature review provides research that corresponds with the data that were collected, analyzed, and presented in the previous section. It is the results of the data collected and the information provided in this literature review that stood as the basis for the project. Peer-reviewed journal articles



were located using ERIC and EBSCO using search terms such as *positive reinforcement*, *group contingencies*, and *antecedent modifications*.

## **Effective Teaching Strategies**

### **Appreciate Student Individualization**

According to Farmer (2013), in order to understand the intricacies of EBD, language should be used that is plain and direct in order to make others aware that positive outcomes are attainable when proper and effective treatment is administered. Kauffman and Badar (2013) expounded on this idea by saying that we need to foster ideas that are less destructive to the individualization of students and their identities, while still recognizing that as an EBD student they need special education. Less focus should be given to the diagnosis of EBD and more to the differences that should alter academic and social skills needed to allow for student success (Kauffman & Badar, 2013).

### **Develop Appropriate Teacher-Student Relationships**

According to Capern and Hammond (2014), strong relationships between students and teachers are critical to student success in academics, social skills, and emotional development, and may even help the EBD student to be more successful in their academics. Developing teacher behaviors that promote a positive student-teacher relationship is an effective strategy to use with all students but especially those that exhibit high-risk behaviors (Capern & Hammond, 2014). Chong and Ng (2011) stated that forming relationships with students can address their basic needs for belonging and self-esteem. Positive interactions between EBD students and the teacher help students to

be successful in the educational environment (Shillingford & Karlin, 2014). “The relationship between the student and teacher influences the interaction between the teacher and student and consequently affects the student’s interaction with instructional material, therefore influencing the learning outcomes” (Short & Bullock, 2013, p. 397).

Teachers often view the means to this relationship as showing students that they are fair, just, empathic, caring, and good listeners (Chong & Ng, 2011). Students feel that teachers can build a relationship with them when they listen, make nondiscriminatory judgements or actions, give equal attention and praise, and treat them with respect (Capern & Hammond, 2014). Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) cautioned that teachers may allow their feelings of inadequacy to avoid forming a relationship with an EBD student, and that further training is needed to increase the chances of forming these important relationships.

One method of forming these important relationships is to notice and encourage or push the individual strengths of students. In a 2015 interview, Grandin, who happens to be autistic, explained that parents and teachers will start to see strengths when a child is in the third or fourth grade. By exposing children to interesting things, they are able to turn strengths and interests into good careers (Grandin, 2015). Walkingstick and Bloom (2013) referred to a story about an EBD student whose teacher recognized his artistic ability, so people began asking him to use his talent around the school. Because a teacher formed a relationship with him and discovered this talent, he then started acquiring positive attention from his teachers and peers alike (Walkingstick & Bloom, 2013). Grandin (2015) recommended pushing students to do things that may be uncomfortable

for them at first. Those that are caring for the student may have a difficult time watching the student in these situations, but according to Grandin, pushing them outside of their comfort zone could allow them to succeed in their future endeavors.

### **Implement Antecedent (Proactive) Measures**

According to Axelrod and Zank (2012), proactive or antecedent measures concentrate on what took place right before the problem behavior occurred. Teachers looking for effective strategies for EBD students may want to consider antecedent strategies that can be used as a preventative measure rather than a consequential measure (Axelrod & Zank, 2012). Using antecedent strategies by taking measures to prevent the unwanted behavior from the start is a better alternative than waiting until an undesired behavior occurs and then reacting to the situation (Luke, Vail, & Ayers, 2014). Luke et al. (2014) suggested that physical activity is a proven antecedent method to improve the cognitive abilities of students, so at least 1 hour of gross motor time should be used per day, especially at the preschool level. As a portion of an overall behavior plan, school age teachers could implement using two sessions of 30 minutes of gross motor activity just prior to a teacher-directed lesson (Luke et al., 2014).

Another effective antecedent measure is that of establishing a positive classroom that is organized and structured in a consistent manner. Regan and Michaud (2011) stated that it is much easier for an EBD student to be successful when they are in a classroom that promotes classroom organization and an effective behavior management program. This prepares students for success in the classroom and helps to eliminate problem behaviors (Regan & Michaud, 2011). A positive classroom environment generates a

climate that is conducive to caring and respect that results in a positive experience for all students involved, including the EBD student (Walkingstick & Bloom, 2013). One way to promote a positive classroom environment is to give every student a job or chore which boosts the self-esteem, especially of the EBD student (Chong & Ng, 2011).

### **Provide Explicit and Consistent Expectations**

According to Snider and Battalio (2011), any type of strategy used with a student that may have a delay in understanding social situations or appropriate behavior needs to have the expectations, rules, and consequences explicitly explained to them. Especially with social skills, the concept needs to be taught and then modeled with a series of what the skill looks like and does not look like (Snider & Battalio, 2011). The Good Behavior Game Manual (2016) stated that students cannot change their behavior if they lack clarity in understanding what is expected of them both positively and negatively. Lee, Vostal, Lylo, and Hua (2011) stated plans to modify behavior may be ineffective if targeted behaviors are not clearly and explicitly shared with everyone involved in the plan. In research conducted by Chong and Ng (2011) it was found that teachers ascertained that many students with a severe EBD came from a chaotic home life, so the structure of their classroom is important to their academic success. This research also found that setting clear rules and enforcing them with consistency and fairness was important to an effective classroom (Chong & Ng, 2011). Regan and Michaud (2009) stated that the teacher of a proactive classroom would make sure that fewer than five rules were unambiguously shared, posted, and reinforced using language that was easy to understand.

### **Recognize Need for Professional Development and Further Training**

McKenna and Flower (2014) stated that teachers must seek to develop their craft by participating in evidence-based practices in order to develop professionally. Executing the practices has been difficult because of the high turn-over rate of qualified educators that teach students with EBD; the need is great for training and support that provide strategies that teachers can use every day in the regular education classroom (Ryan & Rozalski, 2013). In order for students to be successful in the general education classroom, educators, or frontline professionals, must seek out research based strategies that focus on more effective interventions for students with EBD (Walker, Clancy, Tsai, & Cheney, 2013, p. 3). According to Chong and Ng (2011), addressing professional development, especially in the area of meeting the diverse needs of students, with a range of strategies and skills that address behavior problems should be a main focus for inclusion teachers.

Due to the need for professional development is great, then teacher training sessions must occur in order to supply teachers with the tools they need to educate this population. Even special educators have stated that their teacher education programs lacked proper training on meeting the challenges of an EBD student; furthermore, less than half of teachers who educate students with EBD are credentialed to do so (Kindzierski, O'Dell, Marable, & Raimoudi, 2013). It should be noted that this article was in direct reference to special education teachers and not general education teachers who also educate this population. Short and Bullock (2013) recommended that preservice programs and other teacher training incorporate a wider range of preparation and actual

classroom experience in order to prepare, train, and equip teachers to meet the needs of EBD students.

One elephant in the room topic that must be addressed when dealing with professional development and training of teachers is that of teacher efficacy and teacher attitude towards students with EBD. Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) concluded that general education teachers proved to harbor negative attitudes towards students with EBD. After further research, it was found that a lack of self-efficacy in knowing how to handle the needs of this challenging population was the cause of these unhealthy attitudes (Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). It was also determined that the participants lacked a general understanding of the deficits of an EBD, so it was hypothesized that if teachers were given knowledge and strategies to meet these needs that teacher efficacy would increase and negative feelings would dissipate (Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). How a teacher responds to students with a behavioral disorder has a tremendous impact in managing their behavior especially since student's negative behaviors can be attributed to negative behavior they sense from the teacher (Shillingford & Karlin, 2014). According to Shillingford and Karlin, when teachers doubt their ability to effectively educate the EBD population and make a difference in their learning, then teacher expectations often drop or are given up entirely if difficulties or challenges are presented.

### **Secure Stakeholder Support**

Students, educators, administrators, parents, and members of society are all stakeholders in the effectiveness of the educational environment. Securing stakeholder support is important to the EBD population. According to Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns

(2013), negative administrative support in recognizing the needs of EBD students and the impact it has on a classroom was a main factor for teachers that intended to leave the field of education. On the contrary, teachers who felt emotionally supported by their administration were more satisfied overall with their work (Cancio et al., 2013). Teachers recognized that a close partnership with parents and other colleagues could have a tremendous positive impact on the success rate of managing student behavior (Chong & Ng, 2011). Evans and Weiss (2014) emphasized the importance of a positive collaborative relationship between the general education teacher and the special education teachers, although one main problem was the lack of time for these groups to meet together. This relationship and collaborative effort can benefit especially the general education teacher as they gain insight into meeting the needs of EBD students (Evans & Weiss, 2014). Improving education for EBD students is attainable if a program/plan is put into place where all of the stakeholders work together in a committed manner (Walker & Clancy, 2013). Involving the community and family in a collaborative effort is a collective support that should be available to all children (Regan & Michaud, 2011).

### **Effective Strategies to Improve Academic Performance**

Time on-task is an important skill for every student to master if they are to improve academically. Luke et al. (2014) used the definition for on-task behavior as keeping their eyes on the teacher, keeping hands and feet to oneself, and actively engaging in activities, such as listening and answering questions. Strategies to improve a student's performance include increasing active participation, recognizing gaps and

barriers that hinder academic success, and utilizing a direct instruction method of teaching.

### **Recognize Gaps and Barriers that Hinder Academic Success**

According to Cortez and Malian (2013), students with an EBD often display substantial behavioral deficits that impact their own learning and sometimes the academic success of those around them. In turn, these deficits can cause further behavioral problems (Ennis, Harris, Lane, & Mason, 2014) which only widens the academic achievement gap even further. Watt, Therrien, and Kaldenberg (2014) attributed a lack of core science knowledge to this overall difficulty that EBD students have to gain and retain crucial background knowledge.

Modifications are necessary in order to improve or maintain the academic success of EBD students, especially when it comes to teaching writing (Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013). According to Bak and Asaro-Sadler (2013), this need for modification is due to the student's inability or difficulty to stay connected to the lesson causing them to lose focus which causes frustration and unwanted negative behavior (Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013). According to Ennis et al. (2014), the lack of proficient writing skills causes a major disadvantage in the academic success of the EBD student. Sreckovic, Common, Knowles, and Lane (2014) stated the importance of addressing the writing deficiencies that are often prevalent with EBD students due to the fact that it has a major impact on academic achievement. Vostal and Lee (2015) claimed that the literary deficits are so common in EBD students because of their behaviors and these impede their participation in academic tasks. Unconventional methods, such as a dog reading program, have even



been influential by increasing on-task behavior and strengthening reading skills of EBD students (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2013). Using some of the other strategies mentioned in this research, such as antecedent manipulations and positive reinforcement, may have a positive outcome on closing any academic gaps that may be present (Vostal & Lee, 2015).

Fruth (2014) stated that in order for students to be successful in the classroom, they must have social, psychological, and academic preparedness. Hollo, Wehby, and Oliver (2014) urged teachers to not overlook language deficits that are often quite prevalent in students with EBD; consequently, these deficits impede the student from strategies or instruction that include significant amounts of talking and exchange of language. It is also important to recognize that the abnormal social deficiencies that are characterized by an EBD student hinder their ability to pay attention and participate in the learning process (Sreckovic et al., 2014).

### **Increase Active Participation**

Active participation, such as practice, hands-on activities, and tutoring, are important in helping the EBD student to be successful. According to Datchuk, Kubina, and Mason (2015), it is vitally important that students engage in deliberate instructional practice of the skills taught in order to gain fluency. As more hands-on types of pedagogical practice occur, teachers must provide support to the EBD student during this active participation (Watt et al., 2015). One such active participation strategy is the Numbered Heads Together intervention, which increases student active participation by focusing on collaboration to complete a math problem (Hunter & Hayden, 2013). One

reason the increased active participation is so important is due to the significant amount of time that EBD students spend away from the classroom due to behavioral issues (McDaniel & Flower, 2015). McDaniel and Flower (2015) recommended that teachers develop an efficient method of addressing undesired behavior so that students who are asked to leave the instruction can return to engage in the lesson in a timely manner.

### **Utilize a Direct Instruction Method of Teaching**

When direct instruction is utilized, more complex academic material is broken down into smaller units of instruction, and students are given multiple opportunities to solve problems while demonstrating their cognitive thinking process (White et al., 2014). Datchuk et al. (2015) stated that students' academic growth can advance from the intentional practices that result in success.

Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is one form of direct instruction whereby teachers administer writing instruction in a stage by stage process (Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013). The instruction is based on the memorization of specific mnemonics that are designed to teaching writing to a specific genre (CITE). SRSD is an instructional, evidence-based instructional strategy that is designed specifically for students with an EBD (Ennis et al., 2014). According to Ennis, Jolivet, and Boden (2013), SRSD instruction allows EBD students to be successful with constructing, developing, and organizing ideas to write which is typically a difficult task for this particular population. In addition to these benefits, SRSD utilizes the effective strategies of self-management and self-monitoring which have also proven to be beneficial for EBD students (Sreckovic et al., 2014).

Table 5

*Stages of Self-Regulated Strategy Development*

Stage	Method	Description
Stage 1	Develop background knowledge	Teacher discusses writing genre and develops a purpose for writing
Stage 2	Discuss it	Dialogue with students about writing mnemonic and samples
Stage 3	Model it	Review of writing mnemonic; teacher models pre-writing strategy
Stage 4	Memorize it	Teacher assesses students' ability to memorize the mnemonic
Stage 5	Support it	Collaborative writing exercise with students
Stage 6	Independent performance	Students no longer need scaffolding from the teacher

Source: Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013

According to Mulcahy, Maccini, Wright, and Miller (2014), the National Mathematics Advisory Panel urged teachers to use methods of direct instruction when servicing students that have behavioral problems. Other effective-based practices such as the use of technology, manipulatives, mnemonics, and self-monitoring measures should be used alongside the direct instruction method (Mulcahy et al., 2014). High probability command sequence is another effective strategy whereby the teacher gives a series of commands/questions that will most likely be answered or addressed correctly right before a low probability command, or request that might meet resistance, is presented (Axelrod & Zank, 2012). According to Axelrod and Zank (2012), the number of high-probability commands would then be decreased from three commands to one command prior to the presentation of the more difficult question or command. Research results indicated that

using the HPCS series of commands results in the low probability command, or more difficult task to complete, being completed with more success and frequency (Esch & Fryling, 2013).

### **Effective Strategies to Improve Social Skills and Communication**

In order to improve social skills in the students with an EBD, the teacher must provide opportunities for peer engagement. Chong and Ng (2011) stated that along with the realization that good student-teacher relationships are important; a teacher must recognize the importance of positive peer relationships. In a general education classroom, this would require pairing students that are not easily distracted or angered with the EBD student that may present challenges (Chong & Ng, 2011). According to Harjusola-Webb et al. (2012), it is important that opportunities are provided for students to share their ideas, feelings, and thoughts with the class in order to be a part of a positive social environment. This opportunity is usually rare with students who exhibit challenging behaviors (Harjusola-Webb et al., 2012).

Snider and Battalio (2011) stated that educational stakeholders recognize that part of the educational experience is to learn positive and appropriate social skills. Social skills such as obeying rules, helping others, taking turns, and sharing ideas are a few of the skills that should be a consideration in the inclusive classroom (Harjusola-Webb et al., 2012). Social skills can be taught using similar academic teaching strategies, such as direct instruction, role-playing, and scaffolding where the educator would give explicit instruction and then opportunity for practice (Snider & Battalio, 2011). It is important to note that in order for these same strategies to work, educators must see social ineptness as

a learning problem, instead of an unwillingness to socialize. In addition, students lacking social skills should not be punished (Snider & Battalio, 2011). Walkingstick and Bloom (2013) reminded the teacher that the classroom is a multi-faceted social environment where students and teachers build either a community of support or one of senselessness for EBD students.

According to Spencer, Simpson, and Oatis (2009), peer-tutoring is a strategy that has many benefits such as popularity with both teachers and students, increasing academic achievement, and decreasing unwanted behavior. Peer-mediated instruction and intervention is another evidence-based strategy where peers are given the tools and strategies they need to help their EBD peer be successful (Collett-Klingenberg, Neitzel, & LaBerge, 2012). The tools and strategies provided may be as simple as “After he starts to work, offer to help” or “Help her carry her things when her arms are full” (Collett-Klingenberg et al., 2012, p. 5). Peers can also be beneficial in creating and implementing behavioral support plans for their EBD peers (Walkingstick & Bloom, 2013).

### **Effective Behavior Management Strategies**

Watt et al. (2014) stated off-task and other unwanted behaviors can have a huge impact on an EBD student’s ability to achieve academically. Effective practice of educating EBD students relies on the educator’s use of appropriate behavior management strategies. There were several themes that appeared from the data collection and literature review in regard to strategies that can be used to manage and redirect student behavior: employ behavioral modification strategies, establish group contingencies, foster self-regulation and management, and use behavioral tools.

## **Employ Behavioral Modification Strategies**

According to Cortez and Malian (2013), the correction of behavior with long-term results requires the teacher to use a composed and pleasant tone while enforcing the expectations set forth in the classroom. Teachers could also use the effective behavior management strategy of redirecting a student's behavior toward actions that are more appropriate (Cortez & Malian, 2013).

The use of positive reinforcement is another effective behavioral modification strategy. According to Regan and Michaud (2011), positive reinforcements should ensue right after the targeted behavior occurs. The consistent and repeated use of positive reinforcement can provide chances to change negative behavior simply because of the high-frequency of the positive reinforcement (Regan & Michaud, 2011). Positive behavior intervention system (PBIS) can be used in different cultures throughout the school and has a positive result of not only changing unwanted behavior but fostering values that support a community such as respect and collaboration (Hardman, 2012).

Esch and Fryling (2013) described how the particular reinforcers, or stimuli, that are motivating and desirable among students can be determined by a stimulus preference assessment. The purpose of a reinforcer is to increase wanted behavior and decrease undesirable behaviors, so if the reinforcer is not something that students seek to attain, then a new reinforcer needs to be chosen (*Good Behavior Game Manual*, 2016). *The Good Behavior Game* (2016) recommends that students be allowed to pick the reinforcer occasionally so that satiation, lack of motivation for a reward, does not occur. There are several types of reinforcers that are effective methods of positive reinforcement.

Table 6

*Positive Reinforcements*

Positive Reinforcement Type	Description	Examples
Activity	Students are allowed to participate in desired activities	Playing games Extra computer time
Edible	Food or candy; Caution should be used to consider allergies and nutritional value	Candy Snacks
Social	Verbal statements or non-verbal cues from teachers, peers, parents	Comments such as “Good Job.” Pat on the back
Tangible	Objects that are desirable; Cautions should be used that toys are age/size appropriate (choking hazard)	Toys Balloons Stickers
<b>Token</b>	<b>Rewards given that in themselves have no value but can be traded for something of value</b>	<b>Tickets</b> <b>Points</b>

*Source:* Smith, 2016; Good Behavior Game, 2016.

**Establish Group Contingencies**

Community classrooms focus on the students, teachers, and other school staff engaging in activities that allow these individuals to get to know each other and come together to solve problems that impact the classroom and learning (Walkingstick & Bloom, 2013). According to Walkingstick and Bloom (2013), during these times the activity of “tootling” is promoted where rather than tattling, the teacher or students praise each other for actions that were positive.

According to Farmer (2013), SWPBIS programs (Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention Support) are becoming an effective popular method to generate and reinforce positive behavioral methods on a school-wide level. Various tiers are used in order to teach students appropriate behavior, such as the primary tier that focuses on all students learning appropriate behavioral methods and the tertiary tier that is used with students that have an EBD who may have difficulty exhibiting positive behavior (Farmer, 2013; White et al., 2014).

One group contingency that was mentioned several times in the data collection, as well as the literature reviewed was that of the Good Behavior Game. According to Yettick (2014), 22 studies have been conducted on the use of this group contingency and have proven effective in decreasing behavior challenges such as talking out, aggression, and getting off task. This effective tool have resulted in 75-125 fewer distractions and disruptions to instruction than a classroom not using the GBG; in addition to this positive benefit, teachers gain approximately 60 to 90 more minutes to present instructional material a day when using the game (Fruth, 2014). The Good Behavior Game has been proven to decrease disruptive behaviors in substantial amounts dropping the average of unwanted behaviors from 67% an interval to 26% an interval (Mitchell, Tingstrom, Dufrene, Ford, & Sterling, 2015). The steps to implementing this group contingency are straightforward and can include variety according to the needs of each classroom. The general premise of the Good Behavior Game is that the class is divided into two groups that attempt to address target behaviors without going over a baseline number established



by the teacher, and then the group(s) under that number are rewarded (Good Behavior Game, 2016).

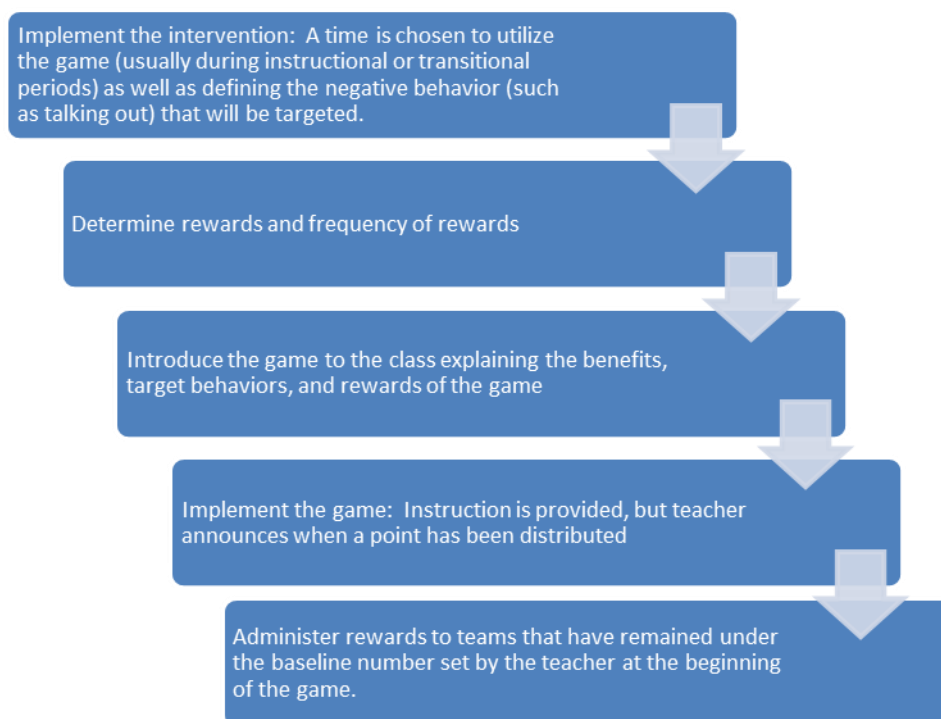


Figure 2. Good behavior game. Source: Good Behavior Game (2016).

### **Foster Self-Regulation and Self-Management**

According to Carr, Moore, and Anderson (2014), the use of self-management strategies have proven effective for improving the social and academic levels of a various group of students and the benefits of self-management generalized to other academic and social areas. The term, *self-management*, is an overall term that refers to a student taking personal responsibility and control for monitoring their own behavior (Chafouleas, Sanetti, Jaffery, & Fallon, 2012). According to Chafouleas et al. (2012), the student is prompted by an external cue (either auditory or visual) to observe and record their

behavior, which in turn decreases the need for other stakeholders to intervene in correcting behavior. Moore, Anderson, Glassenbury, Lang, and Didden (2013) stated a considerable increase in on-task behavior occurs when students use self-management techniques. Fostering this sense of self-management is a skill that will benefit the EBD student as they continue to grow academically and developmentally (Luke et al., 2014).

### **Utilize Behavioral Tools**

Christensen, Renshaw, Calderella, and Young (2012) described a function-based support (FBS) and a strategy that focuses on decreasing unwanted behaviors in exchange for replacement behaviors by using behavioral tools such as a functional behavioral assessment and behavioral support planning. Although the function-based supports are effective, the lack of support that are qualified to implement these tools are limited; it is recommended that general education teacher learn to create and utilize these behavioral tools (Christensen et al., 2012). Frustrations from educators and incorrect implementation of the behavioral tools often cause them to be ineffective (Christensen et al., 2012). These tools are important though and have been proven to be effective by investigating challenging behaviors, including the antecedent behaviors that may have precipitated the behavior to begin with, and then an individualized plan can be created to address these behaviors based on the data collected (Moreno & Bullock, 2011). The team supporting the functional-based supports should monitor the effectiveness of the intervention and discuss ways that the desired behavior can be generalized to other areas (Regan & Michaud, 2011).

According to McDaniel and Flower (2015), the use of a graphic organizer for students to organize and map their own behaviors can be a very effective tool. As a student uses a graphic organizer to document their behavior, less time is spent by the educator addressing negative behavior, and in turn less time is spent away from the instructional process (McDaniel & Flower, 2015). Tobin and Simpson (2012) described how the use of a consequence map that is placed in plain sight of the student may be a reminder of the consequences if targeted behavior is not considered and followed. The map is used to describe desired behavior and rewards for demonstrating that target behavior in addition to consequences for not exhibiting the target behavior.

### **Implementation**

After completing the project, the participants of the professional development would complete an evaluation in order to determine the effectiveness of the project. Within the following month, a two-fold evaluation process would ensue to measure the impact that the teaching strategies had on the general education classroom.

The teacher would implement at least one of the strategies presented in the professional development. After the strategy had been in place for a month, the general education teacher would then conduct a self-management sheet (Appendix A) reflecting on the success of implementation in the classroom and the impact the strategy had on the targeted outcome. This same reflecting sheet would then be utilized over the course of an academic year. These data would allow the teacher to determine if the strategy was being consistently implemented in its entirety, as well as assessing the overall impact that the strategy had on a particular individual or the classroom as a whole.

At two different times during the academic year, two different reflection forms would be completed by peers of the general education teacher. The peers, preferably those that already have a working relationship with the general education teacher, will observe the strategy in action and reflect on the consistency and accuracy in which the strategy was used and the impact it had on the classroom. One commendation and one recommendation would be made from the peer to the general education teacher. Ideally, the peers working together would share common professional learning community (PLC) time and could discuss the concerns, problems, and successes of the strategies used.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

There are several resources and existing supports that would benefit this project. The first potential resource is the support of several key individuals at the school. The special education teachers were used as the peer debriefers for this study and are very supportive of teachers gaining strategies that allow them to be successful in educating the EBD population. The special education coordinating teacher is also very supportive of this research and project study and would be a great source of support during the implementation and assessment stages of the strategies. The administration at the local setting is a good resource, as they are committed to increasing pedagogical practices that benefit students. Personal communication has occurred with the administration on the particular benefits of this study and how increasing teachers' pedagogical practice related to the implementation of these strategies will decrease behavior problems and increase academic engagement for all students.

The other potential resource is the fact that the staff at the local setting currently has a working collaborative relationship with each other. Each grade level currently meets 45 minutes every day in PLC sessions. It is encouraged that teachers use this time to share with each other concerns and successes of educating students. This PLC time would be a great time of support as teachers are implementing some of the strategies. According to BCBA01, problem behaviors can sometimes increase right after implementation as the student tests the resolve of the educator to continue implementation. The PLC time could be used as a time for teachers to encourage one another to continue the strategies with consistency and accuracy.

### **Potential Barriers**

There are a few barriers to the success of this project. The first barrier is the commitment to three days of professional development. With the increased emphasis on state standardized assessment scores, professional development sessions are generally focused on academic strategies that are beneficial to all students. However, the knowledge that creating a more positive environment and increasing teacher efficacy in meeting the needs of all students may provide justification for allowing three professional development days to be used to present these strategies.

Another potential barrier is that of teacher buy-in. Over the years, educators have been presented with many different educational initiatives. There is concern that the teachers will see this project as “just another program” that may come and go and therefore may not support the ideas that are presented in the professional development with 100% support and investment. This lack of teacher support has the potential to make

the evaluative process ineffective for peers that are supportive, as well as not providing a source of encouragement during the implementation process. In order to address this potential barrier it is important to remember, and possibly address during the professional development session, that a teacher's lack of efficacy can have an impact on their attitude toward this particular population (Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). Caution and sensitivity will need to be used to address this potential barrier.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

August 2016

- Professional Development Session
  - Day 1: Researcher presents general teaching strategies to the staff at the local setting.
  - Day 2: Researcher presents strategies that address behavior management
  - Day 3: Researcher presents strategies that increase academic achievement, communication skills, and social skills
- Participants complete a plan to implement two or three strategies that they felt would benefit their particular classroom
- Participants implement at least one strategy targeting academics, behavior, communication, or social skills of the EBD student

September 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the initial strategy implemented
- Educator implements another strategy focused on academics, behavior, communication, or social skills of the EBD student

## October 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented
- Peer completes an observation to provide both a commendation and recommendation on the accuracy and consistency with which the strategy is implemented

## November 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented
- Educator reviews any strategies that involve the students' participation, as the holidays approach and often create an increase in challenges

## December 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

## January 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

## February 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented
- Peer completes an observation to provide both a commendation and recommendation on the accuracy and consistency with which the strategy is implemented

## March 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

## April 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

May 2017

- Participant completes final reflection on the strategies implemented
- Participant writes a composite reflection of the strategies implemented and includes the year's reflections, peer evaluations, as well as their interpretation of the strategies implemented in their portfolio as required for the state's teacher evaluation process.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

The role of designing and presenting the professional development will be my responsibility. With the assistance and guidance of the peer debriefers and other supportive colleagues, I will create the professional development components which will include PowerPoint presentations, handouts, role-playing scenarios, situational scenarios, and video compilations. Once the professional development components have been created, I will share them with the administration seeking their guidance and approval. After the details of the professional development have been approved, I will schedule the actual session to be presented to the staff at the beginning of the school year.

Throughout the year, I will be available to support the general educators as they implement the strategies. The teachers will take responsibility of their own pedagogical practice by implementing, with accuracy and consistency, the strategy they find the most effective for their individual students and classroom. As colleagues, the staff will be responsible for supporting each teacher as they implement the strategies that were chosen. The special education staff and administrators will have the role of acting as an additional support to the educators.



### **Project Evaluation**

The success of the project will be assessed through an evaluation process of the professional development, in addition to self-reflective and peer-observation rubrics.

After the implementation of one teaching strategy presented, the general educator will use a self-reflection sheet provided to indicate the accuracy and consistency in which the strategy is used and the impact the strategy has on the overall classroom. This self-reflection will occur for an entire year, occurring every month, in order for the teacher to track the level of implementation versus the intended impact of the strategy.

A second phase of evaluation will occur, where throughout the academic year, the general practitioner will be evaluated by two of their peers. One of those peer evaluations will occur within 3 months of the implementation of the strategy, and the second should occur in the 3 months following the first. These peer observations and evaluations will follow a specific guideline and will include one commendation and one recommendation for the general educator as to the effectiveness of the strategy.

This type of evaluative process is an outcomes based evaluation method where the success of the project will be determined based on the outcomes present in the general education teacher's classroom. The performance measures will demonstrate whether or not the teacher, as the self-regulator, feels that the strategies implemented are effective in modifying the behavior and academic achievement of the EBD student. The overall evaluation goal is for the general education teacher to implement some of the strategies presented in the project and as a result positively impact the educational process for EBD students. Another goal is that the teacher's level of efficacy in relation to educating this

population increases. As a reflective practitioner, the general education teacher needs to be constantly aware of the effectiveness of the strategy that was implemented and make appropriate changes as necessary. This is especially important in the effectiveness of the reinforcer to make sure that satiation has not occurred, therefore resulting in an inefficacy of the strategy.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

Emotional and behavioral problems associated with EBD can cause a disadvantage to a student who is trying to be included in the regular classroom. Whether there is an official EBD diagnosis or not, EBD students struggle with issues that cloud their judgement when making appropriate behavior, social, or communication decisions. This focus on their own individual struggle often causes them to lose focus on their academic work.

As educators, it is the teacher's responsibility to meet the needs of every child. When a child is not able to focus on the academics because other outside factors cloud their focus, it is the teacher's responsibility to use strategies that encourage positive and appropriate behavior in order for the student to focus. The strategies presented in this study will allow the general educators at the local setting to help close the achievement gap present among the students served by IDEA. Fostering healthy student-teacher relationships will promote a sense of community and respect so that all students can feel cared for and respected. All students at the local setting will benefit from this study as the

educational environment will become one of consistency, respect, and positive outcomes as individual needs are addressed and met.

I also feel that this study will benefit the local educators by providing them with training that should have occurred in their preservice teacher training programs. Equipping them with effective strategies will allow them to feel more confident in meeting the needs and challenges of the EBD population. This in turn will create a more positive atmosphere and attitude about EBD students and their presence in the classroom.

### **Far-Reaching**

The most important far-reaching implication that this study will have is on the EBD student themselves. I am relating the term, *far-reaching*, in this case to mean either far-reaching in distance or in the span of that student's life. As mentioned in the focus group interview, stories circulate about how challenging students find their way back to educators who cared so that the student could thank them for supporting and caring about them even when their behavior was less than stellar. As educators implement the strategies presented in this project, students' lives will be impacted by knowing that someone cared about them enough to change the way they teach or conduct their classroom. This knowledge that someone is interested in them as a person and in meeting their individual needs will have a far-reaching impact on that student's life. As teachers are unaware of where students may find themselves in years to come, teachers will never be able to comprehend the impact that using some of these strategies may have on the EBD student and society as a whole.

The possibility exists that as EBD students learn ways to self-regulate their own behavior, the more likely they are to think about negative actions they may take in the future. As EBD students learn how to work together with peers, the more likely they are to collaborate on projects in the workforce without conflict. As EBD students learn how to replace negative behaviors for positive behaviors, the possibility exists that the EBD student will exchange a healthier behavior rather than a destructive one. The results of this study and the impact that it may have on the EBD student are far-reaching and totally unforeseeable as to the positive influence it will have.

The implications of this study are also far-reaching as research indicates that more research needed to be completed on effective strategies that educators can use with EBD students (Gage et al., 2010). More teacher training in general terms needed to be provided to general educators (Allday et al., 2012; Farley et al., 2012; Stormont et al., 2011). The data collected, analyzed, and reported in this study can be added to the minimal list of resources available for strategies found to be effective with EBD students.

### **Conclusion**

This project was created to provide general education teachers with effective strategies when educating students with an EBD. The culminating project became a professional development session whereby general educators would learn specific strategies to meet the academic, behavioral, communication, and social skill needs of EBD students. The professional development and evaluation timelines were outlined with possible barriers and potential resources and support. Section 4 includes my reflections as a researcher and practitioner as this doctoral project study was completed.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This final section provides reflections on my own professional growth over the last 5 years working on this project study. I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the culminating project and how it can be used in a positive manner for social change. I will then address my growth in regards to being a scholar, researcher, practitioner, and project developer. The section will end with an overall conclusion of the research process and my role as the researcher.

### **Project Strengths**

The problem addressed in this project study was the phenomenon of an increase in inclusive practices with EBD students in general education classrooms where regular education teachers were not equipped to meet their students' needs. The strength of the project is evident in several different ways. The project addressed this problem by examining literature and collecting data from multiple sources in order to define specific strategies that have been proven effective for students with an emotional or behavioral problem. The strategies presented are not written in technical terms that are difficult to understand but are written in language that would be easy for any practitioner to follow. Another strength is that the strategies are feasible to implement in any classroom and do not require a significant amount of planning or resources to implement. The strategies that I present in the project are also stand-alone. A practitioner may choose to implement one strategy (based on individual student need) but not implement another.

The actual project as a product has areas of strength as well. The project was set up in a professional development format that is engaging. The teachers attending the sessions will be involved in hands-on activities that model and practice the strategies provided. The project was also divided into sections according to the problem area; for instance, a practitioner can refer back to the project to find a strategy that is specific to increasing social skills or behavior modification techniques. The project also has elements that are thought-provoking in order to help the teacher re-evaluate their own thinking and attitudes about this particular population.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

Although there were many strengths of the project, there were also limitations. Due to the fact that multiple strategies were discovered during the data collection process and literature review, the depth that each strategy was discussed is minimal. The basics of the strategies are presented as an overview, but more research would need to occur on the practitioner's part if they wanted to know more specifics about the strategies. Another limitation to the project is the timetable. The project requires 3 days of professional development at the beginning of the year. I know that these days are valuable and that generally the teacher's mind is on preparing their classroom for the new school year. Sometimes receiving new information and ideas at the beginning of the year, during this time of preparation, can be overwhelming as just one more thing to do. The timetable requires the regular education teacher to spend some time each month in reflection and twice during the year observing a peer. Although the practice of peer observation is not

new to the staff at the local setting, these additional demands on their time may meet with some resistance.

The problem of teachers not having adequate strategies to meet the needs of EBD students could have been addressed with a different culminating product. A guidebook of effective strategies could have been provided to the general education teacher with a less-time consuming professional development. Due to the nature of the information that needed to be presented to the teachers, some sort of professional development or face-to-face instructional method was the only feasible and logical way to present this material. It is in the context of this personal communication technique that educators are able to view, practice, discuss, and contemplate each strategy and the impact it would have on their classroom and individual students.

### **Scholarship**

My level of scholarship has increased over the last 5 years. Even before I began work on this research project, the coursework associated with this degree allowed me to grow in my professional and pedagogical practice. As my level of scholarship has increased, so has the manner in which I view and contemplate new information. When material is presented to me, I search to find evidence of validity and reliability in the research. I also view professional development sessions differently as I seek to find evidence-based practices that will allow me to strengthen my craft as an educator. Through the data collection process, I realized that as a life-long student, I need to always seek out information for issues that are of a concern to me and my professional practice. One benefit of my project was that I have now formed professional relationships with

some of my interview participants. These participants have provided other information and encouragement to me as I complete this doctoral process. These professional relationships have also helped to strengthen me as a scholar.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

During this study, I have learned a great deal about how to develop a project and evaluation method that coincides with that project. As each step was completed for this project study, I recognized the importance that one section had on the other. This causal relationship among the sections of the study allowed me to see the importance that solid and meaningful research questions had on driving the project and the way the data collection, analysis, and review of literature were conducted. I also realized the importance of triangulation of data, as the data collected from multiple interviews and information from the literature started to form themes that provided answers to the guiding questions. As these themes formed, I saw the value in the triangulation as I knew it was making the project stronger. I also realized that the integrity of the project was enhanced by the member checking and transcript review process, whereby my participants verified my interpretations of their interview. As the evaluation portion of the project began to take shape, I recognized the importance that the evaluation would have on the future of the project and future projects. The evaluation process needed to be extensive in order to determine the overall success of the project.

### **Leadership and Change**

I have always viewed myself as a leader; I wanted to strengthen those skills, which is why I chose this particular doctoral program. My leadership skills have



improved greatly over the course of this doctorate. Through coursework and completing this project study, I have learned aspects that should and should not be a part of leadership. As I view the leadership styles of others, I have been more cognizant of the impact that each style had on those that follow. I have also recognized the power of leadership and how it can be used as a tool for construction and one for destruction. A strong leader has the potential to bring about great change by empowering others around them. I have also realized that change can occur when employing proper techniques to examine the problem and then collaboratively take steps to discover a solution. These insights have promoted my own view of leadership to that of an encourager that empowers others around me while we work together to solve a problem.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Before beginning my doctoral degree program, I always found merit in collecting data about my students' work and then evaluating my own teaching based on that data. The steps that I have taken to complete this degree have confirmed the need for such activities. Because I now see the merit in conducting research to drive my educational decision making, it has become even more of a practice in my professional activities. Engaging in these scholarly activities, such as collecting and analyzing data, has been a challenge, but it has also been very rewarding. This complex method of problem solving has caused me to be more appreciative of other scholarly works that are presented.

The perseverance required to complete this scholarly work has also impacted my life. The tenacity in which I try to solve problems in my classroom has increased as I know there are answers for challenges if I identify the problem, research answers, and

implement the results. This level of perseverance has forced me to evaluate the things that are important and realize that a scholar must practice balance in all areas. The most important aspect of me becoming a scholar impacts my family. I want to foster a love of learning in my daughters. As they see their mom working on her school work, I want them to know that education is powerful and can open any door that they want to open.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

The knowledge that I have gained has helped me to make decisions in my classroom and life that are based on research, especially in regards to leadership. The impact of this project has already had a tremendous impact on my classroom. This project was born from a need that was present not only in my classroom but in my colleagues as well. I struggled with my own efficacy in regards to educating the EBD population. Even before this project was finished, I began to implement some of the strategies I learned during the data collection process. Just one simple strategy alone has made a tremendous impact in the behavior of my class and has increased my instructional time. This has not only encouraged me, but my students are anxious to play the game and receive reinforcement for a job well done. This success has already been noticed by administration and colleagues. As a practitioner, it gives me satisfaction to have identified a problem in my classroom, researched strategies that would be beneficial, and implemented a successful technique. I am hopeful that this process will drive any instructional or educational challenge I may face in the future in my professional career.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As I constructed the project, I found great satisfaction in knowing that the project was research based and that it would provide instructional support to my colleagues. I found enjoyment in collecting the data, as I was able to engage in professional dialogue that had purpose. I also enjoyed analyzing the data, especially when I realized that themes were starting to emerge from the transcripts and literature. I have conducted several professional development sessions prior to this project. However, designing this project from data that I had collected was rewarding and challenging. I constructed the professional development session with several different views in mind, which only provided more strength to the project. Due to my experience with teacher trainings that contained no engagement, I wanted to make sure that the professional development was engaging and enjoyable for the staff to attend. I recognized the importance of including the research behind the strategies, as this was my role as the project developer. Designing this project was professionally satisfying and I am sure will be a practice that I continue in the future.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

During my doctoral residency, one of the professors made a comment about perseverance. Although this statement was made to encourage me through the doctoral process, I have taken this view and applied it to several situations. He said that when a researcher encounters an obstacle in the road, that researcher can either see it as a stepping stone or as a blockade. This study was born from an obstacle in the road that my colleagues and I discussed almost daily as something that seemed impossible to

overcome. The project makes this hurdle in the road a stepping stone to increasing pedagogical practice and positively impacting the lives of EBD students that are in the classroom.

It is my hope that this project finds its way to a teacher that is struggling to meet the needs of a student with an EBD. In implementing just one strategy, the possibility exists that the teacher's frustration can be diffused or eliminated, while the struggling student finds success. It is also my hope that the positive nature in which that student is educated has a tremendous impact on their success as an individual.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The importance of this work lies in the fact that it impacts the lives of students. During this research study, effective strategies were identified as having a positive impact on the success of a student with an EBD. These strategies provided practical application to address academic, behavioral, communication, and social skill concerns.

The implications of this study rely on an educators longing to improve their own professional practice. The study also implies that because of inclusion practices and the likelihood that EBD problems are prevalent in the general education classroom, the presentation of these strategies is relevant to a regular education teacher's professional practice.

The application of the strategies presented in this study has the potential to affect the success of the classroom. However, the effect of the strategies will only be effectual to the extent in which they are carried out. If the strategies are not implemented with accuracy and consistency, the applications of this project study have been nominal. On

the other hand, those educators who implement the strategies in their entirety and with fidelity will find more use for the results of this study.

The implications for future research include the continuous goal of improving one's craft through research-based strategies. Although several strategies were mentioned in this project study, future research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of these strategies and address any concerns in implementing them. Future research also needs to be conducted on ways to improve teacher efficacy and attitudes in regards to teaching this population.

### **Conclusion**

This section was a description of the strengths and weaknesses of this project study. I also discussed my growth as a scholar, project developer, and practitioner. The 5 years that I have focused on growing as a teacher leader has culminated in this study that provides answers to teachers who have been struggling with meeting the needs of students with an EBD. The study and its results have already had a tremendous impact on my own teaching experience and the lives of my students. In the search to find ways to help this challenged population, there are answers.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### Professional Development Project Effective Teaching Strategies for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Rural School By Christie Elam

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this professional development project addresses the need for additional teacher training in regards to effective teaching strategies to be used with students who exhibit the manifestations of an EBD. Data collected during the project study research discovered that regular educators do not have a high level of teacher efficacy when attempting to meet the needs of EBD student. This project initiative will emphasize strategies that target improving academics, modifying behaviors, and increasing social and communication skills. According to the research collected:

Regular education teachers:

- Consider themselves inadequate to meet the needs of the EBD population
- Acknowledge that the challenges of EBD students greatly impact their instruction
- Understand that more training needs to occur
- Accept that positive teacher/student relationships are important
- Require the support from all stakeholders involved
- Need to implement group contingency plans

Behavior analysts:

- Recognize that general educators face many challenges in educating the EBD population
- Suggest that teachers gain additional training on effective strategies
- Advise that antecedent measures are taken to make the inclusive classroom more effective
- Emphasize the need for consistency in the rules, rewards, and consequences
- Recommend increasing active participation and explicit instruction
- Urge teachers to create more group centered activities to promote social skills
- Advocate EBD students managing their own behavior

This professional development project was created to address the points mentioned above by providing effective strategies that regular classroom teachers can use in their inclusive classrooms. These strategies can also be generalized to other areas where stakeholders can support the modifications made in the classroom. The strategies are presented in three professional development sessions. The effectiveness of the project will be determined through self and peer evaluations. The data collected during the evaluations should guide

the administration and teachers in any further professional development that should occur.

### Goals

- Increase pedagogical practice by implementing general teaching strategies to meet the multi-faceted needs of EBD students
  - Appreciate student individualization
  - Develop appropriate teacher/student relationships
  - Implement antecedent measures
  - Provide explicit & consistent expectations
  - Recognize need for professional development and further training
  - Secure stake-holder support
- Provide general education teachers with effective strategies that will increase academic performance
  - Recognize gaps and barriers that hinder academic success
  - Increase active participation
  - Utilize a direct instruction method of teaching
- Equip teachers with strategies that will modify behaviors by minimizing unwanted behavior and increase desired behavior
  - Employ behavioral modification strategies
  - Establish group contingencies
  - Foster self-regulation & self-management techniques
  - Utilize behavioral tools
- Promote strategies that will foster effective communication and social skills among students in the inclusive classroom

### Learning Outcomes for Teacher (verbatim based on the Professionalism rubric)

Professional Growth and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is consistently prepared and highly engaged in professional learning opportunities</li> <li>• Engages in evaluation process with eagerness by seeking out feedback from both supervisors and colleagues.</li> <li>• Consistently self-reflects on evidence of instruction, accurately matching evidence to the rubric in both areas of strength and areas of growth.</li> </ul>
Use of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematically and consistently utilizes formative and summative school and individual student</li> </ul>

	<p>achievement data to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of all his/her students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan, implement and assess instructional strategies to increase student achievement and decrease achievement gaps between subgroups of students</li> <li>• Reflect on use of instructional strategies that led or impeded student learning</li> </ul>
School and Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly organizes and leads school activities and events that positively impact school results and culture. Regularly works with peers to contribute to a safe and orderly learning environment and actively facilitates improvement in schoolwide culture</li> </ul>

(TN Department of Education, 2016)

### **Target Audience for Professional Development**

- General education teachers
- Administrators
- Support staff (This would include P.E., Art, Music, and Computer teachers)

### **Activities**

- Interact with PowerPoint presentation presenting effective strategies
- View supplemental videos
- Participate in role-play classroom situations
- Collaborate in activities discussing strategies
- Present and explain of self and peer reflection and evaluation
- Assess effectiveness of the professional development training
- Review self and peer evaluation forms
- Discuss importance of colleague support

### **Materials**

- PowerPoint of effective strategies
- Scenario cards
- Role-play situations
- Videos



- Evaluations

### **Implementation Timetable**

August 2016

- Professional Development Session

Day one: Researcher presents general teaching strategies to the staff at the local setting.

Day two: Researcher presents strategies that address behavior management

Day three: Researcher presents strategies that increase academic achievement, communication skills, and social skills

- Participants complete a plan to implement two or three strategies that they felt would benefit their particular classroom
- Participants implement at least one strategy targeting academics, behavior, communication, or social skills of the EBD student

September 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the initial strategy implemented
- Educator implements another strategy focused on academics, behavior, communication, or social skills of the EBD student

October 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

- Peer completes an observation to provide both a commendation and recommendation on the accuracy and consistency with which the strategy is implemented

November 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented
- Educator reviews any strategies that involve the students' participation, as the holidays approach and often create an increase in challenges

December 2016

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

January 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

February 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented
- Peer completes an observation to provide both a commendation and recommendation on the accuracy and consistency with which the strategy is implemented

March 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

April 2017

- Participant completes reflection on the strategies implemented

May 2017

- Participant completes final reflection on the strategies implemented

- Participant writes a composite reflection of the strategies implemented and includes the year's reflections, peer evaluations, as well as their interpretation of the strategies implemented in their portfolio as required for the state's teacher evaluation process.

### **Evaluation Plan**

There are three different forms of evaluation involved in this project. The first is the evaluation of the project to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development sessions. This will be a brief survey to determine the effectiveness of the professional development presentation. The next form of evaluation is a self-evaluative measure whereby the general education teacher performs an evaluation of the strategy used and its effectiveness in the classroom, in addition to the accuracy and consistency the strategy is implemented. The year's self-evaluation forms will culminate in self-reflection that the general educator will include in their professionalism rubric targeting the goals stated earlier. The last form of evaluation occurs from the teacher's peers as they come and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy implemented and the consistency and accuracy to which the strategy is presented.

**ABC strategies for teaching students with EBD****Agenda: Day 1**

8:00-9:00	Introduction to EBD  (manifestations, challenges, and experiences)
9:00-10:00	Appreciating the EBD student as an individual  Developing appropriate teacher/student relationships
10:00-11:00	Implementing antecedent measures in the classroom
11:00-12:00	Providing explicit & consistent expectations
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:00	Recognizing need for professional development and further  training
2:00-3:00	Securing stakeholder support

**ABC strategies for teaching students with EBD****Agenda: Day 2**

8:00-9:00	Review general teaching strategies Collaborative discussion about implementation
9:00-10:00	Introduction to behavioral strategies Employing behavioral modification strategies
10:00-11:00	Establishing group contingencies
11:00-12:00	Fostering self-regulation and self-management techniques
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:00	Utilizing behavioral tools
2:00-3:00	Scenarios using behavioral strategies

**ABC strategies for teaching students with EBD****Agenda: Day 3**

8:00-9:00	Review of behavioral management strategies Collaborative discussion on implementation
9:00-10:00	Academic performance strategies Recognizing gaps & barriers that hinder academic success
10:00-11:00	Increasing active participation
11:00-12:00	Collaborative work adding more active participation into a lesson Presentation of collaborative work
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:00	Utilizing a direct instruction method of teaching
2:00-3:00	Strategies to promote communication and social skills

**ABCs of Teaching Students with EBD Professional Development Evaluation**

**1. Prior to this professional development, what was your level of efficacy in teaching students with an EBD?**

- High level of confidence in meeting the needs of the EBD population
- Some confidence in meeting the needs of the EBD population
- Little confidence in meeting the needs of the EBD population
- Totally unprepared or trained to meet the needs of this population

**2. After attending this professional development session, what is your confidence level about using the strategies presented to make educating EBD students more effective?**

- High level of confidence in meeting the needs of the EBD population
- Increased level of confidence in meeting the needs of the EBD population
- Some increase in confidence, but I still have reservations about implementing them
- The PD sessions did not increase my level of confidence about teaching this population.

**3. Which of the following strategies related to general teaching practices do you think you will implement in your classroom? (Circle those that you're currently practice.)**

- Appreciating student individualization
- Developing appropriate teacher/student relationships
- Implementing antecedent measures
- Providing explicit and consistent expectations

- Recognizing the need for professional development and further training
- Securing stakeholder support

**4. Which of the following strategies related to increasing academic performance do you think you will implement in your classroom? (Circle those currently practicing.)**

- Recognizing academic gaps and barriers that hinder academic success
- Increasing active participation
- Utilizing a direct instruction method of teaching

**5. Which of the following strategies related to modifying behaviors in the classroom do you think you will implement in your classroom? (Circle those that you currently practice.)**

- Employing behavioral modification strategies
- Establishing group contingencies
- Fostering self-regulation and self-management techniques
- Utilizing behavioral tools

**6. What are some activities presented in this session that you will incorporate to promote social and communication skills among the students in your classroom?**

**7. How effective do you feel this professional development session was to your overall pedagogical practice?**

- Highly effective; I learned new strategies to help meet the needs of the EBD population.
- Somewhat effective; I learned a few strategies that to help meet the needs of the EBD population.



- Little effectiveness; A few strategies presented may be of interest to me.
- Not effective; I did not learn strategies that would be helpful with the EBD population.
- I am not sure about how the strategies will impact my effectiveness in meeting the needs of EBD student.

**8. What activities did you find helpful or meaningful?**

**9. What activities did you not find helpful or meaningful?**

**10. Do you see the need for additional training on meeting the needs of EBD students? If so, in what specific areas?**

**Self-Reflection-Implementation of Effective Strategies for EBD Students**  
**Teaching Strategy Implemented (Circle one.)**

**General Teaching Strategies**

- Appreciate student individualization
- Develop appropriate teacher/student relationships
- Implement antecedent measures
- Provide explicit & consistent expectations
- Recognize need for professional development & training
- Secure stakeholder support

**Academic Performance**

- Recognize gaps & barriers
- Increase active participation
- Utilize a direct instruction method of teaching

**Social Skills techniques**

**Communication techniques**

**Behavior Management Strategies**

- Employ behavioral modification strategies
- Establish group contingencies
- Utilize behavior tools

- Foster self-regulation & self-management techniques

	<b>Consistency with which strategy is implemented</b>	<b>Effectiveness of strategy</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	<i>5 Very consistent</i> <i>4 Usually consistent</i> <i>3 Somewhat consistent</i> <i>2 Consistency varies</i> <i>1 Little consistency</i> <i>0 Not implemented</i>	5 Very effective 4 Usually effective 3 Somewhat effective 2 Effectiveness varies 1 Effectiveness questioned 0 Not effective	
August, 2016			
September, 2016			
October, 2016			
November, 2016			
December, 2016			
January, 2017			
February, 2017			
March, 2017			
April, 2017			
May, 2017			

Final reflection: What is the effectiveness of the strategy implemented? What is the correlation of the consistency the strategy was implemented compared to the effectiveness? What impact did this one strategy have on your classroom?

**Peer Observation of Effective Strategies with EBD Students**

**Peer observer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observed peer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching Strategy Implemented (Circle one)**

**General Teaching Strategies**

Appreciate student individualization  
 Develop appropriate teacher/student relationships  
 Implement antecedent measures  
 teaching  
 Provide explicit & consistent expectations  
 Recognize need for professional development & training  
 Secure stakeholder support

**Behavior Management Strategies**

Employ behavioral modification strategies  
 Establish group contingencies  
 Foster self-regulation & self-management techniques  
 Utilize behavior tools

**Academic Performance**

Recognize gaps & barriers  
 Increase active participation  
 Utilize a direct instruction method of

**Social Skills techniques**

**Communication techniques**

- Describe the strategy that was implemented. What student behavior or action occurred prior to the strategy implementation?
  
- What evidence exists that the strategy has been implemented with consistency?
  
- What commendation do you have for your colleague in regards to implementing an effective strategy with EBD students?
  
- What recommendation do you have for your colleague as they continue to implement effective teaching strategies for EBD students?

## Appendix B: Cooperation Letter

Tipton County Board of Education  
1580 Highway 51, South  
Covington, TN 38019

August 31, 2015

Dear Christie Elam,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Equipping Regular Classroom Teachers to Meet the Needs of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders within the Tipton County School System at Drummonds Elementary School. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct a focus group interview, follow-up classroom observations, follow-up interviews, and behavioral therapist interviews. I understand that the follow-up classroom observations will only be focusing on teacher strategies and will in no way focus on the children in the classroom. I am aware that you will be video-taping and audio-taping these methods of data collection for verification purposes, but that participant identity will remain anonymous and these data collection instruments are to maintain validity of the data analysis. Once again, I understand that at no time will any child be video-taped or data collected from a child. I am also aware that you will be conducting a member-checking verification by allowing the participants to review the transcripts and field notes of any interview or observation conducted as a result of this study. I know that after your collection of data, you will analyze the data using a coded theme method searching for effective teaching strategies that will assist regular educators when meeting the needs of students with an emotional and/or behavioral disorder. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: allowing the researcher to conduct a purposeful snowball sampling method utilizing the leadership team at Drummonds, as well as supporting and permitting the efforts of data collection through interviews and observations at Drummonds Elementary. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission for the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,



Dr. William E. Bibb  
Superintendent of Schools  
bbibb@tipton-county.com

## Appendix C: Addendum to Cooperation Letter

## Addendum to Cooperation letter

Date: November 19, 2015

To: Dr. Buddy Bibb

From: Christie Elam

Re: Collection of data at Drummonds Elementary School

Dr. Bibb,

Thank you once again for taking your time to consider this addendum to a cooperation letter that you signed on August 31, 2015. This letter is to inform you, as well as ask permission, to change the method of selecting participants described in the earlier letter.

The method described in the previous letter was to present the study to members of the leadership team and have them ask their fellow colleagues in that grade level to participate.

I am asking to change that method of participant selection to the following steps:

\*Briefly present the purpose and the data collection process to teachers in grades pre-K through fifth grade during a PLC time to be specified by Mrs. Mills, Principal at Drummonds Elementary.

\*During this time, distribute the informed consent form so that the prospective participants have time to consider their participation in the study.

\*Send an email within the following week asking for their willingness to volunteer in the study.

There is also another additional change to the original request. I will not be videotaping any of the data collection process; however, audio recordings will be used to maintain validity of the data collected.

In my original letter, I asked for permission to interview behavior therapists. I need to give more clarification on that request. I would like permission to send an email to the special education department, both at the county level and at the local setting, asking for names and contact information of behavior therapists that they recommend.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration.

*ok*  
*w/Bibb*  
*11-20-15*

## Appendix E: Follow-Up and Clarification E-mails

**CE** Christie Elam 👤 Reply all | ▾

To: ☐ des; Cc: ☐ christie.mcduffee-elam@waldenu.edu; ☞ Thu 1/7/2016 7:03 AM

Sent Items; Inbox

Good morning! Thank you so much for your time and attention Monday afternoon. This email is to follow-up on that presentation. If you have any questions about the study and your possible participation in that study, please reply to this email. I know several of you have told me you plan to participate. (Please don't worry about completing the form. I will have another one for you to sign on Monday.) [If you plan to participate in the focus group interview on Monday afternoon \(3:15 food\) please reply](#) with your intent. Remember that the focus group interview will just be a group of willing teachers who will sit together and discuss educating students who exhibit emotional and/or behavioral disorders. We can also discuss any other aspect you want to bring up about educating this population.

Thank you again for your help with this study. I think the benefits could have a great impact on these students.

Christie

Clarification on Research ⤴

**CE** Christie Elam 👤 Reply all | ▾

To: ☐ des; ☞ Thu 1/7/2016 7:22 AM

Sent Items; Inbox

Just had a clarification question that might be of help to all.

My research is on finding effective strategies to use with these students. This does not mean that I am looking for "experts" so to speak. The kinds of questions we will be discussing are things like, "How does having a student with manifestations of EBD impact your instruction?" "What are strategies you have used? Do they work?"

These responses will be added to interview responses from behavior therapist interviews that I am doing. I just want a general education teacher's perspective. I selected that group because if you are like me, we have not ever had formal training on effective strategies to use with this population. I hope this helps.

This focus group interview will be a very relaxed atmosphere. You may want to contribute during the interview or you may find you just want to listen to the other comments. No pressure.

Thanks again.

Appendix F: E-mail Requesting Contact Names and Information for BCBA

To: Special Education departments at XXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXX

Thank you for your time and attention in reading this email. Attached you will find a cooperation letter, as well as an addendum signed by XXXXXXXXX giving me permission to conduct a research study at XXXXXXXXX. This study focuses on finding effective teaching strategies that general education teachers can use when educating students with an EBD. Along with a focus group interview, observations of teaching strategies, and follow-up interviews that will be conducted with voluntary participants at XXXXXXXXX, I would also like to interview licensed behavior therapists. I am requesting a list of names and contact information of licensed behavior therapists that you might recommend.

Again, thank you for your assistance with this endeavor. I feel the results of this study will be beneficial to our students and teachers alike, and I look forward to sharing with you a summary of my findings once the study has received final approval. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Christie Elam



## Appendix G: E-mail Intro to Behavior Analyst

To: Behavior Analyst

Good morning. My name is Christie Elam, and I am a third grade teacher atXXXXXXXXXX. I am currently in the Teacher Leadership program at Walden University, and I am working on completing my project study (dissertation) on effective teaching strategies that general education teachers can use with students that display manifestations of an EBD. The results of this study will be provided to all participants, but especially teachers that could use this information to adapt their own teaching strategy to meet the needs of this special population.

A fellow board certified behavior analyst provided your name and contact information as another BCBA resource. The purpose of this email is to request your participation in this study. Upon gaining your intent of participation, I would set up an interview (approx. one hour) at your convenience to ask you a set of questions that will be used as data for the research. The interview will be audio-recorded in order to maintain accuracy of the data collected. After the interview, I will analyze this data to create a transcript of our conversation together, as well as my interpretations of the conversation. At that time, I will email you a copy of the transcript so that you can conduct a transcript review (ensures that the information was recorded accurately) and a member-checking process (this is to seek your opinions about my interpretation).

Please keep in mind that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that you may withdraw your participation at any time. Your confidentiality will be maintained, as you will be assigned a code that will accompany any data that you provide.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me with your intent to participate. Within the week, I will also be giving you a follow-up call to answer any questions you may have about the study.

Thank you again for your consideration.

Christie Elam