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An Investigation of the Qualities, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective Teachers for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders: The Teacher Perspective

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This study investigated the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers for students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBD) from the perspective of six special education teachers. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a focus group. An analysis of the data yielded three themes. First, effective EBD teachers develop unconditional teacher-student relationships. No matter how many setbacks a student with EBD may experience, the effective EBD teacher relentlessly affirms his or her belief in the student's ability to succeed. Second, effective EBD teachers create positive classroom environments. When students with EBD are removed from the general education setting or experience a crisis at school, the effective EBD teacher provides a safe, consistent, and nonjudgmental haven. Finally, effective EBD teachers individualize instruction. Having knowledge of behavioral disorders and effective strategies is insufficient. The effective EBD teacher identifies the unique needs of each student and designs instruction that meets students' individual academic and behavioral needs.

Keywords: emotional/behavioral disorder, teachers, effective special education, students

Less than one percent of children ages 3 to 21 receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act's (IDEA, 2004) category of emotional disturbance (ED). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), emotional disturbance means:

A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's education performance: an inability to

learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Emotional disturbance includes

schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

Forness, Kim, and Walker (2012) argued, "There is a huge 'service gap' between children with EBD [emotional/behavioral disorder] needing special education and those who are actually identified and found eligible for the ED category of special education" (p. 3). Of those students receiving special education for an EBD, nearly 20% spend the entire school day in placements outside of the general education classroom, and only 20% receive services full-time in the general education classroom. The remaining 60% spend only part of their day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The needs of students with EBD are numerous and diverse. Students with EBD are far more likely to have mental health needs (Forness et al., 2012), have a higher prevalence of academic deficits in reading and math (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004), are more likely to be removed from school (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013), and are more likely to be in restrictive settings (Unruh, Bullis, Todis, Waintrup, & Atkins, 2007). In addition, students with EBD have severe social skills deficits (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). Unfortunately, the academic and social skills of students with EBD improve very little, or not at all, over time (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011; Wehby & Kern, 2014). Only 35 percent of students with EBD graduate high school compared to 76 percent of all students ("SPLC Launches," 2007). Students with EBD are not only at risk because of their disability, but also because of the likelihood that at some point

they will have teachers who are not properly prepared to teach them (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Wehby & Kern, 2014). Inadequate training of general and special education teachers hinders successful inclusion of these students (Oliver & Reschly, 2010).

Several studies identify the teacher as a critical determinant of student success. Stronge et al. (2011) concluded from their study on teacher effectiveness and student achievement that "the common denominator in school improvement and student success is the teacher" (p. 351). They found that more effective teachers have significantly fewer class disruptions and higher student achievement. Similarly, Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) reported that when students in kindergarten through fifth grade have effective teachers, they show one-half standard deviation of growth in reading and math while students with low effective teachers only show one-fifth to one-third growth in their achievement scores in these areas. These findings support the idea that teachers *do matter* and significantly affect student achievement in later elementary school grades (Konstantopolousas & Chung, 2011).

Essentially, the most important factor for school improvement is to improve the quality of the teaching that occurs daily (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). More than any other subgroup, students with EBD need teachers who are well-qualified to teach them (Scott, Jolivet, Ennis, & Hirn, 2012). In their review of the literature, Gage, Adamson, MacSuga-Gage, and Lewis (2017) found no research investigating the relation between teacher characteristics and academic achievement of students with EBD (p. 214). More specifically, Gage et al. (2017) did not identify an association

among teacher education level, certification, and years of experience with academic achievement growth among elementary students with EBD. Although a link between students' academic achievement and the quality of their teachers is well established, "a clear, empirically derived definition of teacher quality eludes the education field generally, and the EBD field specifically" (p. 215).

Qualities of Effective EBD Teachers

Teacher self-efficacy and teacher attitude are essential qualities of effective teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Students with EBD make the most gains academically and behaviorally when they have a teacher who believes in his or her own ability to help students succeed and who has a positive attitude toward them.

Self-Efficacy

Effective teachers of students with EBD have high self-efficacy; in other words, they believe they can enable students to overcome challenges presented by their disabilities to lead productive and successful lives. Perceived self-efficacy is central to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her ability to perform a task competently, and he defined an outcome expectancy as "a person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes" (p.193).

Since the 1970s, researchers have studied how teachers' self-efficacy affects behavior in the classroom and student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). They asserted that efficacy affects a teacher's level of effort, the goals a teacher sets for her or himself, teacher persistence when something does not proceed as planned, and teacher resilience when faced with setbacks. In a review of the literature

involving teacher efficacy and classroom management, Dibapile (2012) concluded that teacher efficacy promotes teacher effectiveness and enhances productivity. Consequently, the most important result of positive self-efficacy is student success. Further, a study based on a survey completed by 1,475 special education teachers serving students from preschool to high school demonstrated self-efficacy significantly impacts student achievement (Carlson, Hyunshik, & Schroll, 2004). Individual teacher credentials (i.e., years of experience, graduate degree, teacher license, national board certification) also have a significant positive impact on student achievement, especially in math. As teachers add credentials, they feel more prepared to overcome the challenges in their classrooms which leads to greater self-efficacy (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012).

Teacher Attitude

Attitude is a substantial part of a teacher's disposition. As noted above, a teacher's self-efficacy is related to his/her beliefs of personal aptitude, expectations of students, and student achievement. In other words, the effectiveness of a teacher is affected by his or her disposition (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). Kindness, caring, and high expectations are among the dispositions of excellent teachers (Helm, 2006). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed preparation standards for teachers entering the field of special education. One of CEC's (2015) standards states that beginning special education teachers must have knowledge of "teacher attitudes and behaviors that influence behavior of individuals with exceptionalities" (p. 40). Teachers' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, students with EBD influence their affective responses and intentional

behaviors when interacting with students (Poulou & Norwich, 2002).

Teacher attitudes toward students who are at-risk for EBD differ significantly from attitudes toward students who are not at-risk. Lago-DeLello (1998) found that students who were at-risk experienced (a) rejection by teachers; (b) decreased perception of ability by teachers and limited teacher expectations; (c) less academic engagement and involvement in classroom activities; (d) few instructional accommodations to meet individual needs; and (e) negative or neutral, and nonacademic teacher feedback.

Knowledge of Effective EBD Teachers

Knowledge of teacher-centered and student-centered evidence-based practices and strategies is an essential quality of an effective teacher of students with EBD. One size does not fit all, so an effective teacher must be knowledgeable about a wide range of evidence-based practices.

Evidence-Based Practices

The use of evidence-based practices (EBP) is critical for all students with disabilities (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011) and particularly critical for students with EBD (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012). These students are more engaged in learning when teachers use effective instructional practices (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012). Therefore, it is useful for educators to have general knowledge of EBPs that address common needs (i.e., academic performance issues, emotional factors) of students with EBD. Sadly, many EBD teachers leave the profession before they learn to implement a variety of EBPs (Billingsley et al., 2006).

Skills of Effective EBD Teachers

In addition to knowledge of a range of evidence-based practices (EBPs), an effective teacher of students with EBD must

also know when and how to apply the EBPs. Specific student needs require individualized instruction and unique environmental modifications within the context of a genuine teacher-student relationship.

Individualization

For students with EBD, teachers must not only develop individualized plans for academic achievement, but also develop plans to address behavioral issues (IDEA, 2004; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012). Data-based individualization allows effective teachers to use assessment data to identify appropriate interventions and to intensify individualized academic instruction for students who do not respond to Tier 1 Primary Intervention and Tier 2 Secondary Intervention within the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Danielson & Rosenquist, 2014; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Lemons, Kearns, & Davidson, 2014; Powell & Stecker, 2014). Similarly, interventions are increasingly individualized in this multi-tiered approach for students with behavioral challenges. When students do not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions, more intensive and individualized interventions are required (i.e., Tier 3 Tertiary) (Kern & Wehby, 2014; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006, Stevens & Lingo, 2013; Wehby & Kern, 2014).

Positive Classroom Environment

Teachers of students with EBD proactively prevent problems and use intervention strategies as part of effective classroom management (CEC, 2015). Consistency is an essential strategy when working with students with EBD, and daily classroom routines ensure this consistency (MacSuga et al., 2012; Hirn & Park, 2012). Effective classroom instruction also includes consistent consequences for appropriate

and inappropriate behaviors (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Mac-Suga et al., 2012).

Teachers cannot follow a prescribed formula when creating the classroom environment. An essential skill of an EBD teacher is to “modify the learning environment to manage behaviors” (CEC, 2015, p. 40)). The results of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) can be “used to develop an [individualized] intervention plan consisting of environmental modifications to (a) reduce the occurrence of problem behavior, (b) increase the likelihood of desired behavior, and (c) reduce reinforcement of problem behavior” (Iovanonne, Anderson, & Scott, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the learning environment must meet the needs of all students, while at the same time addressing each student’s individual needs.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

Effective teachers are those who establish positive relationships with their students (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu, & Choi, 2011; MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012; Marchant & Anderson, 2012; Owens & Dieker, 2003; Rappaport & Minahan, 2012; Scott et al., 2012). An initial preparation standard developed by CEC (2015) for special education teachers relates to the development of the teacher-student relationship: “Establish and maintain rapport with individuals with and without exceptionalities (p. 40).” Scott et al. (2012) advised:

Rather than focusing solely on the *use* of a practice as a means of identifying effective teachers, we must focus on the manner in which the teacher *approaches* practice. It is acknowledged as fact that instruction occurs within the context of a teacher-student relationship in which each

individual’s behavior affects that of the other and that effective teachers have a manner of developing this relationship to maximize the probability of success (p. 4).

While teacher-student relationships are central to teaching, these relationships take time to develop (Newberry, 2010). Even though the development of positive teacher-student relationships is a requisite skill of effective EBD teachers, there is minimal instruction on how to develop this skill. “Relationships involve emotional work yet teachers are given little instruction or support for the development of personal relationships with students” (Newberry, 2010, p. 1702).

Method

Although it is difficult to define, measure, or teach, EBD teachers think they know effective teaching when they see it, yet their perceptions are absent from the existing body of literature (Scott et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to identify the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD from the perspective of the teachers who actually teach them. The guiding research questions for this qualitative study were as follows: (a) What do teachers of students with emotional/behavioral disorders perceive to be the qualities, knowledge, and skills that are necessary to be an effective teacher? (b) Are teachers of students with emotional/behavioral disorders born or made?

Participants and Setting

The six participants in this study were teachers of students with EBD from a Midwestern school district that serves 11,370 students and employs 1,823 staff members. Approximately 140 certified staff in addition to numerous support staff serve

1,580 students with disabilities from ages 3 to 21; 127 of those students qualify for special education under the state's EBD classification system. Of the six participants, four taught in an elementary resource setting, one taught in a middle school mostly self-contained setting, and one taught in a high school resource setting.

Through purposeful, homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2012), all 32 teachers who teach students with EBD in this district were e-mailed the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale (MTES) described below. Of the 16 participants who completed the MTES, six participated in interviews, and five were present for the follow-up focus group. Steps were taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants by using pseudonyms, and participants were directed not to discuss their participation in the focus group nor identify the other participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three methods: Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. Multiple methods were employed for triangulation.

Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale. The Teacher Efficacy Scale was developed by Gibson and Dembo (1984) to "measure teacher efficacy, provide construct validation support for the variable, and examine the relationship between teacher efficacy and observable teacher behaviors" (p. 536). In 1997, Coladarci and Breton modified the Teacher Efficacy Scale to use with special education resource room teachers. Each item on the scale is answered on a Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For this study, the language of some items on the scale was changed from *teacher* to *EBD*

teacher. The result is the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale (MTES). The purpose for administering the MTES was to identify and interview teachers with the highest scores.

The MTES was electronically sent to the 32 teachers of students with EBD in the school district. Sixteen teachers completed the survey, with six consenting to be interviewed and to participate in a focus group. Due to only six participants agreeing, the MTES was not used to select participants for individual interviews and the focus group. However, based on the recommendation of Coladarci and Breton (1997), the MTES was used as a tool when designing the interview questions.

Interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol was crafted to allow teachers to openly share their perceptions and experiences. The first item on the protocol focused on EBD teachers' perceptions of what teachers of students with EBD do that most likely promotes student success. This item is based on the notion that some teachers are naturally more effective with students with EBD than others (Scott et al., 2012). Items 2 through 8 were open-ended questions based on the Council for Exceptional Children's 2015 teacher preparation standards for the emotional/behavioral disorders specialization. Items 9 through 11 were based on questions from the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale to allow participants to expand on their initial responses. Individual interviews were scheduled at a time and place that were most convenient for participants. Each participant was interviewed one time with the duration ranging from 35 to 75 minutes. A transcript of the interview was electronically sent to each participant to verify accuracy. This process is referred to as member checking.

Focus group. Focus groups can be used to explore the findings of a series of interviews (Roulston, 2010). Five of the six participants met one time to collectively discuss the results of the interview. The three themes that emerged from the interview data were presented individually, and participants were asked to comment on these findings. The focus group lasted one hour and was digitally recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis and Validity

Data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti which is qualitative software used to categorize the interview and focus group data. Data analysis began with coding. Thirty-one codes were identified and ranked by the number of interview statements associated with them. Further analysis revealed that some codes were too broad; consequently, more specific codes were created within the broader codes during this secondary analysis. Of the final list of 51 codes, three codes were identified as general patterns and seven codes were identified as typical patterns. When all participants made statements related to a particular code, this established a general pattern for the code. If at least half of the participants' statements fell under a particular code, this was considered a typical pattern. Fewer than half of participants' statements under a particular code resulted in a variant pattern. The three general patterns became themes, typical patterns became subthemes to support the general themes, and variant patterns were dropped as insignificant.

Results

Three themes emerged from the data. Participants identified developing an unconditional teacher-student relationship, creating a positive classroom environment,

and individualizing instruction as essential skills for effective teachers of students with EBD.

Theme 1: Unconditional Teacher-Student Relationship

All participants emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship for effective instruction of students with EBD. Building these essential relationships with students takes time, yet it is the only way to really get to know them. According to participants, the teacher-student relationship can either help or hurt the student. Participants shared how relationships let students "know that someone is in their corner" and how students need to "feel a part of the class." These interactions with students need to be sincere and authentic. One participant explained, "If you care about the kids, the kids will know it, and they'll do just about anything for ya. It may take a while, but they'll get there."

Allowing students to start each day anew is another key factor when building unconditional, teacher-student relationships. Participants found this approach helps students develop trust that each day brings new things and what happened the day before is over. In contrast, a lack of a relationship can have the detrimental effect of making kids feel unwanted. These effects are why participants emphasized the significance of how they react to students' behavior. They stressed the importance of not getting mad and taking things personally, having empathy, separating "bad" behavior from a "bad student," recognizing what students do right, and even needing to have a little "amnesia when working with students with disabilities."

Participants explained the importance of general education teachers

in relationship building. They believed the attitudes of these teachers made a difference. If general education teachers wanted students with an EBD in their classrooms they would make accommodations, but if they did not, then accommodations were not made. Paradoxically, one teacher remarked, "Most [general education] teachers want the student's behavior to change but will not consider a change to the way they interact with the student." Two participants shared anecdotes of administrators not wanting students with EBD in their schools. It seemed as if the sentiment was, "Get him out and keep him out!"

A pattern that emerged from the data was how an EBD can impact students' academic success. These students oftentimes are "bright, but there is a lot of clutter" that disrupts learning and communicating. Participants illuminated the reality of students not fully progressing until teachers understand the "root of the issue," which is best achieved through listening. "Students know the difference between hearing and listening. There's a huge difference, and they've figured that out very, very early on if you are actually going to take the time to listen."

Most participants identified *listening* as an essential skill for being an effective EBD teacher. They shared how meeting with students first thing each morning allows students to share and teachers to assess students' emotional states. Teachers can then take preventative measures if necessary, as many students with EBD have unstable home lives. Some participants felt students should be allowed to discuss issues not related to school, as well as "vent" when necessary. In sum, listening is the primary avenue for discovering the student's issues and is best achieved

through one-on-one discussions with a teacher who has a relationship with the student.

Theme 2: Classroom Environment Conducive to Learning

All participants agreed that organization of the physical, classroom environment affects the behaviors of students with EBD. Three participants identified décor and two identified the classroom layout as important environmental factors that affect student success. Participants described the importance of creating a homey, consistent environment for student ownership and for creating a calm learning space.

The classroom environment also needs a place where students can de-escalate during times of crisis. When a student exhibits severe, externalizing behaviors (e.g., screaming, destruction of property) in response to a perceived adverse stimulus, the student has reached the level of crisis. Participants highlighted the significance of having a predetermined space for students to de-escalate along with procedures for keeping all students safe.

Beyond the physical environment is the general atmosphere of the classroom. Participants asserted that consistency and high standards are the norm in an effective classroom environment. "Stability" and "success" for students are achieved when all educators are "on the same page." One participant declared, "The expectations for the student [with EBD] should be the same as they are for students without disabilities. Do not lower the expectations."

Participants agreed that a positive classroom environment is essential for the success of students with EBD, and the teacher determines the atmosphere of the classroom. Participants illuminated how using humor, incorporating breaks, creating

a familial structure, and reducing emotional triggers are at the forefront of achieving success. One participant recognized the teacher's power over the classroom environment, admitting, "We can make school a living hell, or we can make it a wonderful place. I want to make it a wonderful place."

Theme 3: Individualization

The third theme is individualization. All participants claimed that meeting the individual needs of students with EBD is a skill of effective teachers. Three participants explained the necessity of getting to know students' individual needs because "one size definitely does not fit all." Because each student has specific needs, it is important to "find out what works" and to "vary lesson delivery." Yet, identifying and meeting these individual needs are ongoing. One participant explained, "Students evolve and strategies have to change to meet those evolving needs." Individualization is paramount when managing behaviors. Knowing each student's behavior plan provided participants with procedures to prevent and manage crisis.

Although each student with EBD has individual needs, participants have observed common characteristics among their students. The majority of students classified with an EBD has been boys. Another characteristic is high intelligence, which can result in "boredom."

Data collection is an important skill for effective teachers of students with EBD. Participants cited various reasons for collecting data, which included: (a) establishing patterns, (b) planning individualized lessons, and (c) determining the need for special education services, especially with conducting a functional behavior assessment (FBA).

Despite the individual needs of students with EBD, participants identified interventions they found to be generally effective with students. Differentiated instruction (DI) is an effective method for teaching students with EBD. Additionally, using multiple modalities when teaching can help determine "what catches" a student's attention the most. Using high-interest material is another effective intervention that participants suggested. Other interventions included being transparent, starting fresh each day by leaving the past behind, and scaffolding instruction.

Although participants knew the importance of individualization, they also knew it comes with challenges. Each student's plan has to be fluid to meet needs, but modifying plans is hard to do when the student's needs are always changing. They recognized that individualization is easier to do in a resource room for special educators than it is for classroom teachers simply due to the number of students. Lastly, individualized instruction can be viewed as unfair, and it is challenging to convince students that "fair does not always mean equal."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers who work with students classified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder. All participants in this study agreed that developing an unconditional teacher-student relationship, creating a positive classroom environment, and individualizing instruction are requisite skills for the effective teacher of students with EBDs. Now, is it possible for teachers to learn and improve these essential qualities,

or are these qualities simply inherent in certain individuals?

Interestingly, there is an old argument about whether individuals can be trained to be effective EBD teachers possessing these aforementioned skills. In other words, are EBD teachers born or made? There is considerable evidence in the literature to support the idea that effective teachers are born and not made. Scott et al. (2012) stated that teaching students with EBD is a *calling*. "Not everyone is cut out to be a teacher of students with [EBD] and there are traits or characteristics beyond the simple delivery of instruction that are difficult to define and measure" (Scott et al., 2012, p. 4). In a study by Prather-Jones (2011), teachers of students with EBD agreed that the demands of the job require certain personality traits. Additionally, Cancio and Conderman (2008) observed that "many teachers do not have the skills or ability to effectively work with students identified as EBD" (p. 32). Participants in the current study asserted that the idea of effective EBD teachers being born and not made is false, as they believed that even immeasurable teacher qualities can be improved.

Despite the prevailing notion that EBD teachers are born and not made, research demonstrates that teachers' dispositions can be changed. Howe, Davidson, and Sloboda (1998) questioned the reality of innate talents. They found the real determinants of excellence to be early experiences, practice, preferences, opportunities, habits, and training. And based on Dewey studies, Nelsen (2015) observed that dispositions are clusters of habits that can be examined and changed through a process of inquiry in teacher education programs. Beyond this, Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw (2010)

concluded that teacher candidates who demonstrated awareness of their dispositions tended to question the *how* and *why* of their thinking and actions. In addition to teacher awareness of one's own disposition, teachers' modeling of positive dispositions influences the development of more positive student dispositions at the K-12 and university levels (Helm, 2006; Nelsen, 2015). Although teacher dispositions may improve, even EBD teachers with the requisite dispositions at the beginning of their careers can acquire negative dispositions over time due to the frustrations they experience on the job (Helm, 2006).

Still up for debate is whether or not teachers can learn how to develop positive relationships with students. Gentry et al. (2011) noted that exemplary teachers develop positive relationships with their students, but they also identified the need for future research regarding whether it is possible to teach pre-service teachers how to develop positive relationships. Whitbeck (2000) interviewed students in a college of education interested in becoming elementary teachers to discover their beliefs about whether teachers are born or made. The students felt they were called to the teaching profession, and this perception was affirmed by others (primarily teachers) who told them they had natural teaching abilities.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own abilities. The students in Whitbeck's (2000) study had been told and believed that they were born with the qualities to be successful teachers. Participants in this current study observed that students with EBD respond positively or negatively based on their perceptions (beliefs) regarding whether they are wanted in a classroom. Much of the literature cited above indicates

that personal dispositions and abilities can be improved when the dispositions and abilities are identified, and the individual is motivated to change them. Indeed, the goal of effective teachers of students with EBD is to improve the personal dispositions and abilities of students with EBD. Unfortunately, dispositions can also change negatively over time as is the case for teachers of students with EBD who begin to believe they are not making a difference and whose self-efficacy declines over time (Helm, 2006).

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, EBD teachers would benefit from evaluating their level of skill for developing unconditional teacher-student relationships, creating positive classroom environments, and individualizing instruction. To develop positive teacher-student relationships, teachers need a positive attitude and genuine listening skills. Becoming aware of influences (i.e., perceived cause of behavior issues) on a teacher's attitude provides an opportunity for the teacher to reevaluate his or her perspective and acquire a more positive attitude. The teacher's attitude toward students with EBD affects students' inclusion in the general education classroom, the teacher's willingness to provide accommodations, and the teacher's expectations for student achievement. Therefore, not only should the EBD teacher adopt a positive attitude toward students, but the EBD teacher should also educate general education teachers on the impact of a positive attitude on students. When teachers are educated about students with EBD and when they are exposed to students

with EBD, their attitudes become more positive, and their self-efficacy for teaching students with EBD increases.

The other primary component of a positive teacher-student relationship is genuine listening skills. When teachers listen, they show they care. Listening also helps teachers identify and address underlying student issues. Active listening takes patience and continued practice. When students de-escalate after a crisis and are ready to debrief the incident, the teacher's active listening skills are vital. Students may want to get something off their chests, or they may want to brainstorm possible solutions. EBD teachers should consistently work on active listening skills to be effective.

EBD teachers need to create a positive classroom environment, designate a place for students to cool-off after a crisis, and develop a classroom atmosphere based on consistency. This means implementing EBPs with fidelity and consistently applying positive and negative consequences. It also means establishing predictable classroom routines to create a structured, safe environment.

Limitations

The participants in this study were from one school district. Although three themes emerged from triangulated data, the results cannot be generalized to all EBD teachers. The results of this qualitative study relied upon authentic responses from the participants. The data may not be accurate if participants responded based on how they thought they should answer rather than on personal truths or opinions.

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