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# Factors that Affect the Success of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Inclusive Placements

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FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SUCCESS OF STUDENTS WITH  
EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS IN INCLUSIVE PLACEMENTS

by

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A Research Paper

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Historically, a critical component of special education has been the practice of offering a continuum of placements to provide the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet the needs of all students with disabilities (Landrum, Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 2004). This continuum ensures that appropriate placements and necessary services will be available for students with even the most specific and intense needs. When discussing the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities, it is important that policy makers and educators keep in mind the overall goals of education for each individual student, which may include social, vocational and independent living skills, in addition to the academic goals most often the focus of educational programs. Specific and direct instruction of these skills is not typically included in the general education curriculum, but is often necessary for meeting the educational goals of students with disabilities.

Since the 1980s inclusive placements for students with disabilities have become a popular trend in educational reform (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain & Shamberger, 2010; Landrum et al., 2004). With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004, schools are now being held to a higher level of accountability for the academic achievement of all students, including those with disabilities. As a result, many school districts have begun to implement school-wide academic and behavioral service delivery models including Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). These service delivery models are designed to assist educators in providing varying levels of academic and behavioral supports within the general education environment. This movement has helped to increase the popularity of

inclusive placements, with some advocates and professional organizations calling for the inclusion of all students with disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs & Stecker, 2010).

In an inclusion model students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms, and supports are provided both to the students and general education teachers within that classroom environment. Special education teachers are frequently called upon to provide these supports through a variety of consultative roles (Austin, 2001; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007) along with providing individualized assessments, specialized instruction and collaborating with general education teachers through the use of co-teaching arrangements. In theory, inclusive placements of students with disabilities incorporate the best of both general and special education by offering students access to the general education curriculum while providing individualized supports and services.

Several benefits have been associated with inclusive placements of students with disabilities including increased socialization and academic achievement (Austin, 2001; McDuffie, Landrum & Gelman, 2008). However, questions remain about the effectiveness of inclusive placements for some groups of students with disabilities, particularly students who have a primary diagnosis of an Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (E/BD) (Kauffman, Bantz & McCullough, 2002; Kauffman & Lloyd, 1995). The educational needs of students with E/BD extend beyond the academic domain and include specific instruction in behavioral and coping strategies and social skills. For many students these skills are learned through a gradual and informal process where no specific instruction is needed, however; for youth with E/BD this is often not the case (Nickerson & Brosos, 2003).

In the past students with E/BD were educated primarily in restrictive, separate facilities, including special schools and residential treatment centers that focused on behavioral interventions and social skills training (Landrum et al., 2004; Simpson, 2004). In recent years due to the increasing popularity of inclusion models this practice is much less common. According to a literature review conducted by Trout and colleagues (2003) nearly 82% of students with E/BD are now being served in regular school buildings with less than 26% spending more than one-fifth of their day outside of a general education classroom. Proponents of inclusion of students with disabilities may view these numbers as a success, and in many ways they are, as this trend may reflect an increasing acceptance of students with E/BD among educational professionals and commitment to holding all students to high academic standards. However, when compared to students in other disability categories, students with E/BD still experience more negative academic outcomes such as failing courses, grade retention, dropping out of high school and testing significantly below grade level in reading and math, regardless of their educational placement (Bradley, Doolittle & Bartolotta, 2008; Landrum et al; Simpson; Trout, Nordness, Pierce & Epstein, 2003). Bradley, Doolittle and Bartolotta (2008), examined longitudinal data from the National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study (NACTS), and reported that 40% of students diagnosed with emotional and behavior disorders left high school without a diploma or GED, 75% were below their expected grade level in reading, and 97% were below their expected grade level in math.

In addition, Landrum and colleagues (2004) analyzed data from the Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act from 1989 to 1998 and determined that there was a positive correlation (.22) between

placement in the general education environment and dropout rates for students with E/BD and also a positive correlation (.13) between placement in the general education environment and graduation with a diploma. The authors explain this apparent contradiction by suggesting that more rigorous educational standards might push a specific subgroup of students with E/BD toward higher academic achievement and eventually graduation, while others who cannot meet these demands drop out.

Clearly, the least restrictive environment for students with E/BD may not rely only upon the “place”, but also upon the supports and services provided within that placement. In fact, “the exclusive emphasis on setting ignores the fact that settings are merely contextual variables in which the interactions of importance occur” (MacMillan, Gresham & Forness, 1996 pg. 146). However, concerns have been raised about whether general education teachers have the training and support to provide those “important interactions” to students with E/BD. General education teachers have expressed concerns about educating students with severe emotional and behavioral issues within the general education environment (Austin, 2001; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2006; Wagner et al., 2006). Behavioral issues in the classroom are often seen as interfering with instruction, demanding teacher attention, impeding social relationships with adults and other students and damaging the educational experiences of all students in the environment (Lane, 2007). Additionally, a majority of both special and general education teachers do not think that general education teachers have the skills necessary to educate students with E/BD (Nickerson & Brosol, 2003).

It might appear that the solution to the issue of inclusion of students with E/BD is to provide supports and specialized services, such as behavioral interventions and social

skills training, within the general education environment. However, this will require special education teachers to serve a number of roles in addition to delivering individualized instruction to students with disabilities. Furthermore, supports will need to be in place for both educators and students. While inclusive placements may be a promising instructional practice and potentially offer academic and social benefits, extreme care needs to be taken before its implementation with students with E/BD. The purpose of this paper is to examine factors that affect the success of students with E/BD in inclusive placements including the roles of special educators related to collaboration and the critical supports necessary for the inclusion of students with E/BD in general education classrooms.

### **Standards for Professional Practice**

As the responsibilities of special education teachers become more complex and inclusive placements for students with E/BD become more frequent, it is important to examine the standards of professional practice related to educating students with severe behavioral concerns to ensure that they are still relevant for practical classroom application. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has identified 10 standards and 162 knowledge and skill statements that educators should demonstrate when working with students with E/BD, yet, only 23% of elementary, 30% of middle school and 13% of high school teachers strongly agree with the statement that they have adequate training for teaching students with disabilities (Wagner, et al., 2006). This discrepancy between available knowledge and what educators feel comfortable implementing may be due in part to the standards set by the CEC being too broad or out of touch with what is realistic for classroom practice.



Teachers who work with students with E/BD have identified that of those standards established by the CEC many are not critically important and are difficult to implement within the classroom. A recent study used input from teachers from across the country who were members of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and who worked with students with E/BD, to identify a more focused and specific set of standards (Manning, Bullock & Gable 2009). Two areas identified as most important were collaboration through fostering respectful and beneficial relationships with families and professionals and instructional planning, specifically integrating academic instruction and behavior management for individuals and groups of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, these two standards - collaboration and instructional planning - and the related knowledge and skills are often seen as challenges for the inclusion of students with E/BD and reflect both the necessity of changing roles for special educators and areas where supports are needed.

### **The Role of the Special Education Teacher in Collaboration**

Collaboration, which for the purposes of this paper is defined as individuals or groups working together in a variety of roles to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2010), has long been an essential characteristic of special education. Decisions about educational services and placements for students with disabilities are typically made by a team that consists of special and general educators, students' families, administrators and others involved both professionally and personally in students' lives. However, until recently these partnerships were primarily concerned with making decisions related to student progress within a special education setting (Friend et al., 2010; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). Due to the movement toward more

inclusive placements for students with disabilities, collaboration between special and general education teachers in general education environments is becoming more common (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Friend et al., 2010). As a result the roles of special education teachers are becoming more complex and include a variety of responsibilities that go beyond providing direct, specialized instruction in self-contained settings. Collaboration among educators is frequently accomplished through the use of a co-teaching arrangement where both teachers work together within one classroom to provide instruction and individualized supports to students with disabilities.

#### *Co-Teaching as a Form of Collaboration*

Co-teaching is defined as a partnership between a general education and special education teacher with the purpose of providing instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities, within a single space, typically a general education classroom (Friend et al., 2010; McDuffie et al., 2008). Several approaches to co-teaching have been utilized in general education environments. Four common approaches are: (a) one teach, one assist: where one teacher delivers large group instruction while the other circulates to provide individual assistance; (b) station teaching: where students are divided into three groups and rotate among three stations - two to receive instruction and one to complete independent seatwork; (c) parallel teaching: where the class is divided into two groups that receive instruction in the same content at the same time; and (d) team teaching: where both teachers share equally in providing instruction to the whole group (Friend et al.; McDuffie et al.; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007).

The one teach, one assist approach has been found to be the most common method of co-teaching (McDuffie et al., 2008). This approach allows all students access

to the general education curriculum while receiving individualized instruction and support. However, in practice this approach often leads to the special education teacher assuming the role of instructional assistant while the general education teacher provides instruction and decides how content information is presented (Bouck, 2007; Friend et al., 2010; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). According to a study conducted by Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) special education teachers working in a co-teaching partnership spent 19.2% of their time during a typical school day on instructional support and 14.8% on academic instruction. There are several different variables that contribute to the role assignments in the one teach, one assist model including limited time for joint planning and preparation, a lack of understanding of the content area, general education teachers' acceptance of co-teaching and the skill levels of the students (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).

Although the one teach, one assist approach may help ensure that students have access to the general education curriculum while receiving individualized supports, implementing this approach exclusively does not effectively utilize the special education teacher's expertise in designing and modifying curriculum or using specific strategies to provide instruction to students with disabilities. Additionally, it may actually limit the amount of interactions that occur between the general education teacher and students with disabilities because students with disabilities might be seen as the responsibility of the special education teacher while students without disabilities are seen as the responsibility of the general education teacher. Magiera and Zigmond (2005) found that under typical conditions where teachers had little to no shared planning time or training, students with disabilities in co-taught classes had significantly fewer interactions with the general education teacher if a special education teacher was present.

The theoretical foundations of co-teaching suggest potential benefits for students and teachers involved in classrooms where co-teaching is implemented. Specifically, co-teaching could provide additional support for students with E/BD in the areas where they are most affected including academically, behaviorally and socially (McDuffie et al., 2008). The presence of two qualified teachers in the classroom reduces the student-teacher ratio and provides a greater opportunity for students to receive individualized support and instruction both from a teacher who is trained in the content and from a teacher who is trained in addressing learning and behavioral issues with research-based practices. Additionally, having two professionals in the classroom increases opportunities to monitor, assess and evaluate student progress because one teacher can be made available to observe and collect data while the other provides instruction. This may be especially important for inclusive classrooms in which students with E/BD are present because it is common for students with behavioral issues to have a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) as part of their IEP. In order to accurately address behaviors included in a BIP, a student's behaviors must be directly observed and monitored both before and after interventions are implemented. The presence of two professionals in the classroom could lead to this task being carried out more consistently and with greater accuracy.

Unfortunately, these potential benefits are often not evident in practice. A study conducted by Magiera and Zigmond (2005) examined co-teaching arrangements and found limited instructional benefits for students in co-taught classes when teachers had no shared planning time or training. In addition, there were no significant differences between co-taught classes and inclusive classes where only a general education teacher

was present in several of the areas where students with E/BD are especially affected including on-task behavior, student participation, and peer interactions. These results underline the importance of providing a common planning time and training in co-teaching for educators who are involved in teaching students with E/BD in inclusive settings.

### *Consultation as a Form of Collaboration*

In addition to co-teaching arrangements, special and general education teachers frequently collaborate through consultative relationships. In consultative relationships, special and general education teachers do not share direct teaching responsibilities; instead the special education teacher is available to offer advice and expertise to a number of general education teachers regarding the needs of students with disabilities within a general education environment (Friend & Cook, 2010). According to data from the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS), three-fourths of elementary and middle schools students and 60% of high school students with E/BD had general education teachers who received consultation from a special educator (Bradley, et al., 2008). In addition, approximately 8% of special education teachers' time during a typical school day is spent on consulting with other professionals (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010).

Teacher personalities, teaching styles, attitudes toward inclusion, and knowledge and skills related to teaching students with disabilities affect the consultative relationship. This requires special education teachers to be aware of differences and negotiate them in order to work collaboratively with a variety of other professionals. In addition, administrative support and school policies have an impact on the type of consultative

practices that are offered and how they are carried out (Sayeski, 2009). Therefore, working in a consultative role requires special education teachers to take on a variety of dynamic responsibilities and to consider the connection between the general education environment and the educational needs of students with E/BD.

There have been a number of articles that outline the specific tasks and responsibilities that special education teachers should be able to provide in order to effectively fulfill their role as consultant to general education teachers working with students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Dover, 2005; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005; Sayeski, 2009). These tasks include but are not limited to responsibilities in assessment, curriculum (development, modifications and accommodations), instruction, communication, documentation, positive behavior supports, in-class supports and sharing of knowledge regarding effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, special education teachers are often expected to concurrently facilitate these tasks and fulfill direct teaching responsibilities in self-contained or co-taught classes (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2006). In order to support special education teachers in facilitating inclusion and providing consultation to general education teachers, it is imperative that formal consultative time be planned for and assigned (Idol, 2006).

Formal consultative practices have been shown to be effective in maintaining or increasing the inclusion of students with E/BD into general education environments. A study conducted by Shapiro and colleagues (1999) examined the consultation process in facilitating staff development in the inclusion of students with E/BD in general education environments. Participants from 22 school districts received 2 ½ days of in-service training in self-management, social skills and problem-solving training, peer tutoring and

cooperative learning strategies. Half of the schools received 6-8 weeks of immediate consultative services including: consultants working directly in classrooms where targeted students were being instructed, working with general education and special education teachers to structure interventions, working with school psychologists and guidance counselors to provide facilitative support, assisting in data collection and analysis, providing advice to overcome attitudinal barriers, and collecting outcome and follow-up data. The remaining school districts were provided consultative services 6-8 weeks after the initial in-service training. The majority of schools with delayed consultative support were not successful at implementing interventions. However, once consultation was provided, interventions were successfully implemented. In addition, 70% of targeted students maintained or increased the amount of time spent in general education settings when consultative services were provided. In this study, staff from a local university provided consultative services. In order for special education teachers to provide the same level and quality of consultation they need adequate time for planning and preparation, and on-going training opportunities in inclusive practices and working with other professionals. For example, Wallace, Anderson and Bartholomay (2002) described consultative supports provided to general education teachers (i.e., moral support, advice on modifying the curriculum, behavior management strategies, student evaluation strategies and teaching strategies) in four secondary schools that had exemplary student outcomes and success at including students with disabilities into the general education environment. However, these schools also offered formal time for planning, joint professional development opportunities and an overall school culture of shared responsibility for all students. Unfortunately, this type of intensive support is not

provided for many special and general education teachers working to include students with disabilities in general education settings. In order to facilitate successful inclusion of students with disabilities, specifically students with E/BD who may pose the most significant challenges, it is critical that certain supports are available and readily accessible.

### **Critical Supports for Inclusive Placements**

#### *Critical Supports for Educators*

Even though the inclusion of students with E/BD in general education environments has steadily increased over the last several decades, these students continue to be included at a lower rate than students with other disabilities and are often used as an exemplar for when inclusion is not appropriate (Heflin & Bullock, 1999). Additionally, many educators do not view themselves as having the knowledge or skills necessary to effectively teach students with severe behavioral concerns (Nickerson & Brosf, 2005; Wagner, et al., 2006).

Heflin and Bullock (1999), interviewed special and general education teachers to determine their insights and impressions regarding the inclusion of students with E/BD. They found that there were several common barriers to inclusion: insufficient support and training in collaboration, finding time for communication and planning with team members, being unable to meet the educational needs of the included students, and a lack of behavior management and curricular modifications skills. To facilitate the inclusion of students with E/BD these barriers must be addressed and supports must be provided for working in a collaborative role with other professionals and working with students with E/BD.



### *Critical Supports for Working in a Collaborative Role*

In the past special and general education teachers have seen themselves as somewhat separate from each other and in many ways the structure of the educational system has helped to foster that divide. It is common in public school environments for special and general education teachers to work primarily with different groups of students and to utilize different strategies and methods to deliver instruction, intervene on student behavior, and evaluate progress. They may even work in different parts of the building or in separate schools. Given that teacher education programs are generally set up to distinguish those who will eventually become special educators from those who will be general educators, it is not surprising there is an unstated message of “us” and “them” and of “our kids” and “their kids” that permeates many public school environments. The current movement toward inclusion of all students with disabilities in the general education environment is now forcing educators to step outside of their traditional roles and learn to work together.

However, collaboration between professionals can be seen as challenging to both special and general education teachers. Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) examined beginning teachers’ perceptions of their preparation and skills associated with collaborative roles under IDEIA, and their current training needs. When asked to indicate what they found most professionally challenging in their current teaching situation, the most common response was interpersonal issues and challenges of working with others because of differences in philosophy or style. Despite these challenges, collaborative practices are becoming more and more commonplace in public school environments and

the teachers expected to implement them are not typically given the supports and training necessary to make them effective.

Teachers currently working within the public school environment may be able to provide the best insight into the supports that are necessary to facilitate successful collaboration between professionals (Austin, 2001; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2006; Johnson, 2000; Wallace, Anderson & Bartholomay, 2002). Several common supports have emerged from an educator's perspective. These supports are adequate time for planning and communication, instructional support, administrative support and the need for training and professional development opportunities in collaboration. While educators were able to identify that these supports would be beneficial in theory, in practice they were not always available (Austin, 2001; Bradley, et al., 2008; Heflin & Bullock, 1999). These supports are interrelated and in most cases one must be present for the others to occur. For example, without administrative support, teachers will not receive adequate time for planning and communication or opportunities for professional development. In addition, what is the benefit of professional development if there is not time for educators to discuss and plan to implement new strategies and methods?

The support most frequently identified by professionals needed to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities was training and professional development opportunities in collaboration and co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2006; Johnson, 2000; Wallace et al., 2002). Training programs and professional development opportunities have been associated with increased implementation of collaborative practices in public schools

(Johnson, 2000; Wallace et al., 2002). An evaluation conducted by Johnson (2000) reported outcomes from The Arkansas Schools are for All Kids Program (AR-SAFAK), a 2-level, 4-day training workshop on inclusion offered to public schools in Arkansas. During this workshop teams comprised of an administrator, a special education teacher and a general education teacher received training that focused on understanding leadership challenges and the change process associated with inclusive practices, and assisted with the development of a plan for implementation. The evaluation assessed the behaviors exhibited by school teams following the implementation phase of the training. The results indicated that schools that had been through training were significantly different from schools that had not in several areas related to inclusive practices including sharing knowledge and beliefs and discussing co-teaching as a strategy. Most notably, schools that had been through the training were more likely to have established a school action plan and implemented co-teaching. Specifically, co-teaching had been implemented in 82% of AR-SAFAK trained schools and only 55% of schools where training was not received. Unfortunately, student outcomes and implementation fidelity were not discussed, so it is not clear what effect if any the implementation of co-teaching arrangements had on student outcomes, or if a certain degree of implementation fidelity was associated with improved student outcomes.

Educators involved in these studies have identified that adequate time for planning and communication, instructional support, administrative support and the need for training and professional development opportunities in collaboration would be beneficial (Austin, 2001; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2006). However, very little empirical evidence exists to support the

effectiveness of collaborative practices on student outcomes. One exception is a study conducted by Wallace et al. (2002) that described collaboration and communication practices between secondary-level teachers working in general education classrooms. The schools were selected from four states based on exemplary student outcomes including graduation rates, post-secondary outcomes, scores on standardized tests, inclusion of students with disabilities, accountability testing, and support from stakeholders. Interviews and focus groups, including principals, superintendents, special and general education teachers, school advisory groups, student advisory groups and community members were utilized to gather information regarding the teaching practices, instructional supports, and communication and collaboration practices of teachers and administration within these successful schools.

Results identified examples of school-wide elements associated with success including a culture of sharing and serving all students and collaborative school structures such as inclusion of students with disabilities, block scheduling, joint professional development opportunities, and scheduled time for planning among teams. Classroom elements associated with successful outcomes included a continuum of special education teachers' roles including: the special education teacher as a consultant to provide expertise, the special education teacher to provide direct support to students with disabilities and the special education teacher as an equal partner in delivering instruction through the use of co-teaching.

The results from this study give weight to the perceptions and beliefs of teachers working in collaborative roles regarding the critical supports necessary to make these practices successful. However, the study only examined collaborative practices within

secondary schools. It is clear that further research needs to be conducted to identify what supports or combinations of supports are critical to the successful implementation of consultative and co-teaching practices in elementary and middle schools and to determine if these practices contribute to positive student outcomes.

*Critical Supports for Working with Students with E/BD*

In addition to providing training in collaborative practices to teachers working with students with E/BD in inclusive environments, supports are also needed specifically related to working with students with severe behavioral concerns. Although most general education teachers report a positive attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities, students with E/BD are often an exception (Austin, 2001; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2001; Wagner, et al., 2006). According to a study conducted by Austin (2001) in which 92 teachers working in inclusive environments completed the Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey, many had concerns about the effects of disruptive behaviors on the classroom environment and on the behavior of students without disabilities.

Furthermore, special and general education teachers do not feel they have the skills necessary to address severe behavioral issues (Bradley, et al., 2008; Nickerson & Brosopf, 2003). It is no surprise that teachers feel this way as many teachers have little to no training in working with students with E/BD, implementing behavior management strategies, or creating a supportive classroom environment. Data from the SEELS indicated that only 17% of elementary teachers, 21% of middle school teachers and 6% of secondary school teachers working with students with E/BD had received training specifically related to working with students with severe behavioral issues (Bradley et al.). In addition, less than half of teachers across grade levels received training in

behavior management or creating a positive school environment (Wagner, et al.). Overall, teachers working with students with E/BD have no more instruction in providing behavioral supports or working with students with behavioral issues than teachers of students with other disabilities (Bradley et al.; Wagner, et al.).

Students with E/BD frequently experience academic difficulties along with severe behavioral concerns and educators must be prepared to address both issues simultaneously (Bradley, et al., 2008; Lane, 2007; Wagner, et al., 2006). Providing integrated behavioral and academic interventions across skill areas may contribute to positive student outcomes and have been found to reduce problem behaviors and increase academic achievement (Bradley et al., 2008; Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002). Educators working with this population need professional development in effective, research-validated instructional strategies, behavioral interventions and the special education process in general (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). Ideally, educators should begin to receive training on specific strategies before the inclusion of students with E/BD occurs. This will help to ensure that teachers are prepared to work with students with E/BD and have the necessary “tools” to address behavioral and classroom management issues in addition to providing instruction to students whose academic skills may be lagging behind the standards for their grade level.

It is apparent that a lack of training in instructional strategies and behavioral techniques is a barrier to the inclusion of students with E/BD in general education classrooms and that professional development is an important component of successful inclusion. However, educators who work with students with E/BD have identified other

supports that may be beneficial to their students' success in inclusive placements if implemented correctly.

One support that is commonly used to provide assistance within a general education environment is the use of instructional aides or paraeducators. According to data from the SEELS, almost 30% of elementary teachers, 25% of middle school teachers and 16% of high school teachers received a paraeducator because a student with E/BD was in his or her class. In addition, students with E/BD are more likely to receive individualized instruction from a paraeducator than are other students in the class, including those with other disabilities (Wagner, et al., 2006). Paraeducators can be a valuable resource for special and general education teachers involved in inclusion. Their presence in the classroom may help alleviate stress related to the completion of routine tasks and give teachers more time to concentrate on designing and delivering instruction and behavioral interventions. Although, the intended role of a paraeducator is to provide assistance with routine instructional tasks, basic classroom management and supervision of practice opportunities, in reality, they are often put in a position to provide individualized, one-on-one instruction or behavioral interventions. In many cases paraeducators have no formal background in education or behavioral interventions and receive limited training on-the-job. Paraeducators themselves have reported that they lack the training needed to perform job responsibilities, especially for supporting students with behavioral challenges, and were often asked to assume duties beyond their skills (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010).

The CEC has identified 10 standards and 47 knowledge and skill statements that paraeducators should demonstrate when working with students with disabilities. There

are several specific skills statements that are especially relevant to the inclusion of students with E/BD including include the use of strategies to assist in the development of social skills and manage behaviors as directed, the ability to follow written plans, seeking clarification as needed and the ability prepare and organize materials to support teaching and learning as directed (Council for Exceptional Children, 2010). According to the standards set by the CEC, the tasks performed by paraeducators should be prescribed and directly supervised by a fully licensed and certified special education teacher. The misuse of a paraeducator to independently design and implement specialized instructional or behavioral tasks is unethical and abuses their intended purpose in the classroom. Furthermore, it is not sound educational practice to have staff with little background or training responsible for the instruction and behavior management of students with the most intensive and specific needs without receiving adequate supervision and training from certified special education professionals as it may further divide students with disabilities from their general education peers and hinder their academic and behavioral progress. According to a survey completed by staff at four elementary and four middle/secondary schools educators thought that although the support of instructional aides was important only 10% responded that students with special education needs in general education classes are best taught by paraeducators. In addition, educators indicated a need for increased training opportunities and preparation for paraeducators in working with students with disabilities (Idol, 2006;Wallace et al., 2002).

It is clear that special and general education teachers across grade levels understand the importance of specific supports in order to provide effective instruction and behavioral interventions for students with E/BD included in general education



environments. Furthermore, teachers report a desire for opportunities to gain skills and knowledge regarding the education of students with severe behavioral concerns.

However, in addition to providing supports to educators involved in inclusion it is imperative that the needs of students with E/BD are also addressed.

### **Critical Supports for Students with E/BD**

General education classrooms typically differ from special education classrooms in significant ways and present challenges for the included students who are expected to adjust to a new environment, new set of classmates, new teachers, new rules and curriculum and sometimes even a new school. In addition, in an inclusive environment, students with E/BD may be required to demonstrate academic and behavioral skills that they have not yet mastered. For students who struggle with social, coping and behavioral skills meeting these challenges may be too much to reasonably expect without providing preparation and on-going supports.

Nickerson and Brosos (2003) examined the skills necessary for successful inclusion of students with E/BD with the *Scales for Predicting Successful Inclusion* (SPSI) that measured work habits, coping skills, peer relationships and emotional maturity and the *Devereux Behavior Rating Scale* (DBRS) that measured levels of emotional disturbance. Results indicated that on the SPSI students with E/BD had below average performance in work habits, and poor performance in coping skills, peer relationships and emotional maturity. On the DBRS students with E/BD were in the borderline category for emotional disturbance related to interpersonal problems, inappropriate behavioral feelings and physical symptoms and fears and in the significant category for depression. Students with more severe E/BD according to DBRS scored

lower on the SPSI, implying that students with more severe E/BD would be less likely to experience success in inclusion because of a lack of necessary skills. These results indicate that many students with E/BD are not prepared emotionally or behaviorally to transition into general education environments without supports specifically relating to the development of these skills.

In addition to demonstrating deficits in emotional and behavioral domains, students with E/BD frequently experience considerable deficits in academics and require direct instruction in school survival skills such as participating in class and completing work (Wagner, et al., 2006). In fact, severe problem behaviors have been shown to relate to long-term academic failures. A longitudinal study conducted by Fleming and colleagues (2005) found that disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors in middle school were related to low academic achievement in high school. In the Fleming study, the problem behaviors of students in the seventh grade at 10 public schools in the Pacific Northwest were compared to their standardized test scores in the tenth grade. Results indicated that higher levels of school bonding and better social, emotional and decision making skills were related to higher test scores and higher grades. Elevated levels of attention problems, negative behavior of peers and disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors were predictive of lower test scores and grades. The results of this study support what research over the last several decades has shown; behavioral and academic issues are interconnected and interventions to address one can lead to improvements in the other (McIntosh, Chard, Boland & Horner, 2006), therefore, addressing both issues simultaneously may improve outcomes for students with E/BD in general education environments.

However, there is a discrepancy between what is known to be effective in supporting the academic and behavioral needs of students with E/BD and what is practical for classroom application. This is especially true in general education environments where there is typically a higher student-to-teacher ratio and less emphasis on individualized instruction. Research has shown that interventions considered easy to implement, less time-intensive, and compatible with the environment are the most likely to be implemented consistently and with fidelity (Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2003; Niesyn, 2009). Although many of the practices shown to be effective with students with E/BD do not easily fit these criteria, several promising practices have been identified that address inappropriate behaviors and academic deficits concurrently and are realistic for implementation in general education environments. Furthermore, they require little training or preparation to implement.

*Teacher Directives.* Noncompliance, or the refusal to respond appropriately to a request or directive, has been identified as one of the most challenging and frequent behaviors demonstrated by students with E/BD. However, the way that directives are delivered can have an effect on whether or not a student complies. In order to increase the likelihood of compliance, directives should be predictable and specific, incorporate consequences for compliance (and noncompliance) and provide time for the student to follow-through. In addition, educators should deliver directives that students are likely to comply with before delivering directives that might be more difficult or unpleasant for the student to complete (Landrum, et al., 2003; Niesyn, 2009).

*Teacher Attention and Praise.* Perhaps the easiest and least time consuming practice a general education teacher can implement is the use of positive teacher attention

or praise. Although basic, the effects of positive teacher attention on the behavioral and academic performance of students with E/BD are well-established in the literature (Landrum, et al., 2003). In order to be effective however, praise should be delivered in a systematic way and be contingent on appropriate behaviors being demonstrated. In addition, praise should be given immediately following an occurrence of a behavior and specifically describe the behavior being reinforced (Landrum,et al; Niesyn, 2009). While providing praise to students for positive behaviors seems obvious, studies have suggested that students with E/BD rarely receive praise or positive attention for compliance (Landrum, et al; Sutherland, Wehby & Yoder, 2002).

*Opportunities to Respond.* In general, students with E/BD across all levels are less likely than other students to respond to questions or participate in class (Wagner et al., 2006). This may indicate that as a group, students with E/BD are less engaged in academic instruction and less confident in their academic ability. However, a study conducted by Sutherland, Wehby and Yoder (2002) showed that when teachers provided opportunities to respond coupled with praise and positive attention, students with E/BD produced a higher rate of correct responses. The combination of praise and opportunities to respond has significant implications for the success of students with E/BD in general education classrooms as both have been shown to have positive effects on students' academic and behavioral progress. Teachers can increase the likelihood of students with E/BD responding in class by structuring questions to contain some of the required information to elicit responses from students that are correct and therefore, increase opportunities for praise (Niesyn, 2009). Providing opportunities for correct responding

could potentially result in increased self-confidence in academic ability and improved academic engagement for students with E/BD.

*Direct Instruction.* Academic achievement, on-task behavior and class participation are positively related to the amount of time that students spend engaged in the learning process (Landrum, et al., 2003). The direct instruction model seeks to increase the academic engagement of students through the use of a systematic method to present information, offer feedback, provide opportunities for practice and evaluate progress (Nelson, Johnson & Marchand-Martella, 1996). Similar to improving academic achievement, the direct instruction method can be used to remediate behavioral concerns by teaching prosocial skills in an orderly and systematic manner. The direct instruction model consists of a specific sequencing of steps that should be followed when introducing a new concept (1) gain student attention, (2) review prior knowledge, (3) present the goal of the lesson (4) present new information, (5) guided practice (6) independent practice, and (7) review of the information presented (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002; Niesyn, 2009). Direct instruction has been shown to provide benefits both to students with E/BD and the teachers who work with them by increasing academic engagement and decreasing challenging behaviors (Englert, 1984; Gunter et al.; Nelson et al.).

*Peer Tutoring.* Peer tutoring has been shown to improve academic and behavioral deficits by increasing academic engagement and class participation among students with special needs (Harper & Maheady, 2007; Kamps, et al., 2008; Landrum, et al., 2003; Niesyn, 2009). In addition to increasing positive interactions with peers, which could in turn assist with the development of appropriate social skills (Kamps, Kravits, Stolze &

Swaggart, 1999), peer tutoring also increases opportunities for guided practice and praise, two practices that have been shown to increase appropriate behaviors in students with E/BD. When implementing peer tutoring in general education classrooms, teachers should provide a format or structure for students to follow and consider the pairing of students so that maximum benefits are achieved for both students.

These practices are by no means an exhaustive list of supports that have been shown to be effective with students with E/BD. However, they do represent a sampling of sound educational practices that are supported by research and are easy to implement, not time-intensive and compatible with a general education setting. In addition, they require little to no formal training or advanced preparation. Although, research suggests that these practices are effective for improving academic and behavioral deficits of students with E/BD, currently they are not being consistently implemented in inclusive settings. However, due to changes in legislation and the move toward more inclusive placements there is an increased focus on providing varying levels of supports to address academic and behavioral concerns within general education environments (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002). Whether in a consultative or collaborative role the implementation of these practices often falls to the special education teacher. Special education teachers are generally seen as having expertise in research-based instructional strategies, while general education teachers are seen as experts in content areas (McDuffie et al., 2008). As a result, special education teachers are often put in the position to implement, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions, particularly for students with academic and behavioral concerns, who may be viewed as being outside of the general education teacher's responsibility.

## **Discussion**

The passage of NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEIA have led to the public educational system in the United States being held to a higher level of accountability for providing access to the general education curriculum, and for the increased academic achievement of all students. As a result, many in the educational community are advocating for the inclusion of all students with disabilities, even those with the most severe emotional and behavioral needs. However, it is important that educators and policy makers remember that a continuum of educational placements, from most to least restrictive, is a cornerstone of special education. This continuum of placements helps to ensure that appropriate settings and necessary services will be available for all students, including those whose educational goals need to address more than just academics, and may also include behavioral, social, vocational and independent living skills.

Critics of the inclusion of students with E/BD in general education settings argue that these skills are best taught by specially trained teachers in separate special education classrooms (Kauffman et al., 2002; Kauffman & Lloyd, 1995). However, data on student outcomes suggest that even in special education environments many students with E/BD are not being taught necessary skills or provided with effective supports. It appears that the essential component is not where the instruction takes place, but that these skills are taught in a careful and systematic manner by educators who have the ability to teach them.

Inclusive placements should provide the best of both general and special education by offering students access to the general education curriculum while providing supports and services in the skill areas most critical to individual students. In

practice, however many school districts are falling short on meeting this goal. This is a particular concern for students who have a primary diagnosis of E/BD and who are often not prepared emotionally or behaviorally to transition into general education environments without supports specifically relating to the development of these skills (Kauffman et al., 2002; Kauffman & Lloyd, 1995; Nickerson & Brosow, 2003). Data on educational and post-school outcomes make it apparent that simply placing a student with E/BD into a general education classroom does not adequately address the complex set of needs demonstrated by this population. The least restrictive environment for students with E/BD should not rely only upon the “place”, but also upon the supports and services provided within that placement. Unfortunately, in the current educational system many general education teachers have expressed concerns about educating students with severe emotional and behavioral issues within the general education environment (Austin, 2001; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Idol, 2001; Wagner, et al., 2006). Additionally, a majority of both special and general education teachers working with students with E/BD have little to no training related to working with this population, behavior management or creating a supportive classroom. This implies that on a whole, professionals who lack the basic competencies and skills necessary to be effective are educating students who might arguably have the most challenging and multi-layered educational needs. This lack of confidence and formal training coupled with outcome data may indicate that in the current educational system students with E/BD are not getting their educational needs met in inclusive or self-contained settings.

It is easy to suggest that a solution to the issue of inclusion of students with E/BD is to provide professional development opportunities to educators and supports and



specialized services such as behavioral interventions and social skills training to students within the general education environment. However, in order to do this, many involved in education including teachers, administrators and support personnel will need to change the way they think about special education and students with disabilities. A school-wide culture of shared responsibility for all students regardless of their educational placement or disability, a commitment to collaboration with other professionals and support from administrators contribute to positive student outcomes (Wallace et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, there are many schools at which this culture is not evident, and many educators who still see special and general education as existing separately. Furthermore, in order for inclusion to be successful, policy makers will need to be committed to providing on-going and consistent school-wide supports to both educators and students in a systematic and careful manner even if it means making sacrifices in other areas. For example, the resources dedicated to providing training opportunities for educators involved in the inclusion of students with disabilities, will require additional funds. Likewise, co-teaching arrangements and special education teachers working in consultative roles, which require formal time to plan and communicate may result in less time to provide instruction and an increased need for additional faculty.

Often these decisions are difficult to make, but must be considered before implementing the inclusion of students with E/BD into general education settings. While inclusive placements for students with E/BD may be a promising instructional practice and potentially offer academic and social benefits, extreme care needs to be taken before its implementation. If students with E/BD are pushed into inclusive settings without adequate planning, preparation or support it is unlikely that their educational needs,

which extend far beyond academics, will be met, and the cycle of negative academic and post-school outcomes that are too frequently experienced by this population will continue.

Given the dearth of empirical research on the inclusion-related outcomes of students with disabilities (Simpson, 2004) future research should focus on identifying the combination of supports provided to educators and students involved in inclusion that are positively related to successful outcomes in academic, behavioral, and social domains. In addition, researchers should further examine the components of teacher preparation and training programs that are necessary to prepare teachers to more effectively meet the needs of students with severe behavioral issues in inclusive settings. Finally, as the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers shift and become more dynamic it will be increasingly important to investigate how to best prepare them for collaboration with other professionals and support them in the facilitation of inclusive placements for students with disabilities.

Despite a lack of research to support the implementation of inclusive placements for students with E/BD the practice is becoming more common. Although inclusive placements potentially offer benefits to students, it is clear that in most cases the inclusion of students with E/BD into general education environments is not being executed in the intended or most effective manner. For inclusion to be successful in improving the academic, behavioral and social outcomes of students with E/BD, it is imperative that all involved educators be provided with formal time for consultation and collaboration, intensive on-going training and support from administrators and the community.

## **Implications**

A review of the literature reveals numerous challenges related to the implementation of inclusive placements for students with E/BD (Bradley, et al., 2008; Gable, et al., 2002; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Kamps, et al., 1999; Muscott, 1995; Nickerson & Brosos, 2003; Shapiro et al., 1999). There is an extensive literature base and several government studies including the SEELS, the National Longitudinal Study-2 (NLTS-2) and the National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study (NACTS) that document the poor academic and post-school outcomes for students with E/BD. These outcomes include a 55% high school drop out rate for students with E/BD, with only 20% continuing on to some form of post-secondary education and approximately 43% being arrested at least once (Bradley, et al.) While it is hard to determine the exact extent to which these outcomes are contributable to the nature of the disability, it is clear that overall the educational system is not meeting the needs of students with E/BD.

These challenges have implications not only at the school and classroom levels, but also on a much larger scale. In order to successfully address these challenges it might be most effective to confront them using a top down approach starting with educational policy and teacher education programs, with the intention of having the effects “trickle down” to the educators and students directly involved. To do this, educational policy makers need to examine the concept of adequate yearly progress and determine how that progress can be accurately assessed and measured for students whose educational needs extend beyond the academic domain. Recent history has taught us that it is not enough to simply demand that teachers improve the academic achievement of all students while ignoring other factors that may have an effect on student performance, such as behavioral

issues or poor social skills. To address this issue, it might be beneficial for students with disabilities to have common core standards not only in academic content areas, but also in areas that are directly affected by their disability. While it is not good practice to assume that all students with similar disabilities have exactly the same needs, it makes sense that there are general areas that could be addressed based on a student's diagnosed disability and past performance. In addition, funding should be provided to support intensive early intervention programs, similar to those sometimes available to children with other disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders and developmental disorders. For young children at risk for behavioral issues, programs that incorporate basic academics, social and behavioral skill development and supports and strategies for families, could provide long-term benefits and help ease the transition to general education environments.

The increase in inclusive placements has implications for the way in which teacher education programs are designed. Teacher education programs should be updated to reflect the changing roles of special and general education teachers and students with disabilities should no longer be seen as solely the responsibility of the special education teacher. Therefore, preparation for general education teachers should include more comprehensive training in research-validated instructional strategies and behavioral interventions for students with disabilities in addition to a focus on academic content.

Special education teachers still need to be highly skilled in a variety of areas including assessment, developing and modifying curriculum, making accommodations, instructing students with disabilities, communicating with families and other professionals and documenting student progress. However, due to the emphasis now

being placed on the special education teacher as a consultant, it is important that teacher education programs also provide instruction in developing skills to effectively offer support and training to other professionals to implement these tasks. In addition, as part of certification requirements both general and special education teachers need to have increased training in collaboration, specifically related co-teaching.

Inclusive placements for students with E/BD also have implications for educators at school and classroom levels. Implications for general education teachers include sharing responsibility for the education for all students, even those with behavioral concerns. This will require knowledge of effective behavior management techniques in addition to an openness to work with special education teachers as equals within a general education classroom. Implications for special education teachers include accepting a change in job description, which may involve moving away from delivering individualized one-on-one or small group instruction to working more closely with other professionals to offer support and guidance or through shared teaching responsibilities with general education teachers.

As with many complex educational issues there are no perfect solutions for the challenges related to the inclusion of students with E/BD into general education environments. Due to budgetary and time constraints, every policy or practice that is implemented to facilitate successful inclusion means that another program will have to be reduced or eliminated. However, it is essential that educational policies and teacher education programs change to support current educational practices. As educational policy and teacher education programs are modified to reflect the changing landscape of special education, the ways in which students with E/BD are included into general

education environments and the roles that general and special education teachers play will have to adapt to meet the changes. In addition, it will become increasingly important to examine what outcomes need to be experienced by students with E/BD in order to determine if inclusive placements can be considered a success for students with severe behavioral concerns.

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