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Behavioral Engagement of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

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Master of Arts in Education – Special Education

ED 590: Research & Complete Capstone Cohort #885

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Abstract

This review of literature focused on managing the behavior of students in a classroom. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that students come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Educators have known that without being able to manage behavior, specifically that of students with EBD, addressing academics would be challenging. Thus, the need for strategies to improve behavior was evident. The research question was how can educators foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD? Analysis and synthesis of the research produced three themes: praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Within the themes were specific strategies educators could implement to foster behavioral engagement, including increasing praise (general or behavior-specific), including social skills lessons, and building relationships through one-on-one interactions and getting to know students. Future studies could explore the long-term results of the research themes. Praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention are methods educators could implement to increase the behavioral engagement of students with EBD.

Keywords: behavioral engagement, Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD), functional behavioral assessment (FBA)

Chapter One: Introduction

Behavioral Engagement of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Classrooms were made up of students from varying backgrounds and demographics. Students entered classrooms with wide ranges of experiences, both positive and negative. Teachers were taught they could not control what happened outside of school, only what happened within the classroom. However, teachers were not always prepared to manage the needs represented within the walls of the classroom. Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) presented behaviors and needs that challenged even experienced teachers.

The Capstone paper examined students and teachers from across the United States. They represented a wide range of demographics, socioeconomic statuses, and educational settings. Fostering the behavioral engagement of students with EBD had two cooperating benefits. Because teachers must implement new strategies, or focus more heavily on increasing existing strategies, one benefit was better use of best practices by teachers. Another benefit was increased success, in the form of behavioral engagement, of students with EBD. Three themes captured the best approaches for fostering the behavioral engagement of students with EBD: praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention.

Scope of Research

The three themes listed above resulted from the analysis of 15 studies. Studies took place in elementary, middle, and alternative schools across the United States. The students were predominantly male. African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic were the backgrounds described by researchers, with an emphasis by several research teams on the over-representation of African American males. The students were at risk for or had diagnoses of EBD, with one study examining students with autism. Educational settings included general education, special

education, and self-contained settings. The teachers, ranging from early childhood to middle school and including peer coaches, were predominantly Caucasian females.

Three themes emerged from the research: praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Praise was the most prevalent strategy identified in the research on students with EBD. Not only did praise positively impact the on-task behaviors of students with EBD in several studies, but it also impacted the peers who were present during the study (Allday et al., 2012). Praise was a tactic over which teachers had direct control, regardless of classroom setting, grade level, socioeconomic status, or diagnoses of the students.

Social and emotional support was the second theme from the research. Social skills lessons were taught as part of several studies in order to determine the impact of explicit social skills instruction on the behaviors of students with EBD. Explicit instruction proved to be an effective strategy for fostering the behavioral engagement of students with EBD. In addition, emotional support was a measure of quality classroom management in studies examining classroom management's impact on behavior.

Individualized attention was the final research theme. In an era of education that places emphasis on school-wide or classroom-wide behavior systems, students with EBD often needed additional levels of support. There were a variety of data-driven methods for providing individualized attention to students with EBD. The methods included conducting a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), implementing the interventions recommended in the FBA, teaching students with EBD in small groups, increasing positive attention over reprimands, and providing additional training for teachers. Each strategy had positive impacts on behavior. Together, praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention served to increase the behavioral engagement of students with EBD.

Importance of the Study

The education of students with EBD impacted schools, teachers, and other students. According to Weeden, Wills, Kottwitz, and Kamps (2016), between three and six percent of students had EBD. Weeden et al. (2016) identified general education classrooms, special education classrooms, day treatment, and hospitals as settings for students with EBD. Turton, Umbreit, and Mathur (2011) discussed alternative schools as another setting for students with EBD, stating that twenty percent of students with EBD were placed in settings other than the local school. In addition, approximately half of students with EBD spent sixty percent of the day, or more, outside the general education classroom (Turton et al., 2011). The data from Weeden et al. (2016) and Turton et al. (2011) pointed to a need to understand how to help students with EBD experience success in the classroom, especially with the statistics on how many students with EBD were removed to other settings.

The purpose of the study was to identify practices that foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD. Behavior was closely linked to the setting in which a student with EBD was educated. A functional behavior assessment (FBA), which is an analysis of the function of behavior, was required prior to adjusting a student's setting, connecting behavior to setting (Turton et al., 2011). It would benefit educators and administrators to understand which strategies directly improved the behavior of students with EBD. Teachers would be able to implement strategies within the classroom, while administrators could provide professional development or coaching to teachers on classroom management practices. The study added to the body of knowledge in the area of behavioral engagement of students with EBD.

Research Question

A challenge of education was that no two students were exactly the same. Therefore, education was not one-size-fits-all. Students represented a wide variety of learning needs, backgrounds, and social/emotional statuses. A role of the educator was to create a learning environment conducive to the needs of the learners. Students with EBD challenged traditional methods of teaching, necessitating research on how educators could promote inclusivity and facilitate success. Therefore, the research question established was: how can educators foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD?

Connection to the Program Essential Question (PEQ). Concordia University's Program Essential Question was: in light of what is known about special education law and policies, what are best practices for providing inclusive instruction for all learners? The research question was drafted to identify practices for fostering behavioral engagement, with the goals of increasing inclusivity of students with EBD. However, the research revealed practices that could be applied to all learners.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were determined to be instrumental in understanding the research question and subsequent research themes.

Behavioral engagement referred to behaviors that supported learning in the classroom environment. The term was described by Allday et al. (2012) as on-task behaviors, such as active listening, answering questions, following directions, being in prescribed locations, and appropriately asking for help. A common goal among the EBD researchers was to improve the behavioral engagement of students.

Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) provided the focus for the research. Students with EBD display increased levels of externalizing behaviors, such as destruction of property,

cursing, and aggression, as well as internalizing behaviors of social avoidance and anxiety (Weeden et al., 2016). The research was aimed at finding effective strategies for fostering the behavioral engagement of students with EBD.

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) described an assessment conducted for all students with EBD. Turton et al. (2011) defined an FBA as a process for collecting information to determine the antecedents and consequences of a behavior, predict when the behavior will occur, and develop interventions to target the function of the behavior.

Summary

Addressing the behavior of students with EBD was an essential need of educators. The research produced themes of praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Praise given by teachers had a positive impact on the behavioral engagement of all students, not limited to students with EBD. Social and emotional support improved student behavior when delivered through explicit, small-group instruction, as well as when applied to the entire class. Teacher training, an increase in positive attention, implementation of FBAs, and small-group instruction each facilitated individualized attention to the result of increased behavioral engagement. Praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention provided best practices educators could follow to provide inclusive instruction for all learners, as per Concordia University's Program Essential Question.

Chapter One established the importance of addressing why and how educators could foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD while relating to Concordia University's Program Essential Question of how to provide inclusive instruction for all learners. Chapter Two was a synthesis of 15 studies of students with EBD, resulting in the themes of praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. The chapter provided specific strategies for

teachers to implement. Chapter Three contained a summary of the research, examples of applications for education, and suggestions for future studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Review of the Literature

How can educators foster the behavioral engagement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD)? Students with EBD have been educated in a variety of settings, including general education and special education classrooms, self-contained classrooms, and alternative schools (Turton et al., 2011). Because students with EBD presented a broad range of behaviors and needs, resulting in varying placements, research was sought to determine best practices for fostering behavioral engagement. This review of the literature revealed three themes as strategies for fostering behavioral engagement for students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). The themes were praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Additionally, the research extended to Concordia University's Program Essential Question: in light of what is known about special education law and policies, what are best practices for providing inclusive instruction for all learners? Research of behavioral engagement revealed strategies educators could implement to provide inclusive environments for all learners.

Praise

Praise emerged as a common theme among the research articles. Allday et al. (2012) investigated the impact of behavior-specific praise (BSP) on students' on-task behaviors through quantitative research. The research team defined BSP as statements that specifically describe the desired behavior. In order to measure the impact of BSP, the researchers recorded and coded teachers during instruction, alongside observing students for on-task behaviors such as active listening, answering questions, following directions, being in prescribed locations, and

appropriately asking for help (Allday et al., 2012). Training for BSP, as well as ongoing feedback, was provided to the teachers by the research team. The participants, four teachers and seven students, represented one Midwestern middle school and two Southwestern elementary schools. Students were nominated by teachers per the criteria of having an EBD diagnosis or being considered at-risk for EBD (Allday et al., 2012). The intervention produced the increase of BSP by all teachers, as well as the increase of on-task behaviors by all students participating. Allday et al. (2012) noted that praise directed toward any student, not just the student with EBD, promoted the on-task behavior of the students with EBD. In addition, the teacher verbalized fewer corrections as the result of BSP. A limitation of the study was the lack of data on the long-term effects of BSP. In addition, the observer's presence in the classroom could have impacted the teacher's behavior (Allday et al., 2012). Praise was deemed an effective strategy for fostering behavioral engagement.

Another study corroborated the notion that praise positively impacted student behavior. Maggin et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study to compare self-contained settings with general education settings for students with EBD. There were 133 students in 34 self-contained classrooms and 135 students in 77 general education settings. The teachers were predominantly female and Caucasian, with roughly 55 percent having education beyond a bachelor's degree (Maggin et al., 2011). The students in the Maggin et al. (2011) study were predominantly male and African American. The range of grade levels was kindergarten through fourth grade. Nearly 80 percent of participants qualified for free/reduced lunch (Maggin et al., 2011). Each student was observed four times, for 15 minutes per observation, totaling one hour. The research team used a variety of observational measures to record the teachers' use of praise, opportunity to respond, and reprimands. While opportunity to respond and reprimands were consistent across

settings, teachers in self-contained settings offered slightly higher rates of praise than teachers in general education settings. However, it was noted that both settings fell far below the recommended levels of praise for students with EBD (Maggin et al., 2011). A limitation of the study was an incomplete sample, due to missing permissions. In addition, scoring errors may have led to the mis-identification of some students. According to Maggin et al. (2011), higher levels of praise in self-contained settings may have been related to the lower student-teacher ratio, speaking to the benefit of small groups within classrooms. Regardless of the setting, praise was identified as a method for boosting behavioral engagement.

The following study on non-contingent attention (NCA) also took place in an alternative school. Rubow, Noel, and Wehby (2019) defined NCA as time-based attention, given to students without the basis of behavior. The purpose of the intervention was to determine whether NCA impacted the rates of disruptive behavior of the two students and the rates of praise administered by two teachers, all of whom were observed in alternative education settings (Rubow et al., 2019). In this quantitative study, the teachers were trained to use a discreet timing device to provide the students with reinforcement or attention, such as a compliment on clothing, work habits, or disposition. The results of the quantitative study were the decrease of disruptive behavior from the students, in addition to an increase in praise and decrease in reprimands given by the teachers (Rubow et al., 2019). While the study was not intended to measure the impact of praise, but rather, reinforcement or attention, it resulted in an increase in praise. A limitation of the study was the time intervals between given attention remained consistent, rather than being stretched out over time. Additionally, the withdrawal phase of the study was not adequately observed and could not be used to draw further conclusions (Rubow et al., 2019).

A withdrawal phase was incorporated into the quantitative study by Weeden et al. (2016). The research team sought to determine the impact of a class-wide praise and points intervention, in the form of a game, on disruptive student behavior. Tangible rewards, such as stickers or free choice, were awarded when the class met a group-set points goal (Weeden et al., 2016). Weeden et al. (2016) measured the impact of the intervention using student surveys, as well as the number of points earned by the class. Points were awarded on an interval basis, dependent upon the presence or absence of desired social behaviors. The withdrawal period brought the return of disruptive behaviors, which had been reduced while the intervention was in place (Weeden et al., 2016). Limitations of the study included the small range of participant grade levels (first through third) and the difficulty of monitoring for group-wide points in a single-teacher classroom (Weeden et al., 2016). The study by Weeden et al. (2016) was similar to the study by Rubow et al. (2019) in that praise and/or attention resulted in a decrease in disruptive behavior, as well as an increase in praise from the teacher.

Wills, Kamps, Fleming, and Hansen (2016) studied the impact of class-wide interventions on the disruptive behaviors of students with EBD. The research team targeted tier one and tier two students, as identified under a response to intervention (RTI) model, in this quantitative study. The study encompassed 17 elementary schools, with teacher totals at 159 and student totals at 313. Participants engaged in a classroom management approach called Class-Wide Function-related Intervention Team (CW-FIT) which incorporated a variety of behavior management strategies (Wills et al., 2016). Strategies included class-wide social skills lessons, the awarding of points to earn rewards, and competing as a team. Additional support, in the form of self-management and help cards, was provided to students in tier two. Schools participated for one year at a time, as part of a four-year study (Wills et al., 2016). According to Wills et al.

(2016), on-task behavior increased and off-task behavior decreased for both tiers of students. Praise given by the teachers increased in regards to the groups of students but did not increase when directed toward individuals. Because the study had multiple components, a limitation was the research team was not able to identify which component had the greatest impact (Wills et al., 2016).

An additional study examined the impact of CW-FIT in classrooms. Caldarella, Larsen, Williams, Wills, and Wehby (2019) included 540 students and 149 teachers in a quantitative study on the impact praise-to-reprimand ratios (PRRs) had on student engagement. The teachers were trained to implement CW-FIT. Caldarella et al. (2019) achieved similar results to Wills et al. (2016) in that the classroom management strategies employed through CW-FIT led to improved PRRs, which was of particular significance to students with EBD or disruptive behaviors. A limitation was the types of praise given by teachers were not examined, so there was not data on which type was most effective (Caldarella et al., 2019).

Much of the research on praise was centered around EBD or disruptive behaviors. However, McDonald, Reeve, and Sparacio (2014) used quantitative research to explore how praise could be increased through physical prompts to reduce stereotypic behaviors of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The three teachers wore devices, set to timers, that vibrated every ten minutes to serve as a reminder to administer praise to the three target students. In addition to behavior-specific praise, teachers were instructed to administer coins as part of a token economy system. As a result, teacher praise increased above and beyond the ten-minute increments, while students' stereotypic behavior decreased (McDonald et al., 2014). Limitations of the study included the lack of long-term data, no feedback from teachers, and small number of participants (McDonald et al., 2014).

Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, and Wehby (2010) examined the use of praise, in cohesion with opportunities to respond (OTR) given the students, in a mixed-methods study. Both strategies were highlighted as teacher-centered approaches to altering student behavior (Partin et al., 2010). The teachers in the study taught in one of eight urban schools. The 38 participants represented both general education teachers with students at-risk for EBD and special education teachers in self-contained, EBD classrooms (Partin et al., 2010). Self-monitoring and weekly feedback served as the method of data collection. As outlined by Partin et al. (2010), teachers would listen to audio recordings of their teaching in order to tally praise and OTR, while research consultants focused feedback on quality of praise, setting goals, and designing opportunities to improve. A limitation of the study was self-monitoring could increase the chance of bias. Self-monitoring praise and OTR by teachers led to increased appropriate behavior and decreased inappropriate behavior (Partin et al., 2010).

Social and Emotional Support

Social and emotional support surfaced as another theme in the research on students with EBD. In the quantitative study by McDaniel, Bruhn, and Troughton (2016), two teachers led social skills interventions from the Stop and Think curriculum. Participants were five students in second and third grade, two of whom were Caucasian males and three of whom were African American males. Interventions took place three days per week for 30 minutes each day (McDaniel et al., 2016). Each class participated in 12 lessons. The researchers measured negative social behavior (NSB) prior to, throughout, and two weeks after the social skills interventions. Not only did NSB decrease during the intervention, but it also remained low after the lessons concluded (McDaniel et al., 2016). Limitations of the study were the small sample size and lack of data on unstructured times, such as recess or free play. The researchers suggested future

studies to investigate the impact of social skills interventions in the general education setting, as well as collecting data on the entire class (McDaniel et al., 2016). The explicit instruction of social skills for students with EBD was a method for fostering engagement because it offered social and emotional guidance to students.

Social skills lessons were also taught in whole-class formats as interventions for students with EBD. Wills et al. (2016) used CW-FIT to teach rules and skills to classes of students, such as how to gain adult attention, follow instructions, and ignore disruptive peer behavior (Wills et al., 2016). Classes were divided into teams and awarded points for appropriate implementation of the above-mentioned skills. Teams meeting the pre-determined points goal were rewarded at the end of the week. Students who were unresponsive to the class-wide intervention received another tier of support in the form of help cards (Wills et al., 2016). Time on task increased and disruptive behavior decreased in students with or at-risk for EBD (Wills et al., 2016).

The CW-FIT program was used in a second study to examine praise to reprimand ratios and student engagement. Caldarella et al. (2019) examined the impact of praise to reprimand ratios through implementation of CW-FIT. The research revealed when teachers improved the praise to reprimand ratio for students at-risk for EBD, the students were more engaged. Through implementation of class-wide social skills programs, teacher praise to reprimand ratios improved, thus improving the behavioral engagement of students with EBD (Caldarella et al., 2019).

Another quantitative study that established effective teaching as a tool to increase behavioral engagement was conducted by Garwood, Vernon-Feagans, and the Family Life Project Key Investigators (2017). The research team measured the impact of classroom management quality in kindergarten through third grade on literacy test scores of third grade

students. The 235 participants from rural Pennsylvania and North Carolina were followed for four years, while researchers evaluated the classroom management of the students' teachers. Subscales included emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Garwood et al., 2017). In addition to students, the study included the participation of 189 teachers. The data demonstrated a significant difference in reading test scores for boys when accompanied by four years of quality classroom management. The quality of classroom management did not affect the girls' test scores (Garwood et al., 2017). The first limitation noted by Garwood et al. (2017) was that classroom management was rated as a class, not specifically on the relationships between teachers and students with EBD. The second limitation was that the research did not rank the three classroom management strategies, so it was unknown which contributed most to the success of the male participants (Garwood et al., 2017). Offering emotional support was an indicator of quality classroom management and contributed to the research on behavioral engagement.

Social skills instruction was also studied in cohesion with culturally responsive practices. Robinson-Ervin, Cartledge, Musti-Rao, Gibson, and Keyes (2016) investigated the impact of a social skills intervention on following adult-given directions through mixed-methods research. The six participants, each in sixth grade, completed computer-based social skills lessons, followed by face-to-face practice of the social skills. Social skills were reinforced as students accumulated credit to use at a school store (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016). Factors that contributed to cultural responsiveness were the computer-based aspect of the lesson, the incorporation of student input, and the application of the skills in real-life scenarios (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016). The research team collected quantitative data, using interval based observations, to demonstrate improvement among the participants. Students demonstrated improvement, following the social

skills intervention, in following adult directions (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016). Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) listed the following limitations: the social skills were not based on a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), student attendance could have impacted the results, and the study only measured the impact on following adult-given directions. In spite of the limitations, Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) determined computer-based, culturally-responsive social skills interventions to be effective in increasing the frequency with which students follow adult directions.

Individualized Attention

Many schools had building-wide initiatives to manage behavior and engagement. However, some students might have required an individualized approach to fostering behavioral engagement. In a mixed-methods study, Nahgahgwon, Umbreit, Liaupsin, and Turton (2010) selected three students from a pool of candidates requiring tier three interventions under the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Two of the candidates were Caucasian, kindergarten boys in general education settings. The third student was a Hispanic boy in a first-grade classroom. For each student, a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) was developed, tested, and implemented (Nahgahgwon et al., 2010). Data was collected four days per week for a total of 22 sessions. The implementation of the FBA improved on-task behavior for all three students, as well as decreased the frequency of office referrals (Nahgahgwon et al., 2010). As a limitation, the researchers did not collect standardized post-data. In addition, the study only measured off-task behavior, not disruptive behavior. Because teachers tended to fall back on how they were comfortable teaching, the researchers suggested a future study to determine long-term impacts of FBA implementation (Nahgahgwon et al., 2010). The teachers of the three students

attributed the success of the FBA to its individualized content, in contrast to the blanket approach of PBIS.

Students with EBD were educated in a range of environments. Some students' least-restrictive environment was in the general education classroom. However, some students functioned best in self-contained settings. Maggin et al. (2011) compared the two settings to determine whether one had an instructional advantage. According to the data, students were more likely to be taught in small groups in self-contained classrooms (Maggin et al., 2011). Because students in self-contained settings exhibited lower academic capabilities and elevated disruptive behaviors when compared to their general education counterparts, the increased attention of small groups was recommended by the researchers (Maggin et al., 2011).

Rubow et al. (2019) based a study on the amount of attention provided to students with EBD. The basis for the study was research on students with EBD receiving less positive attention and more reprimands, the majority of which was behavior-based (Rubow et al., 2019). When the teachers provided interval-based attention to students, regardless of behavior, there was a decrease in disruptive behavior (Rubow et al., 2019). Both teachers in the study participated in a one-hour training session with a research assistant and were able to carry out the intervention with fidelity, demonstrating that the intervention could be implemented with minimal training and be successful (Rubow et al., 2019). The study reflected the importance of students with EBD receiving attention outside of behavior.

Attention related to behavior was also described as a way to provide individualized attention to students with EBD. Partin et al. (2010) explained reprimands could be predicted by disruptive behavior, whereas the absence of disruptive behavior, or the presence of compliant behavior, was not predictive of praise. Because praise was unpredictable and reprimands were

predictable, disruptive behavior was more likely to gain the attention of the teacher (Partin et al., 2010). The attention of the teacher reinforced negative behaviors. Partin et al. (2010) asserted praise should be differentiated, just as teachers differentiated academics. Teachers should reflect on whether the praise provided to students reinforced positive behavior, provided feedback, prompted positive interactions, and reflected the unique needs of the student (Partin et al., 2010). Providing individualized attention to students through differentiated praise was another research-backed approach to increasing behavioral engagement in students with EBD.

Individualized attention may serve as a precursor to interventions in students with EBD. Turton et al. (2011) investigated the impact of FBA-based interventions on student behavior through mixed-methods research. Three adolescent participants, from a self-contained classroom in an alternative school, participated. During the first phase of the intervention, the research team conducted an FBA for each participant, including a file review, staff interviews, student interviews, and observation (Turton et al., 2011). The second phase was the implementation of the intervention, which was based upon the data gathered in the FBA (Turton et al., 2011). According to Turton et al. (2011), the function-based interventions improved the behavior of each of the three participants, both long term and across settings. Turton et al. (2011) identified several limitations. A potential limitation of the study was the impact of teacher experience with FBAs and administering interventions. Additionally, the study did not measure off-task behavior, only disruptive behavior. Finally, the intervention only targeted one function of behavior rather than many (Turton et al., 2011).

Perceptions of students with EBD informed research in individualized attention. Balagna, Young, and Smith (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the perceptions and experiences of Latino, middle-school students at-risk for EBD. Eleven students from a mid-sized city in the

western United States were interviewed by the research team (Balagna et al., 2013). Three students were females and eight were males, with all but one student being fluent in both English and Spanish. Open-ended interviews allowed for building rapport between the interviewer and interviewee and flexibility for follow-up questions (Balagna et al., 2013). One of the themes from among the students' responses was the impact of teachers on their feelings and experiences at middle school. Preferred teachers were kind, empathetic, and learned about students as individuals. Several students in the study identified experiences of teachers providing one-on-one attention, whether a conversation, content-specific assistance, or taking a personal interest in a student's well-being (Balagna et al., 2013). Inversely, teachers who did not provide positive, individualized attention negatively impacted the behavior, or attendance, of the students interviewed. According to Balagna et al. (2013), the approach teachers took to individualized attention, whether positive, negative, or non-existent, had a direct impact on student attitude, participation, and engagement. It could be perceived that the trustworthiness of middle school students, at-risk for EBD would be called into question. However, the researchers cautioned against that as a limitation and did not identify any cautions against trusting the narratives of the students (Balagna et al., 2013). A limitation was whether the results could be generalized, due to the qualitative design of the research. According to Balagna et al. (2013), all procedures, questions, and conclusions were reviewed to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness.

Addressing teacher training was another approach to providing individualized attention. Conroy et al. (2019) launched a four-year, quantitative study on the impacts of Best in Class, a training program for teachers, focused on best practices for teaching students who have or are at risk for EBD. The participants were 186 early-childhood teachers and 26 coaches, all of whom were located in two southeastern states (Conroy et al., 2019). Half of the teacher participants

were provided with a training workshop, teacher's manual, and coaching sessions, while the other half comprised the control group (Conroy et al., 2019). At the conclusion of the study, the teachers who were trained and supported in Best in Class demonstrated higher levels of confidence, increased use of best practices, and improved classroom quality as compared to the control group of teachers (Conroy et al., 2019). The limitations of the study were the lack of known, long-term outcomes, as well as the knowledge by the observers of which teachers were in the control group (Conroy et al., 2019). The focus on best practices was an additional way teachers could learn to focus individualized attention on the role of an educator and provide better-focused attention on students with or at-risk for EBD.

Conclusion

Students with EBD displayed a broad range of behaviors in the classroom. The emphasis of least-restrictive environment led to higher numbers of students with EBD in general education settings. Teachers could turn to the research to answer the following question: how can educators foster the behavioral engagement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders? Analysis of the current research led to three themes. Praise led to an increase in on-task behaviors and a decrease in reprimands (Allday et al., 2012; Caldarella et al., 2019; Maggin et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2014; Partin et al., 2010; Rubow et al., 2019; Weeden et al., 2016; Wills et al., 2016). When teachers provided social and emotional support in the form of social skills interventions, negative behaviors decreased (Caldarella et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2016; Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016; Wills et al., 2016). Emotional support was also identified as a characteristic of quality classroom management (Garwood et al., 2017). Individualized attention, in the form of an FBA or small-group setting, decreased off-task behavior (Nahgahgwon et al., 2010; Maggin et al., 2011; Rubow et al., 2019; Turton et al., 2011). Individualized attention, in

the form of implementing best practices or attending professional development for teachers, also had a positive impact on best practices (Balagna et al., 2013; Conroy et al., 2019; Partin et al., 2010). Educators could foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD through praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Chapter three discussed the findings of the literature review, classroom applications, and future studies.

Chapter Three: Discussion/Application and Future Studies

Discussion

The question of how educators could foster the behavioral engagement of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders guided the analysis of 15 qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research articles. It was determined that praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention led to increased behavioral engagement in students with EBD.

Concordia University's Program Essential Question asked: in light of what is known about special education law and policies, what are the best practices for providing inclusive instruction for all learners? The three themes pointed to three areas of best practice for educators, particularly those servicing students with EBD or other areas of special education. Praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention promoted the inclusion of all learners in all settings.

Insights Gained from the Research

Three themes emerged from the research: praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention. Increases in behavior-specific praise bring decreases in disruptive behavior. Some research points to timers or physical prompts as beneficial for teachers in remembering to administer praise. While much of the research focuses on the behaviors of individuals, class-wide administration of praise is effective in reducing disruptive behaviors and

increasing on-task behaviors. When part of the class-wide interventions, praise to reprimand ratios improve among teachers. Self-evaluation is another method for increasing praise and allowing more opportunities for students to respond.

Social and emotional support presents itself in two approaches. The first approach is providing social skills instruction or interventions to students. Students who are instructed in areas of problem-solving, gaining teacher attention appropriately, and resisting peer disruptions increase positive behavior and decrease negative behavior. The second approach of social and emotional support in the research is that of effective teaching, with the provision of support to students as a characteristic. Therefore, social and emotional support, either as an explicit intervention or a tool utilized by a teacher, improves the behavioral engagement of students with EBD.

Individualized attention can take several forms in the classroom. One method is to provide individualized attention through the design and implementation of an FBA. Students with EBD require an FBA as part of an individualized education program (IEP). An FBA incorporates a file review, staff interviews, student interviews, and observation, in order to determine the function of a behavior and an appropriate course of action to reduce said behavior. The interventions within the FBA are specifically tailored to the student for whom the FBA was written. Carrying out an FBA can result in increased on-task behavior and decreased office referrals. Other research explored the type of attention received by students with EBD. Small-group instruction and one-on-one time helps students feel better connected to teachers and improved behavior. Teachers can make a significant impact on student behavior when they provide positive, individualized attention to students consistently. The insights from praise,

social and emotional support, and individualized attention lend themselves to specific classroom applications.

Application

The synthesis of research produced tangible steps educators can take to foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD. As evidenced in the above studies, the average praise-to-reprimand ratios of teachers fall well below the recommended average, particularly where students with EBD are concerned. Based on the research, three suggestions can improve praise in classrooms, therefore, increasing behavioral engagement of students with EBD. The first method is for school districts to include professional development opportunities on praise. Because the research overwhelmingly supports praise as an effective approach to students with EBD, it would be appropriate for teachers to be trained in this area. Likewise, mentorship programs could include an emphasis on mentors tracking the praise statements of mentees during teaching, in order to provide a baseline upon which to improve. A second strategy to increase praise is for teachers to use a physical prompt or timer to administer praise at consistent intervals. Finally, teachers without a mentorship program in place could self-evaluate the frequency of praise statements by conducting a video or audio recording of a lesson. As the research teams did, teachers could tally praise statements to track increases or needs for improvement.

Social and emotional support can be addressed in the adoption of a social skills curriculum by a district, school, or individual teachers. The research provides evidence in support of both whole-class and small-group social skill instruction. In addition, one-on-one interventions increase behavioral engagement when used to supplement social skills lessons in

the classroom. Effective classroom management should include the provision of emotional support for students.

Teachers have several opportunities to provide individualized attention to students with EBD. This can begin with the FBA, part of each student's IEP. As evidenced by the research, when teachers or teams conduct and carry out the FBA with fidelity, it results in improvements in on-task behavior and a reduction in disruptive behavior. In addition, teachers who provide positive attention to students see improved behavioral engagement. Because students in the research described their behavior as better for teachers who took the time to form relationships and provide individualized attention, teachers should make relationships a priority.

Limitations of the research should be considered when discussing applications of the research. A limitation of the mixed-method and qualitative studies are the small sample sizes of students. Additionally, there are questions regarding whether student feedback during observations contains bias. Due to the nature of conducting an FBA, it is difficult to gather qualitative data on the impact of an FBA. Several studies note the lack of results on a withdrawal phase, while others note the lack of long-term results in general. Because some studies had more than one variable, it can be difficult to identify which made the largest impact. For example, it is difficult to know which type of praise is the most effective when the types were not compared in the studies. Finally, with the interventions being teacher-driven, there is not a way to measure the impact of teacher experience or the student-teacher relationship. Future studies in the area of behavioral engagement of students with EBD can be designed to address some of the limitations of the existing studies.

Future Studies

Future studies on the behavioral engagement of students with EBD can address some of the limitations listed above. Future studies should include additional qualitative data, such as interviews with students with EBD. The existing qualitative research has the potential to be confirmed by the inclusion of additional voices. An emphasis on the long-term impact of the FBA should also be explored, as suggested by current researchers. Long-term data would add credibility to the results of the mixed-method studies with small sample sizes. While it may be difficult to scale a study on the impact of an FBA, it would add immensely to the research to look at a large sample size and determine if the results align with those of a small sample size.

The lack of long-term data and the lack of withdrawal phase data have been identified as limitations. Future studies could explore the long-term effects of praise on students with EBD, following students as they move through grade levels, schools, or settings. Most likely, these studies will continue to be quantitative. The studies would serve the field of special education by either confirming the impact of praise in the long-term or by identifying factors that result in regression. Either result would benefit educators of students with EBD. Finally, the impacts of teacher relationships and experience could be included in future research. While experience is gained through time, it could provide insight into why experienced teachers may have an advantage in teaching students with EBD. In addition, the research could provide additional strategies for all educators in relationships and best practices.

Conclusion

The behavioral engagement of students with EBD is important because of the impact a student's behavior can have in the classroom. Praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention are themes from the research, answering the question of how educators can foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD. Concordia University's Program

Essential Question, regarding best practices for the inclusion of students in special education, is also addressed. Several best practices are identified, most of which are teacher-centered.

Teachers can adopt practices such as increasing praise, improving the praise-to-reprimand ratio, incorporating whole-class or small-group social skills instruction, providing one-on-one attention or interventions to students, building relationships to offer emotional support, following through on the supports and strategies of an FBA, and honoring the unique needs of individuals. While the research is overwhelmingly in support of teachers being able to foster behavioral engagement, limitations make clear the need for additional research in the area of EBD, particularly with long-term results and teacher impact. Based on current research, educators can foster the behavioral engagement of students with EBD through praise, social and emotional support, and individualized attention.

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