The Education of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Today's Schools

Matthew Spreter

St. John Fisher College

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One of the most controversial issues in Special Education today is the placement of students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (E/BD). Many professionals support inclusion of students with E/BD into the general education environment, while others take a more conservative approach. In order to evaluate educational placement of students with E/BD, research from journal articles and text was conducted to determine if there was any consensus among professionals in the field. The researcher interviewed a number of school professionals, representative of those who might make up a Committee for Special Education (CSE). It was deemed important to hear from real educators from different points of view and perspective. They were all asked about their experience in working with students with E/BD and their viewpoints regarding placement of these students. After investigating this problem, there is no clear cut answer regarding optimal placement of students with E/BD, as each student has his or her own unique needs.
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Background

From the beginning of time adolescence has been associated with a period of turmoil, affecting both the individual and those near and dear to the youth. "Plato characterized the adolescents of his era as argumentative and easily excitable, while Aristotle found them impulsive, prone to excess and exaggeration, and lacking self-restraint. For centuries, the decade of adolescence-from puberty to early adulthood-has been viewed as risky and problematic" (Andrews, 1997, p. 1).

There are many physical and emotional changes that transpire during puberty that can affect adolescents. According to Hansen, Nagle and Meyer (1998), it is these biological variations along with the development of more advanced cognitive and verbal abilities that can interfere with the youths' interactions with both peers and adults. "Adolescents may experience a variety of other changes that affect social relationships, including school and peer group changes, changes in family structure or functioning, and alterations in societal and community expectations" (Hansen, et al., 1998, p.489). There is an increase of pressure to conform to peers which conflicts with a desire to establish a unique identity during adolescence (Bundy, Bundy, Wise & Wise, 1991). A time of stress, a time of drastic changes... it's no wonder that teens show signs of defiance and exhibit risk taking behaviors, however, why do some seem to show extreme behaviors?

"The behavior of contemporary American youth is consistent, if not more severe, than that reported in centuries past." Current statistics of the rise of youths engaging in problematic behaviors are alarming. For example, as mentioned in an Ohio State University bulletin about family life, "the number of youth between 10 and 17 of age arrested for rape, robbery, homicide, or aggravated assault rose 48 percent between 1986 and 1991"(Andrews, 1997, p. 1) In addition
to an increase in youth violence, it has been projected that psychological problems such as anxiety and depressive disorders in children are significantly under-recognized and under-treated. “In his December 9, 1999 Report on Children’s Mental Health, the U.S. Surgeon General estimated that one in 10 children and adolescents suffers from a mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment” (Cook, 2003, p.1). Whether classified or undiagnosed, such emotional disorders can lead to behavioral problems or subsequently, behavioral problems can lead to a diagnosis. In any case, why do some adolescents show signs of extreme emotional and behavioral problems and what can we do to help this population of youngsters? Schools are mandated to provide education for these students, but are they equipped?

The Problem

How does a child evolve into an adolescent with chronic behavior problems or a youth diagnosed with having an emotional or behavioral disorder? “The question of whether bad behavior is preprogrammed genetically is one of the central controversies in child development. An informed starting point is to remember that child development requires that interplay of biology and society, the characteristics children bring with them into the world and the way the world treats them, nature and nurture” (Garbarino, 2000, p. 72).

Recent studies have found several links between the family structure and adolescence with emotional or behavioral problems. For example, in a national sample, one third of adolescents identified as emotionally/behaviorally disordered lived with both parents, whereas two thirds of adolescents not identified as emotionally/behaviorally disordered lived with both parents”(Bauer & Shea, 1999, p. 7). In addition, “Disrupted relationships in childhood predispose boys to trouble in adolescence. Whether it is outright abandonment, or psychological rejection, violent boys often leave infancy and early childhood with one of the biggest strikes
against them: disrupted attachment relationships (Garbarinio, 2000, p. 72). This information suggests that a single-parent child, who has a poor relationship with his/her mother or father, will be more likely to have significant behavior problems than that of the control group. However, such demographics do not fully explain why such problems are occurring. Correlation doesn’t necessarily imply causation.

There are still other factors to consider. “Many learners with emotional or behavioral problems may have either learning problems or communication disorders . . . In one study, 97% of the learners identified as demonstrating mild to moderate emotional/behavioral disorders fell more than one standard deviation below the mean on an individually administered test of language” (Bauer & Shea, 1999, p. 5). Broken homes, attachment difficulty, emotional problems, learning difficulties, the list of research continues with no single cause. Perhaps it would be beneficial to examine the particular behavioral characteristics of students with emotional or behavioral disorders rather than identifying causation as a means to help adolescents with behavioral difficulties.

Social-skills deficits are associated with a number of negative outcomes, including mental health problems, behavior problems, delinquency, substance abuse, sexual offending, loneliness, high-risk sexual behavior, and academic and vocational difficulties. Not surprisingly, there is also a strong correlation between social deficits and peer rejection (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 427, p. 490).

Children who are well liked and have adequate friends generally like school, regardless of their academic standing. Further, they will tell you that their favorite part of school is “chasing the boys” or “playing with my best friend Courtney.” Rarely will children answer that what they like
best about school is science or learning . . .

Conversely, kids who struggle socially generally dislike school. They often do everything in their power to avoid attending school, such as engaging in tantrums or feigning sickness, or even ditching classes. They tell you that they hate school because no one likes them and they have no, friends (Cook, 2003, p. 2).

Similar findings were presented in a 1997 Family Life Bulletin from Ohio State University. “Classmates rated approximately one-third of all peer rejected children as highly aggressive . . . Children who think reactively evaluate ambiguous social situation as negatively directed toward them and react to these situations with aggression” (Mounts, 1997, p. 1). “Peer relationships are important for young children and increase in importance as children grow older. Because many children are from single-parent homes or homes in which both parents work, the amount of time children spend in the company of peers is greater than ever. For children who spend a significant amount of time with peers, rejection by peers is a significant event” (Mounts, 1997, p.1). For adolescence with chronic behavioral problems, peer rejection is only one of the problems associated with this group of individuals.

According to research completed by Halverson, Hart, Overholser, and Spirito (1990), poor social skills may make it more difficult for an adolescent to keep up with life demands. This along with interpersonal difficulties could lead to a suicide attempt - the second leading cause of death among adolescents. For example, “One study examining adolescent suicide attempters hospitalized on a psychiatric floor found that these patients displayed less adequate peer relationships than did a control group of nonsuicidal psychiatric patients” (p. 1). Emotional disorders such as depression are linked to such statistics. Such symptoms may be a result of poor
social relationships. For example, "Depression is described primarily as a disorder of cognition, resulting in impaired affect and behavior . . . Cognitive errors in interpersonal interactions lead an individual to view current life experiences primarily as negative, resulting in the development of the depressive syndrome" (Reed, 1994, p. 1).

Academically, adolescents with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (E/BD) struggle with their disability in the school environment as well. The United States Department of Education stated that "adolescents with E/BD fail more courses, earn lower grade point averages, miss more days of school, and are retained a grade more often than other students with disabilities" (Bullock and Gable, 2006, p. 7). Not only do these students struggle academically but they are at increased risk for alcohol, drug use, and have a dropout rate of 55% (Bullock and Gable, 2006). These statistics are alarming and it seems as though more could be done to combat this problem. Perhaps if these students had different experiences in school, more supports, effective interventions, perhaps the statistics may not be so bleak. As an educational community, the statistics show that changes to how students with E/BD are approached and how they are serviced need to be made. The consequences for these students in later life can be devastating.

As adolescents with Emotional or behavioral disorders age into adulthood, these deficits have grave consequences. These persons encounter difficulties living successfully in the community and display marital difficulties, substance abuse, depression, violence, and arrests in excess of the national norms for their peers without E/BD . . . Of the population as a whole, between 45% and 60% will drop out of high school before completion, 10% to 15% will enter post secondary education programs, and few will receive
services from adult service agencies. It follows that interventions offered in secondary/transition program must be as powerful and as focused as possible, since they may well be the last coordinated services these persons will receive before entering society and adult life. (Bullis & Davis, 1997, p.29)

Not only will these adolescents struggle in completing school but, “they are less likely to earn a job in a competitive environment due to lack of academic skills and the presence of behaviors that prevent them from being accepted and retained by employers” (Pierce, Reid & Epstein, 2004, p.2).

**Recent Discussion on Students with E/BD**

Adolescent students with E/BD are coming to classrooms of public schools in larger numbers than ever before. They come with many needs that educators need to meet in order for them to be successful in a school-based environment. When these students are classified through special education, they have a variety of choices in terms of placements and programs that can make them successful. This choice ranges all the way from being enrolled in a general education class with support of a consultant teacher, to being in a residential treatment facility. It is the job of the Committee for Special Education in that district to evaluate the child's needs and determine an adequate placement for them.

In looking at placements for all students with disabilities, federal legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, dictates that students must be educated in the "Least Restrictive Environment". In other words, they must be placed in the environment closest to a general education classroom in their home school district as possible. After the passing of IDEA, schools made the move to inclusion for the majority of their special education
students. Many self-contained classrooms have been dismantled and students were placed in inclusive environments. While the hope is to allow students with disabilities to be in general education classes, the reality is that there are still students with disabilities who simply need more support than can be provided in that environment. For this reason, even nine years after the passing of IDEA, self-contained classrooms are still in existence. In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized. The re-authorization continues to allow a “continuum of services” for students with disabilities. This continuation of the “continuum of services” indicates that there is still a need for self-contained classrooms, and more restrictive placements outside the general education environment. While educators have realized that placing students in the least restrictive environment is important, meeting the needs of the individual student is of the utmost importance in educational ethics.

The question of how to appropriately place a student with a disability can be a difficult decision for both parents and educators. However, when the student in question has an Emotional/Behavioral disability, this decision can become even more difficult. Not only does the committee need to consider the needs of the child to be successful, they also must confront ethics regarding how that student impacts the rest of the classroom. If students diagnosed with E/BD are placed in a general education classroom, respecting the rights of the student with the disability and the rights of the other students in that classroom needs to be balanced for a positive learning environment.

Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders have a multitude of choices in term of placement to best meet their needs. The placement that fits their needs is based largely on the severity of their behaviors and their academic skill levels. Unfortunately, of all the disabilities on the spectrum, students labeled “Emotionally Disturbed” are least likely to be included in general
education classrooms. Long states that “less than 15% of the one to two percent certified emotionally and socially disturbed students are in regular classes” (Long, 1996, p. 115). Looking at these statistics, there are many inferences that can be made regarding this phenomenon. Is there an under representation of students with emotional behavioral disorders, because many students with similar issues are labeled under a different classification? Is there a stigma related to an “Emotional Disability” classification, which causes many students to be labeled differently? Could this be due to inadequate preparation of general education teachers and lack experience with including students with E/BD?

Although there are many possibilities that might explain the low numbers of included students with emotional disabilities, they remain the most under-represented disability group in general education classrooms. Does this mean that students with E/BD perform better in segregated special classes, specifically for students with similar needs? Can these students be integrated into the general education environment and flourish under the positive role models they come in contact with? Are the behaviors that these students simply too extreme to be handled in the general education environment? There are arguments on both sides of this issue, which seem to be relatively evenly matched among the literature.

One group believes that students benefit from inclusion dealing with positive role models, and perform worse when they are exposed throughout the day to other students with similar disabilities. They argue that these students can “bounce off each other” and create a downward spiral of negative behavior.

On the other hand, another group of educators also argue that some students exhibit much too severe behavior to be included in the general education environment. Instead of mixing in
with the general population of students, they need specialized therapeutic programs that deal
with social skills, managing emotions, and focusing on positive behavior.

**Programs- Inclusion**

Since the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), the
education field has seen a shift toward including as many students with disabilities as possible
into general education classes with non-disabled peers. For many students with and without
disabilities, this has been an opportunity to grow both academically and socially, however, for
students with emotional behavioral disorders, the act of mainstreaming into the general education
environment creates many questions for educators and parents. There is a “delicate balance that
teachers and schools must strike as they ensure the rights of the students with disabilities to learn
in the least restrictive environment, while maintaining the learning community for the school as a
whole” (Adams, 1999, p.2). The issue is of growing concern, as more students with serious
behavior issues are being placed in mainstream classes (Adams, 1999). When students with
emotional behavioral disorders act out, it threatens the balance of the classroom and can put
other students with and without disabilities in an environment where time on task is decreased,
and the learning environment is disrupted.

With the surge of inclusion and the numbers of students with and without disabilities in
general education classes, teachers are dealing with more needs in mainstream classes than ever,
reflected by the breakdown of families and increasing rates of poverty (Long, 1996). While many
teachers work vigilantly to accommodate the grown amounts of needs within their classrooms, a
certain amount of frustration is inherent. “Teachers come to feel impotent to do anything
significant for these children in view of the myriad of overwhelming life situations they bring to
the classroom. The inability to help these children is doubly frustrating because many teachers
were attracted to the profession to do good things for children” (Long, 1996, p.106). Many teachers in the general education environment are doing the best they can to create learning environments conducive to all student needs, especially those with E/BD. With increasing pressure on teachers to juggle competing needs and providing good instruction can be frustrating for many teachers. Many general education teachers are already struggling and many of them don’t have the skills to use appropriate strategies to teach students with more severe E/BD (Bullock and Gable, 2006). Consequently, general education teachers that are expected to service students in their classrooms are under prepared, under supported and overwhelmed by having students with E/BD in their classrooms.

In order for Inclusion to be successful all school professionals must be knowledgeable about the individual needs of the child and how to best instruct the child inside and outside the classroom. Ron Nelson, associate professor and co-director of the center for At-risk Children’s Services at the University of Nebraska states support the idea of “Responsible inclusion,” which means that the child goes into the classroom with the skills needed to participate” (Nelson, Benner, Lane & Smith, 2004, p.2). This is extremely important for students with Emotional Disabilities whose area of weakness may lie outside traditional academic areas. For example there is a difference between a student with a learning disability in math computation or reading decoding compared to a student with an emotional disability that may have difficulty with transitions or during unstructured activities. Teachers and experts suggest that inclusion works best with the right supports in the right places. Whether that support is given in the lunchroom or math class is determined by the student’s individual needs. In order for inclusion to be successful with students with Emotional Disorders there must be a schoolwide commitment. There needs to be a comprehensive plan that uses positive discipline, proper training, adequate funding, support
in the classroom, and strong communication. Above all, shaping the behavior of all children rather than policing misdeeds can set the groundwork for successful inclusion (Adams, 1999).

Nicholas Long (1996) suggests that inclusion of students with E/BD can work, but there are criteria that must be met ahead of time for students to be successful in the environment. He states that it is crucial that the classroom teacher accepting the student be a willing participant in the process, rather than having the student placed there by administration (Long, 1996). Long argues that many students with E/BD are placed into classrooms with teachers that are less than excited to have them in their classes. If they are not willing participants in the process, they will be much less likely to work collaboratively to set up an environment in which students can be successful.

Long also states that it is crucial that the “support staff including the principal must agree to participate in advanced crisis-intervention training in order to have the skills to support the classroom teacher during times of conflict” (Long, 1996, p. 124). This type of training that Long urges for support staff is intended to help support classroom teachers who have willingly accepted a student with emotional disabilities. It is safe to assume that the level of training in crisis intervention that Long encourages is not the reality for most schools. In reality, the classroom teacher will be dealing with the majority of the conflict situations, with some help from administration.

Long (1996) has a third major criteria necessary for students with emotional disabilities to succeed in an inclusion environment. They must possess skills that are no more than two grade levels below that of the rest of the class, be motivated to keep up with assignments, work with support staff and have positive feelings about their placement (Long, 1996). This third major criteria described by Long is one that seems to be rooted in common sense. Students must have
the tools to succeed and be willing to put in the effort to be successful where they are. If they want to succeed in an inclusion classroom, are given the support and are willing to take advantage of that support, they are far more likely to succeed. However, if this is not the case, the student is likely to be set up for failure.

Unfortunately, observational studies suggest that most regular classrooms are not characterized by the strategies known to be effective with these students. Very significant changes in what teachers know and do will be required before a majority of regular classroom teachers are prepared to create the minimum conditions necessary for success of the students with behavioral and emotional disorders while also providing an appropriate program for the non disabled students (Kaufman, Lloyd, Baker, & Riedel, 1995). Jonathan McIntire, a director of Exceptional Student Services for Orlando (Florida) Schools, states that many school staff have preconceived notions about students with emotional disturbances that may effect classroom performance. “[Some teachers assume] that a lot of these kids are bad guys, but often the behavior is a manifestation of their disability.” This quote supports the idea that schools with safety issues for children with disabilities often lack knowledge and resources (Adams, 1999).

While most teachers and experts support the goal of inclusion, many are pushing for additional support when faced with aggressive or violent kids. “Some kids mental health needs are beyond what a general education school can deliver” (Nelson et al., 2004, p.2). Although students with emotional disabilities may have additional access to supports through the school nurse, special education teacher, social worker or guidance counselor, schools are not set up to be primary mental health providers. Caralee Adams suggests that implementing a school wide “responsible inclusion” approach that emphasizes routines, clear expectations, and proper supervision can adequately support many students with emotional disorders can be successful
among non-disabled peers. As educators however, we must also remember that one-size may not
be suitable for all (Adams, 1999).

Programs- Self-Contained

For many students, especially students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders, options
other than the general education classroom need to be considered. In examining what’s best for
these students, they may require something more in depth than a “one size fits all” approach.
Diane Connell, a professor of special education at River College in Nashua, New Hampshire
says. “Full inclusion isn’t always the way to go. While normalization is important, placing kids
with disabilities in general education settings may not be what’s in the best interest of the child
when the classroom is not set up to meet the child’s special needs. “Student needs should take
priority” (Adams, 1999). Other mental health experts, such as Nicholas Long suggest that we
may want to “look before we leap onto the inclusion bandwagon” (Long, 1996, p. 118). While he
is not debating the efficacy of the practice of putting children with emotional disabilities in the
least restrictive environment, he is weary of including all students, or doing so, just because of
the current trends of the times.

In looking at inclusion as a program, we must examine the highly restrictive definition of
inclusion that “requires that all individual occupy a common space, regardless of whether that
space has the features appropriate for their needs.” It assures that every place can be structured to
serve every individuals needs (Kaufman et al., 1995, p.5). A more adaptive and humane
definition of an inclusive school system is one that allows for a variety of placements that offer
conditions under which every individual feels safe, accepted, and valued and is helped to develop
his or her affective and intellectual capacities. Such a definition recognizes that in some cases
there will have to be different placements for different individuals (Kaufman et al., 1995).
Kaufman points out that, while many students can succeed in an inclusion environment, placements must fit the needs of the students first and foremost. Bullock and Gable (2006) argue that “while inclusion for students with E/BD should be maintained as a goal, the reality is that many students with E/BD have a very difficult time in inclusive classrooms (Bullock and Gable, 2006, p. 5).

“A century ago, overenthusiasm for the institution as the sole placement for people with disabilities resulted in great injustices and the needless exclusion of many individuals from regular schools and communities. Perhaps overenthusiasm for the regular school and the regular classroom as the sole placement option for students with disabilities has the potential for creating equal tyranny” (Kaufman, 1995, p.5). In education trends seem to come and go. Kaufman realizes that although it is necessary to educate students in the least restrictive environment, a “one size fits all” approach could be as disastrous for some students as was not being able to attend a regular school was many years ago. There needs to be choices for students with disabilities, especially students with E/BD. Based on a students need, a CSE committee needs to be able to choose between a continuum of services. The continuum would start at the general education level, then possibly resource room, or a self-contained classroom. If the need is severe enough, that student may need a special program not provided at that school, thus attending something outside their home district, such as a BOCES program, day treatment, or even residential treatment.

Nicholas Long (1996) has the same reservations about inclusion for all students with E/BD, taking a conservative approach on the issue. In looking at the practice of inclusion for students with emotional disabilities, he has five concerns. His concerns are that professionals need to examine five key issues regarding inclusion of students with emotional disabilities. His
first concern is the need to go beyond the rhetoric of inclusion and do what is right for the student. His second concern is the need to bring classroom teachers into the inclusion process, which is often left out of the equation when making decisions about placement of students with E/BD. Long’s third concern is that school professionals must shed the naïve assumptions about re-educating emotionally disturbed students. His fourth concern is the lack of professional support for emotionally disturbed students and the staff working with them, especially in an inclusive environment. Finally, his fifth major concern is regarding the conflicting goals between the rights of the emotionally disturbed student and the rights and integrity of the school program (Long, 1996). Long’s concerns about inclusion for students with emotional disabilities has come from years of experience working with troubled young people. His concern is the “one size fits all” approach of inclusion, not the practice itself. He is supporting the fact that the limits of inclusion must be considered, especially when placing students with emotional disabilities. He makes a statement that somewhat embodies the signs of the times when he states that being “against inclusion is like being against God, Country Motherhood, and Elvis” (Long, 1996, p. 118).

Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities have unique needs that need to be met, regardless of the program. Research done by Kaufman et al. (1995) has in talking with administrators, teachers, social workers and mental health personnel provided some conclusions on programs for students with disabilities. In their description of what is necessary for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, they mention a few key factors. One of the first suggestions that Kaufman, et al. make is that treatment for the student be matched with the severity of their needs. The nature of the behavior need to be assessed, analyzed and then programs and an intervention plan should be tailored to meet those exact needs (Kaufman et. al,
1995). The reasoning behind this is due to the fact that the student should come first, thus their specific needs and how they can be addressed should be considered before any judgement on placement is considered. They firmly believe that a student first approach should be taken, rather then an approach based on a national or district agenda for specific placement. Bullock and Gable (2006) state that the least restrictive environment for many students may be a “highly structured, supportive classroom for students with E/BD. In this environment the child may thrive, learn new behaviors, and make academic progress, whereas in a less structured environment, the child might not develop socially and academically as would be expected” (Bullock and Gable, 2006 p. 5). Taking this into consideration, many districts have taken the philosophy or “least restrictive environment” to mean that students with disabilities should be pushed into general education classes. However, if this does not meet the needs of the student, they are often placed in self-contained classes, or outplaced to programs that specialize in working with students with E/BD.

Kaufman, et. al. (1995) also propose a multi-component treatment for students. Examples of multi-component treatment would include placement, addressing specific behaviors, social skill training, academic intervention, social and family services, counseling, and pharmacological treatment. They also stress that these different components need to gel together and be as seamless as possible, working together to remediate problems students encounter. This multi-component treatment for student’s needs to occur no matter what placement the student is in. However, the reality of services and the ability to perform them in a seamless multi-component fashion is often out of the reach of public schools and their inclusion placements (Kaufman, et al., 1995).
The multi-component treatment is perhaps the largest pitfall of inclusion for students with E/BD. While school districts work to have supports in place for these students, the problems the students often bring with them can many times overshadow the resources given to the program, thus causing both the student and the faculty to be in a difficult situation. While most educators would like to include as many students as possible, the reality of school funding and understaffing is always a concern. This is something that is of particular concern to Nicholas Long. He used this statement to describe the inclusion movement for students with emotional disabilities:

I concluded that the inclusion movement was like a sponge. It soaked up all the positive phrases, sentences, and ideas of the education reform movements of the past decades. The language of inclusion offers parents and educators, who are upset by the present turmoil of special education, an attractive way of denying the complexity of re-educating emotionally disturbed students. The arguments for inclusion are filled with soothing language, and the favorable promises of inclusion have had the effect of lulling the public into passive head nodding and dreamlike acceptance loaded with terms like- “There will be... adequate... appropriate... a common vision... ample, etc.”. I want to know what happens when the red hands of reality squeeze the inclusion sponge dry. (p.119)

This quote from Long displays his distrust for the practice of inclusion for emotionally disturbed students. His brash words for inclusion seem to be in direct opposition to the practice of simply putting students with emotional disabilities into inclusive environments. He is arguing that these students have real complex needs. He believes that these needs cannot all be met in a general education classroom, especially the needs of students with emotional disabilities. He argues that
districts can often put students into these inclusive environments without adequate funding or resources to manage the needs of the student. His opinion is based on looking at the reality of the resources available to students, weighing the options then making an informed decision for placement of a student based on truth instead of rhetoric.

Kaufman, et. al.(1995) also advocate for the use of social skills within the curriculum for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Often these students lack the ability to behave appropriately and communicate with others in social situations. Somewhere along the way, these skills were not taught, thus it is important that schools address these needs. They state that not only do students need to learn these social skills, but they need a safe environment in which to practice them in role playing or through other structured activities, it is not enough to simply discuss these skills (Kaufman, 1995). The premise that students must practice these skills is logical, especially considering how other academic skills are taught. Rarely do Math teachers teach a skill, then move on to another immediately. A good teacher will teach a skill, allow students to practice and perfect that skill before moving on. Similar practice for social skills training would be common sense.

Some students with emotional or behavioral disabilities may be able to receive these types of services while remaining in a general education environment; however, other students with more severe disabilities may need alternate placements in settings tailored to provide this multi-component training. This alternate placement would generally be in the form of a smaller self -contained class, or possibly out of district placement for students with the most severe needs.

Kaufman, et al, (1995) are also skeptical about inclusion environments for students with E/BD. They have made some suggestions for these students, in order for them to be successful.
They recommend a faculty to student ratio of 5:1 for some students all the way down to 1:1 for the most severe students. It is stated that these “conditions are seldom met, but we suspect that very few school systems, let alone regular classroom teachers will be prepared or willing to accept some students with emotional and behavioral disorders. “It is difficult meeting the needs of the general population of students in a classroom, let alone the population with the addition of students with emotional behavioral disorders” (Kaufman, 1995, p. 4). This research shows the difficulty of teaching students with E/BD effectively and exposes the reality that most districts aren’t equipped or willing to provide conditions necessary for success among these students, in the general education environment, or in many cases even in the self-contained classroom.

**Support Systems**

With many students with E/BD or those who display behaviors associated with E/BD, the role of the school in creating support systems for these students is ever growing. In the educational community, it is important that professionals recognize this growing trend of students and create an environment with supports for students exhibiting difficulty controlling their emotions and behaviors. Although this is already happening at a grass roots level, school by school, legislation has been in place to assure that this happens. “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997) specifies that local education agencies use positive behavior supports, including functional assessments to reduce problem behavior.” This is the case for students with and without disabilities (Kennedy, Long, Jolivette & Cox, 2001, p. 1). This legislation provides a safeguard for students and guidelines to schools as to best practices for dealing with students with E/BD or students exhibiting characteristics of E/BD. The re-authorization of IDEA in 2004 has maintained consistency in this area of behavioral supports. It sets the precedent that positive interventions must be put into place to help the student, rather
than simply a punitive routine which often results in a downward spiral for a struggling student. Perhaps some or many of these students can see some success behaviorally and academically if they are receiving positive behavior support.

Research by Kennedy (2001) on positive behavior supports has shown that they can be successful for students who are struggling in their current environment.

"It is well established that positive behavior supports can be successful in reducing the problem behaviors of students with severe disabilities. Numerous reports have documented the importance of identifying the stimulus controls, establishing operations, and reinforces maintain problem behavior and the utility of incorporation those events into a broadly conceived and implementing intervention package." (Kennedy, 2001, p.2)

Behavioral interventions and support systems can vary greatly depending on the setting. Some supports can help students with E/BD in the inclusion environment, yet some require more support and resources than can be provided in this environment. This isn't to say there aren't supports that can be given to students in the general education environment with some extra support. Much of the success of inclusion of students with E/BD depends on the school and there policies and practices. According to Caralee Adams, there are many things that teachers and schools can do to create a safe and successful environment, not just for students with E/BD but for all students (Adams, 1999). "Teachers and experts suggest that inclusion works best with the right supports in place: a school wide emphasis on positive children, proper training, adequate funding, support in the classroom, and strong communication. “Above all, shaping the behavior of all children rather than policing misdeeds can set the groundwork for successful inclusion.”
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(Adams, 1999, p. 2). If a school meets these criteria, there is good chance students with emotional and behavioral needs will outperform those in other schools.

One type of support that can be performed in either an inclusion setting or a self-contained setting is a teacher-mediated intervention. This type of intervention involves the teacher (rather than the student) taking control of the behavior, recognizing antecedents, appropriate rewards and consequences for that student (Pierce et al., 2004). “Examples of teacher-mediated interventions include token economies, contingency contracting, adjusting task difficulty, and story mapping. In each of these interventions the teacher is in charge of manipulating the independent variable to produce a change in the dependent variable (student behavior)” (Pierce et al., 2004, p.2). Often these types of interventions can be successful for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties, if the teacher has properly identified the function, antecedents, and appropriate rewards/consequences. “Overall, most (90%) of teacher-mediated interventions showed a positive effect on academic outcomes of students with E/BD” (Pierce et al., 2004, p.13).

Although it is often not seen as a concrete support system for students, the role of caring in schools and the classrooms can play a significant role in the success or failure of students with E/BD. It is important to keep in mind that many of the individual student histories of students involve adults that have provided the problem child inadequate care (Long, 1996). Often the reason that students have difficulty managing their emotions, behaviors and displaying pro-social skills is due to the fact that they have not been modeled and reinforced at home. This lack of care at home can often mean students “lack a sense of self, suffer low self-esteem, and may not have been taught impulse control” (Long, 1996 p.108). The lack of guidance at home often manifests itself though emotional outbursts or behavioral difficulties at school. Modeling caring
and responsible adult behavior is imperative for teachers working with students with E/BD. Although caring about students is important, it is also imperative that students are aware that the teacher cares about them and believes in them. Teachers do this by showing positive behavior supports, listening to students, showing confidence in them, teaching pro-social skills, spending extra time with students, and holding high expectations for behavior and academics. It is important for teachers to realize that they can make an exciting and fun place for students as well as provide the only anchor of security and attachment for some students (Long, 1996).

While support systems for students with emotional or behavioral disorders can be provided by a school system, it is imperative that the school is committed to sustaining interventions for the student. There are no “silver bullets” that will automatically cure students with these issues; therefore, they will need ongoing support throughout their school career and perhaps beyond (Kaufman et al., p, 1995). What Kaufman, et. al (1995) stress is that students can’t be given interventions and then be neglected. E/BD is a multi-dimensional problem that needs many different supports, which will need to be consistently monitored, adapted and changed throughout the child’s time in school.

**Functional Behavioral Assessment**

In the past years, research has shown the effectiveness of using Functional Behavior Assessments to analyze roots of behaviors and use them to put together a Behavior Intervention Plan, targeting problem behaviors. Many experts would argue that the functional behavioral assessment (FBA) has emerged as a valuable and, in many cases, a requisite component in the development of an effective behavior support plans (Kern, Hilt, & Greshman 2004). The value of these procedures is demonstrated in a number of literature reviews that reveal its utility in the development of effective interventions as well as the increasing trend in use” (Kern et al., 2004.
One can see FBA’s in use in any school district visited, being used to help diagnose the roots of behaviors and manage the needs of their most behaviorally needy students.

Through research and practical use in classrooms across the nation, lawmakers agreed on the validity of this practice and set parameters around the use of the FBA. The “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, mandates “functional behavioral assessment (FBA) in particular disciplinary situations. Specifically, an FBA must be conducted by a school when a student’s suspension or alternative placement exceeds 10 days or accounts for a change in placement, when a student is placed in a alternative setting for 45 days due to a weapon or drug violation, or when due process hearing officer places a student in alternative placement for behavior that is dangerous for self and others” (Kern et al., 2004, p.1). This practice is a safeguard for the rights of students and safety of schools. If students engage in behavior that keeps them out of school for 10 or more days or may warrant a change in placement, a look at the root of the behaviors the student is exhibiting is certainly warranted before changes are made. There may be a simple solution within the current placement to correct the behavior without making a change to placement. In cases when the child possesses a weapon, drugs or acts in a manner dangerous to themselves and others, it seems equally important that the reasoning for these behaviors be assessed, to hopefully look for interventions appropriate for that student.

Reasoning for enacting this into law in 1997 came from the work of Iwata, Dorsey, Silfer, Bauman, and Richman (as cited in Kern et. al, 2004). They were the first to use the term “functional analysis”

This model uses structured 5-15 minutes analog sessions in which individuals are exposed to conditions known to be associated with the problem behavior (i.e. absence of attention, delivery of instructions,
removal of an activity or item). Reinforcement respective to each condition (attention, removal of instruction, access to activity/item) is provided contingent on the occurrences of the problem behavior. The rate of problem behavior suggests classes of intervention likely to be effective.” (Kern, 2004, p.4)

This method of finding the function may be effective but doesn’t seem to be used enough in the real school setting. More recent models have been created to find the function of behavior, perhaps with more ability to be used in a school-based environment, by real professionals, rather than researchers. The difficulty of the process lies in the ability for professionals to use the method in real life. Means that are too complicated, or rely on research or “experiment” type means are not always practical within the parameters of a real school.

Since the 1982 study, many other researchers have worked on models that may be more effective in a real school setting, with the ability to be implemented by actual teachers and school staff. These new models use a variety of methods of gaining input on student behavior, i.e. through teacher interview, behavior checklists, rating scales, and direct observation by another staff member. This method of looking at behavior and using more practical means, allows teachers, counselors and other staff to look at the behaviors and determine the function, or reason the student is exhibiting them. Staff can also use these observations to determine a hypothesis about the antecedents, consequences, as well as the function of the behavior. This information can easily be used to collaboratively form a Behavioral Intervention Plan (Kern, 2004). If done properly, the plan can target the behaviors directly and implement appropriate reinforces for positive behavior as well as consequences for negative behavior. In theory, these plans can
reduce the frequency of the targeted problem behaviors, while implementing positive motivators for the student as well.

As with any educational theory, there is often a disparity between that theory and actual practice within the school walls. As modern schools are teeming with students in need of behavioral intervention, the task of performing an FBA and an appropriate Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) can become daunting. Other factors can impede progress of the implementation of this process. Kern et al. state that, "evidence suggests that the potential for accurate and widespread application, the accuracy and feasibility of the process, when implemented by school staff alone, remains unclear" (Kern et al., 2004, p. 9). This shows that there is a realization among these researchers that there may be some disparity between theory and actual practice. Not all school staff nationwide have the training or experience to effectively conduct an FBA and use the data to implement a meaningful BIP. They also state that future research needs to be done to explore the effective methods of collecting data for an FBA, and the barriers that school staff face in using them accurately and consistently in the school environment (Kern, 2004). This shows that Kern et al. have an idea that real life factors may hinder this process and further research needs to be done to determine how to make something that works well more "user friendly," so it can be implemented effectively and consistently in the real world.

Despite the barriers that schools face in implementing the FBA/BIP process, Kern, et al. are confident that it can be used in schools and produce positive results. "In addition, procedural review indicates that FBA, as applied with students with or at risk for E/BD, represents an evidence-based practice, and its broad applicability and feasibility are promising" (Kern, et al., 2004, p.10). The idea of the FBA and BIP for students with E/BD is promising based on the literature. When thought out thoroughly and implemented as written, they can be extremely
effective. However, often other factors hinder this from happening for students with E/BD. For schools in general, these interventions are promising, but in general they are still being developed in practice.

**Conclusion**

The issue of educating adolescent students with E/BD has been a hot button issue among many educators and districts for some time and seems to be one that will continue to be controversial for some time to come. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 and 2004 states that all students with disabilities should be placed in the “Least Restrictive Environment” for the student to function and hopefully achieve success in school. The law also states that necessary supports must be provided to ensure that these students are getting appropriate support in the least restrictive environment.

Unfortunately the term “Least Restrictive Environment” is a vague term and can be interpreted in many different ways. Some school districts see this as a mandate to include as many students with disabilities as possible in the general education environment and look for ways to support them. Other districts take a more conservative approach and have gradually increased the amount of students with disabilities in the general education environment, while retaining some other, more restrictive placements such as resource room and self-contained classrooms for students with greater needs. It seems that many districts are struggling to find a balance in keeping students as close to the general education classroom as possible, yet providing them with the services they need for the students to be successful.

Making already difficult process for any student with a disability even more complicated, is the decision making process involved with students with E/BD. For these students, placement becomes an especially controversial issue. Many districts are finding themselves in the middle of
hot button cases of students with E/BD, and struggling to find an appropriate placement in the least restrictive environment. Districts and parents are faced with a student that struggles emotionally or behaviorally and need to ask key questions. Can we accommodate this student with support in the general education environment? Do we have general education teachers willing to accept and work with these students? Does our school have adequate resources to accommodate this student in a general education classroom, and be able to expect that the student will succeed?

In looking at the research, there seems to be no clear-cut answer as to what the right thing to do is, in terms of placing students with E/BD. There seems to be many varying opinions on this issue among the experts in the field. However, there seems to be a few common threads that most of the experts can agree on. First, all of the experts see educating students in general education classes in their home school, with their peers as being an optimal situation. None of the research viewed seemed to disagree with that as a goal. The researchers also seemed to primarily focus on what the main goal of special education should be: the needs of the student.

Advocates for inclusion point out the positive role models that general education peers can be in the general education setting. Peer pressure to conform to classroom norms and modeling of appropriate behavior can be powerful for students with E/BD. Inclusion advocates also say that these students can be supported through support personnel such as a consultant teacher, counselors, administrators and other school staff. Inclusion advocates assert that the access to the general education curriculum among peers may help students achieve at a higher level then the alternative of placing the student in a classroom with other behaviorally challenged and possibly disruptive students (Lane, Wehby, Little & Cooley, 2005).
Other experts take a more conservative approach to working with students with E/BD. They believe the student must be taken into consideration on an individual basis. A look at the general education environment and the reality of resources must be evaluated before placing a student with E/BD into an inclusion environment. They must also take into consideration the needs of the student and whether the school actually has the resources to adequately support the student and the teacher in the general education environment (Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill & Handler, 1999). Many experts believe that although the intention of placing students with E/BD in the general education environment is good, many general education teachers simply don’t have the training to take on this task, or support from the school staff and administration needed (Shapiro et al., 1999). In this case, the more conservative experts believe that placing students in smaller environments, with more structured rules, consequences and rewards may be a less restrictive environment for a particular student. In this case, a student with E/BD might benefit from more teacher attention, structure and training in social skills (which generally are not taught in the inclusive setting (Long, 1996).

With a lack of agreement in the research over the best placement for students with E/BD, there seems to be a need to explore this question further. In addition, the researchers seemed to indicate that there is often a disconnect between theoretical best practices and reality of services and supports for students with E/BD. School professionals may be limited by time, lack of resources and support in dealing with these students. This disconnect can affect which placement is best for students with E/BD. To rectify this situation it seems pertinent to discuss the placement of students with E/BD with real professionals in real schools with real limitations facing them. Hearing from these professionals on the front lines may help to shed light on the difficult decision regarding placement of students with E/BD.
Purpose

With the controversy over placement of Adolescent students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the current literature seems to be quite conflicting on placement and supports for students with E/BD. Some educators believe that students with E/BD should be moved toward the general education environment as much as possible, while others are skeptical about this practice. The skeptics claim that self-contained classes, especially ones for students with E/BD can more readily provide support and resources for the students to be successful.

Because of the controversy, the researcher wanted to see what real educators thought about the issue and how decisions about placement are made in their respective districts. The question of whether a disconnect between the theory and actual practice and opinions of real educators was a primary focus of the research.

Method

To determine the real views of educators on students with E/BD and appropriate placement and supports, the researcher wanted to conduct face to face interviews with real educators. The CSE (Committee for Special Education) process involves a number of people making decisions about what is best for a student. Using this logic, the researcher determined it was necessary to interview a variety of school professionals to hear various opinions on the issue. In looking at the literature, it became apparent that it would be necessary to interview teachers (general education, special education consultant teacher, and a teacher of a self-contained program for E/BD), a CSE chairperson, a teacher assistant, and a social worker/counselor. This group of professionals would be representative of a committee for special education at the school district where the research was being conducted.
The overall importance of interviewing a cross section of professionals is due to the fact that different school professionals often bring different viewpoints to the table, based on their job as well as their prior experiences. The researcher wanted to look for overall similarities and differences based on the professional’s job title and their opinions. The hope is that analyzing this data will provide insight on challenges and barriers of including students with E/BD, the differing viewpoints of school staff, and the variance between the literature and reality of what is being done in schools.

To conduct the research, the researcher primarily looked a large suburban high school in Western New York. For the purpose of this discussion, the large suburban school will be identified as School #1. Participants will be individually chosen to be included in this study. Participants of this study were based on their experience in working with students with E/BD. The researcher wanted to receive information from more experienced professionals, as it may be less likely to be biased. From the researcher’s point of view, professionals with limited experience working with students with E/BD may not have had as many positive experiences, which may influence their responses. This may have created more bias in the responses given. Many teachers have not had adequate training in working with students with E/BD and need to learn as they go. Often, it takes time to develop skills to effectively work with students with E/BD. More experienced professionals are likely to have honed their skills in working with students with E/BD and will likely have both positive and negative experiences to share, which would likely influence their overall beliefs. These individuals often have seen a number of systems put in place for students with E/BD and can share their opinions based on what they have seen work and not work.
During the study, confidentiality of the participants has been maintained. No names will be given in this study, or the identity of the school that they work in. The school will be identified in the research as School #1 and participants will be identified only by their position. Participants have been made aware of this confidentiality policy prior to being interviewed. They have signed a waiver understanding their right to privacy and the minimal risk that this research provides to them. Their waivers will be kept in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher.

During the interview, participants will be asked a series of questions. Many of the questions will be the same, with the exception of some follow up questions the interviewer may have regarding an answer provided by the participant. The first question that will be asked of the participants is to describe their experience in working with students with E/BD. The second question the participants will be asked is the area in which they saw the students with E/BD and their opinions on how it went. They will be asked what supports are necessary for students with E/BD to be successful in that particular environment. The participants will be asked if they believe students with E/BD are appropriately placed in the school district. Finally, they will be asked whether they believe students with E/BD perform better in a general education setting or in a self-contained setting.

Results

The General Education Teacher

The general education teacher at school #1 had taught inclusive classes for many years, and had seen students with E/BD almost each year. This year he had accepted students from the 8:1:1 program dedicated to students with E/BD, into his inclusive Earth Science classroom. When asked about his feelings about working with students with E/BD, he said that he was enjoying the experience so far and would be willing to do this again. He would also accept
students into his class with E/BD, not necessarily connected with the 8:1:1 program. He mentioned that he had a special education background from college, which he claimed might make him more tolerant of diverse learners than other general education teachers. He said that having students with E/BD in the classroom was definitely challenging, but it was something he enjoyed as long as he had support. He mentioned how having the support of a consultant teacher and a competent teacher assistant made the job much easier. He admitted meeting the needs of all the students was challenging, yet something he enjoyed doing. When asked if he thought students with E/BD would perform better in a self-contained classroom or an inclusive classroom, he claimed that most of the time he believed an inclusive classroom would be better. When asked why, he stated that he has noticed a lot of positive peer interaction, good modeling by the other students and an environment of tolerance. He did state that the biggest problem with including students with E/BD is when they are academically far below the rest of the class. He believes that in those situations, they should be self-contained. He believed that academic issues were more of a factor in placement of students with E/BD than the emotional or behavioral aspect. When asked if students with E/BD were appropriately placed in the district, he believed that most were, with a few exceptions. He did state that he believed that almost any school would have its exceptions. He liked the idea of having an 8:1:1 program to give students with E/BD a “home base” but liked the approach of mainstreaming the students in as many classes as they could handle. He believed this was a good compromise between a self-contained program and an inclusive experience.

**Special Education Teacher- Inclusion/Resource Room**

The Special Education teacher I spoke with had six years of experience, all of which she had been exposed to students with E/BD in some capacity. In her first year teaching, she was an
inclusion teacher in an urban school, which had three students with E/BD along with students having other disabilities. Aside from students labeled as having some type of emotional or behavioral disorder, there were five or six general education students in the class she believed could be classified as E/BD. They displayed emotional and behavioral problems, as well as displaying delays in academic skills. In this classroom, there was very little administrative support and almost no support from counselors.

After a year in an urban school, she spent the other five years of her teaching as a Consultant teacher in a large suburban school, School # 1. Each year, she saw students with E/BD in the inclusion environment. She also had students with various classifications that displayed severe emotional and behavioral problems. As she worked with these students, she found that some were successful in the inclusion environment and some were not. She spent a great deal of time formulating FBA’s and BIP’s for these students to comply with regulations and improve targeted behaviors. She said that some of the students were able to stand up to the rigors of the general education classroom with support, but many ultimately returned to self-contained classrooms.

As a follow up question, the researcher asked why she thought inclusion worked for some and not all. She said there were a number of reasons. In the urban school, it often had to do with the severity of the cases she dealt with. The students often needed more mental health support and family support than she could provide. Students often received less support from administration and counselors in the urban school, which made it difficult. The counselors and administrators were so busy dealing with the problems of the general school population, the students with E/BD didn’t get as much support as they needed. She said that she and the general education teachers often felt “alone” with the students with E/BD. In this urban school, it
seemed that the CSE chair people often pushed for inclusion of students with E/BD, even when it seemed to others that the student clearly was not suited for that environment. She claimed that to get a student with E/BD placed in a self-contained classroom, you almost had to be like an attorney and argue a case against overwhelming odds.

She claimed that at the suburban school, School # 1, the scenario was different. In this school, there was far fewer students with E/BD and fewer students that were un-diagnosed cases. The administration was not overwhelmed with discipline and had time to work with the students with E/BD. They could build a rapport with them and work on changing behaviors. The social worker at the school had time to regularly meet with these students and other students with emotional needs. Even in a crisis, the social worker could drop everything and assist. Having this resource was a great benefit to the students in an inclusion setting. The social worker gave them strategies to deal with issues in the classroom appropriately and worked at building social skills. When things didn’t go right in the classroom, the social worker helped the student evaluate what they did and how they could improve the situation. She said that the support of the consultant teacher, a good general educator, counselors and administration was all necessary for students to be successful.

As a follow up question to this, the researcher asked what happened when students with E/BD weren’t being successful in the general education setting? She said that she would work with the general education teacher to make sure they were using different classroom strategies and documenting the outcomes. If this was not successful, they would bring the student up to the “Instructional Support Team” or IST. This group would brainstorm what had been done and further possibilities for interventions. These interventions would be tried. If the student was still unsuccessful, they would return to IST. At this point, a FBA would be conducted to find the root
of the behavior. After this was completed, a few targeted behaviors would be picked and a BIP would be implemented. She said at this point, most of the strategies had already been exhausted and in reality, this point was usually when they started to think about alternate placements. She said they would use the BIP for a while, but a CSE for placement in 8:1:1 or Alternative Education was often the outcome. These programs were more structured and had more support from the social worker. They also had social skills training built into the curriculum. She said that the district could usually find some type of program to fit the needs of an E/BD student. Only in extreme cases was the student “outplaced” because of lack of a viable option.

When asked if she felt the district appropriately places students with E/BD, she said she did, for the most part. She said with the classified 9th grade students entering the high school, there is a lot of program shifting to find what fits for the student. After that, there usually isn’t a lot of change. She said that the district supports the teachers and students for the most part. Unlike the urban school she worked at, CSE’s weren’t like a courtroom. She said they were more like a genuine collaboration, searching for what’s best for a student. She said there were often disagreements from various members, but generally the outcomes were positive.

When asked whether she thought students with E/BD performed better in an inclusion setting or a self-contained setting, she was hesitant. She said that she believed the goal should be to have students educated in a general education setting, but that wasn’t always the reality. She believed some students had emotional and behavioral needs that were too severe for general education. She said it often was a lack of social skills. For these students, Alternative Education and 8:1:1 was more appropriate.
8:1:1- Self-Contained Special Education Teacher

When the researcher spoke to the self-contained 8:1:1 teacher, she was asked what her experience working with students with E/BD was. She quickly responded that her program was specifically for students with E/BD. Then she went into detail about her background. She was in her 7th year teaching and had taught inclusion and self-contained. In her first two years teaching, she taught students with E/BD and other disabilities as an inclusion teacher. She taught grades K-8 and saw many things at various different levels.

For the past four years, she has been a 8:1:1, self-contained teacher. The program is for students with E/BD and other disabilities where students display significant emotional or behavioral needs. Her program has the students self-contained for part of the day and mainstreamed into general education for part of the day. She puts supports in place for these students to make sure they succeed.

When asked what supports the students needed to be successful in that environment, she said it was a difficult question. She pointed out that she tried to mainstream her students out in as many classes as she could. When her students were mainstream, she was acting as a consultant teacher. She went on to give a general description of what supports students in her program needed to be successful.

She said the supports really needed to be individualized to meet the needs of that particular student. One student has a modified day, which means they go home halfway through the day. This student cannot make it through an entire school day without getting into trouble. She has one girl in her program. She is mainstreamed into art and science. In Art, she has the Teaching Assistant (TA) for the program serving as a 1:1 aide. In Science, the TA services her and two other students. The 8:1:1 teacher says she is not there, but serves as an indirect
consultant teacher. Other students take electives with no direct support in the classroom. She communicates with all of these teachers regularly to assure that the needs of the students are being met and assists with modifications for the general education teachers.

Her students are self-contained for Math, English and Global studies. She considered these to be the most challenging classes for the students to handle academically. She worried that academic frustration would lead to behavioral difficulties. She did mention that she had one student that was mainstreamed for Global Studies because she believed he could "handle it" outside of the regular academic classes, the 8:1:1 program offers a "social skills" component. They have a "morning meeting" each morning where they eat breakfast and discuss social skill topics or problem solve. Often the Social Worker pushes in. Some of the specific areas focused on during morning meeting were; transitional planning, academic support, anger management, anxiety, and specific issues going on in the school and in their lives.

When asked if she believed that students with EBD were appropriately placed in the school district, she said yes and no. She believed that the students in the 8:1:1 program were appropriately placed and needed a support system like it contained. Their goal was to change behaviors and teach positive social skills and compensatory strategies. Ultimately, she wanted to see her students mainstreamed in as many classes as possible and in the end she would ideally like to see them leave the program for a less restrictive one, such as resource/consultant teacher services. Her exception to proper placement had to do with the students that were not in her program. She noted that her program was "capped at eight students" and there were many more possible candidates that could benefit from the program. These students were essentially on a "waiting list" and remained in a resource/consultant teacher program or were entered into alternative education. She acknowledged that those students needed more support than they were
given, however most of the cases were not severe enough for the district to send them out to a BOCES program.

For the next question, the researcher asked whether or not she believed that students with E/BD performed better in an inclusive environment or a self-contained environment. She told the researcher that this was a difficult question to answer and was hard to say. She said it depended on a lot of factors, primarily the student and even the particular subject. She believed that a great deal of it had to do with the academic ability of the student. Students who simply do not have the academic base to participate in the general education environment often have difficulty. They become behavior problems because they do not know what's going on and tend to treat the class as a joke.

She was also frank in discussing the ability of the teacher. She believed this was a huge component. She believed that some of the general education teachers were far better able to teach students with E/BD due to their content area background. If the teachers were good at working with students with E/BD, this could often be a much better situation for the students. On the other hand, if the teacher has poor classroom management, is not tolerant, or does not work well with students with special needs, the class can often be a disaster. She was honest and said that she was a "behavioral specialist" but she wasn't certified in each single high school content area. She believed that whenever her students could be mainstreamed with content area teachers, the better education they would receive.

She believed that even with her students mainstreamed in general education classes, the 8:1:1 program still served a strong role for her students. She said often her students had a poor home life, and her room was kind of like a "stable home for the students." They could leave their belongings there, or go there during the day if they were in crisis and feel "at home." She said
they also benefited from having one teacher that followed their progress throughout the day and made sure they were being successful in all areas of school, rather than 9 academic core teachers.

For the final question, she was asked what supports she needed for her students to be successful in her program. She said the first was administrative support. She had an administrator who strictly did discipline for the 8:1:1 program and was extremely supportive. He gave the teachers a great deal of latitude in making decisions about consequences for students. If the 8:1:1 teachers believed a student should go to in school suspension for any length of time, they simply had to notify their administrator and they would usually support the teacher’s decision. If a student was consistently not following rules, according to their behavior plan, they would meet with the administrator. Often the teacher would be able to suggest a consequence.

Another support she and the students needed was flexibility in programming. She believed that an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was exactly that, an “Individualized Education Program” and the student should get what they need. As much as possible, the program should fit the needs of the student, not the reverse. She believed that the most important part of the decision making process was looking at the student and figuring out exactly what they need and modifying the program to fit those needs. She believed that it also came down to knowing the child. One of the best ways to design a program for a student, she believed, was to ask the student. She said that working with high school students, they will often say what they need. The goal is obviously to find the least restrictive environment, but using the student to figure out what that is can be extremely helpful.

She added that in her program, not only did the students need supports, but she did as well. The first thing she mentioned was the help of a good TA. She said that her teaching assistant had been doing 8:1:1 for 20 years, since the program began. She noted that her TA was
extremely competent and was great backup for her academically as well as in crisis situations. She said it is important that a teacher and the teaching assistant be on the same page, sending the same message during crisis situations.

In addition to a good TA, she said she needed the help of others around her. She needed administration to allow her to attend professional developments in academic areas and behavioral intervention areas, to hone her skills. She jokingly added that she needed the help of the social worker across the hall. She said after a stressful day, she needs “counseling” and support from him to help keep things in perspective. She said that support is important because her job is a number one burnout job in education. She mentioned having the others around her bringing a positive attitude is crucial. She also needed help from general education teachers. It was important to have teachers willing to work with her students and also teachers that were willing to offer her materials for the content area classes she taught. She noted that they were the content experts, so borrowing materials from them was crucial for her to provide the best education possible for her students while self-contained.

**Teacher Assistant - 8:1:1**

The discussion with the Teacher Assistant at School #1 began as the other interviews did, with an explanation of experience working with students with E/BD. She said she had been a Teacher Assistant for 20 years and had been with the 8:1:1 program for 16 years. She said in that amount of time, she could write a book about all of the various things that she had seen. She claimed her 16 years have been full of sad, dramatic and wonderful moments, all of which, she claimed was part of the job.

She described some of the sad moments she had experienced. She had seen drugs and alcohol tear apart families and destroy the lives of her students. Some of her students had been
pregnant and had their lives permanently changed due to that experience. Others had been sent to jail and have called from jail because she was the only person they thought cared. She had also seen her students injured and killed in car accidents.

The TA also said that in her time working with students with E/BD, she had experienced some wonderful things. She told a story about a time she was at the school’s home football game and one of her former students came up to her and hugged her. He introduced her to his wife and children then told her that she was the reason he stayed in school and didn’t drop out. The former student said she had helped him out so much during his high school years, and she helped him get through it. He claimed that without her help, he wouldn’t have been able to graduate.

When asked if students in the district with E/BD were appropriately placed, she was hesitant to answer. She said she only had the experience of working in the 8:1:1 program, so it was hard for her to judge whether other students were appropriately placed. She believed that the students that were currently in the program belonged there. She said their academic and behavioral needs required something more than could be provided in the regular education setting. She also said that a lot of these students need “their place in the world.” Some of them had difficulty interacting with other students due to social skill problems. Having the 8:1:1 classroom to come back to was often a great comfort to them, especially when they were mainstreamed into general education classes.

She also said it was difficult to gauge whether students were more successful in the general education environment or in a self-contained environment. She said that they encourage students to attempt as many mainstream classes as they can handle. However for some, it isn’t very easy for them. She said it really came down to the student. Some were more capable of handling the mainstream classes academically. Others might be able to handle them
academically, but didn’t have the social skills to interact properly in the class. Overall, she said it really depended on the student and the particular class that they were attempting to mainstream them into.

The final question she answered was dealing with the supports necessary for students to be successful. She claimed with the 8:1:1 program, it was set up so that the students were supported pretty amply. She said, for the most part they get what they need. Her biggest criticism was the lack of support for the 8:1:1 teachers, especially the new ones. She claimed many teachers had come and go from the position because they didn’t get enough outside support. She said that the teachers were pretty much “hung out to dry.” She recounted the first year of the current 8:1:1 teacher and said it was horrific. She was so happy and thankful that the teacher made it through the year and came back. The TA said for the new teacher, it was sink or swim and she was all on her own. She was happy that the new teacher worked out because she thought she was excellent with the students. She also said its “frightening to think if she had left because there is a very shallow pool of teachers that can handle these students.” She said that to do the job, you had to be “a little crazy yourself.”

The Teaching Assistant went back to the supports that they provide in the classroom and said that she and the 8:1:1 teacher worked well as a team. The teacher always introduced her as her “partner” and treated her as an equal. She claimed that due to her experience with E/BD students she often was in the role to “have the teacher’s back” during the educational process. She didn’t have the background to teach, but could help make sure the environment was good for the teacher to teach. She said that the two of them had their different roles. She was the “mom figure,” while the teacher was the “educator.” She also stated that they worked with two different types of students and both of them had their strengths. She said she would rather work with the
students that "throw chairs." "I like the bad ones," she said. However, she said the teacher was much better at working with the students in the class that had extreme anxiety and were more inward with their emotional needs. She said this worked well and that they complimented each other.

In wrapping up the interview, the Teaching Assistant said that she really loved working with students with E/BD. Despite all of the challenges, she said it was extremely rewarding. She liked the excitement and knowing that each day was going to be different, with new challenges. If given a choice, she claimed she wouldn't want to do anything but work with students with E/BD. She thought anything else would be dull. Plus, she believed that the kids needed people that really genuinely cared about them.

School Social Worker

During the interview with the school social worker, he was first asked about his experience working with students with E/BD. He said that he had been a social worker for 22 years. He had been in a residential facility as a social worker/counselor. There, he saw a great number of students with E/BD and had an opportunity to hone his skills and deal with some "tough cases."

For the past 14 years, he has worked at School #1 doing counseling for students. Some of his job entails case managing for students and bringing in outside resources such as therapists and other community resources. He also does a great deal of what he referred to as "pavement counseling." He referred to this as dealing with the day to day issues that come up with students with E/BD. They may have scheduled appointments, but often they need immediate attention due to crisis situations. He spends most of his day with students with E/BD. He uses a group method of counseling as well as 1:1 counseling sessions. Often the group sessions are important for
teaching and reacting to the reactions of the students. He uses these sessions to help build social skills awareness in the students. He also spends a great deal of time discussing “gossip” in the large group. He later follows up with individual students to help advise them on best choices relating gossip.

He said that his role in the school has changed in his time in the district. He said there were six social workers in the district and one and a half at the high school. He works with special education students that are mainstreamed in consultant or resource programs as well as the 8:1:1 program. He started with just the 8:1:1 program, but has since “branched out.” He did mention that his primary focus was the 8:1:1 program and he took on as many other students as he could. He claimed that many of the resource/consultant students who had counseling on their IEP’s saw their guidance counselor. He usually ended up seeing those students with more severe emotional and behavioral difficulties. The social worker said that the school used to have an extra counselor from an outside resource, but that was discontinued and now the school social workers have been picking up the slack.

When asked what supports were necessary for students with E/BD to be successful in school, he claimed it was a difficult question to answer. He said that some students with E/BD simply weren’t able to even be in a regular school environment. These students need to have intense social skills training and a therapeutic environment that the school district could not provide. He said these students needed to deal with other issues before they could even be in a regular high school. As far as the students in the high school, he said it depended on the program.

All of the students needed strong support from Administration. The administrators needed to be understanding of their situations, yet hold them to a high standard. It also helped when the administrators went out of their way to know these students, which they often do. He
said the students with E/BD needed a strong teacher monitoring their IEP, be it in resource or in the 8:1:1 program. The teacher needed to be involved in their lives, supportive and make sure that the student is getting what they need. Lastly, he pointed out that they needed the support of counselors and social workers. He said that the emotional support from the counseling sessions often helped students to work through problems in their school day and make positive choices.

When asked if he believes if students with E/BD were appropriately placed within the district, he claimed that it wasn't so much the program, but what is done to support the student. He said for the most part, students with E/BD are appropriately placed. He believed there was a need for more support for students who were outside of the 8:1:1 program, but maybe didn't display behaviors extreme enough to be candidates for the program. He claimed a lot of those students needed a significant amount of counseling and there simply wasn't the staff to support those students. He said he felt bad for them, like they were “lost in limbo”. Sometimes they had extreme emotional needs, but because they didn’t act out behaviorally, they often did not get the support they needed from the social workers. He said that the lack of resources to help them was a “systematic problem” that seems to be prevalent all around, not just at this school.

CSE Chairperson

When interviewing the chairperson for the district’s Committee for Special Education, she was asked many of the same questions. She was first asked about her background in working with students with E/BD. She explained that she began her career as a Speech Pathologist in Habilitation Houses. She had some experience with working with students with E/BD in that setting. Her first real experience working directly with students with E/BD was when she started working in the district she was currently working in. She explained that she had been a Speech Pathologist that worked with many groups, including the 8:1:1 program. In her current position,
as CSE Chair, she worked with the Instructional Support Teams at all of the buildings. She worked with those teams to ensure that they are using interventions and developing Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans. As a group, they eventually decide whether there is an emotional or behavioral piece that needs to be addressed and then supports are put in place.

As a follow up question, she was asked about the decision making process in regards to students with E/BD in the district, in terms of programming. She said the committee needed to look at a number of things to make these decisions. A student’s skill set is important, as well as his or her specific strengths and needs. After looking globally at a child, it is the job of the committee to make the “geography meet the needs of the student.” She was indicating that the most important thing a committee could do was evaluate what needs a student had and tailor a program to them, or use that to decide on a program that fits them. She said that as a chairperson, she ultimately is looking for the least restrictive environment for a student. However, she mentioned that for some students, a self-contained classroom was the least restrictive environment.

Next, she was asked whether she believed students with E/BD performed better in an inclusive setting or in a self-contained setting. She started out by saying that there “is no self-contained world.” She explained herself by saying that these students need to be able to interact with others in society and participate as citizens. She then mentioned that on the other hand, this was not realistic for all students. She said that some needed a therapeutic environment where they could see success. Some students with E/BD were so severe that they needed no access to the general education curriculum. In these extreme cases, they need to focus primarily on
becoming well emotionally and socially before they could even function with classroom curriculum.

In further explanation, she stated that the goal of all students with E/BD, no matter how severe, would be to gain social skills, get well mentally and make it back into the general education classroom. She stated this is where they can best get the curriculum needed to meet state standards. Not only would they gain the curriculum knowledge, but also they would learn to be citizens and part of a group, similar to the real world. She also stated that students that were self-contained for too long were disadvantaged. While some needed it, the longer they stayed in self-contained, the more they "fall apart." She stated that there was a problem in the high school with students that had been self-contained throughout their education. Many of these students had "large gaps in their learning." She stated that they really needed to be out in the general education environment with the "content specialists."

She continued her explanation by saying that the 8:1:1 program was necessary, but ideally all of the students in the program would be able to be mainstreamed into inclusive classrooms. She said that ideally, special education teachers and support staff would be able to support the students with E/BD in the general education environment. She then hesitated for a minute and repeated the words "ideally." She explained that there were a lot of conditions and things that needed to be in place for this to work.

The things she mentioned would be necessary for this to happen are first "bodies." There needed to be simply more people available to support these students. More special education teachers, more support staff, and smaller class sizes. She emphasized the need for training of general education teachers and consultant teachers to better work with students with E/BD in the general education environment. Being better equipped to deal with students with E/BD would
lead to less of a need to self-contain these students. The chairperson also mentioned a need to work on school culture and mindset, especially among the general education teachers. She claimed that the staff was slow to accept special education students into the general education classroom though inclusion. Many resented having students with IEP’s in their classes. She said that it was getting much better in the district, but they still had a ways to go. She said that this was a huge problem for students with E/BD. There were very few teachers in the district and in the high school that wanted to work with the students with E/BD, or were even willing to do so. She realized it was not something that could be forced on teachers, but this mentality needed to be changed.

Continuing about the ideal situation of educating students with E/BD in the general education class, she said there were a lot of things in the system that posed problems. She said districts were still interpreting the re-authorization of IDEA and what it means to them. She admitted that for students with E/BD, there was a significant gap between what they would need support wise, and funding to provide it to them. She believed that “the educational system in general was lacking” in terms of funding to comply with IDEA. She believed this was a huge problem for all schools. She admitted that her district was actually quite fortunate though, that “our district is ahead”, even though they were struggling to make the situation for students with E/BD ideal, she believed her district was doing better than other districts due to having more resources than many other schools. She stated that the district in general was pretty “well off”.

The final question for the CSE Chair was whether or not she believed students with E/BD in the district were properly placed. At first she laughed and said “most people don’t see the whole picture like I do”. She said that she believed the consensus of the staff would be that they weren’t. She said a lot of this was due to the fact that regulations were pushing towards all
students with disabilities in the general education classroom, yet not all teachers were "ready" for this. She went back to her statement about the culture and mindset needed by general education teachers to make inclusion successful.

She noted that the 8:1:1 program for students with E/BD was focused on trying to prepare students to return to the general education environment. This meant that general education teachers would have to have students with E/BD in their classrooms, a frustrating situation for some. She also said there were many "misconceptions" that teachers had about programs outside of the school, specifically provided by BOCES. She noted that these programs were often centered on social skills, behavioral intervention, and mental health. She said often, they did not even deal with academics. She said she didn’t think most teachers even realized this. The Chairperson also noted that as a district, they had to “keep in mind their resources and the law.” They needed the least restrictive environment for a student. To send them to one of these outside programs they need to be aware that the focus will be primarily on mental health and behavior. She said, as a group the committee needed to take this into consideration and decide “what’s better?”

Discussion

In looking at the responses of the people interviewed, there were a number of similarities between the viewpoints of the individuals and their beliefs regarding students with E/BD. There was much more continuity in the answers provided to the researcher than there was contradictory statements. There were a few key areas that the professionals discussed which showed this continuity.

In school # 1, all of the professionals interviewed strongly supported the idea that the goal of educating students with E/BD was to ultimately include them with the general education
population. They all seemed to share a progressive and traditional outlook on inclusion of students with E/BD. The professionals believed that some students, due to the severity of their disability or mental state, needed to be in programs outside the general education environment. The consensus of the professionals seemed to be that removal from the general education environment should be geared towards building skills necessary for students to re-enter and be included at a later date. The professionals seemed to have a very balanced view of education for students with E/BD. None of the professionals interviewed favored full inclusion for all students all the time, but all saw this as the goal of any special education program.

The interviewees seemed to mutually agree that the placement of students with E/BD ultimately should be decided by the needs of the student. The respondents agreed, some students with E/BD were able to handle being included in general education classes with support, others were not. Some students had skill levels that allowed them to participate in general education classes for some subjects with support, but not others. The idea behind this thinking was centered in the belief that students who are academically prepared for certain subjects may be able to handle them in the general education setting as long as the emotional and behavioral supports outside the classroom are in place. There seemed to also be a consensus that many of the students with E/BD benefited from a “home base” where they could receive emotional and behavioral support, as well as being taught social skills. Having this safe place at school helped them to venture out into general education classes, while having a feeling of security that they had this place to return to.

Both the CSE Chairperson and the 8:1:1 Self-Contained Special Education teacher brought up thinking that was somewhat “outside the box” in the debate between self-contained and inclusion. The 8:1:1 teacher noted that students with E/BD had an IEP, and the important
part of that was the “Individualized” portion. She believed that students shouldn’t simply be put into a “self-contained” class or “inclusion” class. Her philosophy was that programs should be mixed and matched to meet the needs of the individual student. She believed that some students needed to be self-contained for the majority of their day, while others could be mainstreamed into general education classes the majority of their day and return only for the social-skills training and behavioral/emotional support. This would mean having more than one program listed on their IEP.

The CSE Chairperson also had this philosophy. She stated “there is no self-contained world.” She meant that students with E/BD needed to be ready for life in the real world. It was important that they learned how to interact with the general public and function in society. She also acknowledged that some students were too severe to be mainstreamed. Overall, she her philosophy was to teach students social-skills and coping mechanisms and to return them to the general education environment as soon as possible.

A concern that the 8:1:1 teacher and the CSE Chairperson both brought up was the gaps in learning that can happen with students who are self-contained for long periods of time. Both individuals were concerned that students who had been self-contained for many years were missing knowledge and skills that students in the general education environment seem to have. The 8:1:1 teacher was frank and stated that she wasn’t certified in each area of content at the high school level and didn’t know the content as well as a general education teacher. She believed it was difficult for any teacher to be a master of all content at the high school level. For this reason, she favored including students into the general education environment whenever possible. The CSE chairperson also stated that this was a problem for students who were self-
contained over long periods of time. Although she had a balanced approach to placement, she
realized the “gaps in learning” for students who spent many years self-contained.

In looking at the responses of all of the professionals surveyed, there were some
differences, but there were an overwhelming amount of similarities. All of the respondents
seemed to believe that the goal of education of students with E/BD should be to ultimately have
them mainstreamed into the general education population. They also, collectively seemed to
realize that this was a process that would take much longer for some than others, with some
perhaps never making it there. Another issue that all of the professionals seemed to stress was
the role of administrative support. They all believed that supportive administrators that provide
fair and logical consequences were needed for these students to be successful, regardless of the
program they were in. All of the professionals seemed to agree that counseling for students with
E/BD was crucial to assist them in being successful in either an inclusive setting or in a self-
contained setting. In dealing with students with emotional issues, counseling is often needed to
assist them in dealing with problems that come throughout the day. The final similarity in
responses was the fact that no matter what the program, it needed to be staffed adequately and be
provided with adequate resources. These extra staff and resources are needed to support students
throughout the day. However, in the days of budget crunches in schools, providing the needed
staff and resources can be difficult.
References


