Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Practices for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders:

A Meta-Synthesis

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH
EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

1. Introduction

1.1 *Background*

The term inclusion has been tossed around the educational world for several decades now. In
1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandated that all children with
special needs should be educated in their least restrictive environment (LRE) with their general
educated peers, schools began to create special schools and self-contained classrooms for
students with disabilities. In the 1980's there was a movement to create a more inclusive and
unified model of special education. Separate education was no longer equal and with the Regular
Education Initiative's (REI) attempt to correct the limitations of IDEA by creating one system of
general education in which students with disabilities were to be supported within general
education classrooms, the push for inclusion began. One major argument against full inclusion
came from those who worked with students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders.

Emotional and/or behavioral disorders (EBD) is one of the thirteen classifications recognized
by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (2004), and falls under
the category of *emotional disturbance*. Emotional disturbance is defined as follows:

"… a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period
of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health
factors.

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers
and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school

problems."

As defined by IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to

children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional

disturbance. [Section 300.8, 4]

Advocates questioned the appropriateness and efficacy of the self-contained programs,

arguing that they were ineffective and creating a less equal system for educating children with

disabilities. They felt that they also stigmatized and excluded those individuals with disabilities

(Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). One major argument against full inclusion came from those

who worked with students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders. Critics of the REI

movement felt that general education was neither interested or prepared to teach a large

proportion of students with learning and behavioral problems (Muscott, 1996). Many felt that

instead of pushing full inclusion, there could be a middle ground, a more pragmatic approach to

the problem.

Though this may not be surprising to many, children with EBD were often kept separate even

during the 1980's and 90's when there was a huge push for full inclusion. Students with EBD are

a challenging demographic and often disruptive, and as a result have primarily continued to

participate in specialized programs. Historically data has shown that students with EBD tend to

have the lowest rates of inclusion in comparison to others with high incidence disabilities.

According to a study completed by the Chesapeake Institute in 1994, 18% of students with EBD

are educated in placements outside their local schools as compared to 6% of students without

disabilities. Of those students who are educated in local schools, less than 17% of students with

EBD are educated in general education classrooms, as compared to 33% of all students with

disabilities.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was amended to better meet

the needs of all students with disabilities. The interpretation of the legislation has evolved and

changed over time. Education is not the same as it was in 1975, now the appropriate educational

design for students with disabilities is more gray than black and white as it was previously.

While there are still self-contained classrooms, programs and schools, there are also many

students with disabilities that are fully included in the general education classroom. It seems that

best practices are not so much focused on education as a whole but more on educating the whole

child in whatever way best meets their needs. Inclusion means that all children, regardless of

ability, have a right to an accessible and meaningful education where their participation is valued

and their potential for achievement is enabled (Gardwood, 2018).

1.2 Author's Beliefs

My professional and ethical beliefs around inclusion have been shaped over many years

through a variety of educational and teaching experiences. While I believe that in many cases

inclusion can be beneficial for students with exceptionalities, I also believe certain students can

benefit from separate programs catered to fit their individual needs. I have to be honest, that this

was not always my opinion, in fact I have just recently come to this belief.

When I was growing up, my parents befriended a neighbor with down syndrome. She

was about thirty years old and lived with her mother about two blocks away. She was friendly,

kind and loved to talk, something she had in common with my talkative father. She had a job at a grocery store in the neighborhood and on her way home from work walked by our house. After a couple of friendly chats with my dad, she became a regular at our house. I remember watching my mom try to teach her how to count money, over and over, day after day, never giving up hope that one day she would learn. Even at a young age I knew something was different about this woman, but the kindness and acceptance shown by my parents taught me how to treat those who were different than myself, and would eventually lead me to my career in education.

Watching my mother work with this individual inspired me to not only become a teacher but also to work with students with exceptionalities. During one summer in high school, I jumped at the chance to teach swimming lessons to students in a life skills class. My favorite student was a boy a year younger than me, with down syndrome. He was so enthusiastic about learning how to swim, he made me excited about teaching him. When school started again in the fall, I found my friend from swimming lessons being included in several of my classes. He would join us for physical education, sit next to me in home economics and frequently sit with my friends and I during lunch. Thinking of him being successfully included in general education gave me hope that the inclusion model would be beneficial for students with all kinds of exceptionalities.

This of course is a romanticized idea of the inclusion model, and what it truly means for students with exceptionalities. Inclusion looks different for every student because the needs of each student varies. While inclusion makes sense for many students, for some this is not their least restrictive environment. I was always of the belief that students should be included in general education as much as possible, but when a new behavior program was introduced to my

school, I started to wonder. While I do think in many cases students with emotional and

behavioral disorders can successfully be included in general education, I also feel that there is a

need for special behavioral programs for students with severe behaviors.

Students in special education need to feel safe to be included in general education but it is

also important for students in general education to feel safe. In working with students in a

behavior program I have had my fair share of experiences with students becoming physically

aggressive toward their peers and toward staff members. Many of these students have

experienced trauma in their lives and have very short fuses when it comes to stress. The slightest

thing can trigger a student, which can mean the other people in the room may be in danger. I

personally have fallen victim to this when addressing a student in crisis. The students in this

program have additional supports, like small class sizes, one on one TA support, an onsite

counselor, and behavior coaches trained to assist when students are in crisis. I am curious what

the implications would be for the students if they were in a full inclusion setting. Would they get

the support that they are guaranteed in the behavior program?

As a young educator, I know that I still have a lot to learn about emotional and behavioral

disorders, inclusion and the students that fall under this umbrella. As a result of my curiosity, I

aim to determine what the arguments are for and again inclusion for students with EBD?

With this meta-synthesis, I hope to investigate the following research question:

1. What does the literature say about teacher's perceptions of the inclusion of students

with EBD?

2. How does previous training in special education correlate with teachers' perceptions of

the inclusion of students with EBD?

3. How can schools help to create and maintain positive teacher perceptions towards inclusive practices?

1.3 The purpose of this meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis, focusing on the inclusion of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, had several purposes. One purpose was to review literature on inclusion, specifically arguments for and against inclusive practices regarding students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The second purpose was to review journal articles related to the general, special and preservice educators' perceptions of inclusive practices. The third purpose for this meta-synthesis was to analyze what universities can do to better prepare preservice teachers for teaching in inclusive settings. A fourth purpose of this study was to classify each article by publication type, identify research design, participants, and data sources of each study, and summarize the findings of each study. The final purpose of this meta-synthesis was to identify significant themes with in the articles and relate those themes to my own classroom experiences teaching students with emotional/behavioral disorders.

2. Methods

2.1. Selection criteria

The 26 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria.

1. The articles explored issues related to teacher perception regarding students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

2. The articles explored issues related to public education concerning emotional and behavioral disorders.

3. The articles were published in peer reviewed journals related to the field of education.

4. The articles were published between 1995 and 2018.

2.2. Search procedures

Database searches were conducted to locate articles for this meta- synthesis.

2.2.1. Database searches

I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC,

Ebscohost, & Taylor and Francis) using these specific search terms:

1. ("Teacher Perception") AND ("Emotional and Behavioral Disorders").

2. ("Special Education") AND ("Inclusion").

3. ("Teacher Perception"), ("Emotional and Behavioral Disorders") AND ("Inclusive

   Practices").

4. ("Inclusive Practices") AND ("Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders").

These database searches yielded a total of 26 articles (Adera, & Bullock, 2010; Cartledge &

Johnson, 1996; Clifford, 201l; Coleman, Webber, & Algozzine, 2000; Cooper, 1999; Elam, 2016;

Fielding, 2012; Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018; Gidlund, 2018; Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2018;

Heflin, & Bullock, 1999; Jackson, Willis, Gile, Lastrapes, & Mooney, 2017; Kamens, Loprete, &

Slostad, 2003; Kauffman, Llody, Willis, & Baker, 1995; Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005;

LeBreton, 2018; Lee, 2012; Muscott, 1996; Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas, 2012; Oliver, &

Reschly, 2010; Poulou, & Norwich, 2010; Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Simpson, &

Mundschenk, 2012; Simpson, 2004; Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018; Sutherland, Denny, &

Gunter, 2005).

2.3. Coding procedures

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 26 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

2.3.1. Publication types

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive work, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* use a formal research design to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* use existing literature to analyze, expand, or further define a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption. *Descriptive works* describe phenomena and experiences, but do not disclose particular methods for attaining data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain, justify, or recommend a particular course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. *Guides* give instructions or advice explaining how practitioners might implement a particular agenda. An *annotated bibliography* is a list of cited works on a particular topic, followed by a descriptive paragraph describing, evaluating, or critiquing the source. *Reviews of the literature* critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

2.3.2. Research design

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* research utilizes numbers to convey information. Instead of numbers, *qualitative* research uses language to explore issues and phenomena. *Mixed methods* research involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative

methods to present information within a single study.

2.3.3. Participants, data sources, and findings

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., general education teachers, teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, preservice teachers). I also identified the data sources used in each study (e.g., observations, surveys). Lastly, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

2.4. Data analysis

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 26 articles included in this meta-synthesis. Significant statements were first identified within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, significant statements were identified as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) arguments for inclusion; (b) arguments against inclusion; (c) characteristics of students with emotional/behavioral disorders; (d) perceptions from the general education teacher, (e) challenges of inclusion for students with emotional/behavioral disorders, (f) teacher attrition and (g) areas for improvement. I then generated a list of non-repetitive, verbatim significant statements with paraphrased formulated meanings. These paraphrased formulated meanings represented my interpretation of each significant statement. Lastly, the formulated meanings from all 26 articles were grouped into theme clusters, represented as emergent themes. These emergent themes represented the fundamental elements of the entire body of literature.

3. Results

3.1. Publication type

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I located 26 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each article is located in Table 1. Fourteen of the 26 articles (53.8%) included in this meta synthesis were research studies (Adera, & Bullock, 2010, Elam, 2016, Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018, Gidlund, 2018, Heflin, & Bullock, 1999, Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003, Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005, LeBreton, 2018, Lee, 2012, Oliver, & Reschly, 2010, Poulou, & Norwich, 2010, Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013, Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018, & Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). Three of the articles (11.5%) were guides (Cooper, 1999, Jackson, Willis, Gile, Lastrapes, & Mooney, 2017, & Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas, 2012). Five of the articles (19.2%) were opinion pieces/position papers (Cartledge & Johnson, 1996, Coleman, Webber, & Algozzine, 2000, Kauffman, Llody, Willis, & Baker, 1995, & Muscott, 1996). Four of the articles (15.3%) were reviews of literature (Clifford, 2011, Fielding, 2012, Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2018, & Simpson, & Mundschenk, 2012).

Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Adera, & Bullock, 2010	Research Study
Cartledge & Johnson, 1996	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Clifford, 2011	Review of Literature
Coleman, Webber, & Algozzine, 2000	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Cooper, 1999	Guide
Elam, 2016	Research Study
Fielding, 2012	Review of Literature
Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018	Research Study
Gidlund, 2018	Research Study
Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2018	Review of Literature
Heflin, & Bullock, 1999	Research Study
Jackson, Willis, Gile, Lastrapes, & Mooney, 2017	Guide

Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003	Research Study
Kauffman, Llody, Willis, & Baker, 1995	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005	Research Study
LeBreton, 2018	Research Study
Lee, 2012	Research Study
Muscott, 1996	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas, 2012	Guide
Oliver, & Reschly, 2010	Research Study
Poulou, & Norwich, 2010	Research Study
Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013	Research Study
Simpson, & Mundschenk, 2012	Review of the Literature
Simpson, 2004	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018	Research Study
Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005	Research Study

3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies

As stated previously, I located 14 research studies that met my selection criteria, (Adera,

& Bullock, 2010, Elam, 2016, Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018, Gidlund, 2018, Heflin, & Bullock, 1999,

Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003, Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005, LeBreton, 2018, Lee, 2012,

Oliver, & Reschly, 2010, Poulou, & Norwich, 2010, Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013, Stites, Rakes,

Noggle, & Shah, 2018, Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). The research design, participants, data

sources, and findings of each of these studies are identified in Table 2.

Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings

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Adera, & Bullock	Mixed Methods	400 educators who had participated in one or more CCBD (Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders) professional development trainings.	Surveys, post-survey focus groups	Research found the main determinants of dissatisfaction among teachers of students with EBD were categorized in two groups, within and outside the classroom. Stressors from inside the classroom included, diverse skills and abilities among students, challenging behaviors, and inconsistent school expectations. Outside stressors included lack of parental involvement, collaboration, and ambiguity of roles and responsibilities. In contrast to other studies, results showed that teacher qualifications do not play a role in decisions to leave a job. Qualified teachers of students with EBD will likely stay in their positions if schools are cognizant of job-related stressors and make efforts to remedy work-related problems.
Elam	Qualitative	14 elementary general education teachers struggling with effectively educating students with EBD	Focus group interviews and individual interviews	Using a system of interviews, the goal was to determine specific teaching strategies to be implemented by teachers in order to be effective when working with students with EBD. The data collected resulted in five themes of effective strategies; foundational groundwork, general

				teaching strategies, strategies to improve academic performance, strategies to improve social skills and communication techniques, and behavior management strategies. General teaching strategies discussed included: appreciating student individualization, developing appropriate teacher/student relationships, implementing antecedent measures, providing explicit and consistent expectations, as well as, recognizing the need for professional development and training. Behavior management strategies implemented included: employing behavioral modification strategies, establishing group contingencies, and utilizing behavior tools. Some additional strategies included, recognizing academic gaps, increasing active participation, and fostering self-regulation and self-management techniques.
Garwood, & Van Loan	Mixed Methods	41 pre-service educators	Surveys and open-ended questions.	In this study preservice teachers were given a pre/post survey after completing course work focusing on relationship-based

				approaches to positive behavior support. Prior to course work, the preservice teachers seemed to label the students themselves as challenging rather than the behaviors they were exhibiting. After the course work results stated that teachers made significant improvements in their understanding towards compassionate behavior management, intentional relationship building, and establishment of a welcoming classroom environment. Participants noted a change in how they viewed students with EBD, moving from seeing them first as their disability then as a person, to seeing them as a person who happens to have a disability.
Gidlund	Qualitative	6 focus groups with 4-8 teachers of grades 4-6.	Focus group interviews and follow up interviews based on stimulus text.	Including EBD students in mainstream classes was expressed by the teacher as being a disadvantage for those in the classroom. Common themes of problems, dilemmas, and impossibility were the causation. Problems included, environment, teacher preparedness, and lack of resources. Dilemmas listed by educators involved just

				because everything is equal doesn't mean student differences disappear. They also found conflicting inclusion strategies to be a major problem.
Heflin, & Bullock	Qualitative	18 teachers (general education and special education) at various grade levels in Texas	Open-ended questions	The results of the interviews showed that teachers, both in general and special education, felt that implementation of full inclusion was not fully thought out or properly implemented as participating teachers were chosen purely on their accepting and willing personalities. All of the teachers felt that formal training and time for collaboration was needed, in order to best modify curriculum to meet the needs of the students. Teachers also felt that additional staff support was needed for student access. None of the professionals in the survey felt that full inclusion was the best option for all students.
Kames, Loprete, & Slostad	Qualitative	71 elementary classroom teachers	Survey	Results of the study found that teachers had two major areas of need in regards to teaching in inclusive classrooms. First they felt the need for information and education both about the child and how to best modify curriculum to meet the needs of said

				student. Second, teachers felt they needed collegial and administrative support. Teachers were very concerned with time, having enough to meet the needs of all the students, time to collaborate and time to seek information/education that they need.
Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley	Quantitative	37 special education teachers and 72 students with high incidence disabilities	Behavior rating scales, psychometrically sound tools and procedures.	Findings indicated that students in self-contained classrooms had higher academic skills than those in a self-contained school. It was also indicated that there was no significant difference in social skills of students in either setting. It was found that students in the self-contained classes higher levels of internalizing behaviors than students in the self-contained school.
LeBreton	Qualitative	2 administrators, 17 general educators, 4 special educators and 4 para professionals teaching in rural Louisiana.	Surveys and individual interviews	Data indicated that though the site of the study is considered a fully inclusive school, there was not a consensus as to what full inclusion was, nor did participants agree that all disability classifications were best served through full inclusion. Many participants were only vaguely familiar with the classification of EBD and there was no

				agreement as whether or not students with EBD were in their LRE in an inclusive general education class.
Lee	Quantitative	127 general education and special education teachers in North Central Texas	Survey	The present study showed teaching experience was a significant predictor of teacher's perceptions regarding placement of students with E/BD in a general education classroom. Teachers with more years of experience teaching would find the addition of a student with EBD to form positive social relationship with other students in the general education classroom. A student's age played a major role on teachers' perceptions regarding behaviors of students with EBD. Teachers working with preschool and kindergarten students found it less disruptive to have a student with EBD in their classroom, than elementary and middle school teachers did. It was also noted that special education teachers scored significantly higher on their efficacy than general education teachers. Thus, teachers who have positive experience with inclusionary practices for

				students with EBD are more likely to have a higher degree of positive perceptions about integrating students with EBD into the general education setting.
Oliver, & Reschly	Quantitative	26 course syllabi in special education preparation programs	Course syllabi review	According to this study, special education teacher preparation programs are providing content on reactive, behavior reduction procedures with some supervised experience. Only 7 of the 26 syllabi had a course entirely devoted to classroom management. Thus, resulting in teachers that may not be adequately prepared to meet the behavioral needs of diverse learners.
Poulou, & Norwich	Mixed Methods	170 elementary school teachers	Questionnaire	In aiming to identify the types of emotional and behavioral difficulties that elementary school teachers in Greece see as problematic in their teaching, this study found that 'work avoidance', 'negativism', 'physical aggression', and 'lack of concentration' as most problematic. According to the data only one of the most problematic behaviors, 'lack of concentration' was among the highly frequent behaviors. In regards to severity of the behaviors the study

				showed that, 'depressive mood' and 'truancy' were rated as highly severe. Though these behaviors are listed as most severe, they are listed very low in frequency.
Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes	Quantitative	25 primary general education teachers	Surveys	Teachers, despite their motivation and education knowledge, lack critical skills for managing challenging behavior. Knowing these deficits exist, reduced self-efficacy and enhanced stress, leaving teachers susceptible to more significant psychological problems, which taken together, could lead to teacher burnout.
Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah	Mixed Methods	120 early childhood and elementary preservice teachers	Survey and open-ended questions	Preservice teachers lacked a coherent understanding of inclusion and thought themselves as needing additional professional development to be fully prepared to teach in an inclusive setting. As a result, teacher preparation programs should provide a more coherent conceptual framework to guide the development of both course and field work related to inclusive practices and inclusion.
Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter	Quantitative	109 teachers of students with EBD	Survey	This study found that teachers felt confident in their ability to

				collaborate with others to provide academic services to students with EBD but limited in their ability to provide academic instruction to their students, and this perception is even lower for teachers issued emergency licenses.

3.2.1. Research design

Of the 14 studies, 5 of them (35.7%) used a qualitative research design (Elam, 2016; Gidlund, 2018; Heflin, & Bullock, 1999; Kames, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003; LeBreton, 2018). Five of the studies (35.7%) utilized a quantitative research design (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005; Lee, 2012; Oliver, & Reschly, 2010; Scanlon, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). Four of the studies (28.6%) utilized a mixed-methods research design (Adera, & Bullock, 2010; Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018; Poulou, & Norwich, 2010; Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018).

3.2.2. Participants and data sources

The majority of the participants in the 14 studies included in this meta-synthesis, were general education teachers, special education teachers who work with students with emotional/behavioral disorders and preservice general/special education teachers. Seven of the studies (50%) analyzed data from teachers of students with EBD (Adera, & Bullock, 2010; Elam,

2016; Heflin, & Bullock, 1999; Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005; LeBreton, 2018; Lee,

2012; Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). Four of the studies (28.5%) analyzed data from

general education teachers (Gidlund, 2018; Kames, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003; Poulou &

Norwich, 2010; Scalon, Barnes, & Holmes, 2013). Two of the studies (14.2%) focused on

pre-service general/special education teachers (Garwood, & Van Loan, 2018; Stities, Rakes,

Noggle, & Shah, 2018). In addition, to general education, teachers of students with EBD, and

preservice general/special education teachers, course syllabi were examined, as well as, research

from para educators, administrators, and special education students with high incidence

disabilities.

Surveys and interviews made up for the majority of the data sources used in this study.

Seven studies (50%) used surveys to collect data (Adera, & Bullock, 2010; Garwood, & Van

Loan, 2018; Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003; LeBreton, 2018; Lee, 2012; Scanlon, &

Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). Five of the studies (35.7%) used

interviews as their primary source of data collection (Elam, 2016; Gidlund, 2018; Heflin, &

Bullock, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2010; Stities, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018). Other data

sources were also used in the research studies, including questionnaires, behavior rating scales,

psychometrically sound tools and procedures.

3.2.3. Findings of the study

The findings of the 14 research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be

summarized as follows.

1. Teachers' perceptions of including students with emotional/behavioral disorders are often negative. This is frequently due to a lack of knowledge in regards to managing behaviors or accommodating academic needs. Though educators agree that inclusion must extend beyond simple access to the general education classroom, there is no consensus on what the term can and should mean for schools and students.

2. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are included in the general education class less frequently than other peers with exceptionalities. Externalizing behaviors, inappropriate placement and supports are major reasons why students with EBD are excluded from the general education setting.

3. Preservice education does not adequately prepare teachers for teaching in inclusive settings. During general education course work students are commonly only required to take one special education class, usually consisting of disability descriptions rather than inclusive teaching strategies.

3.3. Emerging themes

During my analysis of the 26 articles included in this meta-synthesis, 7 themes emerged. These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) arguments for inclusion, (b) arguments against inclusion, (c) characteristics of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, (d) perceptions of the general education teacher, (e) challenges of inclusion for students with emotional/behavioral disorders, (f) teacher attrition and (g) areas for improvement. These seven theme clusters and their formulated meanings are represented in Table 3.

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Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
Arguments for Inclusion	● Inclusion means that all children, regardless of ability, have a right to an accessible and meaningful education where their participation is valued and their potential for achievement is enabled. ● Many parents feel that inclusion will help their child make friends, increase self-esteem, and reduce the stigma of special education. ● All students should have access to general education. ● The development of social skills in students with severe disabilities across school aged groups. ● Improvements in the attitudes that non-disabled peers have for their peers with disabilities. ● The development of positive relationships and friendships between peers as a result of integration. ● Research states that overall teachers reported an improvement in behavior among the students with emotional/behavioral disorders while they were in general education. ● If students with emotional/behavioral disorders aren't included in the general education class how will they learn what appropriate behavior looks. General education provides EBD students with models for appropriate behavior.
Arguments Against Inclusion	● Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are considered the most difficult to include and have been cited as the exemplars of times when full inclusion is not appropriate. ● Teachers feel that they do not have enough knowledge or training to properly support full inclusion. ● Many teachers feel that full inclusion focuses on socialization but does not focus on academics, which comes as a concern because of the increased pressure on teachers to meet higher academic standards. ● Attending a general education class with a full-time aid would be just as stigmatizing as leaving the class for pull out instruction. ● Some researchers feel that negative views on inclusion stem from the fact that general education teachers did not initiate the push for full inclusion. ● Both teachers and parents are concerned about teacher's abilities to meet the needs of EBD students and feel they are unable to deal with severe behaviors in the general education classroom. ● Without necessary training, teachers can unintentionally worsen the behavioral crisis. ● Fears surrounding inclusion among general education teachers may stem from fear of students with emotional/behavioral disorders.

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	● Professionals who advocate for students with emotional/behavioral disorders, also express concern that full inclusion may not be appropriate, because it does not allow for the students to have the support and specialized instruction that they need. ● Negative attitudes from general education teachers can be detrimental to the success of inclusion of students with EBD.
Characteristics of Students with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders	● Struggles to learn not related to intellectual, sensory, or health concerns. ● Difficulties forming relationships with others. ● Inappropriate feelings or behaviors in otherwise normal situations ● Prolonged sadness or depression. ● Development of physical symptoms or fears related to personal or school problems. ● Tend to display externalizing (aggression) and internalizing (anxiety) behaviors. ● High dropout rates, absentee rates, grade retention, drug/alcohol abuse, criminal arrests. ● Because of their mental health needs many students with EBD can be impulsive when interacting with other and they may inadvertently disregard the feeling of their classmates or teachers, which can then lead to alienation and fewer chances to form meaningful relationships. ● Lack of motivation and diverse skills and ability levels. ● Many students with emotional/behavioral disorders have experienced trauma in their lives, and as a result have high ACE (adverse childhood experience) scores.
Perceptions of the General Education Teacher	● Many general education teachers feel that inclusion takes away from the learning of the other students. ● Teachers feel that they do not have enough knowledge or training to properly support full inclusion. ● Many general education teachers are worried their classrooms will become violent environments. ● Having students with a variety of cognitive, social and emotional needs in the same class makes it impossible to deliver quality instruction. ● Research shows that a major reason why inclusive classrooms are not successful is due to teacher perception. If a teacher perceives, the class as a failure, it is likely the class will fail. ● Preservice teachers often feel that textbooks often don't refer to real classroom experiences, thus when presented with a student with behavioral needs, many general education teachers fall short in their ability to appropriately meet the needs of that student. ● University students in the field of education yearn for more practical learning, both in general and special education.

	• Preservice general education teachers know that just because you can write a good lesson plan that doesn't necessarily mean your lesson will go exactly as planned, especially when students with different learning needs are present. • General education course work does not touch on working with students with emotional/behavioral disorders. • Afraid of students with disabilities, don't know how to interact.
Challenges of Inclusion for Students with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders	• Teachers tend to label the students themselves as challenging, rather than the behaviors themselves. • Though students have every right to be included, how to create those environments that promote inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, is a source of debate and uncertainty. • Inclusion often refers to students with LD, physical disabilities, or high incidence disabilities. • Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are considered the most difficult to include and have been cited as the exemplars of times when full inclusion is not appropriate. • Even districts that consider themselves fully inclusive, some students with emotional/behavioral disorders are sent to different schools or out of state placements. • Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are being inappropriately placed in inclusionary settings. • Though educators agree that inclusion must extend beyond simple access to the general education classroom, there is no consensus on what the term can and should mean for schools and students. • Included in the physical class doesn't mean students will have access to appropriate curriculum. • Despite not being trained psychologists, teachers are increasingly expected to address the mental health needs of their students with emotional/behavioral disorders. • Many students with EBD are seeking attention, for them, negative attention is better than no attention at all.
Teacher Attrition	• Teacher turnover rates have increased over the last decade, with school migration rates considerably higher in special education compared with general education programs. • High-poverty schools have higher rates of attrition than wealthier schools. • Role overload, and involvement in too many non-instructional tasks are considered to be major reasons for attrition among special educators. • Special education teachers are given diverse roles and responsibilities, that, coupled with excessive caseloads and teaching responsibilities, resulted in sped teachers spending less time teaching and more time completing paperwork.

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	- Many teachers feel that administrators do not understand the diverse needs of students with emotional/behavioral. - Special education teachers feel that they are given inconsistent program materials, large caseloads, inappropriate therapeutic placement options for students with severe emotional/behavioral disorders and are sometimes used as a dumping ground for students with delinquent behaviors. - Loss of instruction time due to classroom disruptions. - Sending students to the office/suspension is sometimes not an option. - Often times the school and the family not on the same page regarding student behaviors. - There is a struggle to keep other students and staff safe while also working with students in crisis. - General education teachers unwilling to work with students with emotional/behavioral disorders. - Special educators feel that general education teachers lack empathy and knowledge in regards to working with students with emotional/behavioral disorders. - There is often a huge lack of parental involvement among students with emotional/behavioral disorders. - In some cases, lack of proper communication is to blame; parents blame the teacher, while the teacher blames the parent. - Many teachers choose to transfer to programs that are perceived to be less challenging.
Areas for Improvement	- Inclusion must focus on the needs of all students. - Teachers need both better preservice and in-service preparation to provide high quality instruction and improved supports to allow them to better meet needs. - Resistance in regards to change and the unknown can be easily addressed, resistance due to lack of training, inability to meet student needs, and safety concerns will require carefully sculpted, comprehensive solutions. - Communication between general education and special education teachers should be proactive not reactive. - Both general education and special education teachers need training and time to collaborate. - Quality of services determines effectiveness more than placement of the student does. - In order for students with emotional/behavioral disorders to succeed in general education there needs to be careful planning and systematic implementation. - Not allowing for one class to have all of the students with IEP's – "inclusion class"

	- Rather than making a blanket statement putting all students in general education, individualized decisions need to be made for each student, with a wide range of support options. - Positive approach to behavior management, valuing students in a sincere way, love and care for students, passion for working with children, interest in forming relationships with students. - Students with emotional/behavioral disorders need positive interactions among peers and teachers. - Teachers building high quality relationships is the key to helping their students improve their behavior and academics. - Preservice education needs to address relationship building. Focus on building a caring and inclusive classroom environment. - Teachers need to see the child, not the disability and separate children from their behavior. - Teachers need to understand their own emotional responses to students with emotional/behavioral disorders if they are going to include students in meaningful ways.

4. Discussion

In this section I have summarized the emergent themes from my analysis of the 26 articles included in this meta-synthesis. After analysis, these emergent themes were then combined with my own personal experiences working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders in the public-school system.

4.1. Arguments for inclusion

Inclusion was first initiated in 1975, by parents advocating for their child's right to access public school. As time has progress parents have been advocating for not only access to special programs with in public schools but also access to general education, with hopes that their child could develop positive relationships among peers, increase self-esteem, reduced the stigma of

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special education and bridge the gap between those with disabilities and those without. For individuals with emotional and behavioral disorders full inclusion is even harder to access. I have seen this first hand in my school district. After inclusion advocates worked to close down self-contained school for students with emotional/behavioral disorders, at the elementary level, four site-based behavior programs were created to take its place. One of those behavior programs resides at the school where I am currently teaching physical education.

Prior to the existence of this program, students did not have any access to the general education setting. For students with emotional/behavioral, a lack of social skills is often present. They often struggle with impulsivity and may inadvertently disregard the feelings of their classmates or teachers, which can then lead to alienation and fewer chances to form meaningful relationships. If we separate students with EBD, only allowing them access to other students with EBD, how are they going to be able to learn what behaviors are appropriate? By allowing students with EBD to access their general education we can provide them with opportunities for learning those appropriate behaviors from their peers. Research states that overall teachers reported an improvement in behavior among the students with EBD while they were in general education. I have seen this to be true on several occasions.

When students from our site based behavior program start to have access to their general education peers, they generally begin very slowly, by eating lunch with them or attending a special with them, often times, that means joining their peers for physical education class. As a physical educator, I teach both the general education classes, as well as, the behavior classes. I have seen how successful students with EBD can be in the general education setting. After one student, gained access to the general education setting, I had a conversation with him about how

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wonderful I felt his behavior was during the general education PE class, I then asked him if he

felt the same way about his behavior. He responded that yes he felt his behavior was better in

general education because he couldn't act out like he did when he could when he was in his

behavior class. His response shocked me at first, but the more I thought about it the more I

realized, he couldn't display those behaviors because he was trying to build relationships with

his general education peers and they wouldn't allow for those behaviors.

When working towards full inclusion for students with emotional/behavioral disorders, it

is essential that the process needs to be carefully planned and systematically implemented, so

that students feel successful in the general education setting.

4.2. Arguments against inclusion

The placement of students with emotional/behavioral disorders into the general education

setting is a topic of strong debate. Students with EBD often are considered the most difficult to

include and have been cited as the exemplars of times when full inclusion is not appropriate. The

social, academic and behavioral characteristics of students with EBD are often disturbing and

disruptive to those who try to educate them. Both teachers and parents are concerned about

teacher's abilities to meet the needs of EBD students and feel they are unable to deal with severe

behaviors in the general education classroom. General education teachers have to differentiate

instruction for all students in the class, and with large class sizes it is unclear if teachers are able

to meet the high needs of students with EBD. Even professionals who advocate for students with

emotional/behavioral disorders express concerns that full inclusion may not be appropriate,

because it does not allow for the students to have the support and specialized instruction that they

need.

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When given a choice, most teachers would not choose to have a student with severe behaviors in their class because who would want the added stress? Research shows that negative attitudes from general education teachers can be detrimental to the success of inclusion for students with emotional/behavioral disorders. If teachers are not in support of inclusion, their students are sure to feel rejected thus further alienating them from the general education setting. On the other side, even if a teacher is willing to work with a student with EBD, their lack of training could accidentally worsen the behavioral crisis, thus, resulting in a feeling of failure for both the student and the teacher.

Just as the diagnoses of students with EBD are vastly individualized, so are each students' needs. Full inclusion does not only mean being physically included in the class; it also means that students need to have access to their LRE (least restrictive environment). If a student is not benefitting academically or non-academically, or when a student disrupts the learning environment for other students, a question of appropriateness comes to mind. Working with students with emotional/behavioral disorders has shown me that the general education setting is not appropriate for all students. When a student becomes physically aggressive, additional support needs to be available to keep the students, teacher and student in crisis safe. Currently, the way general education is structured, students would not be provided those supports. Ideally, prior to working with students with EBD, teachers would be trauma informed, trained in positive behavior support, and provided with all the additional support needed to meet the needs of the student. Unfortunately, this just does not occur. I know this because, I was not provided with adequate training prior to working with my students with EBD. Everything that I have learned is from experience and on the job training.

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4.3. Characteristics of students with emotional/behavioral disorders

Students with emotional/behavioral disorders tend to display externalizing and internalizing behaviors. These behaviors can often be disruptive and disturbing to those who work with them. For many students with EBD their struggles to learn are not related to intellectual, sensory or health concerns; most have experienced various forms of trauma. From the outside, students with EBD look very similar to their peers, but on the inside, are dealing with a variety of emotional struggles, which can manifest into inappropriate feelings or behaviors in otherwise normal situations. These inappropriate feelings or behaviors, present teachers with a challenge. Some choose to rise up and accept the challenge while others shy away and push the challenge onto someone else.

In my teaching experience, I have always enjoyed the challenge behaviors present. While I can honestly say, I do not always make the right choice when working with students with behaviors, I would say that I always try to do what is best for the student. When I started working with students in our site based behavior program, I was introduced to another world of behaviors, and challenged in ways I never thought I would be. The one thing that is constant is the unpredictability of the students. Strategies that work for students one day is not guaranteed to work the next day. It is essential for teachers to be flexible because students with EBD are not going to fit into the mold of the typical student. Research states that the most important thing for students with EBD is to build positive relationships with adults and peers. My focus has been just that, relationship building. One major benefit of the site based behavior program is small class sizes. Since some of my classes only have five students, I am able to spend time building high quality relationships with my students.

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4.4. Perceptions of the general education teacher

Unfortunately, to the detriment of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, research

states that general education teachers as a whole feel that they are ill prepared, lacking both

knowledge and training, to fully include students with EBD. Research shows that a major reason

why inclusive classrooms are not successful is due to teacher perception. If a teacher perceives,

the class as a failure, it is likely the class will fail. The feeling of being unprepared for the

challenging behaviors that students with EBD present, leaves teachers doubting themselves,

which in turn, pushes students with EBD out of the general education classroom.

General education teachers have made assorted claims about their trepidations for

including students with EBD in the general education setting. The research refers to them being

concerned that their classrooms with become violent environments, lacking the proper

knowledge to help students with EBD appropriately. It also states, that they feel having students

with a variety of cognitive, social and emotional needs in the same class makes it impossible to

deliver quality instruction. Though, these are just a few reasons, the research overwhelmingly

states that general education teachers as a whole do not feel the general education setting is

appropriate for students with EBD, and I personally feel, that the majority of their assertions

stem from fear; a fear of the unknown, a fear of the label, and a fear of failure.

When talks of closing down the behavior school started, and our school learned that we

would be one of the sites for the program, lots of conversations surrounding the program began.

As the rumors swirled around the school, talks of violent and aggressive children started to scare

some of the teachers working in the school, pushing a few of them to transfer locations. Prior to

the school year starting our school was given two extra days to train staff in NCI (non-crisis

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interventions), and ACEs (adverse childhood experiences). These trainings were helpful to a

point however they did not fully help the staff to feel confident in their abilities. Two days of

training does not prepare you for working with children with severe behaviors, it does however,

terrify you into realizing just how bad the behaviors could get. I remember specifically during

the NCI training, listening to the trainer speak about what to do if a child grabs on to your hair

and how to safely release the child's grasp. On the first day of school I felt absolutely terrified

and unprepared to work with the children in the program. It took about half of the school year

before I started to really feel any sort of confidence in working with the children in the program.

Even though, I was starting to bond with the children, staff in the school who did not work with

the children in the program, were still scared, and spoke negatively of the students in the

program. As the year, has progressed more and more students in the program are gaining access

to the general education setting. I have heard from several general education teachers how

wonderful the students in the program behave when they are in the general education setting.

One of my fellow teachers even stated that they behave better than the students in general

education.

Research states that teacher attitude is a major part of the success of inclusion. If we can

help teachers to feel confident in their abilities to work with students with emotional/behavioral

disorders, perhaps the negative connotations surrounding inclusion of students with EBD will

decrease.

4.5. Challenges of inclusion for students with emotional/behavioral disorders

One major hurdle that students with emotional/behavioral disorders have to face is

teachers who label the students themselves as challenging instead of their behaviors. By

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separating a student from their behaviors teachers can better identify what is causing the

behavior in the first place. As I have stated before students with EBD are considered the most

difficult to include and have been cited as the exemplars of times when full inclusion is not

appropriate. Even districts that consider themselves fully inclusive, send some students with

EBD to different schools or out of district placements. Severe behaviors and often extensive

needs, make them challenging to accommodate in the general education setting. Though

educators agree that inclusion must extend beyond simple access to the general education

classroom, there is no consensus on what the term can and should mean for schools and students.

This oftentimes results in students with EBD being inappropriately placed in inclusionary

settings, thus setting them up for failure.

While reading the articles and studies in this meta-synthesis, one thing was abundantly

clear; inclusion does not and should not look the same for every child. Some students with

emotional and behavior disorders may be able to be fully included in general education, that does

not prove to be true for all students with EBD. Just as each students' diagnoses are unique, so are

their educational and emotional needs. I have seen students in our behavior program as they are

slowly reintroduced into general education. It starts with first meeting the teacher, visiting the

classroom, then gradually evolves to the student joining the class during lunch or during a

special. For some students, this is a perfect glimpse into general education and once they get a

taste they are ready for more. For others, even this small glimpse is too over whelming. It is

essential that special education teachers choose the classroom and teacher that would best fit the

specific student's needs.

4.6. Teacher attrition

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Teacher turnover rates have increased over the last decade, with school migration rates considerably higher in special education compared with general education programs. It is common knowledge that special education teachers have an extremely high burn out rate, most leaving special education programs with in the first five years of teaching. For teachers of students with emotional/behavioral disorders that number is even higher. Since the behavior program started at our school, the turnover rate for teachers in the program is about eighty percent. Challenging behaviors make for a stressful work environment and teachers often feel they are walking on eggshells around their students. With our program, specifically, a lack of guidance and support is a huge factor in teacher turnover. There are many moving parts in the program that all have to work together in order for the program to be successful. Teachers need to be able to rely on their para-educators, administration and support staff, in order to properly educate their students. This means having constant productive communication between all staff, this in itself presents a huge challenge.

When working with students with severe behaviors, research states that teachers struggle with consistency. Oftentimes the school and the family are not on the same page regarding student behaviors, much like teacher and administration are not always on the same page. Inconsistency in behavior management will ultimately lead to loss of instruction time due to classroom disruptions. Teachers report sometimes sending students to the office or suspension is sometimes not even an option. Special education teachers feel that they are given inconsistent program materials, large caseloads, inappropriate therapeutic placement options for students with severe emotional/behavioral disorders and are sometimes even used as a dumping ground for

students with delinquent behaviors. All these factors combine to create an overwhelming environment where teachers end up losing sight of why they loved the job in the first place.

As a physical education teacher, it is difficult for me to even imagine switching to a job where there is such a high turnover rate. I see the stress put on the teachers in our behavior program, causing them to transfer to different programs or move away from special education entirely. Even though I am interested in working with students with EBD, I'm not sure I could commit to it full time, knowing the challenges it presents.

4.7. Areas for improvement

Teaching students with emotional/behavioral disorders is always going to be challenging, but there are numerous amounts of ways to make the job better. From universities to school administration, everyone could stand to make changes in the way we are preparing our teachers for working with students with EBD. At the university level, general education programs need to create programs where students learn about inclusive practices and how to incorporate students with exceptionalities into the classroom. As school districts work towards becoming more trauma informed, universities need to provide preservice teachers with the same knowledge so that when they become educators, they are prepared for the challenges that students suffering from trauma present. Preservice education needs to address relationship building and focus on building a caring and inclusive classroom environment. Universities should also reach out to both general and special education teachers currently working in the school districts, to help guide course content in a more realistic, less hypothetical manner, in regards to inclusion.

Teachers need both better preservice and in-service preparation to provide high quality instruction and improved supports to allow them to better meet the needs of their students.

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Inclusive practices are present in most school districts but many teachers still do not know

exactly what inclusion means. Though educators agree that inclusion must extend beyond simple

access to the general education classroom, there is no consensus on what the term can and should

mean for schools and students. Teachers need time for training and collaboration, so students

with emotional/behavioral disorders can succeed in general education. Careful planning and

systematic implementation, and proactive communication among general education and special

education teachers need to be in place to ensure success for students.

Rather than making a blanket statement putting all students in general education,

individualized decisions need to be made for each student, with a wide range of support options.

The quality of services determines the effectiveness more than placement of the student does.

One school I taught at had a blanket statement for inclusion. All students were in the general

education class, with zero options for pull out support. One class in each grade became the IEP

class, housing all the students in special education along with others who were academically

lower than others in the grade. Parents, students in the class and the teachers did not feel that this

was what was best for their students, and yet it still happened. The lack of knowledge of

appropriate inclusive practices at the administrative level is a huge problem as well. Teachers

look to their administrators for guidance, if administration is lacking the knowledge, it is likely

that student needs, and best practices will fall through the cracks.

Students with EBD present additional challenges for general education teachers. Their

tendency to present externalizing behaviors, frightens many teachers into thinking they cannot

possibly work with these students. Teachers need to see the child not the disability. They need to

learn how to separate children from their behaviors and understand their own emotional

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responses to students with EBD if they are going to include students in meaningful ways. A

positive approach to behavior management is needed. Teachers need to value their students in a

sincere way, individualizing decisions made for each student and provide a wide range of support

options. Students with EBD struggle to form relationships and if a teacher is not genuine in their

interest in the child, the child is sure to feel rejected. It is essential that teachers build high

quality relationships in order to help students improve their behavior and academics.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this meta-synthesis indicate teachers face enormous hurdles working with

students with emotional/behavioral disorders. Each student's needs are unique, which requires

teachers to know their students on a deeper level, in order to provide the proper supports needed.

This has to occur so students with EBD have even a chance of being successful in general

education. Unfortunately, the research shows that students with EBD are not being included in

the general education setting with proper supports. General education teachers lack confidence in

their abilities to provide high quality instruction to students with a variety of cognitive and

emotional needs. Special education and general education teachers have numerous

responsibilities and often do not have time to communicate and collaborate in regards to specific

student needs. It is simple for a teacher to simply say, no, it cannot be done. Thus, resulting in

students with EBD falling through the cracks of our educational system, being deemed

uneducable.

Research states that teacher perception has a huge effect as to whether or not inclusion

will work for a child. If a teacher has a negative view of the child or the child's success in the

general education, it is likely the child will be unsuccessful. It is our jobs as educators to separate

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the child from their behaviors and build high quality relationships where children feel valued, cared for, and loved. Teachers need to take a more positive approach to behavior management, because research shows effective teachers of students with EBD who enjoy working with their students on a daily basis, attribute these high-quality relationships as keys to helping their students succeed academically and behaviorally. Inclusion is about all the students in the class, not just students with disabilities. Teachers need to work to develop relationships with all students in their class, not just students who exhibit good behaviors.

In order for students with emotional/behavioral disorders to join the general education setting, teachers need more support. This support needs to occur from the top down, administration should not put teachers in positions to fail. By providing teachers with additional time and training on appropriate instructional and behavior practices, teachers might feel more equipped to teach students with severe emotional and behavioral needs.

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