Response to Intervention and Students with Emotional and/or Behavior Disorder:

A Meta-Synthesis

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Education in Special

Education degree at the University of Alaska Southeast

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Abstract

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2006 mandated RTI programs would be implemented for students with academic and behavioral problems. The multi-tiered approach uses assessments, data collection, and observation to develop and employ appropriate supports and interventions. Students with EBD benefit from RTI data collected using PBIS. Professional development is essential for the success of PBIS. The data collected from RTI using PBIS helps IEP teams who provide support to students with EBD, to develop goals and objectives by designing instructional strategies to help students develop pro-social behaviors. This meta-synthesis of the literature of RTI/PBIS and students with EBD reviews the ways data collected using these interventions are used for professional development and instructional strategies.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) gives students

with disabilities, between the ages of 3-21, the opportunity to free appropriate public education

(FAPE). IDEA was enacted in 1990, revising Public Law 94-142, Education for All

Handicapped Children Act. The 2004 legislation clarified, strengthened and changed word usage

of the 1990 law to "person first" language, with an added emphasis on providing a least

restrictive learning environment mandating Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams to prioritize

integrating students with exceptionalities into the general education classroom (U.S. Department

of Education, 2006). Within an inclusive classroom, accommodations are made to create a

learning opportunity by adapting and modifying lessons to meet students at their level of

understanding. This creates more 'successful experience' opportunities for learning, regardless

of the needs of the individual. One of the provisions of the addition of *No Child Left Behind Act*

of 2001 (NCLB) requires that teachers are highly qualified in a content area. The goal is for all

students to be in proficient in reading and math within a safe, drug-free, and supportive

environment and to graduate from high school (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). In order for

the educational community to continue to meet the needs of students, Response to Intervention

(RTI) was introduced to provide teachers with a problem-solving method of identifying what

difficulties students may have academically and behaviorally.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is conceptualized as occurring in "tiers" or levels of

intervention. Each tier in this multi-tiered approach to identifies and supports students who

struggle with learning. RTI is the requirement of educators to make data-based decisions about

the level of support for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) by using

evidence-based practices of providing high-quality in social skills and behaviors that lead to a

positive school-wide climate. These interventions ideally should to match students' needs,

include monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals

and use the response data when making important educational decisions (Alaska Department of

Education and Early Development, 2009). When students are assessed a three-tiered approach is

used to evaluating the level of support and intervention required. Tier 1 is a universal screening

applies to all students. Instructional strategies used for all students may not work with some

students. Those students who experience difficulty at this level may need additional help in a

more individualized setting. Tier 2 provides more feedback to students through progress

monitoring and small group instruction. Tier 3 gives students a more intensive setting, which

may include one-on-one assistance and more targeted instruction. Students who struggle with

learning or have learning or behavioral disabilities benefit from additional and modified

instruction that aligns with Tier 1 instruction because it helps them deepen their understanding

and acquire skills needed for the general education classroom (Benedict, Park, Brownell,

Lauterbach, & Kiely, 2013). The goal of the RTI programs is to provide early detection of

students who struggle and provide early intervention to improve learning outcomes.

The inquiry approach to understanding student academic issues also applies to behavioral

concerns as well. The three-tiered method of RTI for academics has evolved to frequently be

used as a behavior model because often students that struggle with academics have behavioral

issues that interfere with their learning. Positive behavior support (PBS) and positive behavior

interventions and support (PBIS) is a framework to organize evidence based best practices for

behavior supports implementations. PBIS has become the *RTI for behavior* whereby schools

have implemented a tiered system of supports for behavior (Bradley, Doolittle & Bartolotta,

2008). By incorporating academic and behavioral interventions using the three-tiered structure

teachers, staff and parents can support students' success by promoting academic achievement in

a safe and positive learning environment (Alaska Department of Education, 2009). The

three-tier model as described by Bradley et al. (2008); and Sugai & Horner (2009) has a similar

three-tiered system of intervention focusing specifically on behavior. Tier 1 is a school-wide

framework for all students where three to four social skills are isolated and become the basic

structure. Tier 2 gives students at this level more progress monitoring, feedback, and adult

attention in a small group setting. Tier 3 keys on students' strengths and challenges providing

more individualized assistance and targets social skills instruction. Generally, the supports

outlined in a typical Tier 1 structure are sufficient to help 80% of the targeted population to

maintain or exceed pro-social behavior. Tier 2 levels of support generally are needed for 15% of

a school's population and Tier 3 supports are needed by approximately 5%.

Finding ways to engage and motivate students who have been identified as having

learning difficulties is challenging. Many students with disabilities experience difficulties with

learning which can become barriers to engagement in academic tasks and motivations.

Identifying students with EBD early and serving them effectively is difficult because the

definition is subjective, vague, and poorly stated (Gresham, 2013, Plotts, 2012). IDEA defines

emotional disturbance as follows:

> (i) Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following
> characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a
> child's 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.

(ii) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section.

(34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.8(c)(4)).

While trying to understand the struggles of students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (EBD) specific to reading and comprehension, Guthrie and Davis (2003) reported that struggling readers have self-efficacy difficulties and they lack confidence both in their reading ability and in their capacity to improve. Accordingly, struggling readers view themselves as low achievers because they lack confidence with their other academic and social abilities (Margolis and McCabe, 2004). In addition to specific reading difficulties, these students may express problems with motivation, social interactions and behaviors, which are all dynamically interrelated. By acquiring personal task goals and becoming interested in learning new things, students can have opportunities to gain confidence to learn and to improve their capacity to succeed. Margolies and McCabe (2004) explain that developing intrinsic motivation for reading and learning in school occurs for students when teachers demonstrate their commitment to increase students' comprehension of concepts by being caring, enthusiastic and optimistic. This gives students the encouragement and support needed to be successful. Defining those intrinsic motivators is important so that teachers can observe them and collect data that could be used in making RTI decisions. Often, these motivators can be seen in areas of a student's self-efficacy about reading as a learning tool. Motivation is a strong indicator when defining the continuum

of positive behaviors needed for reading readiness. If this indicator is weak, the likelihood of a

student engaging in a reading activity in a timely manner can also be weak.

Margolis and McCabe (2004) suggest that strengthening self-efficacy can be achieved by

linking recent successes to new work, reinforcing persistence and effort, developing needed

learning strategies that include teaching goal setting identification or goal creation, stressing peer

modeling, and creating positive attributions about one's own abilities and success. Students who

have goals defined at the beginning of a task are more likely to realize if they are progressing and

can also visualize a good outcome. Learning by watching a peer is intuitively done by most

students. Teachers can mentor students in how to turn this intrinsic habit into a positive

modeling opportunity and thereby shape behavior that readies them for reading. Again,

observations here can provide RTI data that can aid teams in identifying what works for enabling

the student to get ready to read, to sustain focus and interest during the reading task and to

anticipate the correct behavior to transition into the application of what is read to what is to be

learned. RTI data collected to observe any of these segments can become valuable on several

levels. The teams can use the data to monitor progress and students can use the data (either

teacher provided feedback or self-monitoring charts) as a way of internalizing a series of

successes, thereby increasing their self-efficacy.

Weisman & Hansen (2007) suggest that understanding students' background knowledge

and where they are from gives insight to the teacher into how best to facilitate learning. They

further recommend the use of various graphic organizers to help students construct meaning from

text, collecting vocabulary words and definitions, and developing the ability to communicate

what they have learned. To identify students' interests at school and home, it is best to begin by

asking students questions about what is relevant and meaningful to them. Guthrie and Davis

(2003) propose an engagement model of instruction that has six characteristics that promote and

support success in reading competence. These characteristics include teaching thematic units,

hands-on activities, interesting texts, student involvement, specific instruction, and collaborative

support that provide the framework for their engagement model of instruction. Hooking the

student's interest to a reading passage by linking it to something a student has already

experienced not only increases motivation to participate but may increase behaviors such as time

on task, focus and ultimately behavior outcomes that increase learning like cooperative teams or

extended learning based on personal inquiry. Measuring engagement times, comparing learning

styles such as tactile versus verbal task rehearsals, evaluating student feedback about interests

and correlating any of these aspects to positive learning outcomes are ways that RTI teams can

use data to increase reading readiness behaviors and reading-based learning outcomes. These

examples of targeted behaviors that should be in place to guarantee reading readiness can

become the focus of a Tier 2 PBIS progress monitoring, or a Tier 3 need for more behavior skill

instruction using techniques like acronym-cued behavior clusters (example-"SLANT").

1.2 Author's experiences and beliefs

I have worked as a teacher assistant at a middle/high school with the most restrictive

environment for students with severe behavioral issues, including EBD for the last five years.

During this time I have had the opportunity to work with and observe students with challenging

behaviors. This site is separate day school for 6th – 12th grade students with emotional and

behavioral problems who have unique needs and benefit from a supportive and highly trained

staff, who strive to provide a positive and safe environment for students to learn, achieve, and

succeed in different ways. My experiences working in this environment where 100% of the

population are students with exceptionalities has piqued my interest about how RTI works for

students with more severe behavioral issues.

In an effort to understand how IEPs are developed, one question I asked my host teacher

while student teaching in a first grade classroom was, "How and when do you determine that a

child may have a learning disability or something else which may be interfering with his learning

progress?" Within this particular class there were about five children that struggled either

academically or behaviorally. At the beginning of the school year all kindergarten, first, second,

and third grade students were assessed to determine their level of comprehension in reading,

writing and math. Reading groups were formed at each level of intervention. I was given a

reading group that was in the Tier 1 cohort that required little intervention and was able to have

students participate in a variety of fun book report activities. By the end of the third quarter,

enough data was collected and three out of the five students who were having difficulties

eventually went through the evaluation process to develop IEPs. From this experience I found I

had more questions about what RTI and PBIS is and how it relates to students with

exceptionalities. My understanding is that RTI and PBIS help to identify students that need

additional help and support.

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

1. What is RTI?

2. What is PBIS?

3. What does the current research show to be effective interventions and strategies that

    are available for teaching students with EBD?

How does the RTI model fit into teaching students that have existing IEPs with EBD? Understanding the history and purpose of RTI, how it has been implemented nationally, how this works within our local school district and how students with emotional behavioral disorder can best benefit from this intervention is the focus of my investigation.

1.3. The purpose of this meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis, which focuses on the RTI model of intervention with children with EBD, has many purposes. One purpose was to review journal articles related to the evolution of IDEA and RTI. A second purpose was to review journal articles related to the RTI and its effectiveness with students with emotional disturbance. A third purpose was to analyze effective strategies and interventions for students with emotional disturbance. A fourth purpose was to classify each article by publication type, to identify the research design, participants, and data sources of each research study, and to summarize the findings of each study. My final purpose in conducting this meta-synthesis was to identify significant themes in these articles, and to connect those themes to my own classroom experience with students with emotional disturbance and using effective interventions to assist in their success in learning.

2. Methods

2.1 Selection criteria

The 29 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria.

The articles explored issues related to the history of IDEA and evolution of RTI.

1. The articles explored issues related to RTI, PBIS, and children with emotional

    disturbance.

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

3. The articles were published between 1990 and 2014.

2.2. Search procedures

Database searches and ancestral 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) using these specific search terms:

1.   ("Response to Intervention") AND ("IDEA").

2.   ("Response to Intervention") AND ("Emotional Disturbance").

3.   ("Response to Intervention") AND ("Strategies in classroom") AND ("Emotional

Disturbance").

4.   ("IDEIA") AND ("Emotional Disturbance").

5.   ("Multi-tier system of supports") AND (Special Education).

6.   ("Positive Behavior Supports") AND (Emotional Disturbance).

These database searches yielded a total of 22 articles (Benner, Beaudeoin, Chen, Davis,

& Ralston, 2010; Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013; Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta,

2008; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn,

2014; Gresham, 2005; Gresham, 2007; Gresham, Hunter, Corwin, & Fischer, 2013; Grosche &

Volpe, 2013; Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013; Kern & Wehby, 2014; Lindstrom & Sayeski,

2013; Pearce, 2009; Plotts, 2012; Restori, Gresham, & Cook, 2008; Richards, Pavri, Golez,

Canges, & Murphy, 2007; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004; Wehby & Kern,

2014; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006; Yell & Walker, 2010).

2.2.2. Ancestral searches

An ancestral search entails reviewing the reference lists of previously published articles

to locate relevant literature to one's area of interest. I conducted ancestral searches using the

reference lists of retrieved articles. These ancestral searches produced seven additional articles

that met the selection criteria (Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Cheney & Barringer,

1995; Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, &

Cicchese, 2012; Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001;

Sugai & Horner, 2009).

2.3. Coding procedures

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the eight 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

Journal articles I used were evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g.,

research study, descriptive article, guide, opinion piece/position paper, annotated bibliography,

review of literature). Research studies utilize methodical research design to gather and/or

analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. Theoretical works utilize existing literature to

analyze, expand, or further define a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption.

Descriptive works describe experiences and phenomena, but did not utilize systematic methods

for collecting and analyzing data. Opinion pieces/position papers justify, explain, or recommend

a particular position based on author's opinions and or beliefs about a specific issue. Guides

provide specific instructions or recommendations to how practitioners might implement

particular programs or agendas. Annotated bibliographies include a list of articles on a particular

topic with a concise summary of each article. Reviews of the literature analyze published

literature on a specific topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

2.3.2. Research design

Each empirical study was classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative,

mixed methods research). Quantitative research collects and evaluates numerical information.

Qualitative research uses language to explore and describe experiences and phenomena. Mixed

methods research combines quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single study.

2.3.3. Participants, data sources, and findings

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., students with emotional disturbance,

teachers of students with emotional disturbance). I also identified the data sources used in each

study (e.g., interviews, observations, surveys). Finally, I summarized the findings of each study

(Table 2).

2.4. Data analysis

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizz-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 29 articles included in this meta-synthesis. Significant statements were first identified within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, significant statements were defined as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) history of IDEA; (b) definition and evolution of RTI; (c) students with emotional disturbance; (d) professional development for PBIS; and, (e) effective strategies to employ RTI/PBIS with students with EBD. 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 29 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

I located 29 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each article is located in Table 1. Seven of the 29 articles (24.1%) included in this meta-synthesis were research articles (Benner, Beaudeoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010; Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens & Cicchese, 2012; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001; Pearce, 2009). Eight of the articles (26.7%) were guides (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Gresham, 2005; Gresham, 2007; Gresham, Hunter, Corwin, & Fischer, 2013; Plotts, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Wehby & Kern, 2014; Yell & Walker, 2010). Ten of the articles (33.3%) were descriptive works (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Bradley, Doolittle, &

Bartolotta, 2008; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Kern &

Wehby, 2014; Lindstrom & Sayeski, 2013; Restori, Gresham, & Cook, 2008; Richards, Pavri,

Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

Three articles (10%) were reviews of literature (Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011;

Grosche & Volpe, 2013; Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). One article (3.3%) was an

opinion (Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004).

Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008	Descriptive Work
Benner, Beaudeoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010	Research Study
Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013	Theoretical Work
Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013	Research Study
Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008	Descriptive Work
Cheney & Barringer, 1995	Research Study
Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008	Research Study
Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens & Cicchese, 2012	Research Study
Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011	Review of the Literature
Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012	Descriptive Work
Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010	Descriptive Work
Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., & Vaughn, S. (2014)	Guide
Gresham, 2005	Guide
Gresham, 2007	Guide
Gresham, Hunter, Corwin, & Fischer, 2013	Guide
Grosche & Volpe, 2013	Review of the Literature
Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013	Review of the Literature
Kern & Wehby, 2014	Descriptive Work
Lindstrom & Sayeski, 2013	Descriptive Work
Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001	Research Study
Pearce, 2009	Research Study
Plotts, 2012	Guide
Restori, Gresham, & Cook, 2008	Descriptive Work
Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007	Descriptive Work
Simonsen & Sugai, 2013	Descriptive Work
Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004	Opinion

Sugai & Horner, 2009	Guide
Wehby & Kern, 2014	Guide
Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006	Descriptive Work
Yell & Walker, 2010	Guide

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

  As stated previously, I located seven research studies that met my selection criteria

(Benner et al., 2010; Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Cheney et al., 2008; Farkas et al., 2012; Musser

et al., 2001; Pearce, 2009). 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
Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010	Quantitative	37 students, ages 7-16 and 8 teachers from 4 different schools in Washington state	Surveys: Child Behavior Checklist: Teacher's Report Form (TRF), Teacher Knowledge and Skills Survey (TKSS) and observation	Successful implementation of PBIS with students with EBD in a self-contained setting was correlated to the professional development of teachers and incorporating PBIS into the classroom and school environment. Ongoing training is crucial to implementing and maintaining PBIS.
Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013	Mixed Methods	13 urban elementary schools with 54 students; 50% minority, 83% male, 40% 1st grade, 33% receiving special education	Surveys: Child Behavior Checklist: Teacher's Report Form (TRF), Teacher Knowledge and Skills Survey (TKSS) and observation	Behavior intervention effectiveness varies, and is dependent on the range of behaviors of individuals and groups. The success of the SWPBIS was based on the quality of implementation and the school climate of each school.
Cheney & Barringer, 1995	Quantitative	26 administrators, general and special education and 73 5th-7th grade students	Surveys: Emotional & Behavioral Disorders Teacher Competency Survey, Social skills Rating System (SSRS), Teacher Report Form, Academically Engaged Time (AET)	The inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom is a challenge for teachers because they believe that they do not have the training or the experience to accommodate the emotional needs of individual students.

Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008	Quantitative	127 1st-3rd grade students	Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD), Daily Progress Report (DPR)	The use of the Check, Connect, and Expect (CCE) intervention to increase positive behavior was found to be the most effective intervention for decreasing problem behaviors. Using daily progress reports to monitor behavioral issues showed significant improvement in 88 of the 127 students that received Tier 2 RTI using *Check In-Check Out* intervention. From this intervention five students were identified for special education services.
Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012	Mixed Methods	21 staff and 44 middle/high school students in an alternative school setting	School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), self reporting and observation	Implementation of Tier 1 schoolwide positive behavior and support (SWPBS) interventions in an alternative school used ticket/reward system for positive and appropriate behaviors. Teachers found they rewarded more in the morning and less when teaching a whole group and being cooperative.

Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001	Qualitative	5 African American students between 8-10 years, 2 girls, 3 boys. One boy and one girl were controls. 3 of the students were diagnosed with serious EBD, ODD, ADHD.	Interviews, Observation, Child Behavior Checklist-Teacher Report Form (TRF)	Posted classroom rules, teacher moving around the room, specific requests to comply, proximity and token economy with mystery motivator were used as interventions. These interventions contributed to reducing disruptive behaviors in students with EBD.
Pearce, 2009	Mixed Methods	9 students grades k-5th grade, 2 females, 7 males chosen by office referral	Through office and individual referrals, interviews, data collection.	Fidelity by teachers in using interventions was challenging when using reward system, counseling and parent involvement. Developmental level of child is a factor in the success of intervention used.

3.2.1. Research design

One of the seven studies (14.2%) used a quantitative research design (Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008). Five of the studies (71.4%) utilized a mixed methods research design (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010; Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012; Pearce, 2009). One of the studies (14.2%) used a qualitative research design (Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001).

3.2.2.Participants and data sources

The majority of the seven research studies included in this meta-synthesis analyzed data from elementary school students and general education and special education teachers. Three of the studies (28.5%) analyzed data from teachers in a self contained setting (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001). Four of the studies (57.1%) analyzed data from professionals in general education settings (Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008; Pearce, 2009). One of the studies (14.2%) was in an alternative school setting (Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012).

Surveys, interviews, and observations provided the main data sources used in the research studies. All of the studies (100%) used surveys to collect data from participants (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010; Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001; Pearce, 2009). Five of the studies (57.1%) used observation to collect data from participants (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen,

Davis, & Ralston, 2010; Benner, Sanders, Nelson, & Ralston, 2013; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001). Two of the studies (42.8%) used interview to collect data (Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001; Pearce, 2009).

3.2.3. Findings of the studies

The findings of the seven research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows.

1. Students with EBD are challenging for teachers in the classroom.

2. Implementation of school-wide positive behavior supports and interventions contributed in reducing problem behaviors.

3. Professional development and training of teachers contributed to successful implementation of PBIS.

3.3. Emergent themes

Five themes emerged from my analysis of the 30 articles included in this meta-synthesis. These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) IDEA and RTI, (b) PBIS, (c) students with EBD, (d) professional development of teachers, and (e) strategies to implement RTI and PBIS. These five theme clusters and their formulated meanings are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
IDEA and RTI	• IDEA began with PL 94-142 in 1975. In 1990 IDEA was reauthorized. In 2004 the law was reauthorized again to include least restrictive environment, and a 2006 mandate was added for collection of RTI data for early detection and intervention. • RTI is a proactive approach to identify and address learning and behavioral problems using a problem solving model and moving away from the "wait to fail" model. • The three-tiered model assesses students' response to interventions with academic and behavioral problems. • Combining the methods of RTI and cognitive assessment to determine students' learning and behavioral difficulties assist in providing appropriate services by applying problem-solving strategies, standardized instruction, collaboration, and progress monitoring. • Multi-tiered approach uses academic and behavioral assessments to accurately address all of the needs of the child. • Data collection from RTI and cognitive assessments is important in developing and implementing appropriate supports and interventions.
PBIS	• PBIS is a framework using the multi-tiered RTI principles to improve social behavioral outcomes. • PBIS started in the 1980s and was developed to address why behaviors occur and use positive practices to decrease problem behavior. • The goal of PBIS is to prevent problem behavior by positively reinforcing socially acceptable behavior and teaching acceptable skills that minimize disruptive behaviors. • Tier 1 works for 80% of the population providing schoolwide preventative supports; Tier 2 targets 15% of the population, and Tier 3 supports 5%. • PBIS implementation can include self-assessment for teaming, agreements, data based action planning, accurate implementation, and evaluation for school and leadership teams. • Data narrows identification of goals and outcomes, described in measureable terms and are achievable with resources at hand.
Students with Emotional Disturbance	• Definition of EBD has not changed very much from the onset of PL 94-142 to present. • US Department of Education 2009 report stated that 7.3% of students served under IDEA are diagnosed as emotional disturbed.

	● Twenty percent of students that have mental health problems have EBD. ● The numbers of students with EBD have increased over the last 10-15 years. ● Approximately 50% of students with EBD are in self-contained learning environments. ● Students with EBD represent 1%-5% of the population and consume more than 50% of teachers and administrators' time. ● Students with EBD are more likely to not graduate and fail more classes than students with other disabilities. ● Students with EBD tended to score lower on academic and achievement tests.
Professional Development for PBIS	● In order for PBIS to be successful there must be staff "buy in." ● Effective staff training is critical to implementation and success of interventions. ● Training should include behavior intervention strategies. ● Teachers feel they are not trained nor experienced enough to students appropriately. ● Monthly trainings should have topics generated by teachers.
Strategies for successful implementation	● Use of school-wide lessons, reward system, and consistency of language and reinforcements. ● Benner's 5-step behavior intervention. ● Early identification and interventions with highly qualified educators using research based instruction assist ● Create a positive school culture with consistent language and clear expectations and consequences. ● Keep verbal statements short and concise. ● Lesson pacing and effective transitions with explicit attention signals. ● Research based progress monitoring for data collection. ● Within each tier there are multiple levels for more accurate evaluation and instruction.

4. Discussion

In this section I have summarized the emergent themes from my analysis of the 29

articles included in this meta-synthesis. These emergent themes were then connected to my own

practices as a special education teacher.

4.1. IDEA and RTI

Formalizing individualized supports and services for students with special needs,

especially students with EBD, began with legislation that was part of the Education for all

Handicapped Children, Public Law 94-142 in 1975. The law required public schools to evaluate

all children with disabilities and use this data to establish IEPs that placed students in the least

restrictive environment possible to insure they could interact with their non-disabled peers when

possible. This legislation was reauthorized in 1990 and called Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA). This law increased the ages served from 6-21 to include pre-schoolers,

age 3 through 6. In 2004 the law was reauthorized. Changes were made again to include a

requirement for the collection of RTI data for early detection and intervention.

RTI is a proactive approach to identify and address learning and behavioral problems

using a problem solving model and moving away from the "wait to fail" model. The three-tiered

model assesses students' response to interventions with academic and behavioral problems.

Combining the methods of RTI and cognitive assessment to determine students' learning and

behavioral difficulties can assist in providing appropriate services by applying problem-solving

strategies, standardized instruction, collaboration, and progress monitoring. This multi-tiered

approach uses academic and behavioral assessments to accurately address all of the needs of the

child. Data collection from RTI and cognitive assessments are important when developing and

implementing appropriate supports and interventions.

4.2 PBIS

PBIS is a framework using the multi-tiered RTI principles to improve social behavioral

outcomes. The goal of PBIS is to prevent problem behavior by positively reinforcing socially

acceptable behavior and teaching acceptable skills that minimize disruptive behaviors. Positive

behavior supports (PBS) began in the 1980's and has evolved from limited use by teams

dedicated to special needs students into school-wide tiered systems for all students with an

integrated continuum of components that include interventions where needed. These types of

frameworks are evidence-based practices based on prevention theories. The systems are

data-driven, which when implemented with fidelity, can provide progress monitoring that shows

a profile of behavior. Teams can make decisions about the amount of support a student needs to

achieve targeted behaviors by tracking compliance data using the different levels of a

multi-tiered PBIS. This type of data also helps teams determine the least restrictive environment

for students on IEPs, especially students with EBD.

While there is no limit to the creative interventions many schools have designed for

PBIS, generally the interventions are social skills monitored by point cards or check-in/check-out

interventions following a period of teaching and rehearsing/modeling the expected outcome.

Feedback conferences are provided for debriefing inappropriate behaviors and to determine if

more support is needed. Data helps to narrow identification of goals and outcomes for

individualized cases and is valued by teams because it provides specific behaviors described in

measureable terms and predicted to be achievable with resources at hand.

For teams supporting students with EBD, the data collected from PBIS systems contributes significantly to the functional behavioral assessment (FBA) required for their IEP development. Sometimes the intensive interventions created for Tier 3 can become antecedent strategies that can be analyzed by the teams and modified to develop replacement behaviors, increase areas that need reinforcement for desired behaviors and re-design explicit schedules of fading support to reach independent functioning or specific goal mastery. This valuable data also helps contribute to the school's need to look at or shape a learning environment, or tailor professional development for teachers and staff working with students being served in Tier 3.

4.3 Students with Emotional Disturbance

The definition of EBD has not changed very much from the onset of PL 94-142 to the present and the definition is poorly stated, subjective and vague. IEP teams are tasked to determine one or more characteristics generally grouped on interpersonal relationships, behavior types, moods, and fears. Each of these can be subject to wide interpretations based on community standards, cultural expectations and environmental stressors. The requirement that the characteristics should be exhibited over a long period of time and to a marked degree tends to promote the "wait to fail" versus early screening and placing interventions with the youngest. Appropriately identifying students with EBD early is important so that they may qualify for special education and related services.

According to the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services (2002), the majority of students with EBD are educated in a separate, self-contained setting. According to researchers, twenty percent of students that have mental health problems have EBD (Gresham et al., 2013). The U.S. Department of Education's 2009 report stated that 7.3% of students served

under IDEA are diagnosed as emotionally disturbed. The numbers of students with EBD have

increased over the last 10-15 years. Out of the special education population, 1%-5% are students

with EBD and consume more than 50% of teachers and administrators' time. This group of

students is one of the most difficult and challenging to teach. Teachers' perceptions of students

with EBD have a negative effect on how they grade and how they perform in the classroom.

Students with EBD tended to score lower on academic and achievement tests, fail more classes

than students with other disabilities and are more likely to not graduate (Plotts, 2012). Teacher

biases, lack of academic and behavioral supports, and inconsistent and reactive teaching styles

all contribute to negative outcomes for students with EBD. Many teachers and administers

believed they were not responsible for students with mental health problems; however, with the

implementation of RTI the mind set of educators is changing.

4.4 Professional development for PBIS

The importance of professional development training for all staff prior to implementing a

school-wide PBIS system cannot be overstated. Researchers have established a correlation

between the reduction of undesired behaviors in a classroom and the teachers managing those

classrooms who have demonstrated fidelity in implementing PBIS systems. Since this need to

build capacity of special education staff has been established over a decade of research, an

instrument, the Teacher Knowledge and Skills Survey (TKSS), is often used to determine the

degree of fidelity. The survey targets teacher actions considered critical to insure PBIS success.

They include specialized behavior support strategies; behavior screening methods to include

behavior support services and methods of evaluation; ways to individualize adopted curriculums

and modifications for supporting intensive needs students; and, ways to establish positive

classroom environments. While these concepts are part of the mandates historically required by

special education legislation, the specific components of this instrument can serve as a good

outline of what should be covered in pre-service or in-service trainings prior to launching a PBIS

school-wide initiative. Researchers have identified that often many general education teachers,

who are responsible for maintaining Tier 1 positive classroom environments that include students

with EBD placed in a least restrictive environment or not yet identified as needing more

intensive supports in a Tier 2 or Tier 3 level, report that they feel they lack the experience or

training to support these students. In one 2010 study, researchers provided extensive training by

university professors across a year-long preparation for implementing a PBIS system for teachers

who all described their training for working with EBD students as "less than sufficient" (Benner,

et al, 2010). This included lectures followed by extensive guided practice and follow-up

workshops for collaboration after classroom implementation of techniques. Data of the study

showed a "large and statistically significant role in improving the behavioral functions of " EBD

students (Benner et al., 2010, p. 96). These researchers have demonstrated that time invested in

training all teachers, not just special education providers, to implement PBIS systems with

fidelity, can be, in educational terms, a dramatic cost benefit for students with EBD.

4.5 Strategies for implementation

All academic strategies for all students begin with effective instructional and classroom

management systems. Often, the degree of effectiveness of a block of instruction is measured by

student attention and engagement times. All veteran teachers know that managing the classroom

is the single most important element of teaching. Without this, non-compliance, defiance and

lack of learning are imminent. Explicit instruction in positive behaviors can be a powerful tool.

This can help to maximize instructional time when students have internalized the behaviors that lead to learning readiness. While this is the ideal and primary theory of classroom success, what does it look like when a student with EBD is cycling through the levels of support in a multi-tiered system? These are students who generally are male, have sub-par grade point averages, are absent 18 days or more per school year, have a 58% chance of dropping out by the end of their sophomore year, are generally engaged and successful only 17% of the instructional period (about 1 hour in the 6-hour school day) and tend to consume 58% of the instructional time planned due to off-task behaviors (Benner et al., 2013). How do teams develop and implement the right level of support to enable these students to their legally entitled free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment?

Kern and Wehby (2014) provided an excellent example of a combination of strategies resulting from data-based individualization plans revised at each level by the team. Teachers used an RTI model to identify the need for moving a student from Tier 1 intervention, a school-wide positive behavior support to Tier 2, where the student was individually monitored on his adherence to five positive behaviors in each class period of the day. Data collected showed the student only 57% successful. Data was reviewed with the student with compliments on compliance and feedback about ways to improve. Intensifying Tier 2 support based on this data, the support team identified poor social skills and low self-esteem. The school counselor provided group support on enhancing friendships. More tightly defined behavior goals were added to the monitoring sheet, such as "bring materials to class." More data showed maintenance or regression but no improvement. The team made a special education referral, completed an FBA, and did interviews and multiple observations in each classroom setting and

non-academic settings. Moving into a Tier 3 support system, organizational goals were added

(binder, planner, recording assignments, etc.). Social skills learning became individualized with

1:1 time for practicing, role-playing, relaxation techniques, and self-monitoring. Parent

coordination of childcare services relieved the student so he could attend homework club with

volunteers to help with assignments. Sports enrollment coupled to homework club gave the

student personal incentives.

The researchers stressed the importance of setting clear expectations and consequences

for positive behaviors. This is best achieved through explicit instruction. Behavior education is

a rising industry, as seen in federal websites about intensive interventions, where various

acronym-based social skill sets and learning readiness postures are reviewed. A good specific

example of teaching behavioral expectations for instructional context can be found in *Teach Like

a Champion*; SLANT method (Sit up, Listen, Ask and Answer Questions, Nod your head, Track

the speaker). If the list is too extensive, staff can provide non-verbal cues to the next step.

Instruction should encompass 1:1 work, small group and whole class and progress monitoring at

each level. Staff should be consistent in their language use for cues and feedback, and especially

in precision requests for compliance.

Another example of behavior compliance instruction is Think Time, a reflective period

apart from the instructional setting, where a student first gains self-control, and then

self-processes or is debriefed by a staff member. The goal here is to reduce coercive interactions.

The Good Behavior Game (GBG) is an evidence-based contingency system to increase focus

time during academic instruction. Teams compete to have high compliance scores on a cluster of

behaviors that exclude disruptive actions, especially independently (without need for staff cues).

All of these strategies require prerequisite skill assessment, instruction in new or targeted behaviors, guided practice, independent performance that has progress monitoring data collection attached to it (either by staff or self-reported by the student) and weekly or quarterly review. This is the data that drives goal achievement and helps IEP teams continue their work.

Of course there are many strategies that can be employed that continue to contribute to the efforts of collecting RTI and PBIS data. Token economies have been used for decades in special education. Behavior programs that have prevention themes often focus on choice as an antecedent to action. The importance of incorporating family engagement in behavior training is also critical to long-term achievement of social skills mastery. The consistency of classroom management routines is a pillar of success frequently supported by research data. Small group and 1:1 instruction, scheduled segments of instruction in small time units daily, and of course capacity building in special education staff that promotes fidelity of the targeted system all are also all time-honored techniques that have proven success in working with students with EBD.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this meta-synthesis focus on the complexity of serving students with EBD and how best to provide appropriate interventions. Helping all educators that serve students with EBD to realize that problem behaviors are a result of a disability and not necessarily a conscious choice by the student to be "bad" goes a long way to establishing an objective yet caring demeanor in working with these challenged youth. Data showing success in response to PBIS serves as evidence that students with EBD can learn to adapt and can acquire the social skills needed to be a contributing member of society. For educators, starting with RTI data to identify the issues and establish baseline is a validating process in that specific behaviors

can be isolated, and thereby modified. Having PBIS systems in place helps organize and make consistent school-wide programs to insure students graduate with the necessary social skills to be productive citizens, including students with EBD.

The development of RTI and PBIS in identifying EBD is useful because the three-tiered models provide the data needed by IEP teams to determine support levels and interventions needed for behavioral changes. Teams can develop goals and objectives and instructional strategies to enable students to choose pro-social behaviors. Mastering these skills can lead to increased learning time while in school and to a more fulfilled life beyond graduation.

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