



Managing Students' Emotional Behavioral Disorder

Inside and Outside of the Classroom:

A Metasynthesis

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**Abstract**

This metasyntesis of the literature focuses on managing students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBD) inside and outside of the classroom. Students with EBD require large amounts of time and attention, often unplanned and in response to disruptive behaviors. Students with EBD can take a heavy emotional and physical toll on teachers, staff and peers involved with them, and instruction time for other students can be shortened or delayed due to disruptive behaviors. School districts find retention more difficult when students with EBD are present due to the high stress factor. When teachers and staff have the appropriate preparation and tools, however, students with EBD can be successful in an inclusive school setting with minimal disruptive behavior. Furthermore, as they make progress, they can practice self-management techniques to achieve more independence.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The definition of emotional and/or behavioral disorder (EBD), called *emotional disturbance* under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (2004), is 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. [Section 300.8, 4]

The definition criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) is more comprehensive and includes the following components: organic mental syndromes and disorders, sexual disorders, psychoactive substance-use disorders, sleep disorders, schizophrenia, factitious disorders, delusional disorders, impulse control disorders not elsewhere classified, psychotic disorders not elsewhere classified,

mood disorders, adjustment disorders, anxiety disorders, psychological factors affecting physical condition, somatoform disorders, dissociative disorders, personality disorders. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2011), students with an emotional disturbance disability comprised 0.9% of the total national school population.

In the school in which I volunteer, there are currently no students diagnosed with EBD. My husband is the high school English teacher and I have been pursuing teaching for several years as well as remaining active in the school by volunteering to chaperone or to assist in classrooms. There have been children that may have qualified under the IDEA definition of emotional disturbance. I have also been in other schools and classrooms with diagnosed EBD students and been involved in their progress through school. My sister is also a teacher, in a Title 1 school in Oakland, CA. Because of her experiences and mine, I feel my current school is set somewhat apart and that EBD students are at least widespread if not prolific in numbers. And they are the most likely to be underserved. The U.S. Department of Education's 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the IDEA (2005) states that students with emotional disturbance consistently had the highest dropout rates and that, every year, students with emotional disturbance had a substantially higher dropout rate than the dropout rate for the next highest disability category.

### *1.2. Author's Experiences and Beliefs*

I was born in the Philippines to a father in the U.S. Navy and a mother who grew up in a wealthy household. We immigrated to the United States when I was in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. My father was one of those souls who, full of strong opinions and a strong temper, reacted well to military discipline and rigor. I have one sister and two brothers, all younger than me. My sister and I, in

my biased opinion, were fairly normal and what other kids' grandparents called "good girls." My brother, the older one, on the other hand, was something else.

I remember very little of my brother's birth or infancy. Once he started walking, however, he seemed to explode in every direction. He became the bane of my and my sister's early years. He had a tremendous amount of energy and temper that had to be experienced to be believed. My earliest memories of him are vivid – screaming what he thought were obscenities at us, throwing a brick at a boy who upset him and hitting the boy in the torso (he was only 3 or 4 at the time so thankfully still had a weak throw), careening around the corner on his tricycle with his legs pumping as fast as they would go, having a knock-down drag-out fight with our sister over a clown wig, me catching the aftermath of another fight where both of them locked themselves in their rooms and every board game we owned had been flung around the living room. The last big show of temper I remember him having was when he was a teen. I was persistent in waking him from a nap, to watch our youngest brother while I went to work, and he was so angry he took his bedroom door off its hinges and broke holes in the wall behind it. He was fine once he vented and had his full nap, but it was a scary thing to watch. I love my brother dearly, but he was a huge factor in shaping my adult approach to confrontations and I will say sometimes I do not react wisely to them.

In my teen years I dated a boy who had a shaky relationship with his parents. I was never sure what exactly caused the rift, although now I believe they tried to control him more than he wished to be controlled. He cut his wrists many times and was eventually sent to a home for troubled teens. Later in life, after the suicide of a friend, I learned that people who truly want to kill themselves will find a way, and that unsuccessful wrist-cutters are usually seeking attention.

In hindsight, this makes sense to me. This boy helped shape my adult ability to handle relationships.

Fortunately some stories have happy endings. My brother dealt with his anger issues and is one of the calmest, most level-headed people I know. He effectively channeled his energy and is now a certified masseuse and yoga instructor. To his chagrin, his daughter in early childhood really tested his calmness with her own brand of temper. The boy I dated actually came to my parents' house a few years ago to say he appreciated my father's efforts to set him straight, and also to tell them that he was doing well and was content. I could never have predicted either of these scenarios.

As I grew older and began to pursue teaching as a career, I sometimes reflected on these two boys in my childhood and other children I have known since then. Sometimes the cause of emotional or behavioral disorders seems apparent. There was a family in our town with two boys and a girl who were half-siblings *and* first cousins. It was common knowledge in town that verbal abuse and alcohol were rampant in the household. Both boys exhibited oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD). The eldest had been warned by the chief of police that he would end up in jail or dead if he did not change. He is currently in jail for armed robbery. In my eyes, the behavior of these children has a cause.

In other children, like my brother and my first crush, it is not so apparent to me. I believe that a combination of nature and nurture is responsible for how a child turns out, but this is not guaranteed.

Whether the cause of EBD is inherent or caused by outside forces, it is difficult for me to handle, internally and externally. While student teaching several years ago, I encountered

students with EBD and I felt I always managed them unwisely by pushing too hard to maintain control. This was my first realization that this was an area of weakness for me.

I spent a year working as a special education aide and another year volunteering an hour a day in the resource room. I worked mainly with an autistic student, which is another story in itself. There were some students moving through the school that I felt were EBD or close to it. Their fits of temper and intransigence were very noticeable and disturbed me. I wondered, if I were in that classroom full-time, or if this child were diagnosed EBD, how would I manage and be successful? How could I help turn these children out into the world so that they could succeed and be happy as my brother had? More specifically, these are the research questions I wish to address:

1. What are good classroom management practices to consider when you have a student with an emotional/behavioral disorder?
2. How do other schools and their special education departments create and keep a behavior management plan for a student with an emotional/behavioral disorder?
3. How can teachers and caregivers maintain perspective and a positive attitude when working with a student with an emotional/behavioral disorder?

### *1.3 Purpose of this metasynthesis*

This metasynthesis, which focused on students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities and the teachers and/or special education staff that assist them, had multiple purposes. One purpose was to review journal articles that related best practices of teachers and/or special education staff serving students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities. I was specifically interested in finding positive behavior modifications and classroom techniques. A second purpose was to review journal articles with examples of behavior management plans and

interventions. A third purpose was to review journal articles that related to teachers and/or special education staff and their best practices outside of the school in respect to maintaining perspective and a positive attitude when working with a student with an emotional and/or behavioral disabilities. A fourth purpose was to classify each article by publication type, to identify the research design, participants, and data sources of each study, and to summarize the findings of each study. My final purpose in conducting this metasynthesis was to identify significant themes that emerged from these articles, and to connect these themes to my own experience as an elementary educator of students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities.

### *2.1. Selection criteria*

The 30 journal articles included in this metasynthesis met the following selection criteria:

1. The articles explored issues related to teachers and/or special education staff serving students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities.
2. The articles explored issues related to behavior management plans and interventions for students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities.
3. The articles explored issues related to coping skills and the best practices of teachers and/or special education staff outside of the school.
4. The articles were published in peer-reviewed journals.
5. The articles were published between 1995 and 2011.

### *2.2. Search procedures*

I conducted database searches and ancestral searches to locate articles for this metasynthesis.

### *2.2.1. Database searches*

I conducted Boolean searches within the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using these specific search terms:

1. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Classroom Techniques").
2. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Individualized Education Programs").
3. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Behavior Management").
4. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Crisis Intervention").
5. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Inclusion").
6. ("Emotional Disturbances" OR "Behavior Disorders") AND ("Behavior Modification") AND ("Schools").

These database searches yielded a total of 22 articles that met my selection criteria (Chambers, 2005; Chong & Lan, 2008; Conroy, Sutherland, Haydon, Stormont, & Harmon, 2008; Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2007; Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Halas & van Ingen, 2009; Havill, 2004; Hester, Hendrickson, & Gable, 2009; Kelly, Carey, McCarthy, & Coyle, 2007; Laursen & Peterson, 2005; Marlowe & Disney, 2006; Marquoit, 2004; Pearce, 2009; Rowe, 2010; Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway, & Landers 2007; Stage, Jackson, Jensen, Moscovitz, Bush, Violette, Thurman, Olson, Bain, & Pious, 2008; Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008; Tyler-Wood, Cerejjo, & Pemberton, 2004; Valore & Siemen, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005; Wright-Gallo, Higbee, Reagon, & Davey, 2006).

### 2.2.2 *Ancestral searches*

An ancestral search consists of reviewing the reference lists of previously published works to locate literature relevant to a topic of interest. I conducted ancestral searches of the reference lists of the articles retrieved through my database searches. These ancestral searches yielded eight additional items that met the selection criteria (Cowan & Sheridan, 2003; DuPaul, McGoey, & Yugar, 1997; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Ann Rogers, 2007; Murdock, O'Neill, & Cunningham, 2005; Noell, Duhon, Gatti, & Connell, 2002; Rose, Horne, Rose, & Hastings, 2004; Wilkinson, 2003).

### 2.3. *Coding procedures*

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 30 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 type*

I coded each article according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive article, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* are a systematic method of collecting then analyzing quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* analyze and expand upon current philosophical beliefs and/or theoretical concepts on a topic using the existing research. *Descriptive articles* describe experiences but do not use systematic methods for collecting and analyzing data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain an author's opinion or position on a topic and may support certain educational objectives or philosophical ideas. *Guides* recommend strategies and/or explain how particular programs, policies or curricula may be implemented. *Annotated bibliographies* are alphabetical lists of articles on a topic with a brief summary of each article. *Reviews of the*

*literature* look at relevant articles and synthesize and analyze articles to identify themes on a particular topic (Table 1).

### 2.3.2. *Research design*

I categorized each empirical study by research design (i.e., quantitative research, qualitative research, mixed methods research). *Quantitative research* is based on numerical data. The numerical data are collected and analyzed. *Qualitative research* uses language rather than numbers to describe experiences and phenomena and relate stories. *Mixed methods research* combines quantitative (i.e., numerical) and qualitative (i.e., language-based) research methods in one study (Table 2).

### 2.3.3. *Participants, data sources, and findings*

I identified the participants used in each study (e.g. teachers of students with EBD, teachers in pursuit of a master's degree in special education). I then identified the type of data sources that were analyzed for each study (e.g. observations, interviews). I also summarized the findings of each research 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 30 articles that I included in this metasynthesis. I first identified significant statements within each article. For the purpose of this metasynthesis, I defined significant statements as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) characteristics and qualities of students with EBD; (b) characteristics and qualities of teachers; (c) characteristics and qualities of classrooms with EBD students; (d) characteristics and qualities of schools with EBD students; and (e) specific tools successfully used in the management of classrooms and behavior of EBD students. I then developed a list of non-repetitive, non-

overlapping (verbatim) significant statements with (paraphrased) formulated meanings. These (paraphrased) formulated meanings represented my interpretation of each significant statement. I finally grouped the formulated meanings from all 30 articles into theme clusters, or emergent themes. These emergent themes represented the essence or content of the entire body of literature (Table 3).

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. Publication type*

I located 30 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each article is identified in Table 1. Seventeen of the 30 articles (56.7%) were research studies (Chong & Lan, 2008; Cowan & Sheridan, 2003; DuPaul et al., 1997; Gersten et al., 2001; Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Kelly et al., 2007; Lane et al., 2007; Murdock et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009; Rose et al., 2004; Stage et al., 2008; Sutherland et al., 2005; Tyler-Wood et al., 2004; Wilkinson, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005; Wright-Gallo et al., 2006). Ten of the 30 articles (33.3%) in this metasynthesis were descriptive works (Chambers, 2005; Conroy et al., 2008; Halas & van Ingen, 2009; Havill, 2004; Hester et al., 2009; Laursen & Peterson, 2005; Marquoit, 2004; Rowe, 2010; Scott et al., 2007; Valore & Siemen, 2003). Two of the 30 articles (6.7%) were guides (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2007; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008). One of the 30 articles (3.3%) was a theoretical work (Marlowe & Disney, 2006).

**Table 1**

<b>Author(s) &amp; Year of Publication</b>	<b>Publication Type</b>
Chambers, 2005	Descriptive work
Chong & Lan, 2008	Research Study
Conroy, Sutherland, Haydon, Stormont, & Harmon, 2008	Descriptive work
Cowan & Sheridan, 2003	Research Study
DuPaul, McGoey, & Yugar, 1997	Research Study
Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001	Research Study
Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2007	Guide
Grskovic & Goetze, 2005	Research study
Halas & van Ingen, 2009	Descriptive work
Havill, 2004	Descriptive work
Hester, Hendrickson, & Gable, 2009	Descriptive work
Kelly, Carey, McCarthy, & Coyle, 2007	Research study
Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Ann Rogers, 2007	Research Study
Laursen & Peterson, 2005	Descriptive work
Marlowe & Disney, 2006	Theoretical work
Marquoit, 2004	Descriptive work
Murdock, O'Neill, & Cunningham, 2005	Research Study
Noell, Duhon, Gatti, & Connell, 2002	Research Study
Pearce, 2009	Research study
Rose, Horne, Rose, & Hastings, 2004	Research Study
Rowe, 2010	Descriptive work
Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway, & Landers 2007	Descriptive work
Stage et al., 2008	Research study
Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005	Research study
Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008	Guide
Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004	Research study
Valore & Siemen, 2003	Descriptive work
Wilkinson, 2003	Research study
Wilkinson, 2005	Research study
Wright-Gallo, Higbee, Reagon, & Davey, 2006	Research study

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

I located 17 research studies that met my selection criteria (Chong & Lan, 2008; Cowan & Sheridan, 2003; DuPaul et al., 1997; Gersten et al., 2001; Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Kelly et al., 2007; Lane et al., 2007; Murdock et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009; Rose et al., 2004; Stage et al., 2008; Sutherland et al., 2005; Tyler-Wood et al., 2004; Wilkinson, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005; Wright-Gallo et al., 2006). The research design, participants, data sources, and findings of these studies are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Chong & Lan, 2008	Qualitative	89 teachers in 7 EBD schools in Hong Kong	Semi-structured interviews	Teachers were found to be experienced, had special education training, and well-prepared to manage students who were challenging. They used their own experiences in a combination of theoretical knowledge and common sense and were confident in their teaching abilities.
Cowan & Sheridan, 2003	Quantitative	67 parents, 67 teachers, and 67 children from 6 school districts – four in a Western U.S. city and two in a Midwestern U.S. city	Subjective problem severity rating of behaviors, acceptability ratings of interventions	Parents, teachers & students rated all focus interventions very to highly acceptable.
DuPaul, McGoey, & Yugar, 1997	Mixed Methods	Two 11-year-old boys in a self-contained classroom for children with serious emotional disturbance in Pennsylvania	Self-evaluation, observations, social skills ratings, peer sociometric status ratings, self-esteem ratings	Both focus students improved in conduct and social skills demonstration. Peer buddies declined slightly in social preference.
Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001	Mixed Methods	887 special education teachers in 3 school districts in the Western U.S.	Questionnaires	Special education teachers felt most support via the values and actions of their principal and fellow teaching staff.
Grskovic & Goetze, 2005	Qualitative	4 students, 2 boys and 2 girls, from a special education school in Germany	Observation	Participants' challenging behavior decreased markedly after implementation of Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI).

Kelly, Carey, McCarthy, & Coyle, 2007	Qualitative	111 principals of special schools in Ireland	Questionnaire, information letter, follow-up phone calls, follow-up interviews to random sample	66% of principals said it was stressful to manage challenging behavior in their school. 73% of these were principals of schools for students with intellectual disabilities.
Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Rogers, 2007	Mixed Methods	178 high school students, 136 faculty members in Tennessee	Student categorical nominations, extant assessment measures (e.g. GPA)	Students that had problems internalizing behaviors were most responsive to interventions.
Murdock, O'Neill, & Cunningham, 2005	Mixed Methods	8 junior high school boys with disabilities (7 with behavior disorders, 1 with learning disability) in Utah	Teacher/student interviews, classroom observations	Methods yielded agreement 64% of the time. In disagreement, there was correlation between teacher interview and classroom observation. Students and teachers felt the assessment procedures were valid and useful.
Noell, Duhon, Gatti, & Connell, 2002	Mixed Methods	4 elementary teachers, and 8 regular education students referred for disruptive and challenging behavior in Louisiana	Interviews, behavior monitoring forms, classroom observation	Performance feedback resulted in high, stable implementation.
Pearce, 2009	Mixed Methods	9 students with EBD in two elementary schools South Dakota	Interviews with teachers, observation, data collection of maladaptive behavior	RTI had a positive effect on student behavior and was accepted by school staff, student families and students. Critical success factors were the participation of families and teachers' weekly staff meetings.

<p>Rose, Horne, Rose, &amp; Hastings, 2004</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>Study 1: 101 staff employed in services for people with intellectual disabilities in Wales Study 2: 99 staff employed in services for people with intellectual disabilities in Wales</p>	<p>Emotional reactivity ratings to challenging behaviors, Maslach Burnout Inventory</p>	<p>Negative emotions were positively associated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization but not personal accomplishment.</p>
<p>Stage et al., 2008</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>18 K-11<sup>th</sup> grade students with EBD who were considered for change of placement to more restrictive settings, in 17 schools in a large metropolitan area</p>	<p>Functional assessment checklist for teachers and staff (FACTS) A and B; Student directed functional assessment interview form (SDFAI); Teacher functional behavioral assessment checklist (TF-BAC); classroom behavior observations; Treatment evaluation inventory (TEI); Student's intervention rating profile; Social and habilitative validity follow-up survey</p>	<p>Construct validity: teachers that use indirect assessments would benefit from collecting several measures. Treatment validity: treatment outcome is greatly affected by treatment integrity. Social validity: teachers found that procedures in the study were helpful but teachers of EBD students in junior high or high school might prefer individual counseling over behavioral classroom intervention.</p>

Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005	Qualitative	109 teachers of students with EBD, in metropolitan area in Mideastern U.S.	Mailed survey	Teachers felt more comfortable with collaborative efforts to provide educational services for students with EBD and less comfortable giving academic instruction to these students. Teachers who were fully licensed felt more comfortable with planning instruction and managing classroom behavior than teachers with emergency licenses.
Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004	Quantitative	55 teachers in pursuit of a master's degree in special education taking a curriculum based assessment (CBA) class or non-CBA class at a Southern U.S. university	Count of pre and post-intervention referrals	Prior to intervention, referrals by CBA-trained and non-CBA trained teachers were similar. Post-intervention referrals were much lower by CBA-trained teachers than by non-CBA trained teachers.
Wilkinson, 2003	Mixed Methods	7 year old student with persistent disruptive behavior, and her teacher	Observation, behavior checklist data	Student's disruptions decreased, behavioral consultation shown to be effective for implementation of intervention methods.

Wilkinson, 2005	Mixed Methods	2 male Caucasian fourth grade students with EBD in mainstream classrooms in a southeast Florida school	Interviews, observational rating scale, behavioral checklist, behavior intervention rating scale (BIRS), children's intervention rating profile (CIRP)	Use of conjoint behavioral consultation (CBS) resulted in a significant increase in teachers' ratings of students' behavioral control with a positive effect at 4 week follow-up.
Wright-Gallo, Higbee, Reagon, & Davey, 2006	Quantitative	2 male students with EBD from a public middle school	Observation in 10-minute sessions using 10-second partial interval recording procedure	Functional analyses of both students showed that escape and attention reinforced disruptive behavior. After differential reinforcement of alternative behavior (DRA) was implemented, disruptive behavior lessened.

### *3.2.1. Research design*

Four of the 17 research studies (23.5%) included in this metasynthesis used a qualitative research design (Chong & Lan, 2008; Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Kelly et al., 2007; Sutherland et al., 2005). Three of the studies (17.7%) employed a quantitative research design (Cowan & Sheridan, 2003; Tyler-Wood et al., 2004; Wright-Gallo et al., 2006). Ten of the studies (58.8%) used a mixed methods research design that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative research methods in their studies (DuPaul et al., 1997; Gersten et al., 2001; Lane et al., 2007; Murdock et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009; Rose et al., 2004; Stage et al., 2008; Wilkinson, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005).

### *3.2.2. Participants and data sources*

The 17 studies in this metasynthesis analyzed data collected from four categories of participants. Seven of the studies (41.2%) collected data from students with emotional/behavioral disabilities (DuPaul et al., 1997; Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Murdock et al., 2005; Pearce, 2009; Stage et al., 2008; Wilkinson, 2005; Wright-Gallo et al., 2006). Five of the studies (29.4%) collected data from special education teachers and principals (Chong & Lan, 2008; Gersten et al., 2001; Kelly et al., 2007; Sutherland et al., 2005; Tyler-Wood et al., 2004). Four of the studies (23.5%) collected data from a combination of students and school staff (Cowan & Sheridan, 2003; Lane et al., 2007; Noell et al., 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). One of the studies (5.9%) collected data from staff employed in services for people with intellectual disabilities (Rose et al., 2004).

These 17 studies used a variety of different methods to gather data from their participants. Six of the studies (35.3%) gathered data using observations (Grskovic & Goetze, 2005; Murdock et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009; Wilkinson, 2003; Wright-Gallo et al., 2006). Five of the studies (29.4%) employed categorical or ratings scales (Cowan &

Sheridan, 2003; Lane et al., 2007; Rose et al., 2004; Stage et al., 2008; Tyler-Wood et al., 2004). Four of the studies (23.6%) gathered data using interviews (Chong & Lan, 2008; Murdock et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009). Three of the studies (17.6%) gathered data by means of surveys or questionnaires (Gersten et al., 2001; Kelly et al., 2007; Sutherland et al., 2005).

### *3.2.3. Findings of the studies*

The findings of the 17 studies included in the metasynthesis can be summarized as follows:

1. The instruction and care of students with EBD causes stress, emotional exhaustion, and job burnout in teachers, staff and principals.
2. Teachers make fewer referrals and are more able to manage EBD students when they receive training in specific methods or have experience. Teachers also need the support of fellow teaching staff and their principal to succeed in helping EBD students.
3. EBD students respond positively to different behavioral management techniques including Response to Intervention, functional behavioral assessment and consultation. They also need the support of their peers, and the teamwork of family and school staff to succeed.

### *3.3. Emergent themes*

Five themes emerged from my analysis of the 30 articles included in this metasynthesis. These emergent themes (or theme clusters) include: (a) characteristics and qualities of students with EBD; (b) characteristics and qualities of teachers; (c) characteristics and qualities of classrooms with EBD students; (d) characteristics and qualities of schools with EBD students; and (e) specific tools successfully used in the management of classrooms and behavior of EBD students. These five theme clusters and their associated formulated meanings are delineated in Table 3.

**Table 3**

<b>Theme Clusters</b>	<b>Formulated Meanings</b>
<p><b>Characteristics and Qualities of Students with EBD</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-established patterns of disruptive behavior associated with EBD students are predictive of poor academic engagement, lower grades, conduct problems, peer rejection, and high rates of school dropout.</li> <li>• Disruptive behaviors occur more often than severe behaviors, comprise the majority of school-based disciplinary referrals, and are important for EBD students as this is often the primary reason they are placed in restrictive educational placements.</li> <li>• Students with externalizing behavior are more likely to be noticed in high school grades because consequences are more severe, whereas internalizing behavior is more likely to go unnoticed in high school grades due to multiple teachers.</li> <li>• There is a frequent comorbidity of depression with many illnesses such that children with learning disabilities or psychiatric disabilities are likely to experience episodes of clinical depression.</li> <li>• It is not always necessary to identify a student’s motivation to misbehave (and escape from a task or demand or receiving attention were the most frequently identified motivating functions of students’ disruptive behavior), but it is important to do so for any student who violates a rule three or more times.</li> <li>• EBD students typically need programs that include both academic and nonacademic supports.</li> <li>• Research has shown that EBD students are more successful when students are allowed a choice of how they want to be involved and perceive that they have some control of their future.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Characteristics and Qualities of Teachers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers of EBD students are difficult to retain due to barriers like low salaries, limited resources, shortfalls in funding and time for ongoing staff development, and burnout, a precursor of which is a negative emotional reaction to aggressive behavior that is predictive of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students who are inadequately prepared are more likely to leave teaching for alternative employment.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students in middle or high school were less likely to implement behavioral interventions because they attributed problem behavior to the students’ cognition and affect, and therefore, they thought individual counseling would be more helpful than further refinement of behavioral interventions within the classroom setting.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students are viewed by principals as being under considerable stress and pressure in their classroom role and at a personal level. Finding a means for reducing stress as well as understanding job design is critical for teacher retention.</li> <li>• Special education teachers feel isolation from both general education teachers and fellow special educators at other school sites and require</li> </ul>

	<p>increased opportunity to interact with colleagues in a substantive fashion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers may not sustain implementation in the absence of structured follow up, which may be facilitated by performance feedback; a framework; and support from other skilled persons.</li> <li>• Teachers appreciate or tolerate otherwise unacceptable interventions for more severe problem behaviors especially when parent and consultant support are readily unavailable.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students dedicate large amounts of time and effort to managing disruptive behavior in the classroom, thus reducing time available for instruction.</li> <li>• Most general education teachers received limited training in behavior management procedures and report a lack of preparedness in working with EBD students.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students may not always agree with their students on their perceptions of behaviors that are causing the most difficulty.</li> <li>• General education teachers are becoming more familiar with implementing relatively complex interventions because of the inclusion of special needs students in general education classrooms.</li> <li>• Teachers with more experience and regular teaching licenses were more confident of their ability to manage EBD students than those teachers with less experience and emergency licenses.</li> <li>• Teachers felt more comfortable collaborating with others to provide services to students with EBD and least comfortable providing academic instruction to their students.</li> <li>• The use of behavior charts and recording procedures may replace academic curriculum as the primary concern for the teacher of the EBD student, but sound instructional techniques can lead to a reduction in student behavior problems because learning and behavior problems go hand in hand.</li> <li>• Teachers receiving greater school level support for working with EBD students reported using more positive behavioral strategies.</li> <li>• Teachers are more successful if their preservice teacher training emphasizes preparing all teachers to better understand and cater for children with diverse learning needs.</li> <li>• Teachers have a greater respect for and understanding of EBD students' resistant and oppositional behavior in school if they have some knowledge of the contextual factors affecting each student.</li> <li>• Teachers of EBD students are more successful when they are supportive, calm, respectful, and intertwine cultural background and life experiences with commonsense logic to manage their students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Characteristics and Qualities of Classrooms with EBD Students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a preoccupation with control in self-contained classrooms, designed to help maintain silence but not to teach children how to manage their anger, sadness or impulses.</li> <li>• There is a pervasive lack of opportunity for normal social interactions within classrooms for EBD students.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most classroom behavior management strategies fall into five categories: changing, managing, tolerating, preventing and accommodating.</li> <li>• Combining several interventions into a “package” that focuses on effective teaching practices is likely to change the classroom atmosphere and set the occasion for future occurrences of positive behaviors and more desirable reciprocal interactions.</li> <li>• Mainstreaming students with behavioral disorders can be facilitated by having general education classroom peers mediate self-evaluation procedures previously managed by the special education teacher.</li> <li>• Positive behavior support in the classroom uses the premise that the more effectively an environment is designed, the more effective it can be in facilitating classrooms that run efficiently, allowing teachers to recognize, assess, and plan for students with special needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Characteristics and Qualities of Schools with EBD Students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools with EBD students in mainstream settings are more successful when teachers and parents are provided with significant consultative support, evidence based interventions with high levels of acceptability, and ongoing collaborative efforts between home and school.</li> <li>• Schools with EBD students have difficulty retaining special education services in rural areas due to a lack of recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, the demands of No Child Left Behind and the threat of litigation regarding service delivery methods.</li> <li>• Principals of schools with EBD students indicated a lack of appropriate support resources at the community, school and department level. They were also concerned for the physical safety and welfare of their non-EBD students.</li> <li>• Schoolwide positive behavior systems for elementary level have demonstrated success but there has been less attention given to the impact of positive behavior support at the middle and high school levels.</li> <li>• Schools with EBD students are faced with staff stress and burnout that impacts the quality of services due increased staff turnover and absenteeism.</li> <li>• Schools with EBD students can reduce staff stress and burnout by managing staff emotional reactions to challenging behavior or intervening using cognitive techniques to reduce the experienced severity or frequency of these emotions.</li> <li>• Schools with EBD students should integrate research and practice, which are essential to the delivery of quality educational services.</li> <li>• Rural schools tend to deal with isolated subgroups, such as students not making adequate yearly progress in math, rather than tackling the more difficult system challenges that may result in school failure, such as shortcomings in the core curriculum.</li> <li>• Schools with EBD students project positive involvement by engaging parents in their children’s education programs, having them feel the school is committed to their child’s success and improving</li> </ul>

	<p>communication with educational staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools with EBD students found that incidents of challenging behavior were disruptive to school activities and to the learning and teaching of all pupils.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specific Tools Successfully Used in the Management of Classrooms and Behavior of EBD Students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing frequent praise and opportunity to respond (OTR) to academic requests</li> <li>• Proactive behavior and classroom management</li> <li>• Directing intervention to the disorder and not the symptom, since similar symptoms have different interventions depending on the disorder.</li> <li>• Applied use of teacher lore, or the study of the knowledge, ideas, perspectives and understandings of teachers. There are no models for classroom behavior management of EBD students based on teacher lore.</li> <li>• Classroom rules that are few, easy to understand, positively stated, and enforceable. They should be carefully taught to children and, thereafter, publicly posted, reviewed, and practiced on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Praise that is well timed and appropriate to the child, the task and the situation to increase a target behavior.</li> <li>• Planned ignoring. The teacher must first confirm the assumption that teacher/adult attention is reinforcing the student's negative behavior.</li> <li>• Teaching students with EBD to request escape or attention to decrease rates of disruption</li> <li>• Self-management procedures because they are ecologically less intrusive and more cost effective than other behavior management strategies, promote self-reliance and provide students with an opportunity to participate in development and implementation of their behavior management programs.</li> <li>• Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC)</li> <li>• A classroom management plan and individual counseling for the student</li> <li>• Life Space Crisis Intervention</li> </ul>

#### **4. Discussion**

In this section, I will give an overview of the major themes found in my analysis of the 30 articles reviewed for this metasynthesis. I will then connect these themes to my teaching practice, and discuss how these themes affect me personally and professionally.

##### *4.1. Characteristics and qualities of students with EBD*

Students with EBD are associated with disruptive behavior patterns, particularly in high school when disruptive behavior is more noticeable and the consequences are more severe. Disruptive behavior is predictive of low grades, peer rejection, and high rates of school dropout as well as episodes of clinical depression. EBD students tend to use disruptive behavior as a means of receiving attention or escaping a task or demand. To succeed, EBD students require both academic and nonacademic supports as well as a perception of personal choice and control over their future.

In my time in the classroom, I have experienced EBD students using disruptive behavior for attention or escape from a task. If a student has a learning disability as well, I believe the disruptive behavior is a means of calling attention away from that learning disability, particularly if peers are present. We had one young boy who was very good at this. He had a way of charming his aides and teachers and distracting them (including myself) away from the subject at hand with conversation and self-effacing comments. It took several months to become observant enough to prevent this. My research showed that if attention or escape is the presumed goal, allowing the student to have that for a short period of time actually reduces the disruptive behaviors. Choice and control are two factors that I feel are important to all children, but my research showed that this is particularly true for EBD students. One of my most important challenges as a teacher or special educator is to relinquish some choice and control to my

students in order to help them succeed and, perhaps more crucial to their self-esteem, feel successful.

#### *4.2. Characteristics and qualities of teachers*

There is a definite need for special education teachers around the country, particularly those who can teach EBD students. This need arises from low salaries, limited resources and lack of support from administration and other teachers. This need is also due to lack of preparation or experience in dealing with students with EBD. Disruptive behavior from EBD students can be so persuasive or serious that it takes a huge emotional and physical toll. The nature of the special educator job itself makes isolation a problem. Often, instruction becomes secondary to behavior management. Special educators and teachers with EBD students can be more successful if they have more experience, are given an opportunity to train and prepare appropriately, and have a support network consisting of other teaching staff and administration. Using positive behavioral strategies, common sense logic, cultural background, and contextual factors also helps.

In the schools where I have had a chance to student teach or be a special education aide, the special education department is physically separate from other teachers and classrooms. Obviously all classrooms are separate, but grades tend to be side-by-side and schedules are similar. This is not the case of the special education classroom. Physical separation makes mental separation inevitable, especially because the teaching methods of the classroom teacher may differ markedly from the special educator who may be using methods specifically tailored to each child in the department. All of these factors serve to isolate the special educator from the rest of the school. In one school I observed that the special educator overcame these obstacles and was instinctively considered a peer and friend to the regular classroom teachers. In another school there was a definite tension and perceived lack of control. I believe my research has given

me the tools to overcome these obstacles in order to have effective communication with other teachers as well as a support network to which I can turn. In my present work in a small clinic, it is my experience that teamwork and a good attitude carry the day. This way the entire team can communicate more effectively and openly, and we rely on one another's skills and experience to help us through difficult tasks. For instance, as a trained teacher my coworkers often rely on me to edit and proofread their writing. I have relied heavily on my direct supervisor and our providers to mentor me as a leader and in conflict resolution. I have learned a great deal from them and I feel I have grown as a person. I hope to achieve the same strong support network and mentoring in the field of education when I become a special educator.

#### *4.3. Characteristics and qualities of classrooms with EBD students*

In many classrooms there is a preoccupation with control, which maintains silence but does not teach children how to manage their feelings and impulses. There is also a lack of opportunity for normal social interactions in these classrooms. Most behavior management strategies in these classrooms fall into the following categories: changing, managing, tolerating, preventing, or accommodating behaviors. The inclusion of EBD students in regular classrooms can be accomplished with positive behavior supports and by combining interventions to suit the classroom and the EBD student.

I would agree that there is a preoccupation with control in most classrooms, with or without EBD students. I believe there is a certain amount of control that must be exerted by a teacher in order for the class to move forward in their instruction but there is definitely an excessive preoccupation in some classrooms with maintaining control. When I first began my teacher education and spent time in classrooms, I experienced both types of classroom. In my first classroom immersion I was placed in a combined K-1-2 classroom. It was a small room,

considering the teacher had three grades, and was chaotic. There were many opportunities for free choice as she taught one grade while the other two worked on any number of things in one subject such as math. The noise level was often overwhelming for me. This teacher definitely exercised as little control as possible. I did notice that, when she did, the students responded quickly and eagerly, such as when she clapped in rhythm to gain the attention and silence of the class. On the other hand, I was told by another teacher that this teacher's students tended to test below the others, perhaps because they were unaccustomed to structured exercises. In another of my classroom experiences, the teacher was quite controlling to the point that her students were unsure what to expect from day to day. For instance, one day the teacher may reprimand them with a long lecture for not writing the date on their papers, but she may not notice or draw attention to the same lapse for another week. I felt that this was unfair because it seemed to undermine the students' courage and self-esteem. They were afraid to talk to her and she never developed the close ties with her students that other teachers did. I believe it's possible to strike a good balance of control and productivity.

In my personal experience as a chaperone and den mother for my husband's cross-country, track, and drama-debate-forensics (DDF) teams for many years, I have encountered this same dilemma about control. I find that adopting a maternal role helps me exert just enough control over students that they will stay in line, but not so much that they cannot talk to me as a friend and advisor. This balance is important to me. Students, particularly high school students, can instinctively draw the same lines in the sand. They could talk to me about movies and music, dances, boyfriends and life ambitions, but I expected them to do as I asked and to behave appropriately. One of my favorite students once called me "girl" (as he would a classmate) with affection when he asked me about a recent injury I sustained. He immediately realized his slip

and looked rather sheepish. On another trip, I noticed that my students were not helping tidy up their host school after a DDF tournament. My voice brooked no argument when I told them to get to it, and they jumped up and began to help the other students. I never expected any of these students to be perfect, since that is unrealistic, but I did expect them to know right from wrong, and to behave in such a way that their families and their community would be proud of them. In this, my personal expectations match my professional expectations for my students, but I would not expect to ever fully control such unique and strong-willed creatures.

#### *4.4. Characteristics and qualities of schools with EBD students*

Schools with EBD students encounter many problems such as staff burnout and eventual turnover, lack of resources, and limited productivity due to disruptive behaviors. These schools can be more successful with consultative support, appropriate interventions and collaboration with parents. School wide positive behavior systems are one suggested strategy for success.

I have seen two schools that implemented positive behavior systems. The first was an elementary school and the second was a junior high school. In the elementary school, teachers and staff were equipped with different colored tickets. Any teacher or staff person could give a student a blue ticket for particularly good behavior (or good deed) or a yellow ticket for particularly bad behavior, and the ticket was presented to that student's homeroom teacher. A blue ticket was treated as a small award, and the student's teacher would give a small presentation to the class about why the student received it, followed by a round of applause from the class. A yellow ticket was presented quietly to the student and their teacher, and usually warranted a consequence such as a call home. In my student-teaching class, blue tickets were highly valued and the young students were in awe of them. I thought the system worked quite well. The second school that I knew used a positive behavior system was a junior high school in

Florida. My friend's daughter explained their system to me. Every student had a notebook planner. This helped them keep track of their classes, homework and activities. In the back was a page devoted to the school wide behavior rules. After the rules were two pages of positive and negative behavior tickets. Any teacher or staff member could stop a student and take one of their tickets. The tickets worked similarly to the previously described school, but there were also material incentives. This seemed natural to me considering the older age of the children. My friend's daughter said the system worked well. I believe one reason these systems work is that they bring peer pressure to bear. Another reason for their success could be that everyone in the school must know the same set of rules, therefore behavioral expectations are quite clear. A positive behavior support system would be my recommendation to any school for adoption. If it is absent on a school-wide level, I would implement one at the classroom level. This is my experience at my present school, where each classroom seems to have its own system and not necessarily focused on positive behavior reinforcement. I believe I would continue to encourage the development of a school wide system, because I believe it would be useful.

#### *4.5. Specific tools successfully used in the management of classrooms and behavior of EBD students.*

There are several strategies and tools that have been successfully used in the management of classrooms with and the behavior of EBD students. Strategies include clear and succinct rules, frequent praise, planned ignoring, applied use of teacher lore, using planned escape or attention, and self-management procedures. Specific tools include conjoint behavioral consultation and Life Space Crisis Intervention.

I have not had any experience with specific tools to help manage EBD students.

However, the strategies previously listed all sound very useful. I am especially drawn to the

planned escape or attention strategy. It relies on the attentiveness of the teacher and the ability of the student to self-manage to the point where he or she may ask for escape or attention. This self-management could be another step toward independence for a student. The strategies for classroom rules, frequent praise and planned ignoring are good strategies for a general classroom as well. These are the strategies I would attempt first, then proceeding to more structured programs as necessary or as recommended by a student's IEP team.

## **5. Conclusion**

This metasynthesis of the literature focused on the management of students' emotional/behavioral disorder (EBD) inside and outside of the classroom. Students with EBD are associated with disruptive behavior as a means of acquiring attention or escape from a task and require extensive supports, both academic and nonacademic, in order to succeed. Teachers of EBD students are likely to have lower retention rates due to the associated stress factor and the perceived lack of support from fellow teaching staff and administration. Teachers of EBD students require a combination of a support network, more extensive training and more experience in order to succeed at their roles. In the classroom, preoccupation with control is often a setback to the success of an EBD student as well as his or her classmates but success is more attainable with positive behavior supports and a combination of interventions tailored to the needs of the student. Schools with EBD students must cope with turnover, lack of resources and disruptive behaviors. Consultative support, appropriate interventions, collaboration with parents, and school wide positive behavior systems are effective tools that can be used in schools.

Rainer Maria Rilke said, "Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us." I believe this is true of EBD students who are so often misunderstood and shunned by their teachers and classmates. Inclusive classrooms can be

suitable for EBD students, and these students can succeed in and out of school, if the right supports are in place.

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