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Perspectives On The Qualities, Knowledge, And Skills Of Effective Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Teachers

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUALITIES, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS TEACHERS

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This dissertation, submitted by Joseph Leggio in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Date

PERMISSION

Title	Perceptions on the Qualities, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Teachers
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Joseph Leggio
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceptions of six teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in one school district. In individual interviews, the teachers shared their perceptions of the qualities, knowledge, and skills necessary for EBD teachers to be effective. Five of the teachers gathered for a focus group to discuss the findings from the analysis of the interview data.

An analysis of the data yielded three themes. First, effective EBD teachers develop unconditional teacher-student relationships. No matter how many setbacks a student with EBD may experience, the effective EBD teacher relentlessly affirms his or her belief in the student's ability to succeed. When it seems like others have dismissed a student, the student can always count on the effective EBD teacher for support.

Second, effective EBD teachers create positive classroom environments. When students with EBD are removed from the general education setting or experience a crisis at school, the effective EBD teacher provides a safe, consistent, and nonjudgmental haven.

Finally, effective EBD teachers individualize instruction. Having knowledge of behavior disorders and effective strategies is insufficient. The effective EBD teacher identifies the particular needs of each student and designs instruction that meets those individual academic and behavioral needs.

Search terms: emotional behavior disorder, students EBD, strategies EBD, classroom emotional behavior disorder, teaching emotional behavior disorder, students emotional behavior disorder

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

More than any other subgroup, students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) need teachers who are well-qualified to teach them (Scott, Jolivette, Ennis, & Hirn, 2012). The literature identifies qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers. Missing from the literature, however, is the EBD teachers' perspectives of what makes an EBD teacher effective. In this study, six EBD teachers were interviewed to gather their perceptions on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers. Five participants participated in a focus group, and they affirmed the themes that surfaced from the interview data.

Researcher's Interest in the Study

As a teacher of students with EBD in an elementary school and in a residential school for middle and high school students, the researcher has observed that his students were not reaching their full potential. Despite the careful planning and delivery of instruction, many of the researcher's students continued to have significant issues in school and with the law once they left his classroom. Returning to the university allowed the researcher to improve his professional knowledge and skills and also to help his colleagues improve their professional knowledge and skills so that the students with EBD in a particular school district would be better served.

Need for the Study

Less than one percent of children ages 3 to 21 receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) definition of emotional disturbance. Forness, Kim, and Walker (2012) argued that "there is a huge 'service gap' between children with EBD needing special education and those who are actually identified and found eligible for the [EBD] category of special education" (p. 3). Of those students receiving special education for EBD, nearly 20 percent spend all of their time in placements outside of the general education classroom, and 20 percent receive services full time in the general education classroom. The remaining 60 percent spend part of their day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Students with EBD who are served outside of the regular classroom in self-contained settings are no more successful, and are more disruptive, than students with EBD in the regular classroom (Maggin, Wehby, Partin, Roberston, & Oliver, 2011). Effective instruction is needed to address the needs of these students despite the setting. When challenging behavior is not properly treated, these issues almost always get worse (Dunlap et al., 2006). Specific behavior interventions (Dunlap et al., 2006) and academic interventions (Rivera, Al-Otaiba, & Koorland, 2006) prove to be effective with students who have challenging behaviors. When effective interventions are not implemented, the significant needs of these students go unmet (Scott & Kamps, 2007).

The needs of students with EBD are many. Students with EBD "are far more likely to have mental health needs (Forness, 2012), have a higher prevalence of academic deficits in reading and math (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004), are

more likely to be removed from school (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013), and are more likely to be in restrictive settings (Unrugh, Bullis, Todis, Waintrup, & Atkins, 2007)" (Scott, et al., 2012, p. 3). In addition, students with EBD have severe social skills deficits (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). The academic and social functioning skills of students with EBD improve very little or not at all over time (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011; Wehby & Kern, 2014).

Students with EBD are not only at risk because of their disability, but also because of the likelihood that at some point in their academic careers they will have teachers who are not properly prepared to teach them (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Wehby & Kern, 2014). Inadequate training of general education and special education teachers hinders successful inclusion of these students (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). The most important factor to improve schools is to improve the quality of the teaching that occurs daily (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

There is an old argument about whether individuals can be trained to be effective EBD teachers. In other words, are EBD teachers born or made (Whitbeck, 2000)? Scott et al. (2012) contended that "not everyone is cut out to be a teacher of students with [EBD] and that there are traits or characteristics beyond the simple delivery of instruction" (p. 4) that are difficult to define and measure. According to Wadlington and Wadlington (2011), "Teachers' dispositions directly affect their effectiveness as educators" (p. 323), and teachers should be aware of their dispositions. Even these immeasurable teacher qualities may be improved. A formal introductory course on disabilities (Ajuwon et al., 2012) or an inservice on including students with EBD (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013) can increase preservice and inservice teachers' positive feelings regarding the inclusion

of students with EBD. Yet it is debatable whether or not teachers can learn how to develop positive relationships with students (Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu, & Choi, 2011).

In addition to a positive disposition, effective teachers use evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions for students with EBD (Bock & Borders, 2012; Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Hagaman, 2012; Hayden, MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Hawkins, 2012; Hirn & Park, 2012; MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2012). The most probable reason that all teachers of students with EBD do not use effective, evidence-based interventions is that they have no knowledge of the interventions or they lack the competence to implement the interventions (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012).

As noted above, the literature describes preferred qualities of, and best practices used by, teachers of students with EBD. Do the professionals who work with these students agree that effective EBD teachers possess the qualities, knowledge, and skills identified in the literature? Although it is difficult to define, measure, or teach, EBD teachers think they know effective teaching when they see it. (Scott et al., 2012). Do EBD teachers' perceptions of effective teaching match the literature base?

Recent studies have been conducted to discover teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013), effective teachers' perceptions of motivations to move to disadvantaged schools (Rice, 2010), and special education teachers' perceptions of their own use of effective instructional practices (Alghazo, 2005). There have also been studies on EBD teachers' perceptions of stressors that cause job dissatisfaction and discontentment (Adera & Bullock, 2010), their perceptions of the importance of selected professional standards (Lusk & Bullock, 2013), and their

perceptions of the usability of school-based behavior assessments (Miller, Chafouleas, Riley-Tilman, & Fabiano, 2014). However, there appears to be no research regarding what teachers of students with EBD consider to be the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD. Certainly, there is great value in asking those who work directly with students with EBD their perceptions of what makes an effective teacher for these students.

In this study, teachers of students with EBD, in individual interviews and in a collective focus group, identified qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers. Because these teachers work most closely with students with EBD, they have valuable insight regarding the qualities, knowledge, and skills necessary for teachers to be effective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD from the perspective of EBD teachers.

Research Question

What do teachers of students with EBD in a particular school district perceive to be the qualities, knowledge, and skills that are necessary to be effective?

Benefits of the Study

The literature on teacher effectiveness documents that teachers differ significantly in their ability to improve student outcomes (Rice, 2010). More than any other population, students with EBD need effective teachers (Scott et al., 2012). Identifying and listing the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD will expedite the process of matching effective teachers with the students who need them

the most, help teachers of students with EBD to self-assess their effectiveness, and enable administrators and teachers to individualize professional development.

The qualities, knowledge, and skills are only part of what makes an effective teacher of students with EBD. Sutherland and Oswald (2005) indicated there is a critical need to understand the transactional processes between students with EBD and their teachers. "Teachers' behavior not only influences, but is also influenced by, student behavior in an ongoing dynamic exchange" (p. 12). What better way to begin understanding these important transactional processes than to ask teachers of students with EBD.

Researcher Reflexivity

Although it is not possible to be totally free of bias, "the important thing is to recognize when either our own or the respondents' biases, assumptions, or beliefs are *intruding into the analysis*" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 97). Accordingly, the researcher has reflected on the factors that may affect the data analysis for this study. These factors were made known to the researcher's advisor prior to the advisor audit. The researcher also disclosed these factors to a peer trained in qualitative data analysis prior to the peer debriefing.

Through memos, peer debriefing, and an advisor audit, the researcher has remained conscious of his opinions and any unintended impact they may have on the data analysis. Most of the researcher's 20-year career in education has specifically involved students with disabilities. For the past decade, he has worked with and studied students with EBD. Based on his professional experiences, he has definite opinions about effective versus non-effective teachers of students with EBD. In particular, the researcher believes

that teachers who have a positive attitude and high expectations for students with EBD tend to be more effective.

As his knowledge and experience have grown in the area of EBD, the researcher has been able to look back in hindsight on his own experiences with students with EBD. When reflecting on his practice, the researcher makes judgments about which interventions were effective and which interventions were ineffective when working with his students. Although the reflections are well-intended and based in the literature, there is no way to validate the researcher's conclusions without going back, implementing certain interventions, and evaluating the success of those interventions.

The researcher took several steps to minimize researcher bias. Under the supervision of his advisor, the researcher was trained to take detailed notes during interviews as part of data-gathering for a scholarly article that is currently in press. The researcher used this training to take copious notes during the interviews. Interview notes were immediately typed up and emailed to participants for member checking. In addition, the focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed. The reported data in Chapter IV is based on the quotes and statements from these verified interview notes and from the focus group transcription.

Qualitative analysis software (i.e., ATLAS.ti) was used to assign individual statements from the interviews to codes. The researcher's advisor conducted a review during and after the coding and data analysis of the interview data. A peer debriefing was also conducted at the conclusion of the data analysis of the interview data. The focus group of participants verified the general themes that emerged from the interview data. In

addition, each statement from the focus group transcript was assigned to codes, and the researcher's advisor also reviewed this data.

Delimitations

One primary objective of the study was to contribute to the discussion about what makes an effective EBD teacher. The participants in this study were from one Midwestern school district where the researcher teaches. This school district is adopting a new teacher evaluation system. In this school district, the EBD teachers are evaluated by the school building administrators and the district-level special education administrators, and the separate evaluations are unrelated. The perspective of the teachers in the district about the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers should be considered during the implementation phase of the teacher evaluation system.

This study may be useful in discussions about the evaluation of EBD teachers. Danielson (2007) indicated that her framework for evaluating teachers also applies to special education teachers, because the general tasks of teaching are fundamental. However, Danielson (2007) acknowledged that "teachers of students with special needs may accomplish the components of the framework in ways unique to their situation." As a result, a special evaluation tool for special education teachers is appropriate (Danielson, 2007). Indeed, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2012a) identified the requisite skills and knowledge for all special education teachers and further detailed the skills and knowledge for each specialty area (e.g., EBD). In the district where this study was conducted, school administrators evaluate special education teachers using the same tool used for general education teachers. In addition, special education administrators evaluate special education teachers using a separate evaluation tool. The evaluation of

EBD teachers is beyond the scope of this study and is therefore not covered in the literature review.

This study may also be useful in discussions about professional development planning, EBD teacher education, and the hiring of EBD teachers, but the literature review does not cover those topics. The focus of this study is on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of an effective EBD teacher, and the literature review is limited to those areas. Furthermore, the participants in this study were only EBD teachers and special education strategists who work directly with students with EBD. General education teachers and teachers in other specialty areas were not included in this study, because the focus of the study is on what makes EBD teachers effective.

Operational Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this study. They are defined here to assist the reader.

Emotional Disturbance:

(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 (IDEA, 2004).

Evidence-Based Practice: Evidence-based practices "are instructional approaches that have proven to be effective through rigorous research" (Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2012, p. 64).

Functional Behavioral Assessment: "A systematic method of gathering information about behavior and its relationship with the environment in which it occurs; it's goal is to identify the function or purpose that behavior serves for the student under specific environmental conditions" (Payne, Scott, & Conroy, 2007).

Intervention: An instructional practice intended to improve academic and/or behavioral student outcomes.

Knowledge: CEC (2012a) has outlined the specific knowledge that teachers of students with disabilities should possess in seven standard areas. In addition, specific knowledge is outlined for teachers of students with EBD (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Knowledge for Initial Special Education Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Specialty Set

Standard	Knowledge
1: Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences	Range of characteristics within and among individuals with [EBD]
	Co-occurrence of [EBD] with other exceptionalities
	Performance issues in the core academic content for individuals with [EBD]
2: Learning Environments	Advantages and disadvantages of placement options for individuals with [EBD]

(continued)

Standard	Knowledge
6: Professional Learning & Ethical Practice	Specialized terminology in the area of emotional/behavioral disorders
	Impacts of the legal, judicial, and educational systems serving individuals with emotional/behavioral disorders
	Principles of reinforcement theory in serving individuals with emotional/behavioral disorders
	Principles of least restrictive environment for individuals with emotional/behavioral disorders
7: Collaboration	None in addition to the initial common specialty set

Note: Adapted from *Initial Special Education Emotional and Behavior Disorders Specialty Set* by CEC Children, 2012a

Least Restrictive Environment: Children with disabilities, to the maximum extent possible, are educated in a setting with children who are not disabled (IDEA, 2004).

Qualities: These are the "traits or characteristics beyond the simple delivery of instruction" (Scott et al., 2012, p. 4).

Skills: CEC (2012a) has outlined skills that teachers of students with disabilities should be able to perform. In addition, specific skills have been specified for teachers of students with EBD (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Skills for Initial Special Education Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Specialty Set

Standard	Skills
4: Assessment	Conduct functional behavior assessments
	Assess social behaviors of individuals with [EBD]
	Prepare functional behavior assessment reports on individuals with [EBD]
5: Instructional Planning & Strategies	Use nonaversive techniques to support targeted behavior and maintain attention of individuals with [EBD]
	Use evidence-based practices to enhance academic and social competence
	Use prevention and intervention strategies for individuals at risk for [EBD]
	Use strategies to teach alternative behaviors
	Plan and implement individualized reinforcement systems and environmental modifications at levels equal to the intensity of the behavior
	Integrate academic and affective instruction with behavior management for individuals and groups with emotional/behavioral disorders
7: Collaboration	Share effective behavior management techniques with families

Note: Adapted from *Initial Special Education Emotional and Behavior Disorders Specialty Set* by CEC Children, 2012a

Special Education Strategist: A teacher in this particular district who is licensed to teach students with EBD, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I was an introduction to this study. This chapter contains a description of the need for the study and the researcher's interest in the study. The purpose of the study, delimitations and benefits of the study, and researcher reflexivity were also described.

Chapter II is a discussion of the literature. Social Cognitive Theory and its primary construct, self-efficacy, are described. Then, there is a review of the literature on self-efficacy's relationship to factors such as teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction. The remainder of the chapter identifies the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers found in the literature.

Chapter III contains a description of the theoretical and methodological frameworks upon which the study was based. The participants and setting for the study are described as are the instruments used in the study, participant confidentiality, and potential risks to participants. Chapter III concludes with a description of the methods used to obtain the data and an explanation of the methods used to analyze the data.

Chapter IV presents the interview data that were collected. Themes that emerged from the interview data and focus group data that supports the themes are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter V asserts conclusions based on the data and relates the literature to the data. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a discussion of the effect the general education teacher has on student achievement. The next section more specifically describes the measure of effectiveness for a teacher of students with EBD. An overview of the literature on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD is presented throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Teacher Effects

Several studies vouch for the teacher as a critical determinant of student success. Stronge et al. (2011) concluded from their study on teacher effectiveness and student achievement that "the common denominator in school improvement and student success *is* the teacher" (p. 351). They found that more effective teachers have significantly fewer class disruptions and higher student achievement than less effective teachers. Similarly, Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) concluded when students in kindergarten through fifth grade have effective teachers, they show one-half standard deviation of growth in reading and math while students with low effective teachers only show one-fifth to one-third growth in their achievement scores in these areas. "The findings support the idea that teachers *do matter* and significantly affect student achievement in later elementary school grades" (Konstantopolousas & Chung, 2011, p. 383). Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges' (2004) four-year study of kindergarten to grade three students randomly assigned to teachers showed that students in grades two and three with more effective

teachers made significant academic gains over students with less effective teachers. They also found that teacher effectiveness had a greater impact on student achievement in low-socioeconomic schools than in high-socioeconomic schools. Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) concluded from their review of data for all students in grades three, four, and five in North Carolina between 1995 and 2004 that teachers' experience, test scores, and regular licensure—as opposed to emergency and other types of provisional licensure—had positive effects on student achievement.

The effectiveness of teachers in the studies above was primarily determined by the students' scores on standardized tests and other academic measures. The effectiveness of an EBD teacher cannot easily be measured by student test scores as will be discussed below. However, Loeb, Soland, and Fox (2014) studied teachers of a particular subgroup and found that teachers who are effective with English-Learners are also effective with Non-English-Learners. They also found that only some characteristics, like knowledge of a student's native language, account for more effectiveness with the English-Learners. This suggests that teachers who are effective with one subgroup of students may be more effective teachers in general.

Effectiveness of an EBD Teacher

Many of the studies above rely on academic test data to determine teacher effectiveness. According to the literature, academic test scores alone do not determine the effectiveness of an EBD teacher or any teacher. Scott et al. (2012) defined *effectiveness* as "denoting that a particular action or event is generally adequate to accomplish some purpose" (p. 3). Scott et al. (2012) also suggested that "for many of these students [with EBD] success will not be defined by college admission or even graduation. Rather, the

outcomes by which we judge success will more reasonably be consistent with employment, independent living, or even maintaining the conditions of parole" (p. 3). Still, EBD teachers cannot wait until students with EBD become adults to measure success. In addition to academic achievement data in the form of permanent products like quizzes, tests, self-management forms, or checklists, EBD teachers also interview students, parents, and teachers about student performance and conduct direct observations (Gage & McDaniel, 2012). Using data-based decision making, effective teachers of students with EBD organize, describe, and analyze the collected data to determine appropriate academic and behavioral interventions and to monitor student academic and behavioral progress (Gage & McDaniel, 2012).

Social Cognitive Theory

Self-efficacy, the first essential quality of an effective EBD teacher discussed below, is the pivotal construct in Social Cognitive Theory (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Social Cognitive Theory posits that psychological functioning can be explained through the interaction of behavior, personal factors, and environmental events (Bandura, 1986). These three determinants do not have equal influence on each other, but each factor affects the other nonetheless (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Individuals do not merely respond to their environment in predictable ways; rather, individuals generate creative intentional behavioral acts based on personal factors, environmental factors, and personal reflection on past experiences (Bandura, 2001).

Setting goals demonstrates the use of forethought and an intention to follow through with a behavior. In this way, "foreseeable future events are converted into current motivators and regulators of behavior" (Bandura, 2001, p. 7). Individuals, then,

choose present behaviors with the hopes of shaping a desired future (Bandura, 2001). Strategies that produce valued outcomes are more likely to be adopted than strategies that produce unrewarding or punishing effects (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

As an individual works toward a goal, he or she reduces the discrepancy between baseline ability and the goal performance level. This is known as discrepancy reduction (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Once a goal is reached, the individual produces a new discrepancy (i.e., discrepancy production) so that an even more challenging goal is established (Wood & Bandura, 1989). "Cognitive motivation based on goal intentions is mediated by three types of self-influences: affective self-evaluation, perceived self-efficacy for goal attainment, and adjustment of personal standards" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 368). In other words, monitoring progress toward a goal, the degree of perceived self-efficacy to reach the goal, and flexibility to adjust strategies to reach the goal affect an individual's motivation.

Individuals do not have to learn effective strategies entirely through personal trial and error. When individuals observe the success of others who are similar to themselves, then they are motivated to utilize the observed strategies. Likewise, individuals tend to avoid strategies that have resulted in adverse consequences for others (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

After individuals observe or learn new skills, they master the skills through guided practice. Acquiring the new skills does not guarantee efficient and successful use of the skills when necessary. "People with the same skills may, therefore, perform poorly, adequately, or extraordinarily, depending on whether their self-beliefs of efficacy enhance or impair their motivation and problem-solving efforts" (Wood & Bandura,

1989, p. 364). Consequently, an individual's degree of success is contingent on an individual's self-efficacy (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Qualities of Effective EBD Teachers

Self-Efficacy

A study based on a survey completed by 1,475 special education teachers serving students from preschool to high school demonstrated the teacher quality of self-efficacy significantly impacts student achievement (Carlson, Hyunshik, & Schroll, 2004). Perceived self-efficacy is central to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her ability to perform a task competently, and he defined an outcome expectancy as "a person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes" (p. 193). Individuals can have high self-efficacy in some domains and low self-efficacy in other domains. These particularized efficacy beliefs guide which activities are attempted and how well they are performed (Bandura, 1997).

Since the 1970s, researchers have studied how teachers' self-efficacy affects teacher behavior in the classroom and student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). They asserted that teacher efficacy affects a teacher's level of effort, the goals a teacher sets for her or himself, teacher persistence when something does not proceed as planned, and teacher resilience when faced with setbacks. In a review of the literature involving teacher efficacy and classroom management, Dibapile (2012) concluded that teacher efficacy promotes teacher effectiveness and enhances teacher productivity. In a study of the relationship between self-efficacy and the performance of special education teachers and consultants, Allinder (1994) found that teachers with high self-efficacy were

more likely to "(a) try different ways of teaching; (b) to be business-like in working with students by being organized and planful in their instruction, and fair and firm when dealing with students; and (c) to be confident and enthusiastic about teaching" (p. 92). The results of a study by Viel-ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, and Benson (2010) revealed a significant relationship between special educators' self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Teacher self-efficacy also affects teacher expectations. Based on a study in which 384 general education teachers were asked to answer questions about case studies, Tournaki and Podell (2005) "found that teachers with high self-efficacy make less negative predictions about students" (p. 299) and adjust their predictions based on individual student characteristics while low efficacy teachers seem to focus on one student characteristic and respond similarly to students despite their individual differences. Interestingly, the study also revealed that all teachers tolerate inattentiveness more when students are friendly than when they are aggressive, and all teachers made higher predictions of academic success for aggressive students who read at grade level than for friendly students who read below grade level (Tournaki & Podell, 2005).

Teacher training and school environment are additional factors that affect teachers' self-efficacy. Based on the analysis of a survey completed by 200 second grade teachers, Brownell and Pajares (1999) concluded that proper support, preparation for mainstreaming, and school climate influence teacher beliefs and perceived success of students with learning and behavior problems in mainstream settings. In another study, Kelm and McIntosh (2012) found that teachers had higher self-efficacy in a school where School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) was implemented than in a school where SWPBS was not implemented.

Various factors influence the increase or decrease of perceived self-efficacy. Mastery experiences and modeling increase perceived self-efficacy. Realistic goals and expectations enhance the likelihood of greater effort and success, while unrealistic expectations negatively affect perceived self-efficacy and the likelihood of success. Finally, reducing stress levels and eliminating negative self-talk positively impact perceived self-efficacy (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Self-efficacy also affects a person's perceived aptitude. People with greater perceived self-efficacy believe that they are capable of success in more domains than people with less self-efficacy. "This self-limitation arises more from self-doubts, rather than from inability" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 365). Societal norms can increase self-doubts in groups of individuals. For example, some women may limit their pursuit of careers due to erroneous beliefs that they lack the capabilities to succeed in male-dominated fields (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 365). People with stronger perceived self-efficacy develop challenging goals and firmly commit themselves to reach those goals (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Teacher Attitude

As noted above, a teacher's self-efficacy is related to the teacher's belief of personal aptitude, expectations of students, and student achievement. In other words, the effectiveness of a teacher is affected by the teacher's disposition (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). Teacher education programs recognize the necessity of assessing and teaching dispositions (Shiveley & Misco, 2010). Kindness, caring, and high expectations are among the dispositions of excellent teachers (Helm, 2006a). At the very least, teacher

education programs should teach the disposition that improvement in student performance is possible (Poulou & Norwich, 2002).

Attitude is a substantial part of a teacher's disposition. One of CEC's (2012a) standards states that beginning special education teachers must have knowledge of "teacher attitudes and behaviors that influence behavior of individuals with exceptionalities" (p. 2). Teacher attitudes are vital for successful inclusion (Cartledge & Johnson, 1996). Teachers' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, students with EBD influence their affective responses and intentional behaviors when interacting with the students (Poulou & Norwich, 2002). Denamet and Houtte (2012) concluded that "in schools where teachers report lower levels of student teachability, students are likely to report less perceived teacher support, which is associated with higher rates of self-reported school misconduct" (p. 868). In essence, you get what you expect.

Teacher attitude toward students who are at-risk for EBD differs significantly from teacher attitude toward students who are not at-risk. One study highlighted the difference in teacher attitude toward students based on the students' at-risk status. Lago-DeLello (1998) found that students who were at-risk experienced "(a) rejection by teachers; (b) decreased perception of ability by teachers and limited teacher expectations; (c) less academic engagement and involvement in classroom activities; (d) few instructional accommodations to meet individual needs; and (e) negative or neutral, and nonacademic teacher feedback" (p. 489). Therefore, students who are at-risk receive instruction that exacerbates, rather than addresses, their learning and behavioral problems.

Other than self-efficacy and teacher attitude, no other qualities of effective teachers are clearly defined in the literature nor are there studies linking a particular teacher quality to the performance of students with EBD. Scott et al. (2012) explained "while most of us have a feel for these characteristics [of effective EBD teachers], they still present serious problems in terms of defining measurable variables that can be empirically tied to student outcomes" (p. 4). Still, teacher qualities are mentioned in the literature. Poplin et al. (2011) described the qualities of the 31 "highly effective teachers" (p. 39) in their study as "committed, optimistic, [and] disciplined" (p. 43). Similarly, one theme that surfaced as a result of interviews with leaders in the field was that effective EBD teachers have the personality traits of passion, patience, humility, and empathy (Zabel, Teagarden, & Kaff, 2014).

Knowledge of Effective EBD Teachers

Evidence-Based Practices

The use of evidence-based practices (EBP) is critical for all students with disabilities (Krestlow & Blatz, 2011) and particularly critical for students with EBD (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012). Students with EBD are more engaged in learning when teachers use effective instructional practices (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012). Therefore, it is useful for educators to have general knowledge of EBPs that address common needs (i.e., academic performance issues, emotional factors) of students with EBD. Sadly, many EBD teachers leave the profession before they are able to collect a variety of EBPs (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006).

Several EBPs are described in the literature. EBPs that encourage active participation include the use of praise (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014; Maag & Katsiyannis,

2006; Marchant & Anderson, 2012) and ample opportunities to respond (Gage & McDaniel, 2012; Haydon et al., 2012; Maggin et al., 2011). Specific feedback (MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012) and direct and engaging academic instruction (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; MacSuga-Gage et al, 2012) decrease behaviors and increase academic achievement. Peer assistance to teach academics (Farley et al., 2012), self-management interventions (Farley et al., 2012; Hirsch, Ennis, & McDaniel, 2013), behavioral momentum, and choice (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014) are also evidenced-based practices identified in the literature.

Skills of Effective EBD Teachers

Individualization

Although school-wide multi-tiered systems of support have improved academic and behavioral performance for many struggling students, "these efforts have not adequately addressed the unique learning and behavioral needs of most students with disabilities, particularly those who function at the lowest achievement levels or who have the most serious behavior difficulties" (Danielson & Rosenquist, 2014, p. 6). The outlook for students with EBD is particularly grim. "Despite advances in developing effective models of behavioral support through school-wide approaches, the outcomes for students with significant behavioral challenges are considerably less favorable than outcomes for other students with disabilities" (Wehby & Kern, 2014, p. 41). Students with EBD make little, if any, academic or social functioning progress over time (Siperstein, et al., 2011).

Current research addresses this bleak outlook for students with EBD. Data-based individualization allows effective teachers to use assessment data to identify appropriate interventions and to intensify individualized academic instruction when necessary for

students who do not respond to classroom and small-group instruction in tiers 1 and 2 of the response to intervention model (Danielson & Rosenquist, 2014; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Lemons, Kearns, & Davidson, 2014; Powell & Stecker, 2014). Similarly, interventions are increasingly individualized in the multi-tiered approach for students with behavioral challenges. When students do not respond to tier 1 and tier 2 of school-wide approaches like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, more intensive and individualized interventions are required (Kern & Wehby, 2014; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006, Stevens & Lingo, 2013; Wehby & Kern, 2014).

"Effective management requires that the teacher have fluency with a wide range of strategies that can be adapted and applies as the situation dictates—often referred to as a 'bag of tricks'" (Scott et al., 2012, p. 5). However, there is risk in treating students with EBD as a homogenous group (CEC, 2012a; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Practices that are evidence-based may work for many students, but they will not work for all students (Torres et al., 2012). In an editorial, Ludlow (2014) explained:

> Even when interventions have been thoroughly researched and validated as evidence-based practices for students with a given disability, there is no guarantee that they will be successful when implemented with a specific learner, who represents a unique set of challenges related to developing basic and tool skills, learning academic content, and acquiring appropriate social behaviors (p. 4).

There are not enough evidence-based practices to address the individual needs of students with disabilities (The Council for Exceptional Children's Interdivisional Research Group, 2014). Consequently, teachers should use promising interventions in the

absence of evidence-based interventions without waiting for studies to prove their validity (Landrum et al., 2003).

For students with EBD, functional behavior assessments lead to individualized behavior intervention plans for students who require the most intensive interventions (Iovanonne et al., 2013; Kern & Wehby, 2014; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; Wehby & Kern, 2014). In studies by Payne et al. (2007) and by Turton, Umbreit, and Mathur (2011) function-based interventions significantly reduced problem behaviors of students with severe behavior difficulties. Student behavior did not differ significantly from baseline behavior when the intervention was not function-based (Payne et al., 2007). Similarly, Briere and Simonsen (2011) found function-based interventions lowered off-task behaviors more than interventions that were not function-based. Finally, Lane, Weisenbach, Phillips, and Wehby (2007) noted that many studies rely on researchers' support and proved that effective function-based interventions could be feasibly implemented by teachers without outside support.

For students with EBD, teachers not only must develop individualized plans for academic achievement, but they also must develop individualized plans to address behavioral issues (IDEA, 2004; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012). Monitoring progress toward specific academic and behavioral goals enables teachers to assess the effectiveness of an intervention for a particular student (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; Mac-Suga-Gage et al., 2012). Therefore, individualized instruction is an ongoing process.

Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

Teachers of students with EBD proactively prevent problems and use intervention strategies (CEC, 2012a) as part of effective classroom management. Effective EBD teachers master a set of empirically supported practices to manage student behavior (Hirn et al., 2012; MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012; Marchant & Anderson, 2012; Neel, Cessna, Borock, & Bechard, 2003; Scott et al., 2012). According to CEC (2012a), effective EBD teachers "create a safe, equitable, positive, and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued" (p. 2).

Although the classroom environment affects the effectiveness of instruction, the location of the classroom does not impact quality of instruction or academic progress for students with EBD. Teachers in the self-contained setting use no more evidence-based or specialized instruction than teachers in the general education setting (Maggin et al., 2011). Students with EBD make little or no academic progress regardless of the educational setting. Students with EBD in high-socioeconomic, low-socioeconomic, special education, and general education settings made insignificant academic progress over the course of a school year despite the setting or type of special education services in a study by Siperstein et al. (2011).

Beyond the physical environment of the classroom is the general atmosphere of the classroom. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) described how the school culture positively or negatively affects the classroom atmosphere. When teachers in a school have low expectations for students, students tend to work down to those expectations. Also, teachers who only associate with like-minded colleagues limit their professional growth. "What you believe…is profoundly affected by your relationships with who does or

doesn't believe it" (p. 103). Teacher isolationism and individualism create a toxic culture and prohibit the sharing of successful strategies used in the classroom (pp. 108 & 109).

However, when the professional capital of a school staff is cultivated and shared, the "group becomes far more powerful than the individual" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 3). A school climate that emphasizes shared responsibility for student success and encourages shared ideas and strategies leads to greater student achievement (Hargreaves & Fullan, p. 160). Consistency is an essential strategy when working with students with EBD. Daily classroom routines ensure consistency in the classroom environment (MacSuga et al., 2012; Hirn & Park, 2012). Effective classroom instruction also includes consistent consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Mac-Suga et al., 2012).

Teachers cannot follow a prescribed formula when creating the classroom environment. An essential skill of an EBD teacher is to "modify the learning environment to manage behaviors" (CEC, 2012a, p. 2).The results of a functional behavior assessment can be "used to develop an intervention plan consisting of environmental modifications to (a) reduce the occurrence of problem behavior, (b) increase the likelihood of desired behavior, and (c) reduce reinforcement of problem behavior" (Iovanonne et al., 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the learning environment must meet all of the students' needs at the same time it addresses each student's individual needs.

Develop a Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

Effective teachers are those who establish positive relationships with their students (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Gentry et al., 2011; MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012; Marchant & Anderson, 2012; Owens & Dieker, 2003; Rappaport & Minahan, 2012; Scott

et al., 2012). One of the initial preparation standards developed by CEC (2012a) for special education teachers relates to the development of the teacher-student relationship: "Establish and maintain rapport with individuals with and without exceptionalities" (p. 2). Scott et al. (2012) advised:

> Rather than focusing solely on the *use* of a practice as a means of identifying effective teachers, we must focus on the manner in which the teacher *approaches* practice. It is acknowledged as fact that instruction occurs within the context of a teacher-student relationship in which each individual's behavior affects that of the other and that effective teachers have a manner of developing this relationship to maximize the probability of success (p. 4).

Teacher-student relationships are central to teaching, and these relationships take time to develop (Newberry, 2010). Newberry (2010) identified four phases (i.e., Appraisal, Agreement, Testing, and Planning) in the teacher-student relationship-building process. Even though the development of positive teacher-student relationships is a requisite skill of effective EBD teachers, there is minimal instruction on how to develop this skill. "Relationships involve emotional work yet teachers are given little instruction or support for the development of personal relationships with students" (Newberry, 2010, p. 1702).

The teacher-student relationship is especially important in the early grades. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found a strong correlation between teacher-student relationships in kindergarten and later school performance for students with behavioral issues. They concluded that positive adult-child relationships in kindergarten were related to fewer behavior issues and greater academic success in eighth grade. Negative adult-child

relationships in kindergarten were more strongly correlated with increased behavior issues and less academic success in eighth grade.

Regardless of grade level, "one key area that teachers can control is the interactions they choose to have with their students" (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012, p. 9). In the dynamic exchange between a teacher and a student with EBD, the teacher's behavior influences the student, and the student's behavior influences the teacher (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005).

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the effect that the general education teacher has on student achievement and, more specifically, discussed the measure of effectiveness for teachers of students with EBD. An overview of the literature on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD was also presented. In particular, self-efficacy, teacher disposition, and teacher attitude were found to be essential qualities of effective EBD teachers. In addition, effective EBD teachers have knowledge of EBPs, and they individualize instruction. Chapter III describes the methodology behind this qualitative study and the methods used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This qualitative study describes the perceptions of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in a particular school district on the most effective practices used by teachers of students with EBD. The purpose of this study is to identify the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD from their perspective. This chapter describes the methodology behind the qualitative study and the methods used to conduct the study.

Methodology

Qualitative v. Quantitative Research

The decision to conduct a qualitative research study over a quantitative research study was deliberate. A quantitative study describes the extent to which variance in independent variables affects the variance in dependent variables; the results of a qualitative study describe *how* the independent variables affect the dependent variables. The positivistic underpinnings of quantitative research are only part of a more pragmatic critical realism perspective (Maxwell, 2013). Quantitative results give a snapshot of an issue; qualitative results are useful for effecting positive change.

The objective snapshot that a quantitative study provides is open to interpretation. "The world is not an object whose law of constitution [we] have in [our] possession; it is the natural milieu and the field of all [our] thoughts and of all [our] explicit perceptions" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxiv). Individuals necessarily interact with the world to create

personal realities. When seeking to make positive changes for students with EBD, one cannot ignore the ever-present perceptions of the individuals who teach them. "Objective-referenced statements of social regularities [are] of little value if we do not understand why it is true" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 78). Therefore, studying an objective reality alone does not provide practical answers to problems experienced in a socially-constructed reality (Carspecken, 1996).

Participants' responses are unpredictable. As a result, qualitative researchers are not sure where a particular study will lead (Maxwell, 2013). The consensus of the informants as induced through the analytic process provides a much richer understanding of a study than the limiting information provided by the testing of a null hypothesis.

The analysis of teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective teachers of students with EBD in this study resulted in three themes from which were derived three assertions. Knowledge of teachers' perceptions can be helpful when developing professional development opportunities, recruiting and inducting new teachers of students with EBD, or having discussions with parents about teachers' perceptions of effective practices.

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

This is a phenomenological study based upon a phenomenological theoretical perspective and a constructivist epistemology. Constructivism brings objectivity and subjectivity together with the realization that there is no absolute truth. A constructivist epistemology "invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or rich meaning" (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). As outlined in Chapter II, there is considerable research on evidence-based practices and desirable traits of teachers of

students with EBD. However, the EBD teachers' perspective on qualities and practices of effective teachers of students with EBD has not been recorded or analyzed. From a constructivist standpoint, there is great value in bracketing what is known from the literature and discovering what EBD teachers believe to be the qualities of teachers that will most likely promote student success.

Husserl's phenomenological theoretical framework, consistent with the constructivist epistemology, posits not only that the researcher's perspective be bracketed, but that any concept of the observed object's pure and natural qualities be bracketed. Bracketing involves setting aside the essences of an object to discover the intentionality placed upon the object by those who experience it (i.e., individuals' perceptions). Individuals can only see selected facets of an object from a given perspective. Even when two individuals have the same vantage point, their perspectives will differ according to their lived experience with the object (Harman, 2007; Landgrebe, 1981). Therefore, discovering the commonalities among the perceptions of EBD teachers regarding the qualities of effective teachers of students with EBD is a powerful enterprise.

Teachers of students with EBD have their own ideas about what works with their students. The literature on teacher effectiveness takes for granted that if teachers apply practices that have been effective—often used in controlled research settings with consistency—their students will make significant gains. A phenomenological theoretical framework "calls into question what is taken for granted" (Crotty, 1998, p. 82). Phenomenology forces individuals to engage with phenomena in the world and make sense of the phenomena (Crotty, 1998).

Phenomenology acknowledges that an objective world exists and that individuals create their own realities by interacting with objects in the world. "Phenomenology's most important accomplishment is, it would seem, to have joined an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism through its concept of the world or of rationality. Rationality fits precisely to the experiences in which it is revealed" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxxiv). Our surroundings are fixed; individuals cannot make something real by imagining it. However, individuals constantly have thoughts, memories, and experiences that enable them to construct a subjective reality of an otherwise objective world. Because EBD teachers naturally have the most experience working with students with EBD, their subjective reality (perceptions) about the phenomenon regarding the qualities and best practices of effective teachers of students with EBD is vital.

Method

Description of the Setting

The participants for this study were teachers of students with EBD from a Midwestern school district that serves 11,370 students and employs 1,823 staff members. Approximately 140 certified staff in addition to numerous support staff serve 1,580 students with disabilities from ages 3 to 21; 127 of those students qualify for special education under the EBD category. The dropout rate for the school district in 2012-2013 was 0.9%, and average daily attendance was 96.7%. Eight-seven percent of the students in the district are Caucasian, and 23% (2,627) qualify for free and reduced meals. The school district is in an urban region with a population of approximately 187,000. Prior to the commencement of the study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the assistant superintendent of the school district approved the research proposal.

Description of the Participants

Through purposeful theory and homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2012), all of the 32 teachers who teach students with EBD in this district were e-mailed the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale (MTES) described below. Of the 16 participants who completed the MTES, six participated in interviews, and five were present for the follow-up focus group. Table 3 details the gender, years of experience in special education (SPED), and grade levels currently taught for each of the participants who were interviewed and who participated in the focus group.

Table 3.

Description of the Participants

Name	Gender	Years of SPED Experience	Years of EBD Experience	Current Least Restrictive Environment
Sara	Female	25	10	Teacher in Psychiatric Facility
Erin*	Female	3	3	High School Resource Room
Ned	Male	20	20	Teacher in Psychiatric Facility
Luke	Male	13	13	Middle School Self-Contained
Katie	Female	15	13	Elementary Resource Room
Gina	Female	8	2	Elementary Resource Room

* Erin participated in an individual interview but not in the focus group.

Participant Confidentiality and Study Risks

Steps were taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The actual names of the participants were known only to the participants in the focus group and the principal researcher. The actual names of the participants were changed to

pseudonyms for this dissertation and for any future publication that may include the data from this study. In addition, the participants were directed not to discuss their participation in the focus group nor identify the other participants in the focus group.

The signed consent forms (see Appendices A and B) explain the minimal risks of completing the initial survey as well as any risks of participating in the interviews and focus group. The consent forms also identify who to contact if participants became uncomfortable as a result of their participation in this study. To ensure confidentiality, the consent forms are kept in a locked drawer away from the notes from the interviews and analysis of the data. Similarly, the audio recording of the focus group is stored on a personal computer which is password-protected.

Data-Gathering Instruments

Modified teacher efficacy scale. As explained in Chapter II, researchers have determined a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and the characteristics and performance of teachers (Allinder, 1994; Dibapile, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). Gibson and Dembo (1984) developed a scale to measure teacher self-efficacy. The Teacher Efficacy Scale originally included 58 items; however, as a result of the analysis of a pilot study by Gibson and Dembo (1984) with 90 teachers, 30 items that clearly loaded onto significant factors were retained. A factor analysis of the updated Teacher Efficacy Scale revealed two significant factors: personal teacher efficacy (i.e., one's belief that he or she has the skills to facilitate student learning) and general efficacy (i.e., one's belief that he or she can overcome environmental influences to facilitate student learning). Based on comparisons of participants' results on measures of teacher efficacy, verbal ability, and flexibility, the teacher efficacy construct passed

the test of discriminability; teacher efficacy is a distinct construct from both verbal ability and flexibility. Finally, observations showed significant differences in academic focus, student groupings, and feedback patterns between teachers who scored high and teachers who scored low on the Teacher Efficacy Scale.

Colardarci and Breton (1997) modified the Teacher Efficacy Scale to use with special education resource room teachers. Each item on the scale is answered on a Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For this study the language in some items on the Colardarci and Breton (1997) scale was changed from teacher to EBD teacher. The result is the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale (MTES) (see Appendix C).

Interview protocol. The items on the interview protocol (see Appendix D) were carefully crafted to allow teachers to honestly share their opinions and experiences without directing their thoughts. The interview protocol enabled the researcher to structure the interview with a purpose. This standardized, open-ended interview format ensured that the participants were asked the same questions while still encouraging open-ended responses (Kvale, 1996; Turner, 2010).

The first part of the interview protocol focused on EBD teachers' perceptions of what teachers of students with EBD do that most likely promotes student success. The first item is based on the notion that some teachers are naturally more effective with students with EBD than others (Scott, et al., 2012). The next seven items on the protocol are open-ended questions based on CEC's (2012a) seven standards for teachers of students with EBD (see Table 1 and Table 2 in Chapter II).

The last three questions on the interview protocol are based on questions from Colardarci and Breton's (1997) modified version of the Gibson and Dembo (1984)

Teacher Efficacy Scale. Colardarci and Breton (1997) indicated a need for studies that would enable teachers to expand on their responses to items on the Teacher Efficacy Scale. The inclusion of the last three questions on the interview protocol allowed participants to expand on their responses to these questions on the MTES.

Data-Gathering Techniques

Survey. The MTES was e-mailed to the 22 teachers of students with EBD in the school district. Eleven teachers completed the survey, and five of those teachers consented to a follow-up contact for an interview and participation in a focus group. One participant later decided not to be interviewed due to personal reasons. In an attempt to increase the number of possible participants, the MTES was e-mailed to 10 special education strategists in the district who work with students with EBD after an amendment to the original study proposal was submitted and approved by the IRB and by the school district. Five of the ten special education strategists completed the MTES, and three consented to be contacted for an individual interview and follow-up focus group. One of these teachers later declined to participate in an interview and focus group.

One of the initial purposes for administering the MTES to participants was to identify and interview the teachers with the highest scores. The MTES was distributed to a total of 32 teachers; 16 teachers completed the MTES; and only six teachers ultimately consented to participate in individual interviews and the focus group. Therefore, the MTES was not used to select participants for individual interviews and the focus group. However, based on the recommendation of Coladarci and Breton (1997), the MTES was used as a tool when designing the interview questions. Also, the results gathered from the MTES are described in Chapter IV.

Interviews. Qualitative research depends on the honest responses of informants (Carspecken, 1996). Roulston (2010) described the neo-positivist conception of interviewing in which the interviewer only asks the interview questions during data gathering and then codes and categorizes the data. Following a semi-structured protocol with mostly open-ended questions reduces the chances that the interviewer will guide the interview, keeps interviewer talk to a minimum, and increases the potential responses of the participants (Roulston, 2010). Follow-up questions sought more detailed answers from respondents rather than suggesting other points of view (Kvale, 1996). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out: "It is not the researcher's perception or perspective that matters but rather how research participants see events or happenings" (p. 47). Accordingly, the researcher refrained from making any statements during the interviews that would influence the participants' responses.

Each 35- to 75-minute interview was scheduled at a time and place that was most convenient for the participant as another strategy to increase potential responses. The researcher recorded copious notes, typed the notes immediately after each interview, and e-mailed the notes to participants so that they could verify that the notes accurately reflected the statements made in the interviews (i.e., member checking).

Focus group. The six participants agreed to a day and time to meet for a focus group to discuss the results of the interview data analysis. One participant did not show for the focus group, and the focus group proceeded with five participants. The researcher verbally presented the three general themes that emerged from the interview data analysis and asked the participants to comment on those themes. The focus group was digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Data Analysis and Validity

As noted above, the participants helped to ensure validity of the interview data through member checking (Robson, 2002). The researcher went through the data from the first two participant interviews and categorized the participants' responses into the codes that surfaced. The researcher's advisor audited the notes from the first two interviews, the list of codes, and the associations between the first two participants' responses and the codes. With the advisor's approval, the researcher continued to analyze the data from the four other interviews.

The amount of raw interview data in a qualitative study can be daunting. Robson (2002) described the benefits of using computer software for qualitative data analysis. ATLAS.ti software was used to categorize the interview data into the initial 31 codes and to rank the codes by the number of interview statements associated with them.

Further analysis revealed that some codes were too broad; the statements associated with those codes were loosely related. As a result, more specific codes were created within the broader codes during this secondary analysis. For example, the initial code "successful interventions/strategies" was subdivided into 12 codes that captured the more specific interventions and strategies that were described in the interviews.

This tighter coding facilitated the use of an analytic method from consensual qualitative research (CQR). In CQR, general patterns define categories in which all participants are represented; typical patterns define categories in which half or more participants are represented; and variant patterns define categories in which two or three to less than half of the participants are represented (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997).

Of the final list of 51 codes, three codes were identified as general patterns, and seven codes were identified as typical patterns.

Once again the analysis of the interview data underwent an advisor audit. The researcher's advisor validated the findings and the plan for conducting the focus group. Focus groups can be used to explore the findings of a series of interviews (Roulston, 2010). The general patterns that became apparent through the analysis of the interview data were presented to the focus group for further discussion. Using different methods (i.e., focus group, interviews) in an attempt to support a single conclusion is a form of triangulation that adds validity to the findings (Maxwell, 2013).

The transcription of the focus group was added to the data in ATLAS.ti, and each statement from the focus group was categorized into the existing codes. The interview data, the focus group data, and the analysis process were shared with a peer who has completed coursework in qualitative research. A peer audit affirmed that the codes and the analytic process used were appropriate for the study. The researcher's advisor also reviewed the focus group data and discussed the results.

Finally, Glesne (2011) suggested keeping analytic notes or observer comments to note what surprises (to track assumptions), what intrigues (to note personal positions and interests), and what disturbs (to help track possible prejudices and stereotypes) the researcher (p. 77). These memos are part of the audit trail that contributes to the validity of the study. Comparable to memos, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested keeping a journal of the research experience to keep track of thinking during data gathering and analysis. These notes were part of the ongoing discussion with the researcher's advisor in an effort to minimize research bias throughout the study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the findings and the analysis of the six interviews that were conducted. Comments from the five participants in the focus group are summarized to triangulate the findings. The themes that emerged are also described.

Summary of Data Collection & Analysis Methods

The aim of this study is to identify the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers from the perspective of the EBD teachers in one school district. Of the 32 teachers who received an e-mail with an invitation to complete the Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale (MTES), 16 completed the scale, and six volunteered to be interviewed and completed a personal interview. Immediately following each interview, the notes were typed up and sent to the participants for member checking. Using ATLAS.ti software, the notes were reviewed line by line and coded. ATLAS.ti is a computer program that enables the researcher to capture words, phrases, or whole statements from uploaded interview documents and to assign them to codes. The initial analysis yielded 31 codes. Upon further analysis, the researcher found three codes to be too broad. After more specific codes were identified, a peer review and advisor audit affirmed the appropriateness of the 51 codes listed in the final analysis.

General, typical, and variant patterns emerged during data analysis of the interview data using a consensual qualitative research method (Hill et al., 1997). When all of the participants made statements related to a particular code, this established

a general pattern for the code. If at least half of the participants' statements fell under a particular code, this was considered a typical pattern. Fewer than half of participants' statements under a particular code resulted in a variant pattern. The three general patterns became themes; typical patterns became subthemes; and variant patterns were dropped as insignificant. The general patterns were presented to five participants in a focus group that was recorded and transcribed. The results of the data analysis are described below.

Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale Results

The MTES was sent to 22 teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and to 10 special education strategists who also serve students with EBD in the selected school district. Of those 32 teachers, 16 completed the MTES, and six participants volunteered to participate in a personal interview and a focus group. Table 4 shows the participants' ranks in personal efficacy (PE) (i.e., one's belief that he or she has the skills to facilitate student learning), general efficacy (GE) (i.e., one's belief that he or she can overcome environmental influences to facilitate student learning), and overall efficacy (i.e., PE and GE combined) among the participants who completed the MTES. Although their scores on the MTES were dissimilar, the six participants identified three essential elements (i.e., general patterns) for teaching students with EBD: an unconditional teacher-student relationship, a classroom environment conducive to learning, and individualized instruction.

Table 4.

Participants' Ranks Based on All 16 MTES Scores

Name	Overall Rank	PE Rank	GE Rank
Erin	1	1	1
Luke	2	2	2
Katie	7	3	13
Sara	11	9	11*
Ned	14	16	12*
Gina	15	13	15

*Sara and Ned had the same score for the general efficacy scale.

Are EBD Teachers Born or Made?

Interview Data

Before discussing the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD, it is important to consider participants' perspectives on whether a person can develop the qualities and learn the knowledge and skills of effective EBD teachers. Five participants stated that only certain people have the appropriate qualities to be effective ED teachers. Gina said some teachers' "black-and-white personalities" make it more difficult for them to work with students with EBD. Likewise, Katie stated, "Some teachers have a better personality," and she added some teachers are better suited for working with students with intellectual disabilities, for example, than with students with EBD. After experiencing different specialties in her special education preparatory program, Erin said that she would not be suited to teach students with intellectual disabilities or students at the elementary level. "Little kids scare me," she admitted. When asked if some teachers are better suited to teach students with EBD than others, Luke answered:

> Some teachers are book smart. Those teachers have a good understanding of theory and assessment tools. They have great knowledge retention. However, they lack a connection with students at an emotional level. Many of these teachers end up switching [disability] categories.

Ned and Sara identified particular qualities of effective EBD teachers, but they differed on whether these qualities can be acquired. Ned said that, in addition to being willing to listen to students, EBD teachers must be empathetic, consistent, fair, compassionate, and patient. Ned observed that some people are more disposed to these characteristics than others. Sara also stated that EBD teachers must be patient, but she said that patience can be learned. She also noted that EBD teachers must have courage to follow through with new interventions, re-try strategies that have failed, and "do this all year."

Focus Group

The focus group participants were presented with the three themes that emerged from the interview data. The question of whether an EBD teacher is born or made was not posed to the focus group, a gross oversight of the researcher. However, during the focus group, two participants made comments about how effective teachers innately address student issues. Ned observed that successful teachers—general education or EBD—quickly identify a student's needs and address those needs "naturally." Luke contrasted the role of the general education teacher and the EBD teacher:

> I think that an [EBD] student—as soon as there is a behavior that's present—they're removed [from the general education classroom] and then come to us where we have the ability to put the pieces back together. So there is a certain

amount of authenticity that comes with this. Because that's what we do. That's what we do best.

Theme 1: Unconditional Teacher-Student Relationship

"If a teacher develops a relationship with a student, then the student will make greater progress." Gina

Interview Data

All of the participants emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship for the effective instruction of students with EBD. The centrality of the student-teacher relationship was reflected in Katie's comment: "Teachers have to build relationships with students," and in Gina's comment: "In order to get to know a student, a teacher has to build a relationship with the student." Gina also noted that building these essential relationships with students takes time.

According to the participants, the teacher-student relationship can either help or hurt the student. Ned noted, "The biggest thing that the students gain [from a positive teacher-student relationship] is that they know that someone is in their corner. They have an adult who is not blood-related who will go to bat for them." In her interview, Katie said, "Students need to feel wanted in class. They have to feel a part of the class." Contrastingly, Sara recognized the detrimental effect of negative teacher-student relationships. She said, "No kid should feel unwanted, unseen, or unheard," and she asked, "Why would you feel good about yourself when you feel unwanted?"

Katie observed that building a positive teacher-student relationship is one primary factor that teachers can control in a student's development: "We can only control how we react or don't react to students from 8 to 3." Both Sara and Erin commented in their

interviews that they do not get "mad" with students; instead, they are "disappointed" in regard to students' choices. Erin made this comment in regard to interacting with students with EBD: "You have to have amnesia when working with students with disabilities. You have to be able to let it go." Luke said that he could show more empathy in his interactions with students with EBD in ways that other teachers could not because of his experience from a "bad background."

Teacher attitude. In addition to commenting on their own interactions with students with EBD, the participants made observations about regular education teachers' interactions with them too. As Sara indicated, "The attitude of the regular teacher makes a difference." She said some teachers adapt lessons and express that they want students with EBD in their classrooms; she also said other teachers know how to make adaptations, but they refuse. Similarly, Luke said most teachers want the student's behavior to change but will not consider a change to the way they interact with the student.

Luke and Ned encountered teachers and administrators who did not want students with EBD in their classrooms nor schools. Luke said, "Some teachers are knee-jerk. 'Get him out and keep him out.'" Similarly, Ned said some teachers think, "He's an [EBD] kid; you deal with him." Luke added this observation based on his 11 years of teaching in an educational day program (EDP) for students with EBD: "When a student showed up at EDP, it [was] clear that the school didn't want the student back." Sometimes a school actually refused to take a student back from EDP.

Listening. One typical pattern that emerged from the interview data was how an emotional disturbance disability can impact a student's academic success. Sara observed,

"An emotional disability disrupts learning, processing, and communication." She added that until a teacher figures out the root of a student's issue, then "you can't do anything." Luke also noted the educational impact of an emotional disturbance. He said students with EBD are usually bright, but there "is a lot of clutter going on." Once the teacher gets "the inside healthy," then learning becomes "organic," and students feel better about themselves. In her interview, Katie acknowledged the impact of an EBD on learning when she stated, "Behavior and instruction go hand in hand." Teachers are not therapists, but one way a teacher can help students clear their minds and prepare to learn is by listening.

Four of the six teachers interviewed identified listening to students as an essential skill for effective teachers of students with EBD. As Sara observed in her interview, having students go right into the classroom at the beginning of the day can be overwhelming. Sara said that she has morning meetings for students to get "all of that out" from the night before at home or from the previous day in school. Listening allows teachers to get to the function of a behavior: "There is a reason for their behavior—always a reason for their behavior." Among the "broad range of issues" Sara has addressed with her students are "boyfriend trouble" and rape. She said, "Resiliency is an important factor in how students respond to perceived and real crises in their lives." Also, Sara observed that students' reactions to these life events vary. To help her students build resiliency, Sara said she provides continued support to her students.

Like Sara, Erin said she allows her students to talk about issues outside of school. She commented, "A lot of a student's issues are not about school or about the teacher." When listening to students, Erin determines if a student wants to brainstorm possible

solutions to a problem or just get something off his or her chest. Sometimes Erin lets students talk through what is bothering them "so that they can let it go." She explained how she lets students "vent," and she does not mind that it may include off-color language, but she said that she does not allow students to use that language in front of other students or staff. In this way, Erin sets behavioral boundaries for her students while allowing them the opportunity to express themselves openly and honestly.

Erin said she prides herself on "getting the whole stories" when students talk about behavior incidents. However, Erin admitted when she is not involved in a student incident or does not witness the incident, she prefers the general education teacher or administrator to handle the incident as it would be handled with students without disabilities. She does not feel she needs to be involved in "everything that happens with the student." Dealing with a variety of authority figures and being subject to rules that apply to everyone will be a part of a student's lived experience beyond school.

Once a teacher has listened to the student, the teacher must respond carefully. Erin noted, "Yelling is ineffective, so I don't do it." Naturally, the message in the response is as important as the tone of the response. Sensitive issues require a carefully thought-out response. Ned stated in his interview, "Teachers can walk a fine line because the home life sometimes is causing [the student's] issues." In other words, teachers should be careful how they respond to information that students divulge.

The impact of a student's home life also came up in Luke's interview. The impact of the home environment is "huge." Luke asserted students must have their basic Maslow hierarchy of needs met. "Dad may be in prison, mom is an alcoholic…if the student were to be moved into an environment where the basic Maslow hierarchy of needs were met,

then the student may thrive." Luke said he is not surprised when transient students have EBD, because they lack a stable environment.

Reflecting on the students he has served during thirteen years of teaching students with EBD, Luke "think[s] there may have been three kids" who had serious mental issues; the others had issues resulting from a bad environment. Alcoholism and abuse in the home are two of the issues Luke said his students have experienced. He added, "There is some point in a child's growth when an event or a series of events occur to trigger an emotional response." Listening, then, becomes the primary avenue for discovering the student's issues. "One-on-one sit downs are good for discovering what may be the issue." Luke advised that teachers and parents need to know how to recognize what is going on with a student and that they need better intervention skills. He lamented that most teachers want the child's behavior to change but will not consider a change to the way they do things.

Listening carefully to students in crisis allows Luke to tailor his responses and interventions to meet students' needs. Luke distinguished an emotional crisis from an attention crisis. An emotional crisis is a reaction to a troubling event for the student. When students are in an emotional crises, Luke said that students are often scared and think that they have no options. An attention crisis is an outburst to get the attention of an adult; as Luke stated, "Bad attention is better than no attention."

Finally, Gina noted the importance of doing a lot of "processing" with students with EBD to help them through issues. Like Sara, Erin, and Luke, she recognized the student's home life as a "huge factor" that impacts student learning. Gina said students with EBD are bringing what they have seen and heard at home to school with them. This

includes “preconceived notions” the student has learned from family members. Gina advised that teachers of students with EBD have to have empathy, but they also have to know when to let go, or they can carry students’ issues with them outside of school.

Although Ned and Katie did not specifically say that listening is an essential skill for an effective EBD teacher, they did acknowledge the stress that some students experience due to issues outside of school. Katie put it this way, “Some students come from crazy bad home environments.” Comparably, Ned stated, “A lot of students have chaotic home lives.” He relayed one example of a student who was on the phone at school with her father. The father said to his daughter, “I don’t want you.” Ned concluded the story saying, “That is very difficult for a student to take, naturally.”

Focus Group

The focus group participants’ verified the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Four of the five focus group participants commented that teachers should be sincere and authentic in their interactions with students. Katie said that students can tell if you are sincere or not. Sara observed that students “know the difference between hearing and listening. There’s a huge difference, and they’ve figured that out very, very early on—if you are actually going to take the time to listen.”

Sara indicated that another key component of the teacher-student relationship is for the students to know that some behaviors are “bad,” but students are not. “We just let them know that it’s how to behave that’s the issue, not the person.” Beginning the school year with this mindset, explained Sara, is part of “building rapport in hopes of the relationship.” She also said that she does not take her students’ behaviors toward her personally. Similarly, Ned said that he does not react negatively to student behaviors.

"It's like they do things, and it's like, 'Why aren't you getting mad?' It's not worth it, you know. We'll get through this. 'But you should be mad. Everybody else gets mad.' I'm not everybody else." Ned continued, "Interact with them on their level," let them know "we all make mistakes," and "go on."

In addition to responding supportively to negative behaviors, Katie expressed the importance of shifting the focus to what the students do well. She mentioned *Love and Logic*® and *The Nurtured Heart*® as two approaches that emphasize positive behavior and minimize attention to negative behaviors. "You know what you did wrong. I want to know what you did right. Okay. You know, they get excited about that 'cause a lot of times all they hear about is what they did wrong." Ned added, "Sometimes the hardest thing for [the students] to do is recognize they did something right."

Allowing students to start each day anew is another key factor when building unconditional teacher-student relationships according to the focus group participants. Sara explained, "I think to develop that trust…the teacher is aware that every day is a new day and that every day brings new things, not the same as the day before." Gina responded to Sara's comments: "I agree. As long as they know you're not going to hold anything against them…it's a new day, a fresh slate." Ned summed up the discussion about the teacher-student relationship this way:

> I think everybody said the same thing and that is be a caring teacher, 'cause if you care about the kids, the kids will know it, and they'll do just about anything for ya. It may take a while, but they'll get there.

Theme 2: Classroom Environment Conducive to Learning

"The teacher needs to be aware that the learning environment greatly affects students with behavior disorders." Ned

Interview Data

All of the participants agreed that the organization of the classroom environment affects the behaviors of students with EBD. Luke illustrated how he and his co-teacher are creating a home environment where students cook and eat breakfast and lunch together when students need it. Luke suggested that the school environment he and his co-teacher create may be more consistent than the home environment for some students: "There is an understanding that when students leave our room, they are going home for the day. The students often do not want to go home, because it is more reinforcing and consistent at school." Luke observed that there is often no follow-through in the home environment for his students, and this reduces the effectiveness of behavior or academic lesson plans that include a home component. Furthermore, Luke estimated, "More parents are inept to deal with [student] behavior than school personnel."

A few participants commented on the décor in the classroom. Erin said that she lets students decorate her room so that the students feel some ownership of the classroom. However, Katie warned, "Less is more. Do not have a lot of crap up in your room. It can be distracting, and it can easily be ripped and destroyed." Along the same line, Ned cautioned "brightly red walls would negatively impact some students with [EBD]," because the color red can cause students to get upset or angry easily.

Two participants commented on environmental factors that enable students to remain calm and focused while working on schoolwork or transitioning from school to

home. Gina suggested that a relaxing, calming space or an individual learning place can help students focus on an assignment without distractions. Sara said, "At the end of the day, it is a good practice to have the lights down with soothing music to help students relax before getting on the bus." As Luke mentioned, going home for the day can be a stressful time for students.

When it is not possible to keep students calm, four of the six participants recognized that students need to de-escalate when they are in crisis. When a student exhibits outward behaviors (e.g., screaming, destruction of property) in response to a perceived adverse stimulus (e.g., teacher, peer, undesirable assignment) without the ability to calm down and resume the classroom activity appropriately, then the student is in crisis. Sara noted that the special education (SPED) resource room is the destination for students whose crises begin in the general education classroom. Two participants spoke specifically about having a special place for students to cool off. Ned asserted, "Most of the time, students look for a place to de-escalate." Erin expressed that she felt fortunate to have such a place, a conference room, next to her classroom where her students can de-escalate. She stressed that the conference room is a "full-sized room," not a "timeout room" or a "quiet room," indicating her perception that the size of the room is important. Erin said, "Removing students from the [crisis] situation is a priority." When it is not possible to remove the student from the situation, Katie explained, "You have to know when to clear the room to keep everyone safe."

Three participants observed the uniqueness of the environments where they work. Ned compared student behavior in the public school setting where he used to teach and the psychiatric facility for children where he now teaches: "Students become more out of

control at [the psychiatric facility] than in the schools." Sara noted that "about 30%" of the students at the psychiatric facility where she teaches are on an individualized education plan (IEP) and therefore receive special education services. In other words, Sara estimated that 70% of the students she serves do not receive services for special education in their public school settings. Finally, Luke noted that the EDP is the "last stop" in his district for students with EBD. During the years he taught in the EDP, Luke said he impressed upon the students that it was the last placement in a district-run facility. The school district contracts with other agencies for more restrictive placements or provides educational services in more restrictive placements when necessary.

Beyond the physical environment of the classroom is the general atmosphere of the classroom. Katie, Sara, and Luke agreed that the environment must be consistent. In his interview, Luke said "There's gotta be consistency. You must give the same message." Sara also emphasized the importance of consistency and the use of common terminology with students from one setting to the next to avoid confusion. Katie echoed this idea in her interview as well: "We all need to be on the same page for a student to be successful." Similarly, Ned referred to the need for "stability" in the classroom.

Besides consistency, Sara and Katie said teachers should maintain high expectations for students. Sara asserted, "The expectations for the student with [EBD] should be the same as it is for students without disabilities. Do not lower the expectations." Similarly, Katie commented, "Sometimes teachers dumb down the material [for students with EBD], and they shouldn't." Katie also described the atmosphere of her classroom: "It is not all roses and sunshine. I am firm, and I have expectations."

Participants identified a few other factors they felt were important in a classroom environment for students with EBD. Sara offered that it is helpful to educate peers on how to relate to a student with EBD so that the peers do not inadvertently trigger behaviors. Ned advised that it is important to allow for side conversations to accommodate the social nature of these students. Erin said she uses a lot of humor in her classroom to keep the mood light thereby reducing the chances that students' agitation will affect their on-task behavior. Luke explained the family environment he and his co-teacher attempt to create to fill a void the students may have at home. "We show and express love for our students." Luke claimed "there have been minimal behaviors" in this family environment. Finally, Sara and Katie observed that building in breaks makes work time more productive. Katie said, "We work for a while, and we play a little bit."

Clearly, the participants agreed that a positive classroom environment is essential for the success of students with EBD, and the teacher determines the atmosphere of the classroom. Katie recognized the teacher's power over the classroom environment: "We can make school a living hell, or we can make it a wonderful place. I want to make it a wonderful place."

Focus Group

All of the focus group participants identified factors they felt contributed to a positive classroom environment. A few talked about their classroom environments as a safe place that is shared by students and teachers. Gina asserted, "It's not my classroom; it's our classroom. So they know to take care of it. So if they're gonna come in and destroy it, then they pick it up." Taking care of the physical classroom is only part of the shared responsibility. Sara also pointed out that students with EBD share an unwritten

code: “What happens in that room stays in that room.” She added there is a “respect part of that.” In other words, students respect each other’s privacy and do not talk about events in the resource room to students outside the resource room. Respecting each other’s privacy is part of what makes the resource classroom for students with EBD a safe place.

Gina explained how the classroom environment may be the only safe environment the students know: “They feel valued, whereas in a lot of areas of their life, they don’t.” In the same way, Luke observed, “I think a lot of our kids come from fragmented or broken homes and that they don’t have a lot of constants in their life.” The school environment contrasts the home environment for many of the students: “We’re a safe spot, a safe zone for the kids.”

In this safe environment, students learn from each other without feeling superior or inferior. Sara said that when students observe the behavior and consequences of other students, they realize they do not want to make the same choices. She elaborated, “[The other students] are there to help because they’ve observed, they’ve watched, they’ve talked, and they know you have this going on and, ‘Boy, I don’t want that.’” Along the same lines, Luke offered, “You have peer interaction: ‘Well, I used to do this, and this is how I do it now, and it seems to work.’” Luke observed that the interaction and collaboration among students benefits them all. He commented, “We get to see other students modeling the behavior that we’re looking for.”

Three focus group participants discussed the overall atmosphere of the classroom. Katie opined that the “feeling” and “energy” of the classroom should be black and white. Ned countered, “I think [the students] need to know that we also see things in grey.”

Katie detailed her position: When students are removed from general education classrooms for behaviors, students are relieved to have clear expectations to return to their classrooms. She said if students "don't know exactly what to do, they're gonna struggle." Vague statements cause confusion. "I think too many times, we say, 'Be nice to each other.' What the hell does that mean?" Consequently, Katie concluded, "A structured area might just help their day."

Like Katie, Ned elaborated his position: "I think things have to be black and white, but I think kids also need to know we live in grey." He said that a student can have "a complete meltdown" if they respond negatively to a black and white environment. To illustrate his point, Ned offered an example. He said that a girl who has been abused by her father will have difficulty working with a male teacher no matter what the teacher's style of teaching. Luke diplomatically ended the discussion:

> I agree with the grey, and I agree with the black and white. Every student, their individual being is black and white. But we create kind of a grey because what Gina does is not applicable to what Sara does nor should you compare.

Luke's comments allude to the third general theme that emerged in this study: individualization.

Theme 3: Individualization

"One size does not fit all." Sara

Interview Data

The third general pattern is individualization. All of the participants claimed that meeting the individual needs of students with EBD is a skill of effective teachers. Erin, Katie, and Luke explained the necessity of getting to know the individual needs of each

student. Because each student has individual needs, Sara said that it is important to "find out what works" for each student; Ned asserted that teachers have to "vary lesson delivery"; and Gina said, "The instructional plan depends upon each student's needs. Identifying and meeting individual student needs is an ongoing process. Ned cautioned that "students evolve, and strategies have to change to meet those evolving needs."

Characteristics of students with EBD. Although each student with EBD has individual needs, the participants described characteristics they have observed to be common among these students. Erin stated that all of the fifteen students on her caseload are boys. Luke estimated less than 20% of the students with EBD he has taught in 13 years were female. Male students, in Ned's experience, tend to prefer hands-on, kinesthetic activities.

The high intelligence of students with EBD was a typical pattern from the interview data. Sara and Luke said that many of these students are "bright," and Katie observed that most students with [EBD] are "intelligent." Ned went even further saying these students can be "academically advanced." Because of this high aptitude, Sara said student behaviors can be the result of boredom at times.

Ned noticed trends among students with EBD over his 20-year career. For example, Ned has witnessed an increase in self-abuse among students. He also said, "Academics are pushed early so that students are learning more academically than they have in the past at the expense of social instruction." He said that although students with EBD are social, they are also "socially stunted." Sara, Ned, and Luke stated in their interviews that social skills instruction is essential for students with EBD.

As discussed above, students with EBD tend to exhibit outward behaviors that result in a crisis. Luke noted, "Some students with [EBD] conduct themselves poorly, but it is not the result of a disorder." He said that there is a difference between conduct and behavioral disorders. Students with conduct disorders tend to have more control over their behaviors than students with behavioral disorders in his experience.

Necessity of data collection. Erin, Sara, and Katie asserted that data collection is an important skill for effective teachers of students with EBD, but each stated a different purpose for data collection. Sara said, "Data helps you to see patterns." Erin noted the use of data for lesson planning: "Gathering this information is important for developing an individualized curriculum. Lastly, Gina recognized that comprehensive data collection is vital when determining if a student will qualify for services under the EBD label: "If I am going to label a student [EBD], then I am going to be sure to collect a lot of data and compare him to his peers."

Erin said that a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) ensures comprehensive data collection. All of the data collection methods mentioned by participants could be a part of an FBA. Erin and Gina said they review cumulative files thoroughly. Erin also interviews students to find out their thoughts regarding their behaviors and academic progress. Sara said, "The student piece of the FBA can be eye-opening," because what others observe may not be the reality for the student. In addition to student interviews, interest inventories (Katie and Luke) and learning inventories (Erin) are methods of gathering information about student preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. Katie also said she conducts "a lot of observations" to collect information on student behavioral and academic strengths and needs. Ned explained he is "not a fan" of paper evaluations but

prefers conducting observations over a week or two, and Gina wished she had more time to conduct observations.

Besides collecting information from the student perspective, information is also gathered from the parent and teacher perspective. Katie conducts parent interviews. Sara and Katie said the school psychologists administer checklists or rating scales to parents, teachers, and students to determine behavioral strengths and concerns. Sara explained that rating scales are helpful to compare parents', students', and teachers' responses to the same questions.

Knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, data collection were contrasted in Erin's and Luke's interviews. Erin "loves" completing FBAs. She uses the assessment data to develop individual behavior interventions plans. Then she continues to gather and monitor the behavioral data to determine if she needs to revise or revamp the behavior plans. Luke, on the other hand, said he did not conduct any assessments at EDP. He explained, "Students had been assessed over and over before arriving at [EDP]."

Individual needs of students with EBD. Teachers cannot assume what works for most students will work for all students with or without disabilities. Sara gave this example, "Not all students want to transition to doing all work on the computer; some students are more comfortable with paper/pencil activities." More specifically, Gina stated that students with EBD are "their own breed." Sara observed that when working with these students, "everyday is a new day," and "you never know what you are going to get." Because each day for students is different, Ned warned, "A strategy that works today may not work again," and "the teacher needs to be adaptable to survive."

The individual needs of students were apparent in Erin's and Katie's comments as well. Erin said each student event is "very situational" and requires a unique response. Katie noted the necessity of knowing a student's individual behavior plan to respond to this student in crisis: "You have to know what to say and what not to say."

Ned said the nature of the psychiatric facility makes individualized instruction difficult for him. Students come and go from the facility, and he does not know what students will need when they arrive. The students vary in age, grade, and ability. He said he is currently helping a student with Calculus while his other students are taking vastly different classes.

Effective interventions for students with EBD. Despite the individual needs of students with EBD, the participants named interventions that they found to be generally effective with students. Erin, Ned, Luke, and Katie mentioned differentiating instruction or delivering lessons in a variety of ways as an effective approach to teaching these students. Both Erin and Luke specifically listed different ways students learn (e.g., visual, hands-on, auditory). Luke suggested using "multiple modalities" when teaching students to determine "what catches" a student the most.

Both Luke and Katie asserted that being "transparent" with students was an effective strategy for them. Luke explained, "We are honest with students even when the answer is not one that the students want to hear." This honesty builds trust as part of the unconditional teacher-student relationship described above. Also, these students know exactly what to expect when teachers are honest and transparent as Katie noted.

Erin, Luke, and Katie said using high-interest materials and activities is an effective intervention. For example, Erin shared that she organized a fantasy football

draft in the fall. Comparably, choice of activities was identified as an effective intervention by Erin and Katie. Katie "give[s] students ownership of the curriculum" and "let[s] students drive the curriculum" whenever possible. In addition, Erin and Katie both stated that they motivate students by having them monitor their own progress.

One other intervention mentioned by both Erin and Katie was the importance of leaving the past behind when working with students with EBD. Erin averred, "You have to have amnesia when working with students with disabilities. You have to be able to let it go." In the same way, Katie said she does not "hang incidents over a student's head" and that she does not remind students of their misbehaviors. Erin was the only participant to say she celebrates small academic and behavioral victories with students and that she "pushes self-advocacy" skills so that her students become more independent.

Katie talked the most about effective interventions of all of the participants. She cited scaffolding of skills as an effective intervention. She explained that she meets "students at their level and pushes them a little bit." Working one-on-one and in small groups, making instruction relevant, and using the *Nurtured Heart Approach*® (i.e., giving minimal attention to negative behavior and praising appropriate behavior) were among the other interventions Katie claimed were effective in her experience. Katie also said it is important for the teacher to know each student's triggers (i.e., antecedents of outward behaviors) and when each student needs a break. She stated that when students do exhibit significant behaviors, she talks to them about strategies for how to handle similar situations better in the future.

Measure of students' success. Based on the participants' statements, the measure of student success can vary depending on the grade level. For Sara, "the way an

elementary [EBD] teacher can measure her success is to see how well a student adjusts in middle school." Erin gave examples of how student success could be measured while students are in high school. Her examples of student successes include a student who makes it through a science class without an issue or a student who skips fewer classes than they have before. "Progress in these areas can be huge." For her students to apply the skills she teaches in real-life situations outside the classroom is a measure of student success for Erin.

Beyond the high school, Erin stated she wants her students to be productive adults. Likewise, Luke offered, "I hope that something sticks with my students long-term." Although Ned did not specifically identify a measure for student success, he said it takes time for students to make progress. "General education teachers must realize that students aren't fixed right away."

Luke shared that the success rate of students with EBD tends to follow "the rule of three," a concept he learned from one of his former professors. He explained that the rule of three suggests that one-third of students with EBD will get better, one-third will stagnate, and one-third will get worse. Luke said that his background is comparable to his students'. Of the 10 men in his circle of friends from troubled boyhood, a handful are dead; one is in the hospital for mental issues; one needed reconstructive surgery from a horrible accident; and "a few of us have gotten better." Luke said he shares the rule of three with his students, and he has them consider which they will be. Finally, Luke suggested a measure of his own success: "If I can reach one kid with one thing, I've done well."

Focus Group

Individualized instruction. When individualization of instruction was presented to the focus group as the third general theme that emerged from the data, the participants agreed that individualization is an essential skill of successful EBD teachers. Luke stated the reason for individualization: "We all come to the table with different needs, and that's what makes us and them individuals." Katie noted that the individual needs drive individualized plans. She said that when students are in crisis, she reminds them of their plans. "What's your plan? Bet you got a plan." She said that each student has to be reminded that he or she has a plan, and he or she has to be prompted to follow it.

A few of the participants emphasized that what works for one student may not work for another student, even if the other student is in a similar situation. Sara said, "It would be real easy to have [a] standard," but she admitted individualization is difficult, because each student has a plan, and each plan has to be fluid to meet a student's changing needs. Katie commented in her interview, "You might need to change the point sheet every three weeks. You might need to do it every two weeks. You need to find what's gonna work to motivate this kid." Point sheets are often used at the elementary level to track behaviors and to motivate students to succeed.

Ned agreed that individualization is difficult, and he stated, "It's just a daily, day-to-day thing you just do. You don't plan it. You can't." Similarly, Katie asserted, "I think individualized is in the moment." Sara explained students with EBD constantly react to their environment. As a result, she said the teacher must always be thinking about what strategies to apply right away. Luke offered an example to illustrate spontaneous individualization. "I go with my heart, do what I feel the kid needs at that moment, 'cause

it could be different in a day. 'I don't want a high five. F you.' Ok, but that's what worked yesterday."

Both Sara and Ned stated that the special education resource room is more conducive to individualization than the general education classroom. Sara observed, "Some [general education] teachers would love to [individualize], but their environment and dynamics don't allow them to do it." Ned contrasted the two environments this way:

> The general education teacher has thirty-something kids in the classroom, and they can't stop and deal with it. Whereas, you may have one or you may have five, but you've got the time to be able to deal with them and help them.

Delivering individualized instruction is difficult; convincing students of the fairness of individualized instruction is also difficult. Sara offered, "Fair doesn't always mean equal," meaning some students require more extensive accommodations than others to succeed. Luke said that he explains to students "what works for me may not work for my co-worker." He also said that he discusses with his students "the fact that somebody is going to need something that you want, but don't necessarily need, and the difficult task is to get over it." In other words, a student may want an accommodation to make a task easier, but he or she may not need the accommodation like another student needs the accommodation to succeed.

Student diagnoses. The focus group participants discussed the pros and cons of diagnoses and categorical labels for students with EBD. Luke complained that he "struggles with labels," and the qualifying statements for a student to be eligible for special education services under the EBD category are too vague and thus open to interpretation. "We don't have a state in the Union that matches" in regard to eligibility

criteria for EBD. He said that if a student comes from a home plagued with addiction, or if a student is sleeping in a car, the student will not function at 100 percent. “That doesn’t mean that kid is emotionally disturbed.” He went on to say, “Out of all the kids that I’ve ever come in contact with, I have had one that I believe had true mental illness and was emotionally disturbed.” Luke explained that “medical jargon really damages the kids a lot.” Instead of helping students with the issues in their lives, school professionals are “railroading our children” into SPED with labels that place limits on students’ abilities.

Ned, too, doubted that some students identified for SPED truly qualify. He remembered a student who qualified for SPED under the other-health-impaired (OHI) category “because she was lactose intolerant.” Students qualify for SPED under the OHI label if they have a medical condition that negatively impacts their educational performance. Ned continued, “Whether it’s OHI or whether it’s [EBD], it does become the catchall. ‘We can qualify this kid.’”

Some focus group participants indicated that diagnoses and labels do not help them individualize instruction. As Gina noted, “Sometimes you might have a student that might have eight different diagnoses and you’re like, where do you start? Well, you do what’s best for the kids. It doesn’t matter what the acronym is.” Similarly, Katie asserted, “If the student comes with whatever string of letters, fabulous. How do I help them?” Ned, however, offered one counterpoint. He said that he attended a session on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that he is better able to serve some students because he gained knowledge of how PTSD can affect his students. The diagnoses, based on the discussion, provide useful information, but do not give enough information to tailor

instruction to meet each student's unique needs. Sara had this to say, "It's looking at the whole picture. Each kid comes with their own baggage. Again, individualize."

Data collection. Most participants said that data collection can help a teacher identify a student's individual needs so that the teacher can implement appropriate interventions accordingly. However, Luke warned that the student behavioral data are "only as valuable as the objectivity of the one recording it." Luke and Ned commented that some general education teachers score behavioral checklists with the intention of qualifying the students for SPED. Luke complained, "We have kids that are qualifying left and right on teacher emotion, and that's not fair to our kids." In the same way, Ned said if a few teachers observe a student struggling, they may say, "Here's how we score it so we can get them qualified [for special education services] under the [EBD category]." In addition to obtaining special education services for students, Ned said some teachers simply want the students with behavior issues out of their classrooms.

By conducting observations, Ned claimed he could determine the degree of the student's behavioral issues. "The five times I observed through the window, that kid's doing well." After some observations, Ned asserted he could ascertain, "Something's setting off; it's not an emotional disturbance here."

Just as Ned mentioned observing through the window, Katie said she wished "we could have a camera in [the classroom] to see what [the student's] behavior's like, you know, see what the antecedent was. Was it asking them to do seatwork? Was it spelling?" She explained that when a teacher goes into a classroom to observe, "sometimes the behavior changes, and you're like, 'Oh, you little stinker, you know that I'm in here.'"

Despite the potential pitfalls of data collection, it is still an essential skill for serving students with EBD. Luke stated, "I love data; I think it is a valuable tool." Collecting data with a variety of instruments from a variety of sources helps to validate it. Luke explained that collecting information from one teacher does not yield sufficient information about a student. "This is one teacher. This is one day. It's an isolated incident." When a behavior is "universal across [the student's] environment," Luke continued, "this is an issue." Luke concluded, "If we didn't have [that data], we'd be going on gut feeling, and that also would not be fair to the kid."

Sara and Ned specifically stated that the results of an FBA reveal student's individual behavioral needs. The FBA is a comprehensive evaluation composed of selected assessments (e.g., interviews, observations, checklists, rating scales) based on the questions a student's educational team wants to answer in regard to the student's level of behavioral functioning. Sara emphasized the necessity of conducting a student interview as part of the FBA. "I love that interview piece…I find out more on kids than anything else." A thorough assessment, according to Sara, must include a student interview. "We collect all this data, do all this testing, but not that many people talk to the kid—directly, specifically, talk to the kid."

Chapter Summary

Three general patterns emerged from the interview data. In each of the interviews, the participants identified developing an unconditional teacher-student relationship, creating a positive classroom environment, and individualizing instruction as essential skills for effective teachers of students with EBD. To develop a positive teacher-student relationship, the teacher must possess a positive attitude and master the skill of genuine

listening. A positive environment includes the physical design and the atmosphere of the classroom. Finally, knowledge of student diagnoses, effective interventions, and general characteristics of students with EBD is helpful, but each student is different. The results of data collection reveal students' individual needs, and effective teachers individualize instruction to address those needs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Although there is considerable information in the literature on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers, the purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of EBD teachers in a particular district on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers. Chapter IV described the themes that emerged from the interview data. These themes were confirmed by the focus group. All participants in this study agreed that developing an unconditional teacher-student relationship, creating a positive classroom environment, and individualizing instruction are requisite skills for the effective teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). Furthermore, most participants in the study agreed upon qualities and knowledge that are necessary for mastery of these requisite skills. This chapter compares the findings of this study with the pertinent literature on the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective teachers of students with EBD.

Assertion One

Effective EBD teachers build unconditional relationships with their students.

All of the participants emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship for the effective instruction of students with EBD. Many researchers have asserted the importance of establishing positive teacher-student relationships (Cartledge & Johnson, 1996; Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Gentry et al., 2011; MacSuga-Gage et al., 2012; Marchant & Anderson, 2012; Rappaport & Minahan, 2012; Scott et al., 2012). The

results of one study by Hamre and Pianta (2001) showed a strong correlation between the teacher-student relationship and school performance. Although it is generally accepted that teacher-student relationships affect academic achievement and behavioral performance, studies demonstrating this link are scarce.

Some studies have investigated causes of teachers' attitudes toward students. Poulou and Norwich (2002) found when teachers perceived the cause of a student's behavioral difficulties to be within the student or to be a result of the teacher's behavior, then more teachers in the study felt better able to address the behavior problem. Conversely, when the cause of the student's issues were perceived as school related (i.e., lack of appropriate services, irrelevant curriculum), more teachers felt anxiety, stress, or helplessness (Poulou & Norwich, 2002). In another study (Lago-DeLello, 1998), a relationship between a student's at-risk label and teacher attitude was established. Students who were labeled at-risk had a significantly different experience in the classroom than students who did not have the label (Lago-DeLello, 1998). Similarly, the participants in this study observed that general education teachers often do not want students with behavior issues in their classes.

When students are included in the general education classroom, the expectations of the teacher affect the student. Owens and Dieker (2003) conducted a study in a school district with 100,000 students and 7,000 teachers. They randomly selected students with EBD from the caseloads of teachers who were nominated as outstanding teachers in this district. In focus groups, these students discussed why they thought these teachers were perceived as effective. The students expressed that these teachers were friendly but firm and that the teachers held high expectations for their students. On the other hand, teachers

with low expectations have a negative impact on their students. In a study of 11,844 students and 2104 teachers across 84 schools, Denamet and Houtte (2012) found in schools where teachers have low expectations, students reported low teacher support and higher rates of self-reported misconduct. The student perspective in these studies complements the teacher perspective in the current study: students rise or stoop to meet teacher expectations.

Listening

Listening is an important part of building a relationship. Most participants indicated that effective teachers are good listeners. Stronge (2007) stated, "Effective teachers practice focused and sympathetic listening to show students they care about not only what happens in the classroom but about students' lives in general" (p. 23). Most of the participants explained negative factors outside of school that impact their students. They also emphasized the importance of helping students to talk through outside issues so students have fewer mental distractions throughout the school day.

Academics and behavior go hand in hand (Lingo, Slaton, & Jolivette, 2006; Scott & Kamps, 2007). The primary finding of a study by Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, and Wehby (2008) was that school adjustment is predictive of academic achievement in reading and writing. When students misbehave, they spend less time in class which leads to low academic achievement (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Three of the participants in this study noted the negative impact of an EBD on a student's academic achievement. According to these participants, listening to students talk about their issues and thought processes is the primary way to lessen the negative impact of the EBD on academics.

Similarly, listening is foundational when working with students in crisis (Long, Wood, & Fescer, 2001). When teachers listen to students, they are able to identify student perceptions and motivations which inform effective interventions (Long et al., 2001). Teachers demonstrate that they care when they listen. Students who perceive that their teachers care for them are more apt to like school (Hallinan, 2008). The participants in this study noted that students respond to teachers whom they believe genuinely care for them, and they noted that one way to demonstrate that care is through genuine listening.

Researcher's Experience

The researcher has taught students with disabilities for 20 years. For the past decade, he has specifically taught students with EBD. In his experience, the most important factor for student success is an unconditional teacher-student relationship.

As a teacher of students with EBD in a self-contained elementary setting one school year, the researcher had a classroom with eight students. By the end of the school year only one student transitioned to full inclusion in the general education classroom. That student's general education teacher visited the student at least twice a week in the self-contained classroom, informed the student what was taking place in the general education classroom, and let the student know he was missed. Contrastingly, the general education teachers of the other seven students did not visit the students in the self-contained setting. Furthermore, those teachers expressed concern when the students tried to transition slowly into the classroom.

At the elementary school where the researcher worked for nine years, the principal emphasized the importance of relationships. Teachers had to line the hallways in the morning to greet students. One student with EBD would come into the school with

his head down, dragging his backpack. He had to walk the length of the school to get to his second grade classroom. Most mornings, as he went through the gauntlet of teachers greeting him and giving him high fives, he would raise his head and reach the end of the hallway with a smile.

Another example of relationship-building in this school took place when students had behavior incidents. When a referral was made to the office for a behavior incident, the principal would take over the classroom momentarily so that the general education teacher could step out into the hallway, debrief with the student about the incident, and assure the student he or she would be welcome to rejoin the class as soon as possible. The principal recognized the critical nature of the unconditional teacher-student relationship.

The researcher also taught in a residential facility that housed 16 students with behavior issues; only half of these students had received special education services for EBD in their home school districts. One 16-year-old female student refused to enter the researcher's classroom for the first two months of the school year, because she did not want to work with a male. Every day, the teacher greeted the student in the hallway, and every day, the student responded with an expletive, if she responded at all, and she sat at a carrel in the hallway. When the researcher gave the student an assignment and offered help, the student ripped up the assignment and offered more colorful language. A female paraprofessional worked with the student in the hallway.

Occasionally, the student wandered into the classroom. She sat in the back of the room with her back to the teacher. She would whistle or sing to attempt to disrupt the class. The researcher told the student he was pleased that she came to class but that she would have to respect the others in the classroom so that they could be successful. The

student would usually make a commotion as she left, often using graphic language to insult the researcher. When working with students with EBD, progress is usually slow, even imperceptible at times. However, by the end of that school year, the student was sitting in the front of the classroom, laughing at the researcher's corny jokes. The student recovered some credits through independent study, graduated early, and thanked the researcher for being her teacher.

Unfortunately, the researcher has witnessed situations similar to those of the participants where the general education teacher has made it clear, directly or indirectly, that a student is not wanted in his or her classroom. In such a situation, it is impossible for the student to return to the general education classroom with any success. The student naturally wants to spend time with the EBD teachers who place no conditions on the respect and encouragement they offer to the student. These teachers create safe havens for students.

Assertion Two

Effective EBD teachers create safe and consistent environments for learning.

All of the participants agreed that the organization of the classroom environment affects the behaviors of students with EBD. For example, four of the participants indicated that students in crisis need space to cool off, and two participants specifically stated there should be a safe space in the classroom for students in crisis to cool off. This is consistent with the literature on supporting and educating students in crisis (Long et al., 2001). One participant pointed out that her students de-escalate in a full-sized meeting room next to her classroom, and she emphasized that it was not a time-out room. A meta-

analysis by Vegas, Jenson, and Kircher (2007) found that time-out rooms are effective but aversive and that they are more often used in self-contained settings.

Three of the participants discussed the uniqueness of the educational settings in which they teach. Two of the participants work in a psychiatric facility and the other worked for eleven years in an educational day program. One of the participants observed that the students at the psychiatric facility display more significant behaviors than the students he taught in the public school setting. Siperstein et al. (2011) conducted a study of students with EBD in different school settings and found the least restrictive environment did not impact the quality of the instruction or the level of student success.

Beyond the physical environment, the general atmosphere of the classroom is important. Three participants specifically stated the need for consistency in a classroom for students with EBD. Effective EBD teachers establish classroom routines (MacSuga et al., 2012; Hirn & Park, 2012) and consistent positive and negative consequences (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; MacSuga et al., 2012). Consistency also extends to the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBP). Research has shown a strong relationship between high fidelity of implementation of EBPs and academic achievement (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Farley, et al., 2012; Kretlow & Blatz, 2011).

Researcher's Experience

In the researcher's experience, students with EBD respond well to routine, predictability, and consistency. At the elementary level, the researcher has used level systems so that students can track their mastery of skills that lead to a transition to the general education classroom and success in that setting. In the high school setting, the

researcher currently provides students with folders with tools to help the students self-monitor their progress toward their individual goals.

The researcher has always established a safe environment for the students. A safe environment is where students have the option to take a break without saying a word, get something off their chests without being lectured, or enlist the teacher to help develop and practice a solution to a problem. This is similar to the environment described by the participants in this study.

It is interesting that in 20 years of teaching students with disabilities, the researcher cannot recall any students with attendance issues. Although students throughout the years have exhibited significant behaviors and complained loudly and colorfully about school work, peers, teachers, and school activities, they come back to school almost every day. This appears to be a clear indication that the school is a safe and comforting place for students.

The researcher had the opportunity to witness just how important the school climate is to student success. One year after the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, the researcher's elementary school was placed on a school improvement plan for not making adequate yearly progress. During that school year, there were 413 office referrals, two for every one student in the school. Thirty percent of the student population had more than one office referral. Through a collective school effort, the staff began sharing responsibility for student success and raised expectations. The office referrals declined each year. After six years, the office referrals were down to 144, only seven percent of the students had more than one office referral, the students made adequate yearly

progress, and the school was identified as a blue ribbon school. The school and classroom environment are vitally important for student success.

Assertion Three

Effective EBD teachers individualize instruction.

There is considerable research on general EBPs that have proven to be effective for students with EBD (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Hirn & Park, 2012; Haydon et al., 2012; Mac-Suga et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2012). However, one size does not fit all. All of the participants asserted the importance of individualizing instruction for students with EBD. By law, students in special education must have an individualized education plan (IDEA, 2004). As a result, several of the CEC (2012a) standards for EBD teachers involve meeting individual academic and behavioral needs.

Characteristics of Students with EBD

Researchers have described characteristics and tendencies that are most prevalent in students with EBD (Ryan et al., 2008; Siperstein et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2012), and the effective EBD teacher should have knowledge of a "range of characteristics within and among individuals with [EBD]" (CEC, 2012a, p. 1) as well as of exceptionalities that may co-occur with EBD. Most of the focus group participants in the current study stated that diagnoses were not particularly helpful when attempting to identify students' individual needs and the interventions to address those needs. Students with the same diagnoses may respond very differently to the same situation. One participant said that some students show great resilience when faced with traumatic experiences like abuse; whereas other students struggle significantly when faced with seemingly insignificant

issues. A diagnosis does not guarantee that a student will behave a certain way or that a student will respond to a certain EBP.

Data Collection

Half of the participants said effective EBD teachers collect data, particularly through a function-based assessment (FBA). The FBA enables an effective teacher to identify appropriate interventions to address the student's individual needs through identification of the function or purpose for a behavior (Iovanonne et al., 2013; Kern & Wehby, 2014, Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006; Wehby & Kern, 2014). Studies have shown that function-based interventions significantly reduce problem behaviors (Payne et al., 2007; Turton et al., 2011) while interventions that are not function-based are ineffective (Payne et al., 2007). This is because the function of the inappropriate behavior will be satisfied through a more appropriate replacement behavior when a function-based intervention is selected.

Researcher's Experience

As the participants in this study pointed out, the application of EBPs does not guarantee success for students with EBD. What works for one student may not work for another student. What works one day with a student may not work the next day. The best, and perhaps only, way to identify what works best for a student is to establish the function of the student's behavior. As Sara said, behaviors are purposeful. Discovering the reason for a student's behavior allows the teacher to help the student learn and practice alternative and appropriate behaviors that will serve the same function as the target behavior has served.

Students perform more successfully when their needs are met. Students who do poorly in a general education classroom because they feel unwanted and unheard often perform better in the EBD classroom where their individual needs are heard and addressed. In the researcher's experience, the function of a student's behavior at times is to get sent out of the general education to work in the more welcoming and comforting environment of the EBD classroom.

Students with EBD make the most progress when teachers are transparent and honest. Collaborating with students to develop behavior plans, helping students monitor their own progress, and setting realistic expectations for students increases the likelihood of students' success.

Final Proposition

The participants' belief that effective EBD teachers are born and not made is false.

In a study by Prather-Jones (2011), teachers of students with EBD agreed that the demands of the job require certain personality traits. Five of the six participants in this study contended that only teachers predisposed to certain personality traits can effectively teach students with EBD. Some literature has supported the notion that not everyone possesses the inherent qualities to be effective teachers of students with EBD (Scott et al., 2012) and that teaching students with EBD is a calling (Helm, 2006a). Cancio and Conderman (2008) observed that "many teachers do not have the skills or ability to effectively work with students identified as EBD" (p. 32). Even those EBD teachers with the requisite dispositions at the beginning of their careers can acquire negative dispositions over time due to the frustrations they experience on the job (Helm, 2006a).

Although some qualities are difficult to measure, "we think we know [effective teaching] when we see [effective teaching]" (Scott et al., 2012, p. 4). A school administrator may assign a student to a certain teacher whom the administrator believes can best manage those student's behavior (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012). Chingos and Peterson (2011) concluded that it is easier to hire a teacher based on observed effectiveness rather than rely on on-the-job training or consider the teacher's highest degree earned. Their eight-year study in Florida of teacher effectiveness in reading and math for students in grades four through eight suggested that, although teachers are compensated for advanced education and experience, those factors do not significantly or consistently improve teacher effectiveness. If education and experience do not result in effective teaching, then the qualities of the teacher must be a significant factor.

Despite the prevailing notion that EBD teachers are born and not made, research demonstrates that teachers' dispositions can be changed. Howe, Davidson, and Sloboda (1998) questioned the reality of innate talents. They found the real determinants of excellence to be early experiences, practice, preferences, opportunities, habits, and training. Based on Deweyen studies, Nelsen (2015) observed that dispositions are clusters of habits that can be examined and changed through a process of inquiry in teacher education programs. Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw (2010) concluded that teacher candidates who demonstrated awareness of their dispositions tended to question the how and the why of their thinking and actions. In addition to teaching awareness of one's own disposition, teachers' modeling of positive dispositions influences the development of more positive student dispositions at the K-12 and university levels (Helm, 2006a; Nelsen, 2015).

Conclusions

Teachers of students with EBD know and apply basic EBPs found in the literature. However, students with EBD who have not responded to classroom and small-group instruction continue to stagnate academically and behaviorally despite these practices. The current research recognizes that students with the most significant behavioral needs require intensive, individualized instruction. Application of EBPs without consideration of the function of a student's behavior is ineffective.

Although students with EBD have individualized education plans, these plans may not include function-based interventions or the plans may be limited by the resources available in the education setting. Teachers can learn the qualities, knowledge, and skills necessary to be effective teachers of students with EBD. Even teachers with the requisite qualities, knowledge, and skills will be ineffective if they work in educational settings that are not conducive to the use of intensive, individualized, function-based interventions.

Recommendations for Future Research

According to the literature, effective EBD teachers possess something intangible and difficult to measure. The literature refers to character traits, disposition, personality, and other terms that are not clearly defined when attempting to describe what effective EBD teachers inherently possess. Future research should define these terms and describe the relationship between the defined qualities and student success.

The literature overwhelming supports the three themes that emerged from this study. However, there are few rigorous studies to support the assertions in the literature and in this study. More research should be conducted to define an unconditional teacher-

student relationship and a positive classroom environment. Studies involving student and teacher perspectives of factors that distinguish unconditional from conditional teacher-student relationships and that distinguish positive and negative classroom environments would help define these broad, but essential skills of effective EBD teachers. Furthermore, quantitative studies should be conducted to investigate the link between these independent variables and academic achievement and behavioral performance. Once the factors of an unconditional teacher-student relationships and positive classroom environments are illuminated, then researchers can use the independent variables and investigate their relationship to student achievement and behavior. The greater the understanding of the qualities, knowledge, and skills of effective EBD teachers that are generally accepted but difficult to measure, the easier it will be to teach these skills to teacher candidates and practicing teachers.

Recommendations for EBD Teachers

Based on the findings of this study, EBD teachers would benefit from evaluating their level of skill for developing unconditional teacher-student relationships, creating positive classroom environments, and individualizing instruction. To develop positive teacher-student relationships, teachers need a positive attitude and genuine listening skills. Becoming aware of influences (i.e., perceived cause of behavior issues) on a teacher's attitude provides an opportunity for the teacher to reevaluate his or her perspective and acquire a more positive attitude. The teacher's attitude toward students with EBD affects the students' inclusion in the general education classroom, the teacher's willingness to provide accommodations, and the teacher's expectations for student achievement. Therefore, not only should the EBD teacher adopt a positive attitude toward

students, but the EBD teacher should also educate general education teachers on the impact of a positive attitude on students. When teachers are educated about students with EBD and when they are exposed to students with EBD, their attitudes become more positive, and their self-efficacy for teaching students with EBD increases.

The other primary component of a positive teacher-student relationship is genuine listening skills. When teachers listen, they show that they care. Listening also helps teachers to identify and address underlying student issues so that students are ready to learn. Listening actively takes patience and continued practice. When students have de-escalated after a crisis and they are ready to debrief about the incident, the teacher's active listening skills are vital. Students may want to get something off their chests, or they may want to brainstorm possible solutions. EBD teachers should consistently work on active listening skills to be effective for students.

EBD teachers should create a positive classroom environment, designate a place for students to cool-off after a crisis, and develop a classroom atmosphere based on consistency. This means implementing EBPs with fidelity and consistently applying positive and negative consequences. It also means establishing classroom routines that students can depend upon.

By listening to students and by monitoring the effectiveness of evidence-based practices on each student, the teacher will be best able to meet each student's individual needs. Listening and progress-monitoring are just two examples of data that the teacher may collect as part of a comprehensive FBA. More than the student's background or diagnosis, the FBA reveals the underlying purpose for a student's behavior. When

teachers design positive interventions that satisfy the purpose for the student's target behavior, then the target behavior is no longer needed.

Recommendations for Administrators

Research has demonstrated that education about students with disabilities increases teacher perceived self-efficacy and a teacher's willingness to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Professional development efforts to increase teachers' knowledge about students with EBD can lead to greater inclusion of students and improve teachers' attitudes toward these students. In addition, creating a culture of shared responsibility for student success and a focus on the importance of unconditional teacher-student relationships can significantly improve the success of all students.

Limitations

The participants in this study were from one school district. Of the 32 teachers invited to be a part of the study, six teachers volunteered to be interviewed, and five of those teachers participated in a follow-up focus group. Although three general themes emerged from the interview data, the results cannot be generalized to all EBD teachers and special education strategists in this district nor outside of the district.

The results of this qualitative study rely upon authentic responses from the participants. The data from the interviews and focus group may not be accurate if participants were dishonest, if they responded based on what they thought they should answer, or if participants responded based on their beliefs about themselves and about their teaching that are not true in practice.

The researcher already knew all of the participants in the study prior to interviewing them. These prior relationships could have inhibited some participants' responses. However, these relationships could have also caused participants to be more forthcoming.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Online Survey Consent Form

TITLE: *Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Practices for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: *Joseph Leggio*

PHONE # *701-200-2275*

PROJECT ADVISOR: *Dr. Katherine Terras*

PHONE # *701-777-2863*

DEPARTMENT: *Teaching and Learning*

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

As a teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (ED), you are invited to complete a survey with the factors that make some ED teachers more effective than others. The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Leggio, a doctoral student in Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota (UND) under the supervision of Dr. Katherine Terras, an associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at UND.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete the Modified Self-Efficacy Scale (MTES) which follows this consent form. If you choose to complete and submit the MTES by the deadline, you will be eligible to win a $50 gift card in a drawing. At the end of the MTES, you will be asked if you are willing to be contacted for an interview and for participation in a focus group. If you are chosen to participate in an interview and in the focus group and you agree to participate, you will be given a $30 gift card for your time upon completion of the interview and the focus group. You will not incur any costs for being in this research study. A summary of the results of this study can be made available to you upon request. By participating in this study you may benefit personally in terms of better understanding and reflecting on the most effective practices of ED teachers.

Although there is minimal risk in this study, some participants may feel uncomfortable responding to questions on the Modified Self-Efficacy Scale and/or in the follow-up interview. Should you become upset at any point in the study, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer any questions. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about the study, you may contact an agency that provides mental health services in your area.

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study. The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name will not be used in data analysis or any final reports. Only the researchers will have access to the data.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any other questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact the principle investigator Joseph Leggio at (701) 200-2275. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone else.

Checking Yes and continuing with the survey indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You can save and print a copy of this form.

Appendix B
Informed Consent for Interview and Focus Group

TITLE:	*Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Practices for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	*Joseph Leggio*
PHONE #	*701-200-2275*
PROJECT ADVISOR:	*Dr. Katherine Terras*
PHONE #	*701-777-2863*
DEPARTMENT:	*Teaching and Learning*

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

As a teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (ED)—henceforth referred to as ED teachers—you are invited to be interviewed with the purpose of exploring the most effective practices used by ED teachers. The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Leggio, a doctoral student in Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota (UND) under the supervision of Dr. Katherine Terras, an assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at UND.

Your participation in the initial interview will last approximately 60 to 75 minutes. There will be a brief demographic questionnaire and discussion questions in an informal, conversational format that will explore your insight on the subject of essential skills of teachers of students with behavior disorders. It will be your choice as to how detailed you want to answer the questions. Interviews will not be audiotaped; the interviewer will take copious notes. The notes will be typed and presented to you for review. All interview data will be analyzed, and any patterns in the day will be presented to you and other participants in a focus group upon your consent. The focus group will last from 45 to 60 minutes.

Although there is minimal risk in this study, some participants may feel uncomfortable responding to interview questions. Should you become upset at any point in the study, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer any questions. If you would like to talk to

someone about your feelings about the study, you may contact an agency that provides mental health services in your area.

Although you will not be paid for being in this study, you will be receive a $30 gift card for being interviewed and participating in the focus group. You will not incur any costs for being in this research study. A summary of the results can be made available to you if you request. By participating in this study you may benefit personally in terms of better understanding and reflecting on the most effective practices of ED teachers.

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study. The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name will not be used in data analysis or any final reports. Only the researchers will have access to the data. Audio data will be kept by the principle investigator for at least 3 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any other questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact the principle investigator Joseph Leggio at (701) 200-2275. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone else.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

_____

Subject's Name

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

Appendix C
Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale

Personal Efficacy

If one of my students with ED couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.

When any of my students with ED show improvement, it is because I found better ways of teaching them.

If my supervisor suggests that I change some of my class curriculum, I would feel confident that I have the necessary skills to implement the change.

If one of my students with ED mastered a new concept quickly, it probably would be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept.

When the grades of my students with ED improve, it is usually because I found more effective teaching approaches.

When a student with ED is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it to the student's level.

Between my teacher-training program and my own teaching experience, I have obtained necessary skills to be an effective teacher of students with ED.

If one of my students with ED did not remember information I gave in the previous lesson, I would know how to increase the student's retention in the next lesson.

If students with ED in my class become disruptive and noisy, I feel assured that I know some techniques to redirect them quickly.

If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.

I have enough training to deal with most learning problems in my resource room.

If parents comment to me that their child behaves much better in my resource room program than at home, it would probably be because I have some specific techniques of managing the child's behavior which they may lack.

When one of my students with ED does better than expected, many times it is because I exerted a little extra effort.

General Efficacy

When it comes right down to it, a teacher of students with ED can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on the home environment.

The amount that a special education student will learn is primarily related to family background.

The time spent in my resource room has little influence on students compared to the influence of their home environment.

Because of lack of support from the community, I am frustrated in my attempts to help students.

If students aren't disciplined at home, they aren't likely to accept any discipline in my resource-room program.

When all factors are considered, teachers of students with ED judge how much to expect from a student by giving the teacher an idea of the parents' values toward education, discipline, and so on.

If parents would do more with their children, I could do more in my resource room.

If one of my new students with ED cannot remain on task for a particular assignment, there is little that I can do to increase that student's attention.

Even a teacher of students with ED with good teaching abilities may not reach many students.

The influences of a special education student's home experience can be overcome by good teaching.

Appendix D
Interview Protocol

Overview of Interview

Based on your experience and success as a teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (ED), I would like to know your thoughts about what qualities, knowledge, and skills are necessary for an effective teacher of students with ED.

Interview Items:

Qualities of Effective Teachers of Students with ED

1. Are some teachers better suited to teach students with ED than other teachers? If so, what is it about those teachers that makes them more successful with students with ED?

Knowledge of Effective Teachers of Students with ED

2. What knowledge should an effective teacher have about individual learning differences of students with ED?
3. What knowledge should an effective teacher have about learning environments and social interactions in relation to students with ED?
4. What knowledge should an effective teacher have about the development and characteristics of learners with ED?

Skills of Effective Teachers of Students with ED

5. What instructional strategies do you use when teaching students with ED?
6. How do you plan your instruction for students with ED?
7. What assessments do you use to determine the needs of your students with ED?
8. How do you collaborate with teachers and parents of students with ED?

Self-Efficacy

9. Describe the correlation between your teaching knowledge and skills and the performance of your students with ED.
10. How effective are you in responding to students with ED when they exhibit behavior issues?
11. Describe the extent to which environmental and home influences affect your ability to teach students with ED.

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