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Assessment Process of EBD Students: Professional Perspectives

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Assessment Process of EBD Students: Professional Perspectives

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

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Abstract

There are an increasing number of students labeled as "Emotionally or Behaviorally Disordered" (EBD) each year (Seidman, 2005). Less than one half of students labeled as EBD graduate (Lehr & McComas, 2005). Early identification is crucial in order to get EBD students the resources and supports that they need to succeed in school. Previous research shows that early identification and early provision of services leads to better outcomes (Kauffman, 1999). This places importance on the properly and timely assessments of students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. The current qualitative study seeks to examine whether current special education assessment processes, along with eligibility regulations, provide an adequate way to target the proper interventions in a timely manner. This research looks at the assessment process from the view point of the professionals who work closest to the students. Findings indicate for school social work are also explored.

Keywords: Emotional and behavior disorders, professional perspectives, assessment processes

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Twelve to thirteen percent of school-aged children in the U.S. suffer from Emotional Behavioral Disorders with at least moderate impairment (Seidman, 2005). Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) is a large category which is used commonly in educational settings. EBD students can display an array of characteristics that make it difficult for them to learn within a main stream setting. These can be things from not being able to make or maintain relationships, acting out against themselves or others, not being able to express themselves or their needs in a productive way, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, etc. (Emotional or Behavioral, 2014).

Common behaviors shown by EBD students can include getting out of their seats, yelling or cursing, disturbing peers, hitting or fighting, ignoring the teacher, complaining, arguing, excessively, stealing, not being truthful, destroying property, not complying with directions, temper tantrums, do not complete assignments, etc. (Emotional or Behavioral, 2014). All EBD students have and display different characteristics and behaviors. This is one reason the assessment process is a vital part of each student's academic success. Each student may need a wide range of supports and or resources to help them with their academic success. These supports can be anything from using sensory tools at their desk to getting extra time on assignments, more one on one help or even just scheduled breaks. The supports and resources all depend on each individual student and their specific needs.

Without proper supports for these children, previous research has found an increase of negative outcomes. These outcomes include poor grades, poor personal relationships, and failure to complete high school. Unemployment, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation are all also associated with untreated EBD (Seidman, 2005).Furthermore

school-aged children present with challenging emotional and behavioral problems and may be resistant to traditional special education approaches. Sometimes even with special education supports, these students tend to have very poor school and post-school outcomes (Stewart, 2010).

Special education departments face serious shortages of teachers and teachers with proper training. The biggest area with shortages is of special education teaching EBD students (Cancio, 2013). Students with EBD can present intensive needs. They require intervention and instruction by well-trained and qualified teachers (Christensen, 2015). Without properly trained teachers stress can build not only with the student, but with the teachers as well. The burnout rate for teachers working with EBD students is higher than any other field of special education   (Seidman, 2005).

Well-structured services in special education for students with EBD are continually improving, but there is still more to be done. Being labeled as EBD can bring stigma from other students. Teachers with special skills are needed and make a huge difference in the success of EBD students. Focusing on improving special education through more effective instruction by well-trained teachers would go a long way toward realizing better and less stigmatizing special education (Cancio, 2013). As social workers we have a responsibility to look out for the vulnerable students. Each EBD student can be vulnerable in multiple ways and it is important as social workers to see these and support the students in the proper ways. Social workers are also a valuable link between school and parents.

The school environment is a primary place for development of youth. The school environment is a major source of influences that guide social behavior. Teachers are

charged with helping students with learning and behavior problems. This includes

students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Kauffman, 1999). Teachers have to

help students overcome the effects of developmental influences that have resulted in

antisocial behavior patterns (Sutherland, 2005). Students with emotional and behavioral

disorders are often placed into self-contained settings to provide more focused academic

and behavioral supports. There continues to be developments in instructional contexts of

self-contained and general education classrooms (Maggin, 2011).

Students who are determined eligible for special education services because of

their emotional or behavioral disabilities present a broad and complex range of

disabilities, needs, behaviors, and challenges to the public schools that serve them

(Kauffman,1999). There are few standardized assessments for EBD students when

compared to those available for intelligence or academic achievement. Behavior rating

scales and procedures for EBD students are available, but they can take a lengthy period

of time to use. One downfall to some assessment tools is that teachers and other

educators can be used as part of tests for EBD. This means their opinions are used based

on comparisons to other students they have taught and can affect the assessment process

(Kauffman, 1999).

Before any assessment begins, the parents are notified and are informed of all

parts of the process. After the permission is given by the parents, the assessment team has

30 school days to complete all parts of the assessment. The assessment team can include

the guardian(s), special education teacher, at least one general teacher (if they have more

than one), a district representative (principal), psychologist, social worker, speech

pathologist, and occupational therapist. This is all dependent upon the student and their

needs.

   The current assessment tools for students are The Functional Behavioral

Assessment (FBA) and The Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC). Each

takes a different approach on assessing the behavior and function of a child individually.

An FBA looks at and determines when and why a student exhibits problem behaviors. It

also looks at what reinforces the problem behavior and what support system will bring

out the desired behavior (Functional Behavioral Assessment, 2001).

   The BASC rates a student in five parts. These include teachers' ratings, parent

ratings, and a self-report of personality, the structured developmental history, and the

student observation system. All of these are scored by a specific computer software set up

for BASC. The strength of the BASC is its integrated approach of looking at a student

from many points of view (BASC-2 Summary, 2015). After the assessment is over, there

is another meeting with the parents to discuss the results and whether the student qualifies

for supports in the school setting. If the student qualifies in the meeting they discuss what

they want included in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The team writes up the IEP

and then it is sent to the parents to sign (Building the Legacy, 2004).

   Getting this assessment done in a timely process is crucial for the student's

success. If the process takes a long period of time it can cause the student to fall behind

academically. It can also cause the student to have more behavioral issues within the

classroom. This can add stress to not only the student, but the teacher and other students

within the classroom. There are limited supports offered to students before the

assessment process is complete (Assistance, 2013). They do not have access to the

special education teacher and get limited out of classroom supports. It can be extremely

taxing on all involved when students do not have the supports they need. The process can

become longer depending on how involved the guardian(s) is. It is important to have the

guardian(s) on board to get through the process and get the students the supports they

need as soon as possible.

The question, therefore, becomes: Are current special education assessment

processes, along with eligibility regulations, an adequate way to target the proper

interventions in a timely manner, in order to support EBD students to be successful? This

study attempts to contribute information toward this question by interviewing 6 school

professional, working directly with EBD students in Minnesota. Semi structured

interviews will be conducted to understand, from the professional's perspective, how well

EBD students are being supported in achieving positive outcomes. Positive outcomes

include better grades, better emotional regulation, engagement in classroom activities,

and better recognition of self.

Literature Review

EBD Students

EBD students display many different characteristics and behaviors. Examples of

EBD student characteristics are difficulty with learning within a normal setting, difficulty

to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers,

Inappropriate types of behavior (acting out against self or others) or feelings (expresses

the need to harm self or others, low self-worth, etc.) Some emotional or behavioral

disorders manifest themselves outwardly. Externalizing behaviors constitute and acting-

out style that could be described as aggressive, impulsive, coercive, and noncompliant.

Other disorders are more accurately described as "inward." Internalizing behaviors are typical of an inhibited style that could be described as withdrawn, lonely, depressed, and anxious (Emotional or Behavioral, 2014). Under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. These characteristics need to be present for a long duration of time and adversely affect their education.

 Not all students with disabilities are eligible for special education and related services under federal and state special education laws. In order to gain special education supports and related services under federal and state law, a student must qualify under one of the thirteen eligibility categories found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Building the Legacy, 2004). Two groups of children—the socially maladjusted and those with conduct disorders—are not eligible for special education services (unless they have another qualifying condition as well). Neither group is included in the IDEA '04 definition.

 Although social maladjustment is widely discussed, particularly when politicians and educators talk about discipline and violence in schools, IDEA '04 does not call it out as a special education category or as a subcategory of emotional or behavioral disorders (Building the Legacy, 2004). In me DSM-IV-TR, the APA defines conduct disorders as "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated" (2000, p. 93). Section 504 and ADA do not have exclusions for social maladjustment, so the educational system is required to make accommodations for these students even though they do not qualify for special education services (Emotional or Behavioral, 2014).

There is an increase in school children who show emotional and behavioral problems. This places an additional stress on the schools to deal with complex and challenging emotional behavioral situations that can affect academic progress (Kaufmann, 1999). Teachers in mainstream schools are confronted with significant classroom disciplinary challenges. This can cause them to spend a good amount of time disciplining students rather than teaching.

There are many things that can be done at home and in the classroom to improve the behaviors of EBD students. Improvements in coping skills can help with feelings of discomfort in stressful situations at school or at home. Tools that promote positive behavior in the classroom include clear behavior expectations, the teaching of expected behaviors, consistent responses and consequences for breaking rules, and individualized plans for children specific to their needs. Children with EBD, require a structured and predictable environment (Kauffman, 1999). These children do best when expectations are clear and consistent and their routine is kept as consistent as possible. Positive reinforcement is more effective than negative consequences in their interactions with students (Christensen, 2005).

Regulations and mandates

States are allowed to develop their own definitions and criteria to assist school districts in determining which students are eligible. This definition may not conflict with the federal definition or criteria. Minnesota is one of many states that have chosen to create a definition, criteria, and evaluation for the ED category. One of Minnesota's changes includes the change to the category's name itself. It has changed it to "emotional or behavioral disorders." Minnesota's law is broader than the federal definition and

includes criteria and evaluation requirements (Quinn, 2001).

In Minnesota, emotional or behavioral disorders are defined as a pattern of one or more emotional or behavioral responses. The responses can include depression, anxiety, mood problems, withdrawal, or behavioral responses. They also include aggression, unusual behavioral patterns, hyperactivity, or impulsivity (Quinn, 2001). All responses are out of the normal range of average students and affect their ability to learn.

The responses must have some affect on education or development. The behaviors must significantly be inappropriate for students' age and culture. They also must be over a period of time and must be present after initial interventions (Assistance, 2013). It is also important to see these responses and behaviors in more than one setting. These settings can be day care, home, school, community activities, etc.

The responses and behaviors can be shown in many ways. These can include isolating themselves, school refusal, perfectionist behavior, not expressing emotions, or sad dispositions. You can also see the responses through physical form. This can include stress, worry, and lack of sleep, eating changes, atypical communication styles, or dysfunctional relationship styles (Quinn, 2001).

Struggles faced by EBD students

Students who exhibit more problem behavior are less involved in academic interactions with teachers than their peers who exhibit less problem behaviors. Teachers sometimes must provide instructional activities that are at a lower instructional level for students with more problem behaviors (Kauffman, 1999). Students who exhibit problem behavior are sometimes provided with less instruction than those students who do not exhibit problem behaviors (Sutherland, 2005). Being segregated from the general

population is most significant with EBD students compared to other students with disabilities. (Maggin,2011). This can cause self esteem, bullying, and/or other peer related issues for the EBD students. Special education faces serious shortages of teachers. EBD students are more at risk and are less likely to be successful in the classroom without well educated special education teacher.

Imagine staring at a piece of paper for hours and accomplishing very little by the end of the day. This is a huge problem for students with EBD (Kauffman,1999). Many EBD students have a very hard time concentrating for even small periods of time. Many are diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). An EBD student can also have feelings of alienation and not being a part of any social group. This can cause them to feel isolated from their classmates and even their teacher. This can happen because of constantly being taken out of class for special supports. Children are often taken out of class to work with a small group and are isolated from others in their classroom for special support needs. Oftentimes, these students have trouble making friends and lack social skills. Skills such as making eye contact, initiating conversation, and making and keeping friends are challenging for EBD students. EBD students often have challenging behaviors that can cause them to be shunned by other students and sometimes even by their own teacher. School environments can be hard for EBD students because they often do not feel like they belong.

Among all those with disabilities those with EBD are among the most frequently unemployed. It is hard to help students with EBD transition from school to work. Students are often criticized. It is very hard for them to be successful focusing on academics for higher education. For students with EBD it is a struggle to focus and to be

able to see into the future. They are often looked down upon and find it hard to see what their strengths.

Findings from the current National Longitudinal Transition Study – 2 (NLTS2) suggest that students with EBD differ from the general population of youth in ways other than their disability (Wagner & Cameo, 2004). For example, as compared with the general population of youth, youth with EBD are more likely to live in poverty, have a head of household with no formal education past high school, and live in a single parent household. Nearly 38% of the NLTS-2 sample had been held back a grade, 75% had been suspended or expelled at least once, and about two- thirds were reported to have co-occurring attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Lehr & McComas,2005).

Students with EBD also experience greater school mobility than other youth with disabilities; 40% had attended five or more schools since kindergarten. Moving to multiple schools can be considerably disruptive and significantly decrease the chances of continuity across instructional programs. In addition, frequent moves increase the difficulties associated with establishing positive long-term relationships with adults and peers, and can heighten feelings of alienation and limit the sense of belonging (Lehr & McComas, 2005).

School Environment

It is still unclear if inclusion is best practice for the school environment. It has been argued that students can learn from appropriate interactions with peers. Academic goals of students with EBD should be the same as their peers anyway. Inclusion can be hard because that requires teachers to have a highly structured classroom and lesson plans that are relevant and accessible to students with EBD. This, however, can also benefit all

students in the classroom. Inclusion can prevent isolation of students with disabilities and allows all students to work together. Inclusion also encourages teachers and special education teachers to work together and builds skills that can support all students. With inclusion, teachers need to be willing to work with the students with disabilities and must stay very consistent. It can be hard on teachers to have to deal with outbursts and the number of children they have. The negative behaviors of students with EBD can distract the learning environment of all students. Students with EBD can take a greater proportion of a teacher's time, leaving less time for all other students. There are positives and negatives to inclusion, and professionals who argue for each side

For many students with EBD, placement in general education classrooms may not feasible. The idea of basing all services on students with EBD in a classroom may not be ok. There are also alternative placements for students with severe EBD, which include hospitals, residential placements, and alternative school settings. Effective programs for students with EBD can be expensive.

With the move toward greater inclusion and providing instruction in the general education curriculum, there is an increased need for general education teachers to be well-informed about how to effectively educate students with EBD. It is essential for teacher education programs to train general educators to work with the increasingly diverse populations in their classrooms including students with varying disabilities, abilities, socioeconomic standing, and cultural backgrounds. Necessary skills include the ability to actively engage students in coursework that is relevant to student backgrounds and interests, effectively organize a classroom environment, and manage student behavior

using strategies that are evidence based (e.g., techniques to increase active student

responding, small group or peer tutoring, applied principles of reinforcement, use of

immediate feedback). In addition, opportunities for staff development must be provided

on a regular basis to update and maintain skills (Lehr & McComas, 2005).

In general, EBD students experience general educational instruction to a lesser

degree than youth with disabilities as a whole. On average, 16% of youth with EBD take

all of their courses in special education settings (compared with 9% of youth with

disabilities as a whole who take only special education courses). Many also attend

alternative schools, which are generally designed to serve students placed at risk of

school failure due to circumstance or ability (e.g., behind in credits, suspended, pregnant

or parenting). In addition to these settings, a high proportion of youth who are

incarcerated have disabilities. One conservative estimate suggests that about 32% of

youth in juvenile corrections have disabilities (Quinn, Rutherford, & Leone, 2001).

Nearly 46% of the incarcerated youth with a disability were identified as having EBD.

Most often, the transition back into the traditional school setting for these students is

unsuccessful and they revert to alternative options (e.g., alternative schools, back into

juvenile corrections, or drop out altogether) (Lehr, & McComas,2005).

Functional behavioral assessment

A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is the process that gathers

information to assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams in developing

appropriate and individualized positive behavioral interventions and supports. An FBA's

purpose is to determine when and why a student exhibits problem behaviors, what

reinforces the problem behaviors, and what types of positive behavioral supports and

interventions would reduce the negative behaviors and increase the desired ones. When a

district wishes to conduct a FBA to collect data to assist in meeting a child's individual

needs, it must first obtain parental consent as it would for any other special education

evaluation or reevaluation. This would include FBAs conducted as part of a special

education evaluation or reevaluation and FBAs conducted to develop or modify a

behavioral intervention plan for a child (Special Education, 2014).The only exception

would be if the FBA is intended to assess the effectiveness of behavioral interventions in

the school as a whole and is not focused on the educational and behavioral needs of an

individual child (Vanest, 2009).

Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC)

The Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) (BASC-2 Summary,

2015) is an assessment of children and adolescents 2.5 to 18 years of age. It is designed

to evaluate various aspects of behavior and personality. This may include positive as well

as negative aspects. It uses various components to measure multiple aspects of a child.

Information is taken and analyzed from different perspectives. These perspectives may

include that of the parent, teacher, and child. This assessment looks at different

components that can either be used in combination or separately. The different

components include the Teacher Rating Scales, the Parent Rating Scales, and the Self-

Report of Personality. Then the data is input into a computer software and compiled for

results.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

After a student is through the assessment process and show they qualify for

special education they will be given an IEP. This is an individual education plan set up

specifically for the student. It shows the students characteristics and what seem to work for them. It also states goals and what progress has been shown.

A federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that public schools create an IEP for every child receiving special education services. The IEP is meant to address each child's unique learning issues and include specific educational goals. The IEP is a legally binding document. The school must provide everything it promises in the IEP (Stranberry, 2014).

By law an IEP is a statement a student's present level of performance, student's annual educational goals, special education supports and services that the school will provide to help your child reach goals. It also includes Modifications and accommodations the school will provide to help your child make progress and accommodations your child will be allowed when taking standardized tests. It shows how and when the school will measure your child's progress toward annual goals and transition planning that prepares teens for life after high school (Stranberry, 2014).

Minimally, the IEP team should have existing information from records, current and past teachers, parents and the student, current classroom observations, and knowledge of previously attempted interventions and their effects. If additional information is needed, consider the following sources of data. The list is not exhaustive and not all components are necessary in all cases. It is important to tailor additional tests and other evaluation materials to the individual case, based on review of existing data (Borneson, 2010).

Issues in Assessment and Education

A major problem for students when going through an assessment is the stigma that may come along with it. This fear is so common that students with EBD can have serious problems in school just because of the stigma (Kauffman, 1999).   The behaviors associated with EBDs are sometimes so overwhelming that almost no one could argue that the identification is unjustified. This fear can interfere with the benefits associated with intervention (Kauffman, 1999).

Early identification of children with EBD is possible and can have significant affects on student (Wagner, 1991). Long periods without supports can also be harmful to those with behaviors because without supports the behaviors can get worse over time. There is a strong case for early identification. Schools are getting much better a finding the behaviors and getting students supports earlier (Kauffman, 1999).

It is crucial for EBD students to get supports that match their individual needs in order for them to be successful. In order for them to get the supports they need identification of the problem and assessments need to be done in a timely manner. If this is not done it delays the interventions and individual education plan for that student. This can cause the student to fall behind academically and to have behavioral issues consistently in the classroom (Kauffman, 1999). We know quite a bit about students with EBD (e.g., characteristics, numbers, factors placing them at increased risk of school failure, where they are served, outcomes). Fortunately, we also know much about effective strategies that we can use with these students to improve their success in school and after they leave school. Shifting from a deficit model that focuses on multiple risk factors and moving toward a focus on strengths is a difficult, yet necessary, step for those

who hope to foster resilience, enhance competence, and facilitate successful school experiences for students with EBD (Lehr & McComas, 2005). This study attempts to answer the following question: Are current special education assessment processes, along with eligibility regulations and adequate way to target the proper interventions in a timely manner in order to support the success EBD?

Methods

Subjects

The study consisted of 6 participants who are professionals (teachers and paraprofessionals) who work with EBD students within mainstream schools in Minnesota. There were four women and two men. There was one general teacher, three EBD teachers, and two teacher's aides. The participants were selected based on their direct work with EBD students in the school environment. Recruitment began with the researcher distributing a study email to four professional contacts who are currently working with EBD students. Those four contacts were asked to forward the flyer to other colleagues who might be interested in taking part in this study. The recruitment technique used was snowball sampling (Exploration, 2009).

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was approved by the St. Catherine University Review Board at an Expedited Level of Review. The researcher has completed CITI training. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and the participants signed a consent form describing the nature of the study. The records of the study were kept confidential. Findings retrieved from the participant were kept in a password protected computer and the audio and transcript were destroyed on the 22nd of May, 2015.

Procedures

The findings were collected in face-to-face, semi-structured interview that were approximately 1 hour long. The interview was guided by a questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. (See appendix A) The questionnaire was based on information that was compiled through a review of the literature on EBD students and the mandates/evaluations regarding these students. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions and began with two questions regarding the respondent's experience in the field. The questionnaire then turned to topics of Minnesota's definitions of Special Education students, the evaluation processes of getting an EBD label, and supports for the students during and after the evaluation process. The interview was taped, and portions of the recording were transcribed. All interviews took place in private locations that was convenient for participants.

All interviews took place at locations convenient for the interviewee. The interviews took place at the offices of interviewees, a library (meeting room), a conference room, and private classroom. All were quiet areas with only the researcher and interviewee.

Analysis Techniques

The findings were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. This means themes emerged from the interview transcript (Berg, 2011). The first step in the analysis process involved open-coding. This is a technique where the researcher reads sentence by sentence through the transcript and summarizes it using a few words to describe the main concept of the statement (Berg, 2011). Axial coding was then completed. This is when similar statements that occur at least three times in the transcript will be placed into

themes (Berg, 2011). Each transcript was individually combed through and analyzed.

Once they were all individually coded the transcripts were then compared to one another.

This then developed the man themes within the research.

Findings

The research was looking to answer: Are current special education assessment

processes, along with eligibility regulations, an adequate way to target the proper

interventions in a timely manner, in order to support EBD students to be successful?

Overall, the professionals interviewed seemed to think the evaluation process was

working. Participants indicated that in general they felt that the assessment team focuses

on the best outcome for the child primarily by involving multi-disciplinary team members

to get a wide perspective of the problem and to see it from many points of view. The

child is always the focal point of everything they do. Participants felt that assessors really

look at all aspects of the child and make sure they are getting what they need from the

assessment and that always seems to be the focal point of what each professional is trying

to work towards at all times. These dimensions are explored within the context of the

following themes that emerged from the interviews: Initial interventions, roles of

professionals, parent/guardian involvement, Resources during evaluation, and length of

the evaluation.

Initial Interventions

The first theme that emerged from the data was the *initial interventions* that had to

be put forth before the evaluation process could begin. There had to be multiple efforts by

a general education teacher that had not been successful within the classroom. The theme

was shown as an important part of the evaluation before the assessment process could

even begin. The assessment team also looked for particular behaviors to have occurred

across more than one setting. (i.e. home, day care, extracurricular activities, etc.)

Participants discussed that it is important to try standard general education classroom

interventions before trying to get special education involved. The interventions are

sometimes called "initial interventions". Sometimes student's behaviors can be adjusted

with initial interventions. To find this out before the special education team gets involved

helps with not overloading them with too many students. This way they can focus on

those who really need the services. Participants discussed the special education team has

to prove the student has a behavior impairment that significantly impacts their learning in

the classroom and in the alternative setting.

This theme is supported by the following quote by a general education teacher:

> *We put into place various interventions that we can monitor over a 7week period*
> *to see if the student responds to them. This could include behavior charts, extra time on*
> *assignments, special breaks out of the room, etc. If after the 7 week period we are not*
> *seeing any improvement we can process to special education testing, if we have parental*
> *support. Typically if we reach this step administration becomes involved and chats with*
> *the parents about the interventions that we have tried and how they did not help.*

This theme was found through the interview process and was not part of the

original questions in the interview. Participants discussed that initial efforts were in place

in order to make sure that students are not thrown into the EBD assessment process if it

was not necessary and essential to their success. Initial efforts also help to identify thee

primary concerns for each child.

Roles of Professionals

Roles of professionals was another theme that emerged from the interviews. Each participant discussed the number and type of professional involved as a central component of the assessment process. The assessment team that evaluates the students is quite large and each of the professionals takes on an important role in the process. Each professional brings a different lens to the table. There are a lot of people coming together with a lot of knowledge to support a student who really needs it. In this situation, the child is viewed from multiple perspectives with the goal of figuring out where his or her difficulties lie.

This theme was supported by the following quotes by an EBD teacher:

The evaluation team is vital to the student's success. The assessment team can include the guardian(s), special education teacher, at least one general teacher (if they have more than one), a district representative (principal), psychologist, social worker, speech pathologist, and occupational therapist.

Each person places a role in the process and brings different outlook on the students. Each person is valuable in bringing together the best knowledge and to support the student. Typically an EBD student's family life is harsh. It is important to look at all aspects of the student to get them the best help we can.

The theme *Roles of Professionals* came up when participants were asked about the role of a social worker in the interview. The researcher found the theme come out in all interviews. The role of professionals had become crucial to the success of students.

Role of professionals are crucial to the success for EBD students. Each brings in a different kind of support and lens to the child. Each professional has a different role to

give each student more than one kind of support and more than one person they can use to move forward. Each professional has a specific role in the assessment process and is placed in the team for a specific reason. Bringing them all together gives the student the best chance at success.

Parent/Guardian's involvement

The theme of *Parent/Guardian's involvement* is important to the process was the second theme that was identified in the transcript. The participation of the parent is crucial in the student getting through the process and in a timely manner. Before any assessment begins, the parents are notified and are informed of all parts of the process. After the permission is given by the parents, the assessment team has 30 school days to complete all parts of the assessment. However, nothing can be done until the permission of the parent is given. If they parents were not involved or reluctant it could really delay the children's resources, if not stop them completely. It showed that parents are the best resources to information needed to understand the child. The theme really showed that without the parents children a not ever get the help they need.

This theme was supported by the following quote by a Teacher Aid:

The involvement of the parent in the EBD process is probably more involved than In many other areas of special education. Parents are asked to fill out multiple forms about their child and their behavior, as well as give information about the family history and history of the child as well. The parent's input is often times the most beneficial part of the assessment because parents often know their children best.

Parent involvement is vital. First, they must give the school permission to do the assessment. Second, we need the parent to answer the questions openly and honestly so

we can identify their children correctly. Some parents are reluctant to ask for help. If

they give false information the students may not get the help they need.

The theme *Parent/Guardian's involvement* showed it was crucial for the parents

to take part in the process. This was found through question seven of the interview and

was made important by almost all professional interviewed.

Resources during Evaluation Process

Another theme that came up was *Resources during Evaluation Process.* The

central idea that came from the theme was that there were resources the children could

access, but they were the resources that did not work within the initial interventions. This

partially has to be done to be able to see the behaviors and to get the correct assessment.

This is also hard on the student because they still have to wait to receive more resources

that will better support them.

This theme was supported by the following quote by an EBD special education teacher:

Many resources are not available until a student is actually qualified for special

education services. The only resources and tools available are those that were put in

place before the evaluation process began. This could allow for one-on-one time with a

mental health therapist, special breaks, from room, goal sheets, etc. Nothing new would

be added until we find out the official diagnosis at the final child study meeting.

The theme *Resources during Evaluation Process* was identified within transcripts.

It was brought up through the interview on question eight which asked what type of

resources children can get during the evaluation process.

Length of Evaluation process

The biggest theme that became apparent was *Length of Evaluation Process*. The theme of the length of the evaluation process was the most talked about within the interviews. This theme stresses the factors within the evaluation process. There are many things that can slow down the process and make it difficult for the students to get the resources and supports they need. It showed that the parent/guardian's participation and the professionals to have time are crucial in getting the students through the process. It also showed the positive that professionals working with the students do take the time to make sure that the student is getting the right assessment. It seems there is a balance that needs to be met between taking too long and taking long enough to get it right. It is crucial for EBD students to get supports that match their individual needs in order for them to be successful. In order for them to get the supports they need identification of the problem and assessments need to be done in a timely manner.

This theme was supported by the following quote by an EBD special education teacher:

The evaluation process is 7 weeks of interventions, followed by 21 days for assessments and typically going over the results is 2-3 weeks after assessments. So it's quite lengthy! The length of time for the evaluation process varies by the student, the special education team, the school district, and the parents. A lot of the process relies on the parents to get information done in a timely manner and turned in. Many times the special education teams within the schools are overloaded with students and trying to find time to fit them all in and get all of their stuff done. It can be difficult. There are a lot of factors that can slow down the process and do. I have seen the evaluation process take almost a whole school year.

This theme was the most talked about within the interviews. This theme came out the

most during the transcription process.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of professionals on the

evaluation process of EBD students. Twelve to thirteen percent of school-aged children

in the U.S. suffer from Emotional Behavioral Disorders with at least moderate

impairment (Steiner, 2012). This shows that there is a need to better understand EBD

students and access them properly. This research sought to understand the factors that

may need to be looked at in order for those students to get the best evaluation and

resources available to them. There were five themes that came out with interviews. All of

which help better understand the process as it is and how it could be improved.

The reason for the referral is the student's behavior, emotionality and/or social

competence. It is not important to specifically define those three terms, and it is not

necessary to delineate which one, two, or three apply to an individual student. The

student may have needs in any or all of the areas. The key concept is the underlying issue

is not a communication disorder, cognitive limitations, learning problems -– the child

may have an academic deficit but it is as a result of underlying social and/or emotional

and/or behavioral issues. This concept has not changed (Borneson ,2010).

The main concern was the length of the assessment process. This was brought up

by 5 of 6 of the participants. For some children it can be extremely difficult not having

the support they need and the assessment process taking so long can affect them not

getting those supports. It can significantly impact a student's progress when they are not

properly being assisted in their learning. It can also affect the teacher and the other

students within the classroom. It would be very beneficial if there was a way to shorten the length of the process or to be able to get the students better supports during the assessment process.

That very thought was brought up in almost all of the interviews. The participants all expressed that it is important for the assessment team to take their time in order to assess the child properly. It seems there is a balance that has to be met in order for the students to get what they need and for them to be able to get the assessment right. This is crucial also in the benefit of the student. Without proper supports for these children there is an increase of negative outcomes. These include poor grades, poor personal relationships, and failure to complete high school. Unemployment, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation are all also associated with untreated EBD (Steiner, 2012).

There is usually a team of professionals that could include a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a social worker, administrations, other mental health specialist, etc. This was a benefit to the assessment process. There are many professionals looking at a child from many different lenses. This can help the child get a thorough assessment and hopefully one that will work in assisting them in succeeding in school. The research showed that all professionals within the assessment process are beneficial and a strength of the process. The negative side is special education departments face serious shortages of teachers and teachers with proper training. The biggest area with shortages is of special education teaching EBD students (Cancio, 2013).

Another participant of the process that the research showed as beneficial was the parent/guardian. The special education EBD teachers interviewed emphasized that the parents or guardians can greatly effect if the assessment and intervention process was

slowed down or went smoothly. Parents are greatly involved in the process and have to

fill out paper work to help the professionals understand the student. The assessment looks

at each child in more than one setting and the parents are sometimes needed to see

another aspect of the child. Parents can also be reluctant and not wanting their children

evaluated. This can also slow down the process of getting children the proper supports

they need. For the assessment process to go smoothly the participation of the parent is

crucial.

Each student has the right to a proper education. Each of these students is unique

and need support and educators to really understand who they are and what they need.

Students with EBD can present intensive needs. They require intervention and instruction

by well-trained and qualified teachers (Christensen, 2015). Without properly trained

teachers stress can build not only with the student, but with the teachers as well. The

burnout rate for teachers working with EBD students is higher than any other field of

special education (Steiner, 2012). EBD students need a little more time and attention, but

with the right resources and supports can be successful just like their peers. It is important

to show these students that they are important and they deserve to and can succeed

academically. The assessment process is a crucial part of getting these students what they

need and helping them become successful short and long term.

There are many things that can be done at home and in the classroom to improve

the behaviors of EBD students. Improvements in coping skills can help with feelings of

discomfort in stressful situations at school or at home. These are equally as important as

the assessment process itself. It is important to give the students the tools to be

successful. Tools that promote positive behavior in the classroom include clear behavior

expectations, the teaching of expected behaviors, consistent responses and consequences for breaking rules, and individualized plans for children specific to their needs. Children with EBD, require a structured and predictable environment (Kauffman, 1999).

Implications for social work

This research looked at the perspective of professionals and their opinions on the assessment process of EBD students. The findings can be used when working directly with students and the school system that impacts them. It can be used to better understand the perspectives and needs of the students. The information will help support the students and hopefully help them through the assessment processes.

The role of the social worker in the assessment team is usually to help better understand the behaviors and where they may be coming from. Many EBD students may have behaviors based on other factors. These could include things happening in their home or outside of school. If that is the case the social worker may be able to help find resources for the family and student. The social workers role in the school is to be the connection between the parents and the school. They are there to make sure each and every student has the resources they may need.

More work can be done to continue to make sure that students are able to get through the assessment process in a shorter length of time. There can also be more done to make sure all students have the support they need as they go through the process. Students may be vulnerable during this time and it is crucial that they are supported in every way possible. To do this the professionals also need to be able to give them the attention they need which means they cannot not be over worked or overwhelmed by case loads.

Future Research

Future research should look at what can be done to offer better support to students during the Evaluation process. Is there a way to offer supports without affecting the results of the process? It could also look at the case loads of special education teachers and if they have the time to be able to give the students the support they may need. The length of time seems to be a need to be able to get the assessment right. Unless the length is affected by parents or lack of time a special education teacher has with how many students they have.

Strengths/Limitations of study

A strength of the research is that there was a lot of good information that came from the professionals that were interviewed. Each professional gave a different perspective and gave valuable information that enriched the research. They were all very cooperative and willing to share any knowledge that they may have. Between the professionals there were over 35 years of experience. These professionals have spent a lot of time in the evaluation process of over 100 students. They have vast knowledge and this contributed a lot to the research.

Another strength of the research was that all of the themes were very apparent. There wasn't any point of view that was skewed or way off base from any other. This made the research even stronger. All of the professionals seemed to agree on almost every aspect of the research. This gave a strong understanding of the process and what the positive and negative aspects of the assessment process were.

A limitation of the study was that it was hard to find many professionals that worked with EBD students that were willing to so the interview. It seemed all of them

were overwhelmed with their work load or were just unable to find the time to do it. The information that came from the interviews was rich, but the research would have been stronger if there were more professionals involved in the process. Therefore only 6 participants took part in this study. Due to this limited number of participants, results from this study are not generalizable.

A second limitation common to qualitative research is that the research is that the researcher was the only coder of the interviews. The researcher comes from a social work lens. This can pull out different themes than another professional may see.

Conclusion

Previous research showed the struggles EBD students had to face in the school setting. It also showed the limitations to what could be done for the students. It even looked at how the process should be done and what it needed to look for. This research looked at the length of time it took to get through the process and if students were getting the support they needed during that process.

The themes that emerged in the research were initial interventions, roles of the professionals, parent/guardian involvement, resources during the process, and the length of the process. The research showed that the assessment process seems to be working well when all of the pieces are working together. There are a lot of factors that can slow down the process and affect the student. Those factors seem to be inevitable to avoid in most situations.

The research showed the view points of six professionals with over 35 years of experience. They brought in a lot of knowledge and wisdom as to what was working and

why the process is as lengthy as it is. They helped come to conclusions on the importance of professional roles and the assessment process in the success of all EBD students.

Summary

This study showed that the assessment process of EBD students is successful in getting students the support they need in a timely manner. There is a great focus on the student and getting them what they need as soon as possible. There are many professionals involved in each assessment team to ensure that the students are getting what they need and are getting the correct assessment.

There are some factors that can delay the process however. The parent/guardian's participation is crucial in getting the process started and making sure everything goes successfully. Without their participation the assessment may not even begin. There is a lot of paper work and discussion between the assessment team and the parent/guardian. If they are reluctant or resistant in any way the process will be much delayed.

There is also the factor of the students not getting proper supports during the assessment process. They have only the resources usually that they had during the initial interventions during the process so that the assessment team can continue to evaluate the original behaviors before putting too much more into place. This can be distracting for the other students in the class as well as hard for the child going through process, but ultimately deemed necessary.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

1. What is your role working with students with EBD?

2. How long have you worked in this profession?

3. Have you worked in any other setting such as day treatment or other alternative school settings?

4. Can you walk me through the evaluation process of EBD students?

5. What do you believe are some of the strengths of the evaluation process from the point of view of the student?

6. What do you believe are some of the challenges of the evaluation process from the perspective of the student?

7. What does the involvement of the parent look like in the evaluation process?

8. What types of resources can children access while going through the evaluation process? Such as do they get one on one attention or are there tools they can use in the classroom setting?

9. Do EBD students usually get through the evaluation process in a timely manner?

10. Do you feel MN's eligibility guidelines for special education are the best guidelines for identification? If so why or why not?

11. In what ways can we improve upon the guidelines for special education?

12. What is going well in the system for EBD students?

13. What can be improved upon and helpful for EBD students?

14. How are social workers involved with students with EBD in the school setting and evaluation process.

Appendix B

Field Notes

September 4, 2014

Today I went through ideas for topics. I knew I wanted to do something with EBD students, but had to narrow down to what I wanted to focus on for my questions. I wanted a focus on the evaluation process of the students after seeing the length of it in my last field placements.

September 11, 2014

I narrowed down to my research questions of looking at the professionals' perspective of the evaluation process. I also started making a list of potential committee members.

September 18, 2014

Started first draft of literature review.

September 25, 2014

Finish CITI Training online. Revised literature review.

October 2, 2014

Turned in Appendix A to chair
Worked on introduction and purpose statement. Worked on Methods portion of paper.

October 9, 2014
Methods and interview questions finished

October 23, 2014
Finished consent form

November 3, 2014
Had committee meeting

November 13, 2014
Worked on revising paper

January 5, 2015
Turned in proposal to IRB

January 25, 2015
Got revisions from IRB

January 29, 2015
Got IRB approval

January 31, 2015
Started recruiting

February 6, 2015
I had first interview. Interview went great. We met at interviewees' office. It took about 45 minutes. It was a quite nice space. There were no interruptions. It took a minute to get computer to record correctly. Interviewee was positive and upbeat. I did not take notes because I wanted to be focused on what I was saying. I had all questions in hand. Conversation went smoothly and answers were clear and consist.

February 8, 2015
Transcribed first interview

February 15, 2015
I had second interview. Interview had a rocky start. We met at the library by a high school. We had a little trouble finding a quite room. After assistance from a librarian we found a nice locked room we could use. After this all conversation went well. We seemed to get stuck on the questions from a students' point of view. Everything else went smoothly. We were in a nice quiet room with a couple of tables and a few extra chairs.

February 16, 2015
I met my third interviewee at their office area within an elementary school. We met before school so that there were no interruptions. It was a nice quiet space. There was one large table with small chairs around it and a desk. We sat in the small chairs across from each other during the interview. There was a nice casual conversation before and after the interview which made it last a little over an hour. Everything went well and there weren't any interruptions.

Feb 20, 2015
Transcribed interviews two and three

February 25, 2015
I met my fourth interview last minute. We connected really fast and I went in and interviewed them right away. We met in a conference room. It was a big room with a large table and large black chairs. It was a little chilly in the room as well. WE got set up and rolled right through the interview. The interviewee was very short and concise on the answers. The answers although short were very informational.

March 2, 2015
I met my fifth interviewee in a classroom at their school. It was after school so there were no children or many teachers left. We met for about 45 minutes. We got into conversation

first about their profession and what they liked most. We slowly eased into the interview. We sat at a couple of student desks and went right through the questions. They also seemed to get stuck on the questions from the perspective of the student. I went through and explained the question more and we kept on going through. It was a bright sunny day and the interviewee was very perceptive to the interview and had lots of questions for me afterwards.

March 3, 2015
I met my last and final interview in a meeting space. It was a room with a few tables and plastic chairs. It was a bit dark and dim. We got into a conversation on why I was doing my research on this topic and then went into the interview. This interview took a little longer than the others. The interviewee went into detail with their answers and we often talked back and forth over answers. It was very informational.

March 6-7, 2015
Finished transcribing interviews

March 11, 2015
Worked on paper

March 13-14, 2015
Coded transcripts

March 19, 2015
Worked on Findings and discussion part of paper

March 21-22, 2015
Finished draft of final paper