A Comprehensive Study Regarding School Day Inconsistencies and Their Effects

On Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

And Learning Disabilities
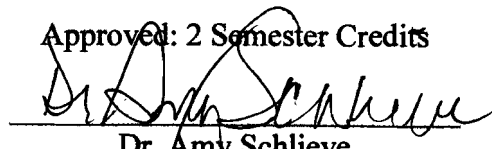

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the available research associated with school day inconsistencies and, specifically, their effects on students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD). Some students are unable to deal with changes in their school day and may resort to problem behaviors as a means of expressing their frustration. Not only are the students themselves affected if they are incapable of dealing with these changes appropriately, but so are their teachers and fellow classmates.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine several aspects associated with school day inconsistencies and their effects on students with specific needs. The study focused on the following areas: common characteristics among students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities, causal factors that may increase a student's likelihood of displaying these characteristics, effects of consistent staffing patterns and class

schedules in the schools, and existing interventions used to attempt to alleviate common disruptions in a school day.

Research indicated that lack of structure in students' daily lives contributes to their difficulties. Therefore, upon conclusion of the literature review, recommendations are provided to assist educators in better accommodating students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Dominic, an envisioned seventh grade student diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders, is enrolled in his second year at the middle school and has been trying to adjust to the differences from the elementary school. He is attempting to adapt to the many teachers he has throughout the day and is again trying to get in sync with his rotating schedule and latest transitions. When he began his education at the middle school, the changes overwhelmed him. His school day was completely different from what he was used to and he was unable to control his anger and irritation whenever his newly-learned routine was interrupted. It has taken some effort and modifications, but Dominic has made a great deal of adjustment this year compared to the last. He and his teachers have worked hard on recognizing signs that indicate when he is getting angry or upset and he is learning how to de-escalate these situations. Dominic is usually a kind, soft-spoken boy, but certain factors still increase the likelihood that he will get irritated and aggressive. He has a difficult time when there are substitute teachers in his class or when his schedule or transition times change due to holidays or school functions. If there is an unexpected difference among his usual teachers or school staff, Dominic will often leave his general education classrooms in a rage. He typically will use the special education resource classroom as a place to compose himself again. He needs time to calm down and often discusses with his special education teacher how he could have better handled the unpredictable situation. If the school week is shortened for any reason, Dominic will simply choose not to attend school because he knows his schedule and class periods will be altered; he avoids the troubling situations he thinks he cannot control. Dominic is among the many students in schools today who simply cannot handle changes in their daily routines.

All students (i.e. those in both general education and special education) of all ages and at every grade level may exhibit problem behaviors in the classroom. Students with special needs have a higher tendency to display disruptive behaviors than students without special needs (Rivera & Smith, 1997). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) by definition, however, display them more often (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Each and every behavior has a purpose; an underlying reason for why it occurs. Once the function or purpose of a behavior is identified, it is then possible to design interventions directly targeting the underlying reason for why it occurs. Problem behaviors often serve an escape or avoidance function (Cipani, 1998). Some students are unable to deal with changes in their school days and may resort to problem behaviors as a means of expressing their frustration or expressing their desire to avoid the uncomfortable situation. Not only are the students themselves affected if they are incapable of dealing with these changes appropriately, but so are their teachers and fellow classmates. Interruptions of any kind affect the learning process for all students, but disruptive behaviors can be most intrusive to the operation of the classroom. The resource room is often a service option available to students with disabilities in a setting outside the general education classroom (Lewis & Doorlag, 2003). However, because one resource teacher may provide educational programs for several groups of students during each class period, a student who enters unexpectedly could disrupt that instruction as well. In resource rooms it is common for doors to be constantly opening and closing, students to be exchanging seats depending on the subject being taught, and new faces to be entering the room at different times; teachers, all the while, are expected to know what work the students have missed, where they have been, and where they are going (Lieberman, 1982). In addition, if students excuse themselves from the general education classroom, getting to and from a resource room could

result in reduced instructional time. With any problem behavior it is important to decrease the antecedents and maintaining consequences that surround it so there are no opportunities for interference.

According to Lewis and Doorlag (2003), students' behaviors that interfere with classroom instruction, impede social interaction with teachers and peers, or endanger others are considered classroom conduct problems. These "behavior problems do not occur in isolation. The way in which the classroom learning environment is arranged and the actions of others can promote, initiate, or reinforce inappropriate behaviors" (Lewis & Doorlag, 2003, p. 115). Therefore, the students and all that surrounds them in a given school day must be examined. The careful organization of a student's school day attempts to diminish the frequency and intensity of his or her problem behaviors.

Teachers and students put much emphasis on learning appropriate organizational skills. Schedules provide structure to what would normally be a complicated and chaotic day. Students generally feel secure with an established routine and may be affected by any changes that occur to their habitual schedule. Middle school and high school schedules can often be extremely complex, and students who do not possess the skills necessary to navigate their day may struggle. A dependable schedule, then, is beneficial for both teachers and students (Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Routines are established and practiced to make the students' days more structured. Disruptions to or inconsistencies in those routines cause problems for some students and they, especially those with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD), cannot handle the shift. Disruptions may include anything from the presence of a substitute teacher to the shortening of a class period in order to accommodate a school-wide assembly. Disruptions and inconsistencies are inevitable, so it is crucial for both teachers and

students to know how to best alleviate their effects and more efficiently manage their day. If students are exhibiting challenging behaviors every day due to inconsistencies in their schedules, teaching these students can become emotionally and physically draining.

Special education has been particularly affected by teacher shortages and turnover of staff (Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Factors that influence staff changes may be tied to stress and burnout. According to Kerr and Nelson (2002), attrition among special educators is particularly severe. Boyer and Gillespie (2000, p. 10), reported that special educators leave the field for many reasons including "insufficient certification, excessive paperwork, the stress of working with students with disabilities, the lack of balance between extrinsic rewards and demands, unfulfilled intrinsic rewards, personal change factors, perceptions of high stress, and frustrations with the climate." Another factor that influences the changes in staffing patterns is the teacher's absence from the classroom. Teachers, specifically special educators, may have to leave class to attend required meetings (e.g., mandated Individualized Education Plan meetings) and, like many employees, may be gone due to illness or vacation time. Substitute teachers are often relied upon and, unfortunately, may inherit disordered classes due to the change in routine. It is important to teach students coping techniques, particularly students with disabilities, for unavoidable changes in the environment that transpire when a substitute is present (Johnson, 2000).

The expectations and responsibilities of students increase as they move into the secondary schools. There are many new transitions that students are likely to face in a day. It is important, then, to be cognizant that there may be students, especially those with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities, who are still unable to handle certain disruptions or inconsistencies. Teachers need to constantly be aware of their students' individual triggers. By

gaining possession of this knowledge, teachers will hopefully learn how to avoid or better manage their own routines and behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

Students have to deal with various transitions in today's schools. Oftentimes, students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) have a more difficult time transitioning smoothly, resulting from the inability to handle inconsistencies throughout their school day and resulting in disruptive behaviors or increased frustration. Due to the effects routine and consistency have on students with exceptionalities, more research needs to be conducted and existing information brought to educators' attention on this issue. A plethora of information can be found that suggest interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), but little is available that discusses students with EBD or LD. Special education services have increased among schools in the United States today. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, students with disabilities must receive their education in the least restrictive environment, which is presumed to be the regular education classroom (cited in Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). This provision means that all educators must be trained in effectively teaching students with exceptional needs and need to collaborate with one another to ensure that students are receiving a free and appropriate public education. Schools must ensure that students with disabilities will be adequately equipped with the skills and supports needed for adult life, including all of the variability that comes along with it (Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The intention of this study is to examine how disruptions in the daily school routine, particularly staff and schedule changes, affect students with emotional and behavioral disorders

(EBD) and learning disabilities (LD). The focus is on these specific groups of students at the secondary level, which is typically the time when schedules rotate and students have numerous teachers throughout their day. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects, this study identifies both the causal factors and the characteristics of students with EBD and LD. This understanding will be achieved through a literature review.

Research Questions

The following questions helped guide the search for relevant literature and target the nature of the researcher's interests.

1. What are the common characteristics among students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD)?

2. What causal factors increase a student's likelihood of displaying these characteristics?

3. What effects do consistent schedules and staffing patterns have on students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD)?

4. What existing interventions are used to attempt to alleviate common inconsistencies or disruptions in a school day?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide clarity and a better understanding of the issues addressed in this study.

Disruption. Any event that delays or interrupts the typical school day routine, causing disorder or confusion in the process.

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). A term used by educators to define students who display one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time, which greatly affects their educational performance:

an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007, p. 158)

The term may also be referred to as "emotional disturbance".

Hidden curriculum. The unwritten, unspoken rules of school that define each school's individual culture (Lavoie, 2005).

Inconsistency. Any event that is not regular or predictable in the typical school day routine.

Learning Disabilities (LD). According to IDEA (cited in Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007, p. 106), the term describes a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written…that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." The term may also be referred to as "specific learning disability".

Assumptions of the Research

It was assumed that an extensive search was conducted in order to gain answers to the study's research questions. The various sources that provided information were assumed to be recent, relevant, scholarly, and of high quality.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the affects of school day inconsistencies on students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and students with learning disabilities (LD). The chapter will begin by identifying common characteristics among students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities. This information will be followed by a discussion of causal factors that increase the students' likelihood of displaying these various characteristics. After identifying students' behaviors and possible reasons for them, this chapter will discuss the effects of inconsistent staffing patterns and scheduling on students with EBD and LD and conclude by recognizing existing interventions that are used to attempt to alleviate the inconsistencies and disruptions in a school day.

Common Characteristics

Before discussing the common characteristics among students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities that have been identified in existing literature, it must be understood that not all students within these populations show evidence of the distinguished traits. There is no single profile that can be examined; the students are extremely heterogeneous, but often share similar characteristics (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). It must also be known that the following characteristics are not specific to all students within the two groups of focus in this particular study (i.e. the characteristics may extend to other disability categories or be present in students who are typically developing).

Reed (1996), like many other researchers in the field, pointed out that students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) thrive on routine and structure and transitions are particularly difficult for them. She stated that students with ASD resist changes in their routine and may have extreme tantrums if their routine is, in any minute way, disrupted. This need for a predictable and

consistent environment has been reiterated in the literature (Kerr & Nelson, 2002; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). The question that needs to be investigated, then, is whether or not students with other identified disabilities experience similar difficulties when it comes to transitions or changes in their routines.

By definition, in order for students to qualify as individuals with either emotional and behavioral disorders or learning disabilities, students' underperformance in academics must not be caused primarily by intellectual deficits or mental retardation (Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006). Because the secondary school years are associated with substantial changes in schedules, transitions, and teachers' expectations regarding student behavior (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004), the social and behavioral skills of high school students must be clearly understood. As Lane, Carter, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) pointed out, social and behavioral deficits lie at the core of emotional and behavioral disorders definitional criteria; however, little information is available regarding the specific social and behavioral skills of high school-age youth with EBD and LD. Instead, the majority of information focuses on students in their elementary years. Lane et al. (2006) conducted a study that examined the similarities and differences in academic, behavioral, and social skills of high school students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD). Their study found that although there are some similarities between the two groups of students, there are also significant differences. Their findings revealed considerable differences between students with EBD and LD in the social domain. Teachers were provided the opportunity to rate the students' skills and the study showed that teachers viewed students with EBD as having lower levels of social competence and school adjustment than their classmates with LD.

Also included in the study conducted by Lane, Carter, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) were their reported findings regarding characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities in the behavior domain. This was relevant because students who may be unable to handle changes or inconsistencies during school hours react to them in a variety of ways. According to the findings concluded by Lane et al. (2006), teacher ratings indicated that students with EBD demonstrated higher levels of problem behaviors than students with LD. Sabornie, Evans, and Cullinan (2006) stated that it is expected for students with EBD to exhibit more problematic behaviors than their peers with LD. Lane, Carter, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) also suggested that both students with EBD or LD may have skill or performance deficits in the above domains that hinder their transition from school to post school activities. It is, therefore, important that students with disabilities receive the appropriate supports and skills they need to become responsible and contributing members of society. As the study stated, it is important to examine the teachers' ratings because it is their perceptions that ultimately influence instructional decisions.

Emotional and behavioral disorders are frequently more obvious than learning disabilities. This is not surprising, considering students with emotional and behavioral disorders usually have one or both of two identifiable behavioral patterns: externalizing and internalizing (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). The students who exhibit external behaviors appear to be aggressive, oppositional, and often fail to comply with instructions. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders who externalize their behaviors may make more negative comments to their teachers than their peers who are not disabled (Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006). Those who show signs of internal behaviors, on the other hand, appear to be anti-social, withdrawn, depressed, anxious, obsessive, and compulsive. According to Walker and Fabre (1987), students

manifesting these behaviors tend not to be referred or identified as having a disability because they are less bothersome to the classroom teachers (as cited in Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Students who are frustrated or bothered by school day inconsistencies or disruptions may display externalized or internalized behaviors, which could be considered inappropriate school conduct (Lewis & Doorlag, 2003).

The processing problems that many students with learning disabilities (LD) experience may cause difficulty in them understanding their own and other persons' social cues and may also cause them to behave in socially unacceptable ways (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Many students with LD lack effective interpersonal skills, have difficulty modeling other students' behaviors and reading social cues, and misinterpret others' feelings. According to Lavoie (2005), students with significant learning problems are more likely to choose socially unacceptable behaviors when partaking in social situations, are less able to solve social problems, and are less adaptable to new social conditions. Success of students with LD is largely dependent upon their social-emotional relationship skills – not their academic skills.

One neurologically-based symptom that is common among students with learning disabilities (LD) is inflexibility (Lavoie, 2005). Students who display this characteristic have significant difficulty in adapting to changes in the school environment and are unable to handle transitions of any sort. Educators often accuse children of overreacting to these changes, but they are "merely responding to their neurologically-based need for continuity and sameness" (Lavoie, 2005, p. 10). This inability to adapt may cause the student with LD to become easily overwhelmed by daily events and may, in turn, lead to feelings of powerlessness. Because students have little faith in their ability to deal with the situation, they often experience great

frustration and angst and may react to transitions with agitation or aggression. These reactions can frequently lead to social rejection.

According to Al-Yagon and Mikulincer (2004) and Pearl and Bay (1999), students with learning disabilities (LD) are at heightened risk for experiencing emotional difficulties and manifesting higher levels of fears and anxieties than their peers who are enrolled full-time in general education classes (cited in Li & Morris, 2007, p. 446). Some researchers, according to Li and Morris (2007), suggested that the increase in emotional difficulties in students with LD is due to the increased frustration and failure that they experience in academic and social activities. The study conducted by Li and Morris was designed to examine self-reported fears and anxieties in children and adolescents (7-18 years of age) with learning disabilities or mild mental retardation (also referred to as mild cognitive disabilities or cognitive disabilities-borderline) and also focused on whether or not the fears and anxieties varied based on the students' genders and ages. They found that students with LD had more fears and anxieties as adolescents; fears of social and performance events. An unexpected finding was that younger students (ages 7-10) with LD also reported higher levels of fear related to criticism and failure. As mentioned earlier, every behavior has a purpose or a primary reason for why it occurs. Fears related to criticism, failure, or specific situations may cause students to want to escape or avoid any experiences that could potentially expose them to these fears. Avoidance, therefore, could be viewed as a function of their behavior.

Student "meltdowns" or frustrations may stem from several antecedents. Li and Morris (2007) suggested that certain fears and related anxieties may have something to do with them. They stated that considerable efforts have been directed towards understanding the fears and anxieties of students without disabilities, but far less is known about the levels and nature of

those held by students with disabilities. Fears, as Li and Morris (2007) defined them, are normal reactions to specific environmental threats; threats that can be either real or perceived. Anxieties are a broad collection of responses to those fears. Individuals with anxiety often view the world as a dangerous place. Students with anxiety problems are often simply told to "stop worrying," but this is not a command that can easily be followed (Lavoie, 2005). Anxiety problems compromise and complicate the lives of many students with learning disabilities. Students with anxiety disorders often develop phobic reactions to incidents or situations and, in turn, these reactions can create a cyclical pattern that controls their entire day. Because the student is full of anxiety and fear, he or she may purposely avoid situations that cause (or that he or she believes *may* cause) more anxiety; this results in fewer relationships, increased family conflicts, and lower self-esteem. The student's lowered self-esteem causes him or her to avoid fearful situations, and the pattern continues. The student is secretly fearful of any changes in his or her environment and doubts his or her ability to effectively handle these transitions. As a result, the student becomes "defiant, resistive, and argumentative" whenever he or she is asked to make similar transitions (Lavoie, 2005, p. 26).

Emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities are considered high-incidence disabilities (Li & Morris, 2007; Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006). Due to the fact that the numbers of students diagnosed with EBD or LD are so prevalent, there is reason for much concern regarding the students' characteristics. According to experts in the field (Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006), research has shown that students with high-incidence disabilities share similar characteristics in the area of academic and social skills. According to Henley, Ramsey, and Algozzine (2002), some professionals believe that students with EBD or LD fail because they have not developed academic survival skills (e.g., finishing tasks, following directions,

adjusting to classroom routines). More than anything else, these particular students need success in school. "Learning requires risk-taking and a willingness to change; students with social-emotional problems have spent much of their lives resisting change. Sameness, even if unpleasant, provides security" (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2002, p. 120). Regarding communication skills, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and learning disabilities tend to resolve conflicts by withdrawing or by using aggression rather than negotiation (Lavoie, 2005). Resentment, fear, apprehension, and other uncontrolled feelings are acted out rather than discussed (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2002). According to Johns and Carr (1995), aggression is an indication of high-level frustration. Typically, students who veer towards aggression fail socially and tend to experience rejection and alienation from their peers (Lavoie, 2005).

The behaviors a student with either emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) or learning disabilities (LD) can be puzzling. The student may appear to have serious "meltdowns" in response to simple and routine situations (Lavoie, 2005, p. 11). Educators must recognize that even the most ordinary events can be threatening and frustrating for the student with inflexibility. Lavoie (2005) provided an example of one student who asked if he could receive at least one week's notice if there would be changes to his lunch table assignment. The student said he needed at least a week to get used to the idea that he would be sitting in a different seat. The teacher should clearly outline his or her exact expectations to the students (Johns & Carr, 1995). On the school's picture day, for example, students may have to be told the exact number of minutes they have before they get their picture taken, that they are expected to wait quietly in line, and that they may receive a reward if they follow the rules. Providing the students with a

specific outline could make the difference between a student displaying appropriate behaviors and one displaying problem behaviors.

Causal Factors

It is difficult to identify the causes of students' emotional or behavioral disorders, but it is agreed that there are common origins at which to examine and on which to focus. The two most major and frequent causal factors are biological and environmental, which includes stressful living conditions, child maltreatment, and school factors (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Both causal factors are interrelated (nature versus nurture) and very seldom does one alone cause emotional or behavioral disorders. Each factor contributes to the student's risk or vulnerability, but the focus of this study is specifically on the school dynamics.

School factors represent the largest category when discussing the relationship between causal factors and youth with and without emotional or behavioral disabilities (Shriver, 2005). School failure does not cause emotional or behavioral disabilities, but school can contribute to social difficulties and academic incompetence (Kauffman, 2001). One hypothesis suggested that a lack of structure or order in students' daily lives contributed to their difficulties. The lack of structure can exist within the staffing patterns, behavior management strategies, daily schedules, or the school setting itself.

Students endure many transitions but one of the first they experience, and possibly one of the greatest, is the movement from elementary school to secondary school. Not only is it an important transition, it is one that poses unique challenges and one of the most neglected developmental transitions during the school years (Polloway & Patton, 1997). Transitions may pose challenges to teachers and students alike; student misbehavior is more likely to occur and educational time can be wasted (Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998). Although this movement

from elementary to middle school is seen as predictable, or normative (Polloway & Patton, 1997) by many, it can be very complicated and stressful for students with disabilities. Adolescence is a time of great instability, so it is not surprising that this is a very difficult time for even students who are well-adjusted. Polloway and Patton (1997) stated that:

> The time when a student leaves the elementary setting and moves on to a middle school level education is one of major change in the student from a biological perspective and also in terms of how the schooling experience is structured and how education is delivered. For students with special needs, the experience is like being in a non-English-speaking foreign country (p. 559).

There are certain features present in a secondary setting that make it particularly unfamiliar to the former elementary-level student. Students transition from an elementary school environment that is typically more supportive because it is smaller in size, and more individualized (i.e. most students have only one or two teachers) to a middle or high school environment that expects more independence, is larger in size, and more departmentalized (i.e. a different teacher for each subject). Other features that students will encounter in a secondary setting include a larger student population, curricular emphasis on content areas, a greater need for more self-regulated behavior, different in-school procedures (e.g., the use of lockers), and different types of class scheduling (Polloway & Patton, 1997). All of the above features can have a profound effect on students with disabilities and may influence learned helplessness. In addition, demands are placed on students that relate to their academic success and social acceptance. According to Robinson, Braxdale, and Colson (1985), there are three areas crucial to school success: academic demands, self-management/study skills demands, and social/adaptive demands. The latter is one that students with disabilities may have a harder time adjusting to at

the middle school. They need to be able to comply with school-based and classroom-based rules and procedures, which can be problematic when explicit and implicit classroom-specific rules and procedures vary from one teacher to another. A growing amount of research indicated that the transition to middle school is a "critical period" in a student's education (Gonzales, Dumka, Deardorff, Carter, & McCray, 2004). In essence, how well a student transitions from elementary school to middle school serves as a strong predictor for later high school success.

The internal structure of the school itself may be detrimental to the development of a student's identity. As mentioned before, students entering a middle school are met with a larger student population in a larger-sized building; this combination frequently leads to "less personal" student-teacher relationships. Oftentimes, students with disabilities meet with different teachers one class period at a time when the students may, in fact, require more attention and direct instruction. In turn, students feel an increased sense of anonymity and external locus of control (Barber & Olsen, 2004). This finding is detrimental to the development of a personal identity because the psychosocial needs of the adolescents making these transitions are not being met.

One of the most common difficulties students with social skills deficits have is the inability to deal effectively with transitions of all types (Lavoie, 2005). Students with learning disabilities have difficulty perceiving and grasping the "big picture" of social situations. When involved in a social interaction, they tend to observe and memorize the details of the entire situation, but fail to form an overall impression of it. Each social interaction, therefore, seems to be a new, unfamiliar experience in which they are unable to predict the responses of others. As a result, the individuals with LD become fearful and distrustful of new situations. The three most dreaded words in their vocabulary are "unknown, unexpected, and unpredictable" (p. 296). Lavoie (2005) also pointed out that transitions can be particularly difficult for students with

behavioral disorders as well. In fact, many students with EBD experience their greatest organizational confusion and frustration during these transitional times. Because of the panic that changes or inconsistencies often bring, students begin to dislike, fear, and even avoid having to transition. Adding to the confusion, many classrooms are full of routines that teachers expect students to follow with no instruction. Some students pick up on subtle clues and teach themselves how to transition effectively. Students with disabilities, however, are most likely to learn these routines by mistake (by failing to adhere to the hidden curriculum and being reprimanded). In addition, these teacher expectations vary as students move from room to room, grade to grade, and even school to school (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004).

The difficulties associated with school transition have been well-documented and it is understood that students with disabilities often struggle with this change in routine. When examining student characteristics associated with difficulties in school transition, some of them appear to be out of the school's power to change (i.e. the students' disabilities). The question that remains is, "What factors can make the transition process go more smoothly?" According to Bruder and Chandler (1996), there are two key elements associated with successful transitions: planning and cooperation (cited in Polloway & Patton, 1997, p. 554). A 2004 study conducted by Barber and Olsen looked at how qualitative changes in the school environment effected levels of school performance, psychological functioning, and interpersonal competence. They found that teacher support during times of transition was the most prominent factor in increasing student academic and social functioning. Likewise, it was also important for schools to respect student autonomy during this transitional period. These findings are of importance to schools because

these factors are well within a school's control. They are proactive steps a school can take to create an environment that is both inviting and aiding to students in times of transition.

"Consistency in instruction is needed for the student to understand the purpose of the schedule and how it relates to the daily activities at school" (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders or learning disabilities thrive on predictable environments; this means that the environments should have limited transitions or surprises. The standard curriculum of a school consists of the published course of study including the rules, regulations, and standards. The standard curriculum is usually understood by all because it has, at one point, been presented to students via handbooks or other publications (Lavoie, 2005). Every school also has unspoken, unwritten rules that defines its unique culture. These rules can impact everything from navigating the school and classroom layouts to the schedules and the social scenes. This is often referred to as the hidden curriculum. Consider, then, how the hidden curriculum can affect the way bells, functions of homework, absence/tardiness policies, dismissal policies, schedule changes, and fire drills are handled in each school. Teachers' idiosyncrasies, homework policies, seating assignments, reputations, personalities, grading policies, tolerances, teaching styles, and discipline policies all fall under the umbrella of hidden curriculum. Students who have not or are not capable of mastering the hidden curriculum experience difficulties in school. Students, from preschool age through high school, need to understand their school's hidden curriculum, learn to better organize their day, and effectively plan for upcoming events (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001).

When a student displays disturbing behavior, including aggression or social withdrawal, the observer often wonders why. In schools, the observer is usually the teacher. It then remains the teacher's responsibility to try to understand what has gone wrong for the student and what

can be done about it (Kauffman, 2001). Identifying a cause can assist in finding acceptable solutions or preventative measures for the future, but will not always supply an answer. Some causal conditions (i.e. school dynamics) simply cannot be changed, so other effective ways of dealing with them are required.

Staffing Patterns

Establishing structure and regular routines in the classroom help students with disabilities feel secure because their lives are often chaotic and they have difficulty staying organized (Johnson, 2000). Lerner (1997) described the need for the teacher to provide structure and establish rapport with students with learning disabilities, while Smith (1998) discussed the need for consistency, structure, and routine for students with behavioral disorders. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education stated that American schools are faced with an increasing shortage of qualified individuals to fill school district positions. Of particular concern is the national shortage of qualified special education teachers as well as the need to train and retain them (Billingsley, 2002). According to McLeskey, Tyler, and Saunders (2004), there is a critical shortage of special education teachers in the United States. Teacher shortages in the field of special education, as well as the widely practiced use of unqualified individuals to fill these positions, are commonplace (Singh & Billingsley, 1996). This shortage is chronic and severe and exists in every geographic region of the nation. The shortages may interfere with students with disabilities receiving an appropriate, quality education (as cited in Snell & Brown, 2006) and reduced and inadequate delivery for the students (Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

According to the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (1999), there are two types of teacher shortages: a quantity shortage and a quality shortage. A quantity shortage is a scarcity in the number of individuals who are available to fill all established and

funded teaching positions, thereby leaving some positions vacant. A quality shortage is the lack

of teachers who are fully certified for their positions and available to fill vacant teaching

positions. A chronic shortage of teachers has persisted since 1975 (i.e. quantity), and no progress

has been observed in reducing the shortage of fully-certified teachers (i.e. quality). The source of

supply for special educators is rapidly becoming depleted. When examining staffing patterns,

there seems to be an insufficient number of highly qualified teachers for students with emotional

and behavioral disabilities (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007), which ultimately,

according to Shriver (2005), affects the positive encouragement, guidance, and support students

receive. Oftentimes special education teachers begin teaching without being fully certified.

Consistency for students with disabilities is crucial, but it is almost certain that the

teachers (both general educators and special educators) who implement structure and routine,

will be absent from the class on more than one occasion throughout any given school year. The

time teachers are spending away from the classroom may be caused by educational reforms and

the need for professional development; they give the teachers added responsibilities which often

remove them from the classroom (Glatfelter, 2006; Johnson, 2000). Responsibilities that increase

the chance for absence could be the need to attend a required meeting or conference, jury duty,

personal necessity or, like many employees, teachers may simply be gone due to illness or

allotted vacation time. Public school teachers in Michigan took an average of eight days for sick

and personal leave in 2007 compared to the national average of nine to ten days (Livengood,

2008). Teachers at most public school can be absent from the classroom with no questions asked

up to 14 days of the 188-day school year. One particular school in Michigan allows its special

education teachers an additional three unrestricted personal days for the high-stress job of

teaching students with disabilities. Teachers utilized sick days for doctor's appointments, to care

for sick children at home, or to get mental respite from a stressful job. Additional days were missed for maternity leaves, long-term paid absence for major illnesses, funerals, union-related business days off, and district business days for training and meetings. Higher absenteeism not only sets a bad example for the students, it also produces lower student achievement. The individual who typically takes over a class when the regular teacher is absent can vary, but most often it is an outside source: a substitute teacher. Having an unfamiliar face directing the classroom activities may cause problems for a student with disabilities. The unfamiliar experience of a new teacher can bring even more confusion into their lives. Substitute teachers often inherit a class of students with challenging behaviors due to the change in routine.

According to Johnson, Holcolmbe, and Vance (1988), substitute teachers teach children an estimated 9 to 14 days per school year. It is quite possible that a substitute teacher is hired every day of the year for any school building. On any given day, substitutes filled 10 percent of the nation's classrooms (Tannenbaum, 2000). Over the course of their entire education (i.e. kindergarten through twelfth grade), students may spend the equivalent of one full year of school under the guidance of substitute teachers (Glatfelter, 2006). Furthermore, the time substitute teachers spend with students is increasing (Johnson, 2000) and substitute teachers are engaged much more frequently on a school-wide basis. This means that all students, including those with disabilities, are exposed to new teachers and teaching styles throughout their entire school year. When students have a five-day period with five different substitutes, valuable time is lost trying to develop routine and rapport. Generally, substitutes are present for a short duration of time; this leaves little time to develop a relationship with the students.

In recent years, however, it has become more of a challenge to fill the substitute positions within our schools (Thompson, 2000). The need is even more prevalent when a position needs to

be filled in the special education setting. Federal law requires special education programs to meet the needs of students who have disabilities whether the permanent teachers become ill or not. Specifically, there tends to be a high turnover of special education substitute teachers, which mirrors the attrition of full-time special education teachers (Welsch, 2001). Many substitutes in the Fayette County School System in Georgia reported that they felt they lacked the necessary skills to be effective in the special education setting (Thompson, 2000). According to Welsch (2001, p. 373), when substitutes are necessary, "the majority of school districts often employ unqualified or minimally qualified persons to substitute for absent special education teachers, offer them little or no training, and do not evaluate their performance." It is assumed, then, that this will also have a negative effect on students (with or without disabilities).

It is crucial that qualified and cognizant candidates apply for substitute positions. Substitutes are expected to provide quality, ongoing instruction in the absence of the full-time teacher (Welsch, 2001). Realistically, however, the demand is greater than the supply and getting quality substitutes is a serious and growing challenge (Tannenbaum, 2000). Ingersoll (1995) stated that schools simply cannot and do not leave teaching positions unfilled, regardless of supply. Across the country, schools are scrambling to find fill-ins; many districts are working hard just to make sure someone is standing at every chalkboard (de Pommereau, 1997). Substitute teachers can teach with little or no educational training at all (Glatfelter, 2006). According to Livengood (2008), schools in Michigan hire substitutes with no qualifications beyond 90 or more college credits. As some schools, a bachelor's degree will do just fine (de Pommereau, 1997). Regardless, substitutes are only present in the classroom for short periods of time so they have difficulty contributing to the curriculum and education. Most substitutes are there to manage the classroom; no learning takes place. Many teachers, according to Glatfelter

(2006), reported they "dumb down" the educational content of the lesson plans with worksheets, games, and videos because they believe these activities are easier for substitutes to manage.

School districts need more than warm bodies to monitor their classrooms every day. Substitutes are often considered "high-priced babysitters" of the classroom while the "real" teacher is gone (Glatfelter, 2006). Students, as a consequence, believe that they do not have to respect or attend to the substitute because the full-time teacher will re-teach the material when he or she returns from the absence (Welsch, 2001). Substitutes need to be treated as professionals in order for the students' actions to reflect the same treatment. If teachers are not appreciated or valued, then students may display disruptive, noncompliant, or aggressive behaviors simply because there was a change in their routine. Students in special education may "test" a substitute just as any student in general education may challenge an unfamiliar person in the classroom (Thompson, 2000). In a chaotic classroom, students may climb on their desks, scream, talk uncontrollably, sleep, click the lights on and off, or ask for a pass and be in the halls for too long. Some substitutes feel like police officers in such situations (de Pommereau, 1997). Myriad problems often face substitute teachers because few are taught how to manage their classrooms and handle discipline (Glatfelter, 2006). Students, too, should learn the expectations for their performance that will be held constant between the regular teacher and the substitute (Tannenbaum, 2000).

Based on the effects that changes in staffing pattern can have on students, special education substitutes need to increase their knowledge about and be familiar with information regarding the population of students with whom they will be working. Full-time teachers should provide specific individual information about his or her students prior to their absences. Many substitute teachers are left without lesson plans, copies of Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

modifications, and behavior intervention plans (Thompson, 2000). When substitutes fail to understand what is expected of the students, the students simply will not perform. According to Brophy (1983; 1988), there is a strong link between teacher expectations and student performance. Students' performances will generally fall within the parameters at which the teachers set; if the expectations are high, students will attempt to meet them, and if expectations are low, their performance too will be low. For most students, any chance at having a relaxed "free day" is worth their attempt and they will test the boundaries with the unfamiliar body in the classroom.

Other factors that influence the changes in teaching patterns may be stress and burnout. According to Kerr and Nelson (2002), attrition among special educators is particularly severe. These teachers experience job stress and burnout at a higher rate than teachers in other content areas do. The first-year experience is considered critical for teacher socialization and development of one's attitude toward the profession (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Boyer and Gillespie (2000, p. 10), reported that special educators leave the field for many reasons including "insufficient certification, excessive paperwork, the stress of working with students with disabilities, the lack of balance between extrinsic rewards and demands, unfulfilled intrinsic rewards, personal change factors, perceptions of high stress, and frustrations with the climate." The most frequently mentioned source of dissatisfaction is the increase in paperwork associated with many of the legal and regulatory requirements in special education (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). Scheduling alone can be stress-producing for teachers of students with learning disabilities (Fass, 1984). Of all the special education teachers, those that taught students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) reported greater stress and role problems (Center & Steventon, 2001). The students' behaviors have been implicated as causes of teacher attrition;

their physical and verbal attacks are often too exhausting. According to George, George, Gersten, and Grosenick (1995), 25-33% of teachers in EBD classrooms held emergency certifications (i.e. they have not earned their full certification). This should be noted because licensed teachers stated they feel significantly more comfortable managing the classroom and planning for instruction than those teachers with emergency licenses (Sutherland, Kenton, & Gunter, 2005).

Schedules

To reduce instructional fragmentation, discipline problems, and student failure, some schools have redesigned the traditional school schedule (Mercer & Mercer, 2005) which is usually comprised of eight or nine class periods lasting roughly 50 minutes in length. Examples of typical school schedules today include "block scheduling" or "alternate-day schedules" (e.g., Day 1/Day 2 or A/B rotations). It is estimated that nearly one-third of the nation's secondary schools use some form of block scheduling (Viadero, 2001). Dozens of variations of block schedules exist and some schools may even use several different schedules at the same time. According to Caroll (1987) and Canady and Rettig (1995), block scheduling means there are fewer classes of longer duration on a daily basis which may last for a semester, a trimester, or a full year (as cited in Tenney, 1998). On a block schedule, classes might range from 60 minutes to two full hours. Variations include the "four-period day" in which students have the same four classes every day for a semester. Such classes are often known as "semester block plans" or "4x4 plans" (Viadero, 2001). Classes meet for approximately 90 minutes and students receive a full year's credit for each class (Hoffman, 1995). One variation to this is when students take eight classes, but four are taken one day and the other four are attended the next. This schedule is referred to as the "four-period rollover" or the "alternating two-week block" and lasts the entire

school year. Some schools reduce the number of classes to six and lengthen the periods to nearly two hours, holding three of the classes one day and the remaining three the next. Other schools use a "modified four-period day" where they may have three full blocks and two half blocks. Of course, other variations and combinations are possible.

One of the most common types of scheduling is the "A/B" schedule (which is also referred to as the alternate-day or Day 1/Day 2 schedule). This is when students take the typical seven or eight periods yearlong, but alternate between two schedules, attending classes on alternating days. These scheduling approaches attempt to address students' differing needs for learning time and improve the quality of time that students spend at school. However, according to Mercer and Mercer (2005), the changes may cause more confusion for students with emotional and behavioral disorders or learning disabilities. The rotation of classes may also require the hiring of additional special education teachers and aides (Bugaj, 1998). Many students found it less stressful having fewer subjects at one time (Santos & Rettig, 1999) and teachers reported that students benefited from more frequent, consistent contact with their teachers and the subject matter. Special educators indicated that they needed daily contact with their students to remediate skill deficits as well as keep up with the students' needs. Not seeing students every day is disruptive to their instruction and necessitates much re-teaching.

According to Tenney (1998), studies that focus on the effects of block scheduling on students who have special needs are, for the most part, non-existent. It can be inferred from research (Eineder, 1996) that when students are in a block schedule with a structured classroom environment and fewer disruptions they will learn and use appropriate conflict resolution strategies (cited in Tenney, 1998). If class is canceled due to an assembly or bad weather, however, or if a student is missing due to a field trip, illness, guidance appointment, pictures

being taken, or another engagement, teachers may only see their students twice that week. That means that fifty percent of their instructional time is lost and almost an entire week will go by before the class meets again (Hoffman, 1995). This also means that when students return, their day will be one of adjusting. Some students with disabilities stated that they felt insecure about the "where" and "when" of their daily schedules (Santos & Rettig, 1999). This insecurity may negatively affect the students' daily functioning. The rapid spread of the block scheduling innovation brings with it both benefits and concerns with regard to programming for students with disabilities. "Despite the amount of information available on block scheduling, little research exists on the benefits and drawbacks for special education" (p. 54). Regardless, when the different rotations of classes are coupled with student absences and staff changes, it becomes obvious the confusion students face when there are changes in their school day routines.

Existing Interventions

After examining characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) and narrowing down some casual factors that may contribute to their behaviors, it is vital that proper interventions be explored. General and special education teachers must understand students in different categories of exceptionality, so that those students' needs can be met (Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006). The troubling behaviors displayed by students with EBD and LD are most often unintentional in nature, so punishing them is ineffective, unfair, and inappropriate. Other interventions must take place.

As discovered through a review of the research, most students with learning problems need the organization and routine typical of systematic scheduling (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). A well-planned daily schedule greatly aids the teacher in providing effective instruction and collaboration. A daily schedule provides the structure to students with learning problems that

they desperately need. It also presents them with expectations and a sequence of events in advance. It is helpful for students to make and constantly update a calendar. The use of a calendar can provide a visual overview of an entire day, week, or school year (Finstein, Yang, & Jones, 2007). Planners are also an effective tool for students who may not properly handle changes to their routines. Educators should demonstrate how to effectively use a planner and suggest that students highlight important dates or changes to their routine. Both calendars and planners help students break down large tasks into sizeable, workable units and they also encourage organization. It is also helpful to use different colors to represent various activities or class periods. According to Downing and Peckham-Hardin (2001), schedules need to remain flexible to account for the changes that unavoidably occur (e.g., assemblies, special events, early releases). When scheduling changes are needed, it would be advantageous for the teacher to explain the new events or assignments to the students ahead of time.

It has been established that continuity and routines are highly important when working with students who have emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD); they prove beneficial for both teachers and students. Once they reach secondary school, students are generally taught by several teachers throughout their day. It would be helpful, then, for students to know and follow the established routines for each teacher (Finstein, Yang, & Jones, 2007). Teachers usually hand out or discuss classroom requirements and expectations at the beginning of a term; the student should keep track of these in a notebook. It is a good idea to have them printed up and accessible so the student can reference them whenever he or she needs.

According to Kerr and Nelson (2002), students' routines should be balanced. They also recommended classrooms display a large wall clock to help students monitor their time according to their schedule. If a student seems easily upset when the school schedule changes, a

time should be arranged to review the changes with the student. Ongoing communication between teachers and students will also ensure consistency (Lavoie, 2005). Teachers should work on identifying what stressful situations seem to provoke or trigger the student to become emotional and upset. This can be done by observing the student or simply by asking him or her. Once these triggers are identified, role-playing can be helpful in teaching the student how to manage his or her anger during such situations (Cipani, 2004). Teachers should develop a personal relationship with each student so that, in times of crisis, there is a person who can assist in de-escalating the situation and providing support (Braaten & Quinn, 2000). Students should have permission to engage in a trusted staff member (e.g., the special education teacher) to be a sounding board when frustration overcomes them and outbursts are imminent (Cornett & Downing, 2006).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of the information attained in the literature review. A critical analysis is included regarding the characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD), causal factors of their characteristics, the effects of changing staffing patterns and schedules, and existing interventions available for students who are unable to deal with changes to their routines. The chapter concludes by offering recommendations for those working in the educational field to attempt to alleviate common inconsistencies in a school day and better accommodate students with EBD and LD.

Summary

Students (i.e. those in both general education and special education) of all ages and at every grade level may exhibit problem behaviors in the classroom. Students with special needs have a higher tendency to display disruptive behaviors than students without special needs (Rivera & Smith, 1997). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) by definition, however, display them more often (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Each and every behavior has a purpose; an underlying reason for why it occurs. Some students are unable to deal with changes in their school days and may resort to problem behaviors as a means of expressing their frustration or expressing their desire to avoid the uncomfortable situation.

Routines are established and practiced to make the students' days more structured. Disruptions to or inconsistencies in those routines cause problems for some students and they, especially those with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD), cannot handle the shift. Disruptions may include anything from the presence of a substitute teacher to the shortening of a class period in order to accommodate an event such as a school-

wide assembly. Changes in staffing patterns affect students with EBD and LD. Special education has been particularly affected by teacher shortages and turnover of staff (Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Attrition among special educators is particularly severe and teachers, like all other employees, have days when they are absent from the job. Substitute teachers are often relied upon and, unfortunately, may inherit a class of students with challenging behaviors due to the change in routine.

Special education services have increased among schools in the United States today. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, students with disabilities must receive their education in the least restrictive environment, which is presumed to be the regular education classroom (cited in Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). This provision means that all educators must be trained in effectively teaching students with exceptional needs and should collaborate with one another to ensure that students are receiving a free and appropriate public education. Schools must make certain that students with disabilities will be adequately equipped with the skills and supports needed for adult life, including all of the variability that comes along with it (Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006).

Critical Analysis

There were four main research questions that this study attempted to address. The following is a critical analysis of the original research questions.

1. What are the common characteristics among students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD)?

As this study discovered, there is no single profile that can be examined when discussing students with EBD and LD; the students are extremely heterogeneous, but often share similar characteristics (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Lane, Carter, Pierson, and Glaeser

(2006) revealed some teachers' views that students with EBD had lower levels of social competence and school adjustment than their classmates with LD and higher levels of problem behaviors. This study is important when attempting to compare or cluster together students with disabilities; it provides evidence that characteristics can vary greatly between them and furthers the argument for individualized instruction.

Emotional and behavioral disorders are frequently more obvious than learning disabilities. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders usually have one or both of two identifiable behavioral patterns: externalizing and internalizing (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). The students who exhibit external behaviors appear to be aggressive, oppositional, and defiant, while those who show signs of internal behaviors appear anti-social, withdrawn, depressed, anxious, obsessive, and compulsive.

According to Lavoie (2005), one neurologically-based symptom that is common among students with learning disabilities (LD) is inflexibility. This inability to adapt can cause the student with LD to become easily overwhelmed by daily events and can lead to feelings of powerlessness. Because students have little faith in their ability to deal with the situation, they often experience great frustration and angst and may react to transitions with agitation or aggression. These reactions common in both students with EBD and LD can frequently lead to social rejection.

2. What causal factors increase a student's likelihood of displaying these characteristics?

According to the existing research, the two most major and frequent causal factors are biological and environmental, which includes stressful living conditions, child maltreatment, and school factors (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). School factors represent the largest category when discussing the relationship between causal factors and youth with and without

emotional or behavioral disabilities (Shriver, 2005). School failure does not cause emotional or behavioral disorders, but school can contribute to social difficulties and academic incompetence (Kauffman, 2001). One hypothesis suggested that a lack of structure or order in students' daily lives contributed to their difficulties. The lack of structure can exist within the staffing patterns, behavior management strategies, daily schedules, or the school setting itself.

The transition from elementary school to secondary school can be very complicated and stressful for students with disabilities. Every school also has unspoken, unwritten rules that define its unique culture. These rules can impact everything from navigating the school and classroom layouts to the schedules and the social scenes. This is often referred to as the hidden curriculum. Students who have not or are not capable of mastering the hidden curriculum experience difficulties in school. This along with the findings concluded in Li and Morris' (2007) study regarding students' fears and anxieties, are worth much attention from educators.

3. What effects do consistent schedules and staffing patterns have on students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD)?

Establishing structure and regular routines in the classroom help students with disabilities feel secure because their lives are often chaotic and they have difficulty staying organized (Johnson, 2000). The insufficient number of highly qualified teachers for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007) ultimately, according to Shriver (2005), affects the positive encouragement, guidance, and support students receive.

Consistency for students with disabilities is crucial, but it is almost certain that the teachers (both general educators and special educators) who implement structure and routine, will be absent from the class on more than one occasion throughout any given school year. The

individual who typically takes over a class when the regular teacher is absent is most often a substitute teacher. Having an unfamiliar face directing the classroom activities may cause problems for a student with disabilities. The unfamiliar experience of a new teacher can bring even more confusion into their lives. Substitute teachers often inherit a class of students with challenging behaviors due to the change in routine. According to Welsch (2001), there tends to be a high turnover of special education substitute teachers, which mirrors the attrition of full-time special education teachers. When students have a five-day period with five different substitutes, valuable time is lost trying to develop routine and rapport (Johnson, 2000). If substitute teachers are not appreciated or valued, students with EBD and LD may display disruptive, noncompliant, or aggressive behaviors simply because there was a change in their routine and they may choose to "test" a substitute (Thompson, 2000). In a chaotic classroom, students may climb on their desks, scream, talk uncontrollably, sleep, click the lights on and off, or ask for a pass and be in the halls for too long.

To reduce instructional fragmentation, discipline problems, and student failure, some schools have redesigned the traditional school schedule (Mercer & Mercer, 2005) to operate on "block scheduling" or "alternate-day schedules" (e.g., Day 1/Day 2 or A/B rotations). It is estimated that nearly one-third of the nation's secondary schools use some form of block scheduling (Viadero, 2001). Dozens of variations of block schedules exist and some schools may even use several different schedules at the same time. According to Mercer and Mercer (2005), the changes may cause more confusion for students with emotional and behavioral disorders or learning disabilities. Teachers reported that students benefited from more frequent, consistent contact with their teachers and the subject matter. Not seeing students every day is disruptive to their instruction and necessitates much re-teaching.

If class is canceled for any reason and students are on an alternate-day rotation, fifty percent of the students' instructional time is lost and when they return, their day will be one of adjusting. Some students with disabilities stated that they felt insecure about the "where" and "when" of their daily schedules (Santos & Rettig, 1999). This insecurity may negatively affect the students' daily functioning. The rapid spread of the block scheduling innovation brings with it both benefits and concerns with regard to programming for students with disabilities.

4. What existing interventions are used to attempt to alleviate common inconsistencies or disruptions in a school day?

As discovered through a review of the research, most students with learning problems need the organization and routine typical of systematic scheduling (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). A well-planned daily schedule greatly aids the teacher in providing effective instruction and collaboration. Most educators have their students make and constantly update a calendar; planners are also an effective tool. They often use different colors to represent various activities or class periods. According to Downing and Peckham-Hardin (2001), when schedules are flexible, students are better able to handle the changes that unavoidably occur (e.g., assemblies, special events, or early releases). If scheduling changes are needed, teachers explain the new events or assignments to the students ahead of time. Ongoing communication between teachers and students ensures consistency (Lavoie, 2005). Teachers benefit from developing a personal relationship with each student so that, in times of crisis, the teachers can assist in de-escalating the situation and providing supports (Braaten & Quinn, 2000). Students are often given permission to engage in a trusted staff member (e.g., the special education teacher) to be a confidant when frustration overcomes them and outbursts are imminent (Cornett & Downing, 2006).

Once they reach secondary school, students are generally taught by several teachers throughout their day. It is helpful, then, for students to know and follow the established routines for each teacher (Finstein, Yang, & Jones, 2007). Teachers usually hand out or discuss classroom requirements and expectations at the beginning of a term; it is beneficial for students to keep track of these in a notebook. It is also a good idea to have them printed up and accessible to the student.

Limitations of the Research

In this study, the researcher's own viewpoint and experiences may have altered the interpretation of the literature, therefore limiting the research conducted. Other topics could have been further investigated to add to the body of knowledge (e.g., routines for those in general education classes), but research was kept specifically to students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD). Thus, additional and longitudinal research would be beneficial.

Recommendations for Educators

To assist educators in preparing students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) to better handle inconsistencies in their school day, the following recommendations are provided as a result of the literature review.

1. As reiterated several times, it is recommended that teachers establish a routine and continuously reinforce it.

2. It is recommended that teachers consistently use planners or daily schedules. Educators should demonstrate how to effectively use a planner and teach students how to highlight important dates or changes to their routine.

3. Teachers need to be aware of the impact substitutes and new schedules have on

students with EBD and LD. Teachers should practice being proactive; leave thorough lesson plans for substitutes that indicate which students need to be assisted and how. Teachers should leave copies of IEP modifications and behavior intervention plans. Oftentimes, teachers' lesson plans contain jargon that is indecipherable to substitutes. This should be considered when writing out daily instructions; define acronyms such as IEP so lesson plans are easily interpreted and implemented. It is recommended that teachers provide the main office with a folder that can be given to a substitute should the need arises. The folder should include seating charts, schedules, routines, and lesson plans that make it possible for substitutes to concentrate on effective instruction instead of having to re-plan the day.

4. The following suggestions were also provided by Finstein, Yan, and Jones (2007):

   a. Post needed information on a bulletin board; this provides a convenient place for students to look.

   b. Make and update a calendar. Use different colors for various activities to help highlight important due dates for projects, assignments, and exams.

   c. Provide students with scripts or how-to cards on how to deal with changes in their routine. These cards are convenient for them to pull out of their notebook or pocket as necessary.

   d. Post reminders; students can check the reminder to know specifically what is expected.

5. Teachers should work on identifying what stressful situations seem to provoke or trigger the student to become emotional and upset. This can be done by observing the student or simply by asking him or her. Once these triggers are identified, role-playing can be helpful in teaching the student how to manage his or her anger during such situations.

6. Use functional communication training as an intervention for students who display disruptive behaviors when faced with change. This involves teaching students a specific communication response that is socially appropriate, produces the same effect or function, and is as or more efficient than the problem behavior (Danforth & Taff, 2004).

7. Teachers should encourage the use of self-monitoring. This is a metacognitive strategy in which students regulate their own behaviors by using checking and questioning progress (Rivera & Smith, 1997). Students keep records of their own behaviors, in hopes that it will cause positive changes in performance.

Recommendations for Substitute Teachers

As a result of the literature review, the following recommendations are provided to assist substitute teachers in becoming more effective when teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD).

1. If substitute teachers are present 5-10% of a student's time in school, then it is crucial that substitutes be trained to be more effective teachers and not simply bodies to occupy the room. It is recommended that substitutes use positive encouragement and follow the daily classroom routine.

2. Substitutes should use paraprofessionals' knowledge of the classroom structure and routine to become more effective with the students.

3. Repeat substituting allows students to become familiar with the teacher and is recommended. This also allows the substitute to become familiar with the regular teacher's schedule and teaching style (Tannenbaum, 2000). When substitutes become familiar with the students and their individual needs they are less likely to fall victim to the disruptive behaviors that often occur when substitutes are called to teach.

Recommendations for Administrators

In order to better serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD), the following recommendations are provided for administrators as a result of the literature review.

1. Make teachers accountable for the activities in their classrooms when they are out of school.

2. Design programs that successfully prepare and support effective substitute teachers.

3. Assess student perceptions about the substitute teacher's role in the classroom and aid in changing their attitudes.

4. Assess the students' competence before they transition to the secondary level. This can be done by maximizing communication and implementing pre-transition programs. Polloway and Patton (1997) pointed out that, "Given the significant differences that exist between elementary level and secondary level schooling, it is extremely important that systematic transition planning occur, especially for those who will be in inclusive settings" (p. 559).

The provided recommendations will assist educators, substitute teachers, and administrators in better accommodating students with emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities. Ultimately, the suggestions are offered to assist in effectively teaching students with exceptional needs, which will ensure that they are receiving a free and appropriate public education.

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