

**Factors Contributing to the Success of Students
With Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities**

by

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ABSTRACT

Youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) face tremendous struggles in school and the dropout rate for this group of students is high. Learning to surmount some of the challenges of this disability in school can prevent future struggles as an adult. This literature review surveys the current academic research to identify the factors that both contribute to and alleviate the struggles that youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities face in school, at home, and in society. This analysis of the literature determines what is most critical to youth with EBD and also determines those factors that can be influenced or directly changed by school faculty. This information provides schools with policy that reflects the needs of youth with EBD and is responsive to youth who see dropping out as their only option. Educators are in a position to aid students with

EBD because schools are a controlled environment of dedicated and trained professionals. The influence that educators have in creating an environment that is supportive and empowering to students is instrumental in helping youth avoid the pitfalls of dropout and academic failure.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) face tremendous struggles in school, perhaps experiencing less success than any other group of students (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). This paper seeks to illuminate the factors that contribute to or alleviate this struggle. Understanding the plight of youth with EBD involves understanding who they are and how they interact with their environment.

School-age youth who have been identified with emotional and behavioral disabilities have a unique set of challenges to overcome. These youth are characterized as having “severe, chronic and frequent behavior that is not the result of situational anxiety, stress or conflict” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2001). Their learning is hindered by their social, emotional, or behavioral dysfunction which may result in poor social relationships, inattention, inappropriate or disruptive behavior, depression, or anxiety.

One characteristic of youth with EBD is that they are predominantly male. An estimated 75% of all students receiving special education services under the category of emotional and behavioral disabilities are male (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). One hypothesis for the under-representation of females in the disability category is that females are more likely to internalize their problems into depressive or anxiety-type symptoms that are not disruptive in classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Other characteristics are that emotional and behavioral disability is twice as prevalent in teenagers as compared to younger school age children and is slightly more

common among African American students (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Low household income and its associated characteristics of single parent families, and low parental education, has been noted to be interrelated with all disability categories, especially EBD (Wagner, 2004; Wagner & Cameto, 2004).

In school, youth with EBD experience greater school mobility, 38% have been held back a grade, and three fourths have been expelled or suspended at least once (Wagner, 2004; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). This group of students is also more likely to receive poor grades, have high course failure rates, and have high absenteeism (Wagner & Cameto, 2004).

The difficulty of youth with EBD in school culminates with an unusually high dropout rate for this group. The population of youth in United States school systems who are receiving special education under this disability category is over 470,000 and the dropout rate of this group of students is over 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This dropout rate is almost twice as high as the next leading disability group, learning disabilities.

To what degree this high dropout rate is caused by school, environmental, or individual factors is debatable. This high dropout rate may indicate friction between schools and youth with EBD to the point that half see dropping out as their only option. Unfortunately, as teenagers with EBD, the school system may be the best resource for learning to deal with their disability. Prematurely terminating this connection leaves these youth with diminished support.

Along with a pattern of academic failure, poor social adjustment, and disengagement from school, youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities also show a

pattern of criminal behavior (National Longitudinal Transitional Study, 1993; Wagner & Cameto, 2004; Zionts, Zionts, & Simpson, 2002). For youth with serious emotional disturbances, 37% were reported to have legal/criminal problems within two years of leaving high school (National Longitudinal Transitional Study, 1993). After having been out of school 3 to 5 years the rate for this group jumps to 58% having been arrested. And among students with serious emotional disturbances who also dropped out, 73% were found to have been arrested 3 to 5 years after secondary school. Rushton (1995) sites education as a key factor in determining whether youth will avoid the pitfalls of poverty, juvenile crime and unemployment.

The potentially high social cost of this group has resulted in policy changes and increased national attention (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) and A National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance are examples of this concern (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). The potentially high social cost of youth with EBD who do not have effective self-management or coping tools warrants preventative policies.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this literature review is how to prevent or alleviate the poor scholastic and social outcomes listed above. Unfortunately, prevention of the emotional and behavioral disability itself is not currently available. The causal origins of emotional and behavioral disabilities are debatable. Like many other psychological disorders, there is ambiguity over how much of the disorder is the result of outside influences on the person or how much is inherent to the person's own brain chemistry

and biological makeup (Farrell, 1995). Even the environmental hazards of lead and mercury have been shown to have an association with EBD-type behavior in children (Marlowe, Errera, Stellem, Beck, 1983). Many theories also emphasize the impact of prenatal conditions or exposure to chemicals in contributing to emotional disorders (Zionts, Zionts & Simpson, 2002). The contributions of variables like a person's environment, or their genetic make up and brain chemistry is open to great speculation and debate. A more purposeful study of EBD is to engage in investigation that brings about direct improvement in the lives of youth with EBD.

This literature review takes the pragmatic stance that school systems are a powerful tool in improving the lives of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Schools provide an immediate way of influencing the behavior, social adjustment, and insight that youth with EBD have into themselves. It is a stable environment with trained specialists and educators who can help children and teenagers learn to cope with their disability. It is at a young age that people have the best ability to learn, change, and adapt in preparation for the inflexibility of the adult world. For example, if youth with EBD are not successful in adapting to the parameters of the school environment, how successful will they be in adapting to the parameters of the legal environment?

The task is then to discover what aspects of the school environment can be most influential in promoting school success or, at minimum, school retention. Staying in school until graduation may not be the ultimate measure of success but it enables educators to maintain influence over youth who benefit from guidance. It seems to be a trend for schools to embrace more responsibility for guiding youth. Society now places

an emphasis in youth's emotional and social well being, making schools a major deliverer of these services.

One way to help kids with EBD succeed in school is to institute academic interventions. Unfortunately, studies that identify the effectiveness of academic interventions with emotionally or behaviorally disabled youth are scarce. Mooney, Epstein, Reid & Nelson (2003) identified only 55 studies on students with EBD from the last quarter century that had an academic intervention focus. Only a total of 358 students contributed to research-verified knowledge of which academic intervention strategies work. Research on students with EBD is insufficient (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). There is an urgent need to know what strategies or aspects of school are most beneficial to youth with EBD.

Purpose of the Literature Review

Given the high propensity for difficulty in school and the tendency for large numbers of these students to end their schooling early, there is ample evidence to suggest improvements could be made in the education of youth with EBD (Kortering & Blackorby, 1992). With more information about the challenges that affect EBD youth, changes can be made to accommodate the needs of this group. Accommodating the needs of these students will allow schools to have a positive influence on the academic and social trajectory of these youth.

The goal of this literature review is to gather information on the environmental, familial, academic, and social factors that most affect the lives of youth with EBD. This analysis also seeks to uncover the personal and school factors that are associated with students who drop out of school. This information will build understanding of the most

relevant issues and allow schools to address these concerns. By providing schools with an understanding of what forces have the greatest influence on students with EBD, changes can be put in place that counteract these forces and not only keep more students with EBD in school but also enhance the benefit they receive from this education. The goal is not only reduction of the dropout rate but also improvement in the service that schools provide to youth with EBD.

Assumptions of the Literature Review

This literature review assumes that schools are the best place to serve youth with EBD. Certainly for more extreme behaviors clinical treatment centers are and should be utilized. This literature review places emphasis on special education department's trained faculty and systems of identification and intervention to adjust to the needs of youth with EBD. Kutash and Duchnowski (2004) indicate that there is a growing focus on schools as providers of mental health services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is an example of public education's commitment to addressing the broader, and sometimes mental health, needs of students who would otherwise be excluded from public education. Kortering and Blackorby state that students with behavioral disorders have presented public education with one of its greatest challenges: to address their intense and often nonacademic needs (1992). The social and emotional needs of youth with EBD require attention before academic pursuits can be approached, making support services like special education a necessity. How quickly and how well, if at all, schools adapt to fill this new role remains to be seen.

Another assumption is that schools can affect students with EBD in a positive manner. This assumes that the high dropout rate can be decreased and that improvements

can be made in the scholastic functioning of this group of students. It also assumes that the psycho-educational disability of emotional and behavioral disability is a condition that students can learn to cope with and adapt to in more productive ways. For instance, this assumes that a student's lack of impulse control can be buffered by a conscious attempt to avoid situations that encourage impulsive acts like aggressive games at recess. If the condition were one in which coping strategies or adaptation were futile, then schools would have no way of influencing the productivity and success of students with EBD.

Definition of Terms

In this analysis of the literature the terms emotional disturbance and emotional and behavioral disabilities are used synonymously because all students in the US public school system are subject to the same federal procedure of identification for eligibility of special education services. Variations on terminology can differ by state or researcher but for the purposes of this literature review all contribute to provide an overall picture of youth with these concerns.

The term emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) is used in the plural sense because it is used to include a variety of challenges faced by a very diverse group of young people. Emotional and behavioral disabilities can include behaviors characterized by social withdrawal, impaired social interaction, attention and concentration deficit, eating disorder, substance abuse, aggressive or disruptive behavior, or a significant mental health problem. Under these categories EBD is determined in accordance with stipulations of the intensity or duration of a child's problems.

A helpful definition for understanding emotional and behavioral disabilities is given in the state defined category of educational disability for Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2001). Emotional and behavioral disability is defined under section PI 11.36 (7)(a) as "social, emotional or behavioral functioning that so departs from generally accepted, age appropriate ethnic or cultural norms that it adversely affects a child's academic progress, social relationships, personal adjustment, classroom adjustment, self-care or vocational skills." A simplified definition is provided by Zionts et al. (2002): "students who have significant social, behavioral, or emotional differences when compared to their normally developing peers" (p. 9).

By focusing on students who are receiving special education under the broad category of emotional and behavioral disabilities, this analysis of the literature utilizes a predefined population. The highly regulated identification and special education assignment process assures that students placed in the emotional and behavioral disability category have concerns that are well validated.

Limitations of the Literature Review

One limitation of this literature review is that it is very theoretical and limited to the realm of academic study. The body of knowledge supplied by academic research may have limitations in its direct application to the school environment. The realities of this population are widely varied and somewhat resistant to quantification.

Another limitation is that the scope of this analysis of the literature is limited to improving the school environment. The realm of influence in the lives of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities from genetics to the community is not easily studied nor easily changed. What is within the realm of our knowledge and within our control is

what happens in schools. As mentioned previously the magnitude of change affected by schools alone is limited. An ideal situation would include policy change that benefited the whole environment around youth with EBD.

Methodology

A review of current academic research was conducted to illuminate current academic thought on emotional and behavioral disabilities. Information was gathered on the environmental, familial, academic, and individual factors that most affect the lives of youth with EBD. This literature review paid particular attention to the personal and school factors that are associated with students who dropout of school. This information builds understanding of the concerns that are of biggest priority to students with EBD allowing schools to make the school environment more responsive to the needs of this population.

Chapter II: Literature Review

An identification of the most relevant risk or protective factors that affect the scholastic success of youth with EBD can serve to illustrate the struggles and supports these youth have. The influence of risk and protective factors even in the presence of severe mental health disorder has been verified by Vance, Bowen, Fernandez and Thompson (2002) in their finding that certain risk and protective factors outweighed the importance of psychiatric symptom severity in predicting future behavioral functioning in students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. This means that outside influence and support can have a degree of impact regardless of the severity of the emotional and behavioral disability.

Of the risk and protective factors, attention was paid to how they relate to scholastic success. Of particular importance were studies that focused on the risk and protective factors that may have a relation to a student's decision to drop out. Scholarly work that addresses the conditions surrounding a student's decision to drop out of school can illustrate the factors involved in a student's disassociation from school. Though dropping out of school is not intended to be the ultimate measure of school or student failure, conditions surrounding such an event does serve to illuminate the conflict between students and other sources. Knowing the sources of conflict provides schools with information about which aspects of school or the environment are most troubling to these youth. Schools with this understanding can help youth with EBD or other at-risk youth. Schools can adopt policy that is responsive to the struggles of students with EBD that can evolve as knowledge of EBD evolves.

For the purpose of providing more insight into the dropout issue, some research was included on other students at risk of dropping out besides youth with EBD. This includes student populations labeled 'troubled' or 'inner-city' that share commonalities with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The major categories of risk factors identified in the literature tend to be a list of environmental influences that are indicative of struggle such as economic disadvantage, belonging to a minority group, family factors, and stress (Mason, Chapman, & Scott, 1990).

Personal Factors as They Relate to Scholastic Success or Strife

Personal factors that contribute to or hinder the scholastic success of students with and without EBD have been identified. Factors that specifically contribute to dropout among students include absenteeism, course failure, repeating a grade, poor academic performance, attitudes, individual behavior, pregnancy, and school adjustment factors. Personal skills and characteristics like low educational aspiration, sociability, low self-esteem, and external locus of control have been linked with kids who drop out (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Personal characteristics have been associated with positive outcomes among youth with EBD. Vance et al. (2002) found that contact with prosocial peers and well developed interpersonal skills, reading ability and social problem-solving ability were most predictive of success one year later. School faculty can seek to bolster these individual skills to provide a sense of accomplishment and motivation to cope and adapt to challenges in positive ways.

The term resilience refers to those personal characteristics which can counter-act negative experiences or risk factors. Studies on the impact of resilience to risk can

provide some insight into the personal traits that aid students both with and without EBD. The main personal traits cited in the literature on resilience are self-esteem, adaptability, ability to problem solve, determination, internal locus of control, empathy, and other social skills (Luthar, 1991; Rutter, 1987; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Weinreb, 1997; Wyman et al., 1992). Though the prevalence of research on the notion of resiliency peaked in the 1980's and 1990's the goal of empowering the personal resources of students is still valid.

One channel to a more resilient outcome by utilizing personal attitude and coping efforts is offered by Rutter (1987). This method utilizes alteration of the meaning or impact of stress through "controlled exposure to stress in circumstances favorable to successful coping or adaptation" (Rutter, 1987, p. 326). He suggests that youth can learn to successfully navigate potentially harmful situations and come away with a stronger sense of self-efficacy by facing challenges with some level of support. Rutter emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy through accomplishments and the importance of learning to cope with and control events.

When considering the personal characteristics of students with EBD that contribute to or negate success in school, much of it is in the student's control. In Werner and Smith's (2001) now 40 year longitudinal study of resiliency: "the overwhelming majority of the resilient individuals considered their personal competence and determination to be their most effective resource in dealing with stressful life events" (p.69). Attitude, personal outlook, and determination all relate to how a student chooses to react to their environment and even how they react to themselves. There are limitations imposed on people with disabilities, yet how an individual chooses to respond to those

limitations makes perhaps a greater difference than the magnitude of those limitations. Schools then can shape attitude, personal outlook, and determination by how a student is encouraged. As will be elaborated on later, the school environment can help foster a student's personal resources through support and guidance as well as successful task accomplishment (Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Rutter, 1987; Weinreb, 1997).

Familial Factors as They Relate to Scholastic Success or Strife

Aspects of an EBD student's family background that have been identified as risk factors include poor family function, low maternal education, being raised by a single parent, household stress, and mobility. Data from two recent longitudinal studies found that more than a third of youth with EBD live in a single parent home and almost a quarter live in homes where the head of the household is unemployed (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). This study also found that in homes of students with EBD, the prevalence of household heads who had not graduated from high school was more than double the general population and that almost half live with a family member who also has a disability.

Research has consistently indicated that a child's school performance is strongly influenced by the family environment (Christenson, 1990). Identifying these risk factors and others does not to assign causation but characterizes some of the struggles that can exacerbate the problems of student's with emotional and behavioral disabilities. It is also important to note that family factors can be an asset in overcoming adversity. Parents of youth with EBD can be viewed as uninvolved or uncaring by educators, when in reality they may be trying to overcome numerous challenges (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski,

Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Of the over two thousand families that participated in the two longitudinal studies mentioned above, parents of youth with EBD were more likely to help with homework and attend parent-teacher conferences. School faculty therefore should not make assumptions about parents but instead foster collaboration.

Family involvement in school and family expectations for the future can improve outcomes for all youth with disabilities (Christenson, 1990; Wagner, 2004). Specifically, parental support translates to a greater likelihood of post-secondary education, more positive classroom engagement behavior, and less chance of receiving disciplinary action (Wagner, 2004). Also, having supportive and caring caregivers who utilize firm, reasoned, and predictable discipline has been shown to contribute to better child outcomes in the face of major life stress (Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Wyman et al., 1992).

Some family responsibilities can take priority over school and force students to drop out. The number of students who leave school because of pregnancy is significant according to Wehlage and Rutter (1986). Fine (1986) indicates that for girls who struggle with school, becoming a teen mother can offer an alternative that generates a sense of purpose and competence. Further, schools can offer sex education, contraceptives, and job training as a way of reducing dropout and teen pregnancy. Alexander and Entwisle (2001) conclude that students who drop out can be placed (either before or after dropping out) in a positions of adulthood before they are ready for the responsibility.

Societal Factors as They Relate to Scholastic Success or Strife

Students who live in poverty are more likely to have significant struggles. They are more likely to drop out of school and/or have an emotional and behavioral disability

(Fine, 1986; Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Similarly, rates of dropout and of emotional disturbance are higher in inner-city schools and are higher for African American males (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004; Wehlage & Rutter 1986). Economic disadvantage is thought to be the factor with the largest influence on the lives of students who drop out (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Economic disadvantage is associated with poor outcomes on many fronts: educational, social, and in terms of physical and mental health. These variables are too interrelated and it is difficult to determine much more about the problem other than the seriousness of the economic stress on these families (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005).

It is important to note that characteristics like low socio-economic status and family background are variables that are relatively static. Though these aspects of EBD youth's lives can not be readily accessed and influenced by school personnel, educators can seek to support students who are disadvantaged by societal inequality. It is useful for educators to be aware of the challenges that students face outside of school because they may need help dealing with these challenges while they are in school.

Almost every piece of research that focuses on either students who drop out or students with EBD makes an attempt at characterizing the socio-economic, family, and personal characteristics of these students. However these lists of identifiable characteristics do not indicate causation, they merely provide insight into the factors that shape a student's response. Searching for the cause of a student's choices to drop out or act a certain way is embedded in the conditions that surround the interaction of the student and their environment, which includes the school (Kortering & Blackorby, 1992).

It is not enough to just say these students are economically disadvantaged and come from single parent homes, understanding these students must go a step further in looking at how students with this background interact with the school.

Disadvantage may make life harder, but it does not govern how a person acts or the choices they make. Disadvantage, however, may set up a dynamic between individuals and others who improperly understand the depth of personal struggle that shapes a person's outlook. When a disadvantaged student arrives at school unprepared and angry the interaction that follows is decided both by the school faculty and the student. This interaction will illuminate what benefit or detriment that student receives from school. Does the student end up sitting sullen in detention or is the student calmly learning ways to gain control over themselves with a faculty member they respect? The next section of research focuses on school factors that can be manipulated to benefit all youth at risk of dropping out.

School Factors as They Relate to Scholastic Success or Strife

School factors are the biggest category of risk and protective factors that apply to youth with and without EBD. School factors that prevent emotionally disturbed students from dropping out have been noted in the literature. Taking occupationally oriented courses or being in a work experience program was related to completing school (National Longitudinal Transitional Study, 1993). Also, being involved in school or community groups and attending a smaller high school was linked to a decreased chance of dropout.

Among all students with disabilities, age seems to be an important factor in dropout. The National Longitudinal Transition Study commissioned by the U.S.

Department of Education notes that most dropouts stayed in school until their same-aged peers graduated (National Longitudinal Transitional Study, 1993). Fewer than one-fourth dropped out before age 17, another one-third left at age 18, and the rest left school at 19+ years of age. Considering that the average number of credits held by this group was only 10 one might guess that peer pressure influenced students' decision to stay in school. The exact implication for students in the EBD disability category is not noted in the research but the influence of age can be inferred. This suggests that students with disabilities may reach the age of graduation along with their peers without having the number of credits necessary to graduate. Seeing their non-disabled peers exit school has an understandable draw for disabled students to also exit school.

The composition of school staff and availability of school funding may also influence dropout rates. Overcrowding and a lack of additional resources like tutoring, counseling services, or the means to follow up on long-term absentees and dropouts has been cited by Fine (1986) as important contributors to dropout rates. Also having a racial distribution of staff that doesn't match the diversity of the students can hinder connections to students. Fine (1986) points out that staff who have large class sizes, limited support staff, and unavailable administrators can develop disparaging attitudes that are carried over to their students.

Students with EBD struggle behaviorally and are susceptible to disciplinary processes in school, and hence, may want to leave. Studies have shown that students who struggle academically and students with disabilities receive more disciplinary consequences (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Not only are students with disabilities almost twice as likely to be suspended from

school, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and learning disabilities are an over-represented disability category in overall suspensions.

The impact of severe disciplinary action must be considered because suspension has been found to correlate significantly with dropout (Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Similarly, students with academic and discipline problems can frequently change schools and/or classrooms. This mobility, along with its deleterious effects on academic performance and social connections, contributes to the high dropout rate of students with EBD (Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003; Kortering & Blackorby, 1992; Wagner, 2004).

Osher, Morrison, and Bailey (2003) cite emotionally disturbed youth's tendency to have both negative interactions with peers and teachers and academic frustration. This, along with the resulting poor grades, may contribute to a disengagement from the learning process (Wagner, 2004). Academic struggle can simply be daunting and unattractive when compared to life outside school, particularly if there are grade retentions or detentions involved.

Dropout, in general, among all students has been well documented and in most cases is the culmination of a long period of disengagement from school. Alexander and Entwisle (2001) describe patterns of how students disengage from academics then fade out through truancy. They indicate that most young children enter their school career with enthusiasm for learning. It is over a long period of failure or discouraging experiences that erosion of a child's investment in school can occur. Wehlage and Rutter (1986) show evidence that the disengagement process is most evident at the high school level. Even as late as their sophomore year, few dropouts in their study anticipated their impending

dropout. This suggests something happens internally or externally to dissuade high school students from reaching their expectations.

Student perceptions of the support they receive from their school and their teachers can have a significant influence. Wehlage and Rutter (1986) found that the variables of teacher interest in students, effectiveness of discipline, and fairness of discipline were reflective of student alienation and rejection of school. A lack of academic success and demoralizing discipline experiences combined with a perception that teachers don't care can lead to a feeling that the institution of school has rejected the person.

The importance of teacher support in students was further emphasized by Croninger and Lee (2001) in their conclusion that social relationships of at-risk students and their teachers are critical in determining whether the student graduates. Dropouts often cite a lack of social and emotional support as a reason for leaving school before graduation. Because dropouts are less likely to have positive relationships at school with either peers or school faculty they are the group that benefits most from teacher support. Teacher support comes in the form of encouragement, guidance in making decisions and foreseeing consequences, emotional support, and information and assistance with personal and school related issues (Croninger and Lee, 2001; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999). Teachers (along with other community members) can be key in providing emotional support, rewarding competence, and promoting self-esteem in at-risk students (Weinreb, 1997). The key is that teachers must both build trust and give actual assistance or guidance to students (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Chapter III: Analysis of the Literature

This literature review surveys the current academic research to identify the factors that both contribute to and alleviate the struggles that youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities face in school, at home, and in society. This analysis of the literature determines what is most critical to youth with EBD and also determines those factors that can be influenced or directly changed by school faculty.

The factors that schools can change to better serve youth with EBD involve providing small classroom sizes with ample staff, implementing a discipline structure that is perceived as fair, and ensuring that teachers build trust and assist students effectively. The factors that schools can only indirectly influence are the personal, familial, and societal factors listed earlier. As Kortering and Blackorby (1992) have emphasized, it is the complex interactions between students with EBD and their environment that is the key in understanding their behavior. The school's role, then, is to moderate the interactions between the student and the environment by bolstering the student's own coping resources, and by building perseverance and future optimism through supportive relationships.

The support that youth with EBD need is more than emotional support, it is effective teaching, counseling that provides sound guidance, and behavioral expectations that are clear and attainable. Schools in which students with EBD are most successful have high behavioral and academic expectations and also have the resources to support these students (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). According to the U.S. Department of Education, supportive programs can include prevention and early intervention as well

as individualized services, positive behavioral supports, and collaboration between staff and families.

The key is to empower students with EBD through support that enables them to experience success over the challenges they face. Academic success is a great example of how a student's beliefs can work for or against them. A high emphasis on academic success can discourage students who struggle by creating a cycle of negative feedback and less reason to try. Many students with EBD report lacking confidence in their academic ability and their ability to have control over their lives (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). This is where teachers taking note of the cycle can intervene with additional tutoring and other support to enable student success. As was cited in Rutter's (1987) work earlier, helping students feel accomplishment in overcoming a struggle through a well-supported challenge can boost self-efficacy. Self-efficacy in academics is a major determinant of engagement in school and it is what students at risk of dropping out need the most.

For schools, a policy of support should foster a realization of a student's own abilities to overcome adversity. Personal development of students should involve gaining self-direction and motivation along with an ability to make rational decisions and gain control of oneself and one's future. Coupling personal development with acquisition of academic knowledge and skill is a broad design for a school's role. This policy of personal development as well as academic development is well suited to the needs of struggling students whose personal challenges need attention before academics can be pursued. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act commits schools to extend their

role into social and emotional realms in addressing the needs of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities so that academic progress can occur.

This policy assumes a role of engaging actively with troubling students who are becoming alienated and disengaged from school. Kortering and Blackorby point out that since youth with EBD do not conform to the norms of a traditional school environment they run the risk of being resented and even “pushed out” by school faculty (1992). Schools, therefore, have both the opportunity and responsibility to prevent struggling students from sliding out the door even if they have the most troubling behavior.

Now, more than ever, schools are accountable for the outcomes that are reached with students. Having a sound policy that works in achieving high academic standards for all students is acceptable for now. As student needs change however, schools will need to be responsive to change and will need to monitor the outcomes that are reached with students. To achieve responsiveness to the diverse and changing needs of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities more evidence will need to be gathered on which strategies are most effective.

This literature review and analysis gives a theoretical justification for the use of supportive strategies with students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities, but much more information will need to be provided to schools in order to achieve better results and decrease the dropout rate. Specifically, Smokowski, Reynolds, and Bezruczko call for more qualitative studies that foster resilience (1999). Also, studies that take a more grounded approach to illustrate actual experiences rather than the theoretical stance of this literature review would be helpful.

An approach that is grounded in the realities of schools would be to interview students with EBD to illuminate the most influential factors in determining individual success in school. Interviews would mirror the richness and complexity of individual situations and as Smokowski, Reynolds, and Bezruczko point out, factors that a student believes to have the most impact on them is what will carry the most importance in how that individual chooses to act (1999). In this sense, the subjectivity of a student's viewpoint is valuable for the weight it has in a student's decisions, attitudes, and behavior. From this information, insight could be gained into the factors that are within a school's control that have the most impact on the success of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities.

A vast body of research still needs to be gathered on how schools can best meet the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Scholarly knowledge regarding this disability group is still in its early stages and the success rate as reflected in the dropout rate is still bleak. As new understanding unfolds for the educators working with these students, research will serve to expedite the growth of this knowledge.

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