The Experiences and Practices of Educators that Teach Students with EBD

by

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A Doctoral Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Doctorate of Education Program at Northeastern University

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August 2017
Acknowledgements

To my wife, thank you for being my greatest friend and most trusted counselor. Your wisdom has no boundaries. The clarity and advice you give me is never yielding. You are a brilliant light in my life. I am a better man because of you. To our son Isaac, at the age of four I was surprised how much you would coach me and encourage me. Your constant positivity and kindness continue to motivate me and others. My family is my greatest source of strength.

To the two greatest teachers in my life, I dedicate this dissertation to you. Mom and Dad, you started preparing me for a career in education before I finished middle school. Watching you both teach students and lead schools has been the greatest source of inspiration in my life. The experience of watching you will always inform my decisions. You taught me to put students first, and to be in service to children. My only hope is to have the same impact that you both did throughout your careers.

Thank you to the good people at Northeastern University. Your efforts towards social justice, global communities, and inclusiveness of all walks of life are things I am proud to be a part of. Thank you Dr. Reiss-Medwed for being my advisor and Dr. Unger for being my professor and second reader.
Abstract

This qualitative study used the traditions of interpretive phenomenological analysis to identify the experiences and practices of educators who teach students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). The guiding question that fueled this study was: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD? This study used Ericsson’s (1994) expertise theory to develop semi-structured interviews that inquired into the deliberate practices and experiences of teachers who educate students with EBD. Participants in the study were teachers who have taught students with EBD for seven years or more. The goal of the study was to identify themes and practices of these teachers in order to inform stakeholders of teaching practices that may benefit students with EBD.

*Keywords:* teacher practices, emotional and/or behavioral disorder
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The Topic

The purpose of this qualitative research dissertation was to explore the practices that experienced special education teachers use to teach students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). Many students with EBD attend comprehensive regular education programs, comprehensive public schools in special education classrooms, or alternative schools for students with EBD; some such students are even incarcerated as a result of behaviors associated with EBD (NCES, 2013). Furthermore, there are students with EBD in the regular education setting who may not have been identified (Kaufman, 2007). There are classrooms within regular education schools intended to meet the needs of students with EBD. Alternative settings include private and non-public schools that offer a variety of services for students with EBD. Incarceration-based education services are educational settings for students who have committed a crime. Regardless of the setting, students with EBD tend to have social issues with peers, demonstrate aggression in the school setting, and may have diagnosable psychiatric problems.

Despite the settings or educational interventions, the academic output and success rate for students with EBD is limited (Chong & Ng, 2011). As a result, the current state of special education for students with EBD is in dire need of reform (Kauffman, 2007). Students with EBD demonstrate disruptive behavior in a variety of settings, which leads to poor grades and undesirable behaviors in the classroom or school setting (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). The majority of these students with EBD tend to drop out from school, experience disciplinary exclusion (Duran, Zhou, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011), and face social stigma (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010; Kauffman, Mock, &
Simpson, 2007). In addition, students with EBD are more prone to drug-abuse, breaking the law, and eventual incarceration (Rueter, 2011; Osher, Morrison, & Wanda, 2003). The minimal academic impact teachers can have on students with EBD and the behavioral difficulties that such students display in the classroom contribute to teacher burnout and attrition (Albrecht, Mounsteven, & Orlanda, 2009; Center & Steventon, 2001). The problem of teacher attrition also contributes to low academic output for students with EBD and limits the number of experienced teachers serving in classrooms designed for students with EBD. However, there is a rare and small population of experienced educators teaching students with EBD. These educators’ unique expertise, perspective, and personalities allow those students to flourish in a variety of settings (Prather-Jones, 2011). This dissertation derived techniques and practices from teachers who are experienced in the field of teaching students with EBD.

**Research Problem**

Students with EBD exhibit hyperactivity, aggression, failure to engage in appropriate relationships, immaturity, and learning disorders (CEC, 2015). Students with EBD demonstrate a high rate of inappropriate and disruptive behavior in the classroom, which may impede other students’ opportunity to learn (Jull, 2008; Payne & Marks, 2007). Teachers are leaving this specific field of special education at an alarming rate (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven & Olorunda, 2009; Male, 1997; Prather-Jones, 2011). Due to these intersections of social and educational problems, an institutional norm has been established that these children cannot be helped (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). By identifying instructional practices geared towards students with EBD, this dissertation combated these social norms by identifying better instructional practices for teachers of students with EBD.
Justification for the Research Problem

Emotional disturbance (ED) is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). This piece of legislation indicates that ED, which is commonly labeled as EBD (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009), is a mixture of physical actions that may occur in the classroom. According to IDEA (2004), a student can be identified as ED/EBD due to having an inability to learn without an indication of intellectual, sensory or health factors; a failure to build appropriate relationships in the school environment; inappropriate behavior; unhappiness; depression; and physical symptoms associated with school-related problems. Schizophrenia is the only clearly defined ED diagnosis in the IDEA (2004). EBD is not a psychiatric or clinical diagnosis, but it is widely used in education (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009).

The direct cause of EBD is not clearly defined, although some suggest it is linked to childhood trauma (Seifert, 2003) or neuropsychological disorders (Mattison, 2006). The National Center for Educational Statistics indicated that the overall EBD population in U.S. schools is approximately 1 percent, using the IDEA (2004) definition. However, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) indicated that approximately 14 percent of children have been surveyed by a health care provider for emotional-related issues, with some children being prescribed medicine to manage their emotional or behavior problems. Lead researchers on the topic estimated that roughly 5 percent of school age children could be identified as EBD (Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). The behaviors demonstrated by students with EBD may also be associated with neuropsychological deficits and have comorbidity with other learning disabilities (Mattison, 2006). The undesired behaviors can be correlated with a history of childhood trauma (Preus, 2008; Seifert, 2003). As the result of the aforementioned behaviors and potential psychological issues, students with EBD tend to spend a
great deal more time outside the classroom than their comparable peers (Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008).

Teachers of students with EBD exhibit a great deal of stress and burnout, and often eventually leave the field (Prather-Jones, 2011). This stress could be related to student behavior (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Cancio & Conderman, 2008). Another source of stress is that teachers coming out of college are not properly prepared to teach students with EBD (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Billingsley, Fall & Williams, 2006; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Teachers who are experienced educators feel that new teachers need more skills in the area of behavior management and a better understanding of emotional and behavior disorders (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). In contrast to these issues, teachers who are seasoned and experienced tend to have unique skills and characteristics that allow them to flourish in an otherwise stressful environment (Prather-Jones, 2011). These teachers tend to be people with high resiliency and emotional stability when it comes to the externalization of behavior among students with EBD (Cancio, Albrecht & Johns, 2013).

Some successful practices for instructing students with EBD have been identified through research. However, many practices are identified through case study, are not useful for all students with EBD, and are antiquated. Instructional practices that are considered basic techniques, such as mnemonic devices, time modification, and other standard practices used in special education environments, are effective (Vennest, 2011). Students with EBD benefit from frequent specific praise (Allday et al., 2012) and individualized assignments (Neisyn, 2009). Almost all researchers mentioned in this dissertation agree that there needs to be more research on instructional practices for students with EBD. The vast majority of experts within the field suggest that research within the field is underexplored.
Students with EBD demonstrate behaviors that are undesirable. This problem, along with many other multifaceted issues, is causing teacher attrition. Teaching techniques for students with EBD are lacking and antiquated. These problems are reinforcing, as poor teaching techniques lead to disruptive behaviors, which increases teacher attrition, followed by a lack of advancement in the field. As a result, educational systems for students with EBD have not made the same strides as other fields. Further research into the phenomenon created by this downward spiral is needed at this time.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

There is a complete lack of pedagogical practices and curriculum in this area related to real-world 21st century learning. Very little literature suggests practices that work well with students who are identified as EBD. The research that is available is old and does not reflect modern pedagogy. There are many case studies and school-wide approaches that stretch over a long time period. The retesting or validity checking of known methods is very thin. Considering that education has changed so much over the last two decades, it seems as though the education of students with EBD has remained stagnant. Much of what has been accomplished in research needs to be repeated in the modern setting.

Academic interventions for students identified with EBD are limited and have never been fully realized in research or in literature (Vennest et al., 2011). As a whole, there is very little research on educating students with EBD (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). Meanwhile, the field is rife with institutional problems. The students are disruptive and demonstrate dangerous behaviors in the school setting (Jull, 2008; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). This may be causing teachers to leave the field of education (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda, 2009). In an underresearched and neglected field,
there is little room for progress and a high incidence of problems. These issues may result from a lack of research and progress. Regardless of the root of the problem, researchers, teachers, and school administrators need to begin to reinvest their energies into improving this field, if for no other reason than to help a very neglected and traumatized population. However, research is widely neglected in favor of other topics because of the difficulty of conducting research involving students with EBD.

Despite so many students in the United States being enrolled in various levels of special education learning environments as the result of EBD, very little research is being done on how to effectively instruct them (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). Researching students with EBD is particularly difficult due to the behaviors these students demonstrate, an overall lack of conclusion to the research, and the variety of settings in which students with EBD are educated (Shores & Wehby, 1999). Despite the overall need for improvements in education for students with EBD, many methodologies need revamping and improvement. This is a matter of not only improving education for a community with a low academic success rate and an important research endeavor, but it is also a matter of social justice. Many associated parties would benefit from further research on the topics of teaching students with EBD.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

This investigation is important to a variety of stakeholders, including the teachers and administrators who serve and educate students with EBD and provide pertinent professional development. The dissertation informs policy makers as well as higher education institutions as they prepare teachers who will occupy future classrooms, as it can be used to create a bank of teaching practices associated with instructing students with EBD. The ultimate beneficiaries of this research will be the students with EBD, as this research will help identify ways to include
these students in classroom activities and decrease the pattern of disciplinary exclusion. New teachers who enter this specific field of special education will also benefit by knowing about instructional practices that they can utilize in their classroom. Information from this dissertation will also benefit school administrators who are frequently taking disciplinary action against these students. In some respects, this dissertation will also impact the studied population, as a source of professional development for mid-career and veteran teachers. Teacher preparation programs and policy makers should also take heed of the information presented in this dissertation, as it may influence their practices and decision making. Finally, this dissertation also serves the parents of students with EBD, as their task is more daunting than that of the teachers. Though this dissertation was intended to benefit teachers, administrators, and parents, its ultimate purpose was to improve education for students with EBD.

Between the issues of dangerous behavior, teacher attrition, dangerous social norms and minimal outcomes, advances in the field of special education related to students with EBD need to be refocused on and improved on, for the sake of the students to who wear the EBD label. This dissertation sought to make the classroom a more meaningful environment for the students who frequent those classes. By increasing student engagement and motivation in the classroom setting, it is hoped that these students will have better educational opportunities and EBD education can take some much-needed steps forward. While this dissertation was an effort towards a positive direction in education for students with EBD, eventual change in EBD education will require a movement initiated by all researchers and practitioners within the field.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

During the 2012-2013 school year, there were approximately 6.4 million students in the American education system receiving special education services (U.S. Dept of Ed., 2015).
Among that 6.4 million, around 384,000 students received special education services for emotional disturbances. Roughly 81 percent of these students were in comprehensive normative schools and attended varying amounts of regular classes, while 13% attended separate schools related to their disability. When considering this large population of students, it is obvious that this field should be a highly researched and professionally driven area of reform.

EBD students are likely to have some of the worst outcomes from their school years among any special education group (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartololita, 2008). Students with EBD are more likely to experience disciplinary exclusion during their educational career (Rueter, 2011). Learning disabilities, poor social skills, and lack of parent involvement are also closely associated with this disciplinary frequency (Bowman-Perrot, et al, 2011). There is also a high comorbidity of being African American, male, and identified as EBD (Kaufman, 2007). This calls into question the validity of the EBD label. These intersections of adjectives all refer to groups of people who are in need of social justice and reform within American culture and education.

Statistics related to the state of Maryland are particularly relevant considering the site for this dissertation’s research. In Maryland, 6.7% of special education students were identified as ED, which was less than 1% of all students in Maryland (MSDE, 2010). Major issues associated with educating students with EBD in Maryland include a lack of training for teachers about the nature of emotional difficulties, a need for further training of administrators and teachers on best practices for teaching students with EBD, and a growing stigma towards students with EBD within the Maryland community (MSDE, 2010). Approximately 50 percent of Maryland students with EBD will drop out, and another 35 percent will be excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. There will be very few positive outcomes in posteducation employment for these
students (MSDE, 2010). A lack of appropriate educational services has led to a disproportionate number of students with EBD dropping out (Colley & Jamison, 1998). This problem is very evident in Maryland. Students with EBD are more likely to drop out than their peers as well as experience changes in their school placement, their classroom environment, and their classroom teachers (Osher, Morrison, & Wanda, 2003).

Research suggests some root causes for the problem that Maryland faces with its students with EBD. The three primary issues associated with drop-out among students with EBD are interest in school, attending school, and a lack of self-advocacy towards addressing comorbid learning disabilities (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). Perhaps low emotional and social coping skills could also be related to having few interventions for or identification of learning disabilities. Students with behavioral issues who drop out are likely to experience future unemployment, criminal activity, and incarceration (Bjerk, 2012). When students with EBD maintain their education and graduate with a functional diploma, the entire community benefits by gaining employable and knowledgeable citizens (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). Despite their challenging behaviors in school, students with EBD can be functional members of the workplace when provided with a quality education that emphasizes functional skills (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). Local communities and workplaces can be improved if the educational systems improve, particularly for students with EBD. However, these improvements exist idyllically, only in limited research. The need for improvement is paramount, and cannot come later: the dropout rate for students with EBD is extremely high, and the long-term outcomes are poor. This piques the question: Why are students with EBD dropping out?

When students with EBD lack interest in school, they tend to drop out (Colley & Jameson, 1998), and there is a high rate of dropouts among EBD populations (Osher, Morrison,
Dropping out leads to a path towards unemployment and criminal behavior (Bjerk, 2012). This is coupled with the fact that many students with EBD are a transient population with low socioeconomic status (Osher, Morrison & Wanda, 2003). This trend is a nationwide epidemic, consistent across all states. When considering the correlation between students dropping out and incarceration, educators and lawmakers should consider the average cost of $31,286 that it takes to imprison a person for a year (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012). This cost of incarceration is only a drop in the social issues bucket that exists when students drop out and engage in criminal activity. Criminal behavior could be decreased if schooling were to improve for students with EBD.

The foremost justification for this dissertation thus was preventing national poverty and crime. However, the overall justification was that this is a social justice issue that demands attention. How can the American education systems make laws and systems like the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) when there is this lurking population being frequently excluded due to the manifestation of behavior associated with their disabilities? How can it be that researchers have left behind this group of children who are in the most need? In an era of American history plagued by mental health deficiencies, why is it that the one safe haven that is the schoolhouse severely lacks the basics needed to help these sorts of children? This dissertation sought to make strides towards change by looking at the successes of our most experienced teachers in the field and identifying reproducible practices.

**Positionality Statement**

This study was sparked by the researcher’s experience teaching students with EBD and bearing witness to the effect that motivation, academic engagement, and a focus on student behavior and learning can have on even the most difficult of students. Through this experience, it
seems evident that when students with EBD are actively engaged in the learning effort, they are far less likely to engage in negative behavior. Certain teaching practices work well with students with EBD, while other practices do not work well at all. The practices that work can be very fulfilling for both the student and teacher alike, making future prosperity possible. The practices that do not work are a disaster, and can be an avenue for putting a teacher and student at risk for the manifestation of behavior associated with behavioral disorders. In essence, poor teaching can trigger dangerous behavior among students with EBD. Great teaching can trigger success in the moment, and for a lifetime.

My experience as a specialist in EBD education was at a regional center in the city of Baltimore that included a residential component. This was the most restrictive environment for special education students aside from correctional facilities. All of the students I worked with at that school were identified as EBD; many of them also had additional disabilities. Students from throughout Maryland were sent to this school when their local education agencies could not provide them with a free and public education. My tenure at this school was thorough. It began in a single locked classroom, deep in the back corridors of the institute.

When I was a young college student, fresh from my first stint as a long-term substitute, I applied to be a teaching assistant at a school in Baltimore that served students with EBD. The outside of the building was well-kept and the lobby was immaculate and clean. The interview was short, and I was quickly hired as an assistant teacher. My job would be to teach one student. On my first day, I travelled through several locked doors into a small area within the school that smelled of bleach, as if it had been freshly cleaned and disinfected. As I passed by classrooms, I saw only three to eight children working with several staff members. I entered the small room that was to be my classroom, to work with a student who could not be in a larger community due
to behavior that was deemed dangerous. For an entire school day, I taught the entire high school curriculum to this student, as best I could. We made remarkable progress on social skills and communication, and the student earned excellent academic grades on tests. Eventually, I worked with this student to transition out of that small locked classroom and into the greater school community. I attended his courses with him, and eventually was phased out of his educational programming. This student went on to graduate from the school and enroll in college. This experience of seeing exclusion at its worst has forever left a mark on me. After watching the growth that was possible for this sort of student, a student who was doomed to be excluded from the world yet grew into a mature and capable person, I set out on a journey to help more children like him.

This would be only one of hundreds of stories where I saw the help I could provide to students with EBD. I set out to become a teacher, to earn higher degrees and certifications. For 13 years I held many jobs at this school in Baltimore designed for students with EBD. I worked as a behavioral coach, in-school suspension teacher, science teacher, special education case manager, and as chair of a school improvement committee. During this time, I earned my degrees and began my dissertation process. As a dual-certified teacher in both biology and special education with a leadership background, my experience was robust but localized. The outcomes I saw from this program were amazing, although largely unquantifiable. Certainly we did not see a large student population go on to college. But we did see them go out into society with a much greater chance of being a contributing member. It would be a success for the program if a student could spend an entire high school career at the institute, and go on to participate in the job market, have a family, or even go to college. The good work done at that regional center was exemplary and will forever impact me as a teacher and as a human being.
Some of my fondest experiences included field trips to teach students about local ecosystems around the Chesapeake Bay. Student-led projects in the greenhouse and the native species garden brought the best out in students. In our science classroom we had a plethora of aquariums, lab activities, and computer simulations. Not only did we have a fun learning experience, but we also earned great test scores and worked towards graduation. Based on my own tenure, I know these students can succeed: it just takes the right situation. I worked alongside great teachers with solid backgrounds and saw them flourish as educators hand-in-hand with the students that they raised up.

Just as I saw the light of teaching, I have also seen its darkness. After losing students to suicide, drug overdoses, running away from home or treatment, and dropping out of school, my will to teach was strained. The death of a student who I had helped graduate and go on to a four-year school left me scarred. That death made me want to leave education and give up teaching. Even though I pressed on, my work on this dissertation in some ways is dedicated to that student. That particular young person would not be the first, nor the last, student who I lost to suicide or mental illness. I know that education and services for those young people could be better. Perhaps if I had known what I know today, I could have been a greater help to them.

Mixing student behaviors with colleague behavior was particularly difficult. The constant slew of new teachers every year, most leaving or quitting after only a short stay at the institute, was particularly disheartening. I mentored many different people to be teachers of students with EBD, and many have gone on to become great teachers themselves. However, some would quit almost immediately, while others would linger on. The problems associated with being a teacher of students with EBD eventually wore on me. At a certain point, I was emotionally hollow.
Meanwhile, as I began work on this dissertation, I was living, studying, and working in the field of EBD education.

During the latter portion of my tenure, after winning several awards for teaching excellence, developing a school improvement committee, collaborating to create a college readiness program for the students at the institute, and leading the necessary changes throughout the school via professional development, something broke me. I lost another former student. The details of the loss are not to be shared in this dissertation, but they are particularly scarring. From this, I knew there had to be improvements in the field of special education for students with EBD. Research and practice derived from contemporary changes to the field became very important to me. There had to be something more that I could do for the field that would help even more students.

I left this specific field of special education for a less emotionally straining environment. I hope that this research will ultimately serve the children who would later arrive at the doorsteps of places like those where I used to teach. Perhaps the good work that is done in this social justice effort on the behalf of students with EBD will find itself in the hands of some new and struggling teacher. I am grateful for the opportunity to conduct research on educational practices for students with EBD, as it is my belief that this may be my contribution to the field that would have the most impact in the long term.

Currently, I am an interdisciplinary team leader and science teacher at a middle school in the Baltimore suburbs. Some students applied to attend the school, while others were placed at the school due to proximity. The team I lead was designed to include a range of students, from those who are benefiting from special education services to those benefiting from advanced coursework. This heterogeneous design is part of an overall goal to make education more
accessible for everyone. Our team does include some students with EBD traits or identified as being EBD. The behaviors I manage are far less severe than those at the institute I formerly was associated with. All of the students that have been identified as EBD are intentionally placed on our team if their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) dictates that level of service. We have few manifestations of EBD-related behaviors due to the inclusivity of our team and the quality of teaching. Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to work on earlier intervention for students with EBD and have had some marked success using my experience to help students in my current setting. Through this experience, I feel that early intervention is paramount for students with EBD.

My perspectives on students with EBD come from a place of empathy and compassion. I have worked very closely with students who have experienced trauma as the result of abuse or neglect. It is my personal perspective that EBD originates from childhood trauma and that there is a social justice aspect of service to students whose EBD results from their childhood histories. I hold the perhaps idealized notion that I can ascertain some semblance of effective instructional practices for engaging and motivating students with EBD, which may lead to better instruction for those students. In this effort, I hope that I can make a contribution to this specific field of special education.

While I may have these idealized perceptions, I am also aware of pitfalls resulting from my own tenure. As a classroom teacher of students with EBD, I won several awards from schools and student groups and was rated very highly by school administrations. It is possible that through my expertise, I developed a positionality that led to me to reach conclusions before this dissertation ever came to shape. This positionality may stem from a place of ego. I may value my own expertise over others, as I have thrived in this field of special education when so many have
experienced the burnout and quit. Many times throughout my career I have seen teachers walk away from this field of special educator, or be forced out by administration. Having seen teachers make poor instructional decisions that enraged a student with EBD, I have many perceptions about what should occur in this sort of special education classroom.

At the end of my doctoral process and this dissertation, I intend to return to the service of students with EBD in an environment that can be modified to fit the needs of those students. Whether that involves founding new programs to meet the techniques that are discovered through my research, or by adding my newfound expertise, still remains to be seen. However, these ideals also shape and mold my positionality and therefore should be apparent to the reader. Beyond these assumptions about instruction, I also perceive that the behavior of students with EBD can be predictable and manageable. Other people in the field of special education may attest to situations where absolutely nothing could be done to help certain students, and while I have heard this line of thought before, I do not ascribe to it. I feel that effective instructional techniques can be used to manage behavior, and also to make behavior more predictable in the classroom. Ultimately it is my goal to take this research and open a school that serves students with EBD in order to combat the cyclical issues demonstrated in this dissertation.

**Research Question**

Some teachers, particularly veteran teachers, have a skill set and personality that seems to do well in the classroom environment when working with students who are identified as EBD (Prather-Jones, 2011). However, this population of teachers is relatively low due to the stressors that these teachers experience in the classroom (Center & Stevenson, 2001). Therefore, this dissertation examined the practices of veteran special educators who educate students with EBD
to identify practices that are reproducible in the classroom setting. Its research question was: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

Research has shown that teachers with 7 or more years of experience in the field of teaching students with EBD have unique characteristics that have allowed those teachers to be successful (Prather-Jones, 2008). This dissertation examined the experiences of educators with 7 or more years of experience and identified techniques that are reproducible in the classroom. This dissertation identified how these teachers are coping with what seems to be a very difficult job in education. Perhaps the experience of these experienced teachers does not include the burnout and stress that novice teachers experience. The dissertation revealed the instructional practices and curricular changes that these experienced educators and veterans of teaching are enacting during their day-to-day instruction.

**Theoretical Framework**

Ericsson’s (1994, 1996, 2016) expertise theory is the foundation for this dissertation. This theory suggests that experience over long periods of time develops practices that are only capable of being achieved by experts within their chosen field. This cognitive psychology theory has roots in biological sciences as well as in structures that originated in the classic era of psychology. Ericsson supported this theory through many qualitative and quantitative avenues that culminated in his contemporary works. This theory will be described through various supporting case studies, the mathematics of chess, biologically, and in its most recent form.

Superior performance exists in every field, whether it is science, arts, or physical activity (Ericsson, 1994). Expertise theory has expanded into various fields and been supported by theorists. Ericsson (1994) attributed much of his influence to early cognitive theorists such as de Groot (1946), Maslow (1973), and Chase and Simon (1973), who identified and studied
individuals who performed at levels superior to their peers. However, it was Ericsson (1994) that would ask the question: Why are these individuals performing at a higher level than their normative peers?

Superior performance is acquired through long periods of time and deliberate practice (1994). To exemplify this performance, Ericsson (1994, 2016) frequently mentioned the game of chess. The right move in a certain situation is a variable with many potential outcomes. Ericsson (1996) compared club-level players to expert players in certain situations. Expert level players make superior moves that improve the outcome of a game in their favor more often than club-level players (Ericsson, 1996). This is not a genetic behavior, because there is no gene for chess. Rather, through a lifetime of practice and study in the art of chess, a player can improve his or her ability over time (Ericsson, 1996). Beyond de Groot’s (1978) study, Ericsson (1996) also cited world chess champion Bobby Fischer as an example. Fischer was a chess prodigy before he was 10, but did not win a world championship until his late 20s. Regardless of the talent he possessed, practice and dedication would be contributing factors to his championship. Ericsson, Roring, and Nandagopal (2007) suggested that IQ predicts chess-playing ability, but only to a certain extent. Games played and time spent playing chess are far more predictive than IQ of a person’s ability to make superior moves (Ericsson et al., 2007)

In an experiment conducted by Simon and Ericsson (1993), a relationship between mathematics and chess would become a key aspect of superior performance. Using think-aloud practices to solve mental math problems, Simon and Ericsson (1993) elicited responses that showed that completing multiple-step equations both on paper and aloud activated memories required to solve problems in the most efficient manner possible. Much like watching a game of chess, researchers can determine the right moves by asking participants to share how they handle
specific situations (Ericsson, 1993, 1994). In the most basic of terms, Ericsson (2014) also extrapolated from the acquisition of reading skills, suggesting that improvement in the ability to read comes from practice and instruction. Expert performance is not some sort of rare phenomenon, it is evident in the very practice that teachers and learners engage in throughout every classroom.

Neural structures and specific ranges of the brain develop as experience is obtained (Ericsson et al. 2007). Therefore, experience changes and molds the neuroplasticity of the brain and modifies its potential output. Someone of higher intelligence tends to perform better than someone of normal IQ on an unfamiliar task, however IQ or measured intelligence is not a predictor of performance on detailed and familiar tasks (Ericsson, et al. 2007). Ericsson (1995) also suggested prior to this research that people who are experienced in a specific domain are able to retrieve long-term working memory into their short-term working memory more quickly. His later research into neuroscience supported his early works. In light of de Groot’s (1978) chess experiments, and further mathematical implications by Ericsson (1996), if two people unfamiliar with chess were compared initially on their play, the player with the higher IQ would likely make superior moves. However, the more experienced player will outperform the novice, regardless of IQ.

Ericsson’s (2016) works suggested that his expertise theory is, much like the brain, a work that is constantly improving with experience. Expertise develops from training, deliberate practice, and learning in a specific field (Ericsson, 2016). In education and teaching, expert performance does not necessarily correlate to training, even though teachers are evaluated by student test scores and colleague perspective (Ericsson, 2016). Therefore expertise theory does not necessarily correlate to the field of education in reference to test scores, teacher observations,
and other nostalgia that are not true indicators of teacher performance but are nevertheless the measures most commonly used in modern education. Contrary to his previous perspectives, Ericsson (2016) suggested that deliberate practice does not necessarily lend itself to superior performance, but rather suggested that it makes certain behaviors within the domain of performance more automatic and natural. Therefore, expert behavior is not necessarily superior performance. Superior performance can only be quantified in domains with quantifiable results based on unbiased sources, such as points in a game or mathematics (Ericsson, 2016).

Experience creates situations where behaviors are more automatic and less stressful for a person.

This latest rendition of his expertise theory (Ericsson (2016) is also less scrutinized than his more widely accepted expertise theory (1994), which has been peer reviewed and cited by a variety of cognitive psychologists and scientists alike. This dissertation based itself on the earlier rendition, which suggests that all arts and sciences have experts who learn from their experiences, perfect their craft over time, and engage in deliberate practices within their field of expertise (Ericsson, 1994).

**Conclusion**

The high rate of attrition among inexperienced teachers (Albreicht et al., 2009) as it relates to stress (Cancio & Conderman, 2008) and student behavior (Wehby et al., 2011), correlates with Ericsson’s (2016) confirmation that experience makes behavior more automatic and requires less mental effort. Center and Stevenson (2001) suggested that experienced special educators develop confidence and the ability to work well under pressure. This also correlates to the behavior described by Ericsson (2016) in his explanation of expertise theory. Prather-Jones (2008) suggested that certain characteristics of veteran special educators working with students identified as EBD develop over a 7-year period. Albrecht (2009) supported the idea that more
experienced teachers were more resilient when educating students with EBD. Experience seems to be a very important factor in avoiding teacher attrition, which plagues schools and devalues education for students with EBD. Due to the linear nature of the research regarding experience in teaching students with EBD, and the frameworks depicted in Ericsson’s (2016) expertise theory, the commonalities suggested that there was a pattern this dissertation could examine. Experienced teachers of students with EBD may have information that explains the phenomenon of negative student behavior, teacher attrition, and exclusion of students with EBD.

This dissertation explored the primary question: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD? This question was explored under the lens of Ericsson’s expertise theory (2016) through qualitative methods that focus on learned experience. The research included participants with expertise derived from 7 or more years of experience educating students with EBD. The ultimate hope of this endeavor was to understand these teachers’ experiences and collect what may be repeatable, in order to decrease the rate of teacher attrition and ultimately improve education for students with EBD.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of educators who have educated students with EBD in the classroom setting so those experiences can be used to improve the educational experience for students with EBD. This study engaged special education teachers in both public and nonpublic settings, including private separate-day programs and residential programs, that provide services for students with EBD. These teachers met the criteria of having 7 or more years of experience teaching students with EBD. This study relies on Ericsson’s (1994) expertise theory, which was chosen as the framework because of its psychological and neurobiological influences that provide a holistic perspective on expertise. This literature review began to answer the primary research question of this dissertation: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

Prior to this review of literature about the education of students with EBD, the state of education, curriculum and teaching practices must be noted. Over the last decade and a half, the reforms implemented in education have been largely ineffective, particularly in urban schools (Payne, 2012). This may lead to an intersection between education and the social problems associated with teaching students in general, particularly students with EBD (Kaufman, 2007). As the comprehensive curriculum modernizes, many expansive theories and ideas have been developed that have led to changes in teaching practices (Cowan, 2013). These changes can have multiple effects: some preventing the delivery of a curriculum by teachers, others catalyzing teaching practices and creating successful learning environments (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Through this change, several pillars of truth have become evident in the practice of teaching. For example, differentiation and student-centered learning are far superior methods for special education teaching than rote memorization models (Bietenbeck, 2014). The infusion of technology into
learning practices can help with skill attainment, particularly for advanced skills and concepts that may be foreign or difficult to obtain (NMSA, 2005). While these truths seem to be evident to the modern educator, many of these contemporary teaching practices have not made their way into research or practice when considering students with EBD. This literature review demonstrates that these modernized curricular and teaching practices are not part of the research, and likely not part of the classroom. Therefore, they have not been considered nor documented in research or practice.

This literature review focuses on three primary themes: students with EBD, teachers of students with EBD, and the instructional methods used to teach students with EBD. First, it will examine what is known about students with EBD, the history of the disorder, and how it is identified and treated. Second, teachers of students with EBD will be examined, focusing on their characteristics, professional preparation, and professional practices. Third, the teaching and instructional practices used by teachers of students with EBD will be described so we can better understand them.

**Students with EBD**

The current definition of EBD is weak and in need of re-evaluation (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). This lack of progress and evolution in reference to EBD is not new, and it has been well-detailed throughout American education research (Vanderwood, McGrew, & Ysseldyke, 1998). Despite its antiquated relevance, the definition of EBD remains unchanged. Section 300.8 of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) is the primary guideline for identification and authorization of special education services for students. Students may receive special education services when they meet the various guidelines outlined in IDEA (2004). According to IDEA (2004), emotional disturbance identification can occur when a student
exhibits an inability to learn without any known intellectual, sensory, or health-related factor. Its characteristics include an inability to have interpersonal relationships, demonstrating inappropriate behavior, suffering from depression, or demonstrating physical symptoms associated with school-related problems. Oddly enough, the only psychological condition detailed in IDEA (2004) is schizophrenia. A student can be identified with EBD even when there are many factors that cannot be readily explained. This overall lack of consistency has caused a variety of problems with the identification, assessment, and educational placement of students with EBD (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010).

EBD identification practices vary from state to state, and further research on those methods is needed (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010). The identification of EBD is difficult, as there are many facets to consider. As a result, a few students are identified while many others are unidentified and, therefore, underserviced (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). School psychologists and IEP teams should be conscious of the wide range of complexities associated with the EBD identification and assessment process (Olympia, Farley, Christiansen, Hollie, Peterson, Jenson, & Clark, 2004).

The appropriate identification of students with EBD is not adequate due to the weakness of the assessment process (Olympia, Farley, Christiansen, Hollie, Pettersson, Jenson, & Clark, 2004). There is no clear definition of EBD beyond the law, so identification may be biased. Assessments can be ineffective because they do not recognize the behaviors that occur throughout the EBD spectrum (Olympia, Farley, Christiansen, Hollie, Pettersson, Jenson, & Clark, 2004). When assessments are ineffective, students with EBD do not get the services they need to be successful in school (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010). One reason for assessment failure is that school psychologists have too much power
during the identification process: holistic measures from a team would probably be more effective (Olympia, Farley, Christiansen, Hollie, Pettersson, Jenson, & Clark, 2004). Ideally, the identification process should be conducted by a panel of specialists that includes educators and clinical personnel (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010). In many cases the influence of a single person’s bias is too great.

Appropriate identification at an early age is very important for achieving academic success (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). However, identification under the current guidelines often fails (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). In the end, and despite all best efforts, there is no clear-cut assessment that directly identifies EBD (Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007), so many children are left unidentified and never receive services that would benefit them (Bradley, Doolittle, Bartolotta, 2008).

As students continue through their K-12 education, their lack of academic skills becomes more difficult to address and may become worse over time (Hayling, Cook, Gresham, State, & Kern, 2007). Failure to identify students at an early age makes future progress more difficult and results sparse (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). The identification of students with EBD is rigged with stigma and perception (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). However, this issue is not directly related to the education of students with EBD. Special education as a whole could be seen as a failed system, due to the lack of results it produces (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). Effective identification methods may be hampered by students, parents, and teachers trying to avoid the label and stigma associated with EBD (Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007).

Emotional and behavioral disorders are linked to childhood trauma (Seifert, 2003). Childhood trauma may include exposure to violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or other forms of maltreatment (Seifert, 2003). These various forms of trauma can manifest in many
different disorders, such as reactive attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Seifert, 2003). People who experience these disorders can manifest dangerous, oppositional, and antisocial behaviors (Seifert, 2003).

The school-based characteristics of students identified with EBD include disruption, acting out, and an inappropriate response to stimuli (Jull, 2008). These outbursts are largely caused by the environment the students experience, in particular the stress of the school environment. These students’ outbursts are predictable based on school and classroom environments (Jull, 2008). Students identified with EBD tend to exhibit inappropriate behaviors such as aggression, disruptive classroom behavior, social maladjustment, and a failure to follow nonspecific directions (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Poor academics and reduced social skills are likely caused by a lack of concentration, poor study habits, and family-related issues, all of which contribute to the behavior of students with EBD (Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). As a whole, the behaviors of students with EBD are contrary to what people appreciate and value. Instead, the behaviors are extreme, dangerous, and likely to disrupt the school environment (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). Students with EBD are not easy to teach, mainly due to their volatile nature (Prather-Jones, 2011).

Students identified with EBD may disrupt academic environments and prevent other students from academic achievement (Payne & Marks, 2007). These disruptions and deficits in appropriate behavior may disrupt relationships with peers and teachers. Additionally, students identified with EBD tend to perform below average across the various content areas (Payne & Marks, 2007). In an age when schools are valued by their test scores, excluding students who are disruptive and score low on tests seems like an ideal plan for struggling administrators.
Students who are identified with EBD tend to drop out of school, be excluded from educational programs, have poor social skills, and demonstrate corresponding learning disabilities (Payne & Marks, 2007). These behaviors perpetuate the stigma associated with EBD and create a cyclical pattern of exclusion (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). Limited parent involvement, low test scores, and disruptive behavior are not a recipe for any teacher’s favorite student. The American education system and perhaps the nature of our society has failed these children. A high correlation between learning disabilities and EBD likely influences a student’s wish to drop out or engage in behavior that warrants disciplinary action (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Family-related issues could make it difficult to include students in the school environment (Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). In addition to family issues, students with EBD tend to come from low-income families (Duran, Zhou, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011). As a whole, it would seem that students with EBD act as they do because of their intrinsic and extrinsic social limitations, which has led to them being left behind in the modern education climate. Given their background, these students are likely to have very few advocates.

Students with EBD benefit from education programs that provide emotional and educational support (Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). The good intention of an alternative education placement is to place students with EBD where they may receive these supports (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). However, sometimes these placements tools are used on a disproportionally ethnic basis (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010; Duran, Zhuo, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011). Educational exclusion, particularly disciplinary exclusion, is a common experience among students identified with EBD (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). Exclusion refers to removing the student from general education; special school placement, suspension, and expulsion are common forms of
exclusion. The pattern of exclusion associated with this population of students is largely due to the behaviors that they demonstrate, as well as the difficulty associated with the common comorbidity of other disorders (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). These behaviors can result in school suspension and expulsion. Students are rarely identified in a meaningful time frame, and as a result they require more resources for treatment and education (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). This reality is largely the fault of the assessment measures used to identify EBD as a whole (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christensen, Kraan, & Weist, 2010). To get services for EBD, students must act like they have EBD. Without disruptive or dangerous behavior, a student might not get identified. Much like identification, special education services related to helping students with EBD are often met with an equal amount of stigma (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). This stigma also stems from negative attitudes about the cost and resources associated with treatment and education. Misidentification is also a type of exclusion a student could experience (Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007). A student could be labeled with EBD for simply having a bad series of events occur. Due to the perceived severity of the behavior, a student may not get the appropriate services and instead quickly receive the overarching EBD label.

Students identified with EBD are subject to exclusion from school programs because of their lack of social skills (Duran, Zhuo, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011). Due to their lack of social skills and appropriate behavior, students who demonstrate the behaviors associated with EBD tend to be more likely to be expelled or suspended from school. These students are also more likely to engage in criminal activity and drug use (Jahnukainen, 2007). These sorts of behaviors automatically lead to exclusion from school. Antisocial behavior such as drug use, violence, criminal behavior, disruption, or poor social skills make a student 12.5 times more likely to
experience disciplinary exclusion (Duran, Zhuo, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011). Young women are far less likely to experience exclusion as the result of emotional or behavioral difficulties, while the most likely group to experience exclusion is African-American males who have been identified with EBD (Duran, Zhuo, Frew, Kwok, & Benz, 2011). The concept of disciplinary exclusion for African-American males with EBD is another research topic that demands further exploration, especially considering the high rate of stigma and lack of appropriate identification tools.

Students with EBD are difficult to include in a standard classroom environment due to the severity of their behaviors and academic needs (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). Students are often placed in environments outside general education if their behaviors are extreme, even though other interventions such as partial or full placement in self-contained classrooms may be an alternative (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). Self-contained classrooms and alternative placements are ideally used to give students a leg up on social training as well as for academic intervention (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011).

The pattern of exclusion could be stopped. A team of participants could make ethical decisions on behalf of a student identified with EBD (Jull, 2008). This team should include students, parents, and teachers. Identification should not be simply left as a behavioral or safety decision by school leadership. Creative responses are needed on the behalf of students identified with EBD, not punitive ones (Jull, 2008). The trend of exclusion may also be related to the stigma associated with EBD (Kauffman & Bader, 2013). The team review could lead to greater inclusion of students with EBD. By creating an understanding of the behaviors associated with EBD, there could be less stigma throughout educational systems and more opportunities for students to be included in general education (Kauffman & Badar, 2013).
The comorbidity of other disorders is important when considering EBD (Mattison & Blader, 2013). Some students demonstrate a correlation between school behavior problems and attachment disorder, poor social skills, and learning problems (Seifert, 2003). Less frequently correlated disabilities such as low IQ ratings and specific learning disabilities can also be prevalent among students with EBD. Other disabilities, like oppositional defiant disorder, social phobias, and ADHD, are more frequent (Mattison & Blader, 2013). There is a correlation between EBD and various learning disabilities, although the frequency of comorbidity between the two classifications is difficult to assess (Ryan, Reid, & Epstein, 2004). If a student manifests behavior that is disruptive as a result of learning disabilities and is also identified with EBD, it becomes very difficult for special educators to make decisions that ultimately benefit the student. These correlations are not clear in all research, but they do occur. Some of these correlations include relationships between severe behavior problems and learning problems, school behavior problems, and poor social skills (Seifert, 2003). School personnel may be less likely to stigmatize students with learning disabilities who do not disrupt the school environment, but their attitude may change when students are physically disruptive and have limited outcomes.

Learning disabilities could lead to inappropriate classroom behavior among students identified with EBD; this also may work in reverse (Lembke & Stichter, 2006). Learning disabilities and other disorders could lead to the manifestation of EBD-like behaviors. This conundrum makes it very difficult for educators to identify specific learning disabilities among those with EBD. This problem is only magnified by the prevalence of further comorbid disorders often associated with EBD. The ultimate result is difficulty in the identification of effective intervention methods and instructional practices.
Students identified with EBD tend to have poor academic achievement because of neuropsychological problems (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Corresponding specific learning disabilities tend to include speed naming, narrative memory, memory for names, and phonological processing. These may affect academic achievement within the evaluated student group. These specific learning disabilities tend to correlate with below grade-level function in mathematics, written expression, and reading comprehension (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Aggressive behavior is related to low performance in school among students with EBD. These aggressive behaviors may stem from an externalization of frustration with learning difficulties and disabilities (Mattison, Hooper & Carlson, 2006). Whether there is a mental or physical cause for a learning disability or not, the overall trend is that students with EBD manifest problematic behaviors as the result of their difficulties in school.

**Summary of Literature Pertaining to Students with EBD**

An examination of literature related to students with EBD has shown that there is a lack of clear definition of students with EBD. This has made it difficult to identify and treat students with EBD. Programs that have addressed students who have been identified are characterized by elements of emotional support. Students with EBD display a wide variety of socially unacceptable behaviors that could include violence and disruption of the school setting. The antecedent to these behaviors could be childhood trauma or learning disabilities.

These issues relate to the issue of academic engagement of students with EBD and this dissertation because of the difficulties associated with educating students with these sorts of behaviors. Educating students who are prone to emotional outbursts can be very difficult for teachers and school staff if handled with conventional methods. This portion of the reviewed literature did not suggest many pathways towards effective educational methods for students
with EBD: it only demonstrated that teaching students with EBD is very different than the traditional student in the comprehensive classroom. Therefore research such as this dissertation is imperative if the education system as a whole wants to make learning accessible to all students.

This portion of the reviewed literature did not relate the issues of educating students with EBD to the teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the characteristics, preparation, and professional practices of teachers of students with EBD. Understanding the challenges of being a teacher of students with EBD will demonstrate the need for particular teaching strategies and comprehensively improving the quality of teaching students with EBD.

**Teachers of Students with EBD**

Teachers’ experiences are as bleak as those of their students with EBD. They work daily with the aforementioned issues with teaching students with EBD. They work towards fixing this broken system through daily effort. In recognition of this effort, the research community needs to try to improve this problem-filled field of education.

Teachers of students with EBD tend to be male, culturally diverse, and relatively inexperienced compared to teachers in normative classrooms (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). The more experienced teachers of students with EBD tend to be people of high professional caliber and emotional stability (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). However, as a population, these teachers are less qualified to teach special education than their regular education counterparts (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006).

Regardless of experience level, teachers face behaviors ranging from defiant to dangerous (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda, 2009). As a result, they experience high levels of stress and frustration (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). Support from school administration can prevent some of the stress experienced by the teachers, although administration can also be a
source of stress for these teachers (Prather-Jones, 2011). Due to a lack of supportive administration, teachers who serve students with EBD have a high attrition rate and many stay in the field for only a short period of time (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). Administration is a vital part of stress management, school perception, job satisfaction, and teacher attrition (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). Symptoms of stress related to teaching in these sorts of environments include sleep loss, neglected responsibilities, physical exhaustion, emotional distress, guilt over instructional quality, drug abuse, and poor attitudes towards students (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). It seems that the task of teaching students with EBD can be very stressful, and schools will ultimately lose teachers if the setting is not properly managed.

Teachers who are new to the field of teaching students with EBD are unprepared to manage their students (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). Preconceived ideas and poor teaching methodologies exist among preservice teachers, which may lead to the exclusion of students identified with EBD (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). New teachers have very little knowledge of the best practices for teaching students with EBD, and instead tend to rely on comprehensive methods (Kindzierski, O’Dell, Marable, & Raimondi, 2013). This may be a misunderstanding of the nature of special education. Teachers are taught how to teach in their college programs, but not necessarily how to manage behaviors. They also use personal experience as a reference point for managing these behaviors (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). This misunderstanding could lead to a lack of behavior management. The lack of control that comes from teaching students who receive special education services may cause anxiety in preservice teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Further training and education may allow teachers to be better prepared for the field of special education and adequately prepare
them for the struggles of inclusion within general education (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

The lack of training may come from an underprepared university system (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Universities do not offer a wide variety of courses on behavior management during teacher training. New teachers also require training in preparing and managing the classroom, which is not taught effectively in the university system as it relates to students with EBD (Kindzierski, O’Dell, Marable, & Raimondi, 2013). This could in turn be caused by the lack of research on teaching students with EBD (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). This may have an impact on students with EBD, as they are candidates for effective behavior management techniques. University programs emphasize behavior reduction strategies and praise systems for students, but do not teach student engagement strategies as part of behavior management strategies (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). In fact, student engagement strategies are rarely discussed as part of any course in the teacher preparation programs sampled by Oliver and Reschly (2010).

Teachers may need training on the actual neurophysical features of EBD as well as comorbid learning disabilities (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). New teachers do not understand the issues and problems the students have as the result of their physical brain composition. Further training on this topic would allow teachers to make more informed curricular and behavioral decisions for students. Hypothetically, this training would eventually increase student success rates, particularly for students identified with EBD (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Further training would allow teachers to generate more meaningful individualized strategy plans for academic intervention from a scientific perspective, instead of from an intrinsic perspective.
The problem as a whole for new teachers is that they are stepping into a very difficult job, underprepared and ill-advised. Rather than work towards gaining experience and growing as a professional, they quit, causing another cohort of new teachers to be set on the improper path. Inexperienced teachers are far more common than experienced ones, and the high turnover rate and lack of experienced special educators is one of the worst problems in teaching students with EBD (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013).

To manage these symptoms of stress, teachers must engage in techniques that will allow them to maintain a positive frame of mind, which include coping skills, healthy diet, exercise, and breathing activities (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). Teachers also need time to complete paperwork, well-structured positive behavior intervention systems in the school, and administrative support to help manage students with EBD (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda, 2009). Beyond these basic necessities, teachers must have faith in their ability to effectively instruct students (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). To accomplish this, teachers must engage in professional development to increase the use of new strategies and interventions to improve students’ academic, social, and communication skills. Other strategies for stress management include forming meaningful relationships with colleagues, collaboration with administration, and avoiding professional isolation (Cancio & Conderman, 2008).

Experienced educators have a unique set of skills and characteristics (Prather-Jones, 2011). They tend to be motivated intrinsically rather than extrinsically. These sorts of teachers do not take the emotional outbursts of their students personally, and accept the students for who they are. Experienced teachers tend to be more flexible when it comes to working with students with EBD. Beyond these coping skills, these teachers also are more confident than their novice peers (Center & Steventon, 2001). This experience lends itself to empowering students with EBD.
(Center & Steventon, 2001; Prather-Jones, 2011). Along with these characteristics, teachers who are seasoned veterans of this field of special education have a lower attrition rate and more job satisfaction (Center & Steventon, 2001). Experienced teachers of students with EBD also have a variety of teaching skills at their disposal, making them more adept at teaching (Wilkerson, Gagnon, Melekoglu, & Cakiroghlu, 2012).

Another element beyond experience and related characteristics is the school climate (Albrecht, 2009). Administrative support, a sense of community, and acceptance all factor into a teacher’s success, retention, and tenure when working with students with EBD (Center & Steventon, 2001). In contrast to the positive community, a negative community feeling, being swamped with paperwork, and dealing with student behavior are key reasons teachers tend to leave the field of teaching students with EBD (Albrecht, 2009). Ineffectively organized schools may also cause teacher attrition among special educators serving students with EBD, which is a topic that needs further research.

**Summary of Literature Pertaining to Teachers of Students with EBD**

Teachers who educate students with EBD are underprepared, ill-experienced and are often not engaged in their first teaching choice. As whole, the best teachers are not headed into the field of EBD special education. Therefore, the rate of attrition is startling and detrimental to the educational advancement of students with EBD. Those who do not fall prey to the typical burnout are unique people who may have extraordinary qualities. That is why they have been chosen as the focus of this qualitative dissertation.

This body of reviewed literature did not expand the knowledge of actual educational practices for students with EBD, but it did confirm the idea that teaching students with EBD is difficult. The review also showed that the current educational system, along with the behaviors
that students with EBD demonstrate in the classroom, may be causing teacher attrition. This intersection of problems associated with teaching is harming the effective instruction of students with EBD, which may be doing further harm to those students. The literature points out that these systems need modernization and research, but it provides few clues towards a pathway to change, nor any real direction or solution. Therefore, the actual instructional practices for educating students with EBD need to be examined in order to better understand the methods that may engage students with EBD in the classroom environment.

**Instructional Practices for Teaching Students with EBD**

This portion of the literature review expands the compendium of teaching techniques and practices related to students with EBD. It includes the known instructional practices for students with EBD, the topic of student engagement, assessing students, and behavior management. Most of the research conducted on these topics followed the case study tradition, or was a meta-analysis of case studies. Therefore, the single instances of research do not provide in-depth elaboration of teaching practices that can be applied throughout grade levels and curricula. Each piece of research within this theme has value within its own context, and will be described in accordance with that value.

**Known Instructional Practices**

Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) suggested that peer-mediated academic interventions may lead to further educational opportunities for students identified with EBD. They utilized 13 case studies, including 169 total participants. Seventy-one percent of the studies evaluated occurred in special education settings where some of the students were identified with EBD. From their research on the identified population and classrooms, the following peer-related interventions were found to be evident: (a) class-wide peer tutoring, (b) cooperative learning, (c) cross-age
tutoring, (d) peer-assisted learning strategies, (e) peer assessment, (f) peer modeling, and (g) peer reinforcement. None of these strategies were specifically identified as effective. As a whole, Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) contended that peer-mediated academic interventions are potentially an effective method for assisting students who are identified with EBD. However, Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) encouraged further research on these interventions and suggested that educators tread lightly on their implementation. These practices are useful for understanding the practice of educating a student with EBD, but they also look a lot like standard interventions for struggling learners. They are not EBD specific as they relate to behaviors that manifest in the classroom setting.

In perhaps the most comprehensive collection of research on evidence-based teaching techniques for students with EBD, Ryan, Pierce, and Mooney (2008) provided a plethora of well-researched techniques. These techniques all have measurable variables, and have been shown to be effective in teaching students with EBD. The authors first reinforced the peer-mediated interventions described by Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004). These peer-mediated techniques create situations in which the students gain a joy of learning through interactions with their peers (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). They may also be used to manage large class sizes. Self-mediated teaching interventions are also effective for students with EBD (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). These techniques include (a) self-monitoring, (b) self-evaluation, (c) self-instruction, (d) goal setting, and (e) strategy instruction. All of these techniques, except strategy instruction, are behavior management techniques and therefore will not be considered in this dissertation. Strategy instruction refers to the steps a student would practice to solve a problem or achieve an academic outcome. These practices help monitor student behavior, but do not necessarily help meet curricular benchmarks.
Ryan, Pierce, and Mooney (2008) provided the most crucial piece of research for this dissertation when they detailed 21 known teacher-mediated interventions for students with EBD. These teacher-mediated interventions include (a) the verbalization of math problems, (b) cubicles, (c) structured academic tasks, (d) modeling-rehearsing-feedback, (e) teacher planning strategies, (f) life space interviewing, (g) adjusting the task difficulty, (h) previewing, (i) sequential prompting, (j) adjusting presentation and point-delivery rate, (k) teaching test-taking skills, (l) mnemonic instruction, (m) taped instructions, (n) trial-and-error reading, (o) personalized system of instructions, (p) student interest, (q) teacher versus child control of task, (r) wait time, (s) story mapping, (t) choice making opportunities, and (u) individual curricular modification. Each of these techniques will be discussed in accordance with Keller’s 2010 ARCS model of motivation design later in this chapter. Ryan, Pierce, and Mooney (2008) suggested that the teacher-mediated techniques provide opportunities for increased academic results for students with EBD, but also that this body of research needs further evaluation and research. Within their thorough research, Ryan, Pierce, and Mooney (2008) also discussed the use of teacher-mediated consequence practices for students with EBD. Even though these incentive programs are highly effective for students, they are not the topic of this dissertation and will not be discussed in this literature review or within this dissertation. That is not to say that incentive programs and consequence systems are ineffective, as they are crucial to any education system for students with EBD.

Lembke and Stichter (2006) suggested a school-wide three-tiered model as a possible academic intervention in reading for students identified with EBD. Students identified with EBD often are difficult to assess in various content areas due to their behavior, which can mask assessment results. By conducting assessments frequently, as part of classroom procedures, the
consistency that is preferred by students with EBD could be achieved. These team-based and school-wide approaches are useful for gaining an understanding of the whole student population within a school. These practices may limit exclusion and help identify the needs of students identified with EBD.

Payne, Marks, and Bogan (2007) suggested several approaches towards modifying instruction and teaching methodologies to create better opportunities for student success. First, by generating curriculum-based assessments, teachers can generate an understanding of a student’s present levels of performance in any curriculum. Second, teachers can then generate interventions to reach specific students at their functional level. The foremost of these interventions is direct and differentiated instruction that focuses directly on instructional goals for specific students. Payne, Marks, and Bogan (2007) described direct instruction as a process through which teachers identify learner goals, break goals into tasks, design specific activities, and arrange the activities in such a way that students are most likely to achieve knowledge.

Wehby, Partin, Robertson, and Oliver (2011) also identified some very broad instructional strategies for students identified with EBD. These strategies include verbal response to academic questions, high rate of teacher praise, and something they describe as active instruction. Active instruction occurs when teachers are providing students with a high frequency of opportunities to respond to questioning; in other words, they are given many chances to participate in class. Wehby, Partin, Robertson, and Oliver (2011) also suggested that it is the responsibility of future researchers to identify effective instructional practices for students identified with EBD.

Academic interventions for students identified with EBD are limited and have never been fully realized in research (Vennest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, & Parker, 2011). In an analysis of literature conducted by Vennest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, and Parker
(2011), several instructional practices were noted that may assist students identified as having EBD. Their literature analysis generated 34 peer-reviewed and appropriate research studies that were used to generate 16 interventions for students. These interventions included: (a) cover, copy, and compare; (b) mnemonics; (c) instructional time modification based on grade level and comprehension; (d) corrective feedback; (e) previewing; (f) reading programs; (g) functional assessments; (h) prompting; (i) story mapping; (j) task difficulty; (k) interest; (l) choice; (m) opportunity to respond, (n) verbal response; (o) computer-assisted instruction; and (p) planning strategy. Each of these methods originated from single qualitative case studies and were not substantiated by the corresponding studies. These methods were done in single instances, and were not considered broadly effective (Vennest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, & Parker, 2011).

Neisyn (2009) worked towards identifying successful academic practices for students identified with EBD in the elementary ages. Through literature analysis, Neisyn (2009) compiled several teaching techniques that were identified as evidence based. These techniques included (a) teacher praise, (b) scaffolding of independent work, (c) increased opportunity for correct responses, (d) peer tutoring, (e) provide students with opportunities, and (f) direct instruction. In relation to these activities, praise should be given frequently and be behavior specific. Independent seatwork should be short and students should have been presented with the material in advance. The opportunity for correct responses should also consider prior knowledge, by frontloading questions with the appropriate previous experience. Neisyn (2009) advocated for individualization of assignments to pique student interest. While Neisyn did create a well thought-out and peer-reviewed analysis of the various techniques, these techniques were not verified by experimentation or observation. Therefore, these techniques were considered in later
chapters, but not utilized as part of the ARCS Framework. Neisyn (2009) did make the points that interventions reduce off-task behaviors and that the techniques she identifies may increase on-task behavior. This assertion was also not substantiated through research.

One piece of literature regarding on-task behavior among students with EBD stands out as a clear pathway towards engaging them in the classroom. Specific praise of student behavior is a great way to engage students with EBD and minimalize the externalization of disruptive behavior (Allday, Hinkson-Lee, Hudson, Neilsen-Gatti, & Kleinke, 2012). Also known as behavior-specific praise, this sort of classroom engagement practice allows students to understand appropriate classroom behavior for both academic practices and normalization of behaviors. The authors suggested commenting specifically on what a student with EBD showing gratitude for the behavior did rather than giving generic praise. This practice can also be used for behavior correction and for classroom norm setting. Though this is not a new practice, its historic precedent verifies the effectiveness shown in that research. Allday, Hinkson-Lee, Hudson, Neilson-Gatti, and Kleinke (2012) was the sole piece of research in this literature review that specifically addressed motivating students towards on-task behavior that includes positive outcomes for students with EBD.

Al-Hendawi’s (2012) hypothesis that academic engagement predicts academic success in students with EBD is an interesting lens that could uncover future effective methods of instruction. This hypothesis applies to educational practices as a whole, not just EBD research. In Al-Hendawi’s (2012) literature meta-analysis, no evidence could confirm a clear relationship between academic engagement and academic success. Evidence of this correlation did exist throughout the literature. Al-Hendawi (2012) suggested that confirmed engagement and academic success may contribute to more than simple academic achievement. Keeping students
on task reduces the number of distractions in the classroom (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Al-Hendawi (2012) suggested that on-task behavior decreases the opportunity for the externalization of inappropriate behavior, though this concept could not be confirmed using his methods. Al-Hendawi (2012) also suggested that the search for functional relationships between the effectiveness of academic interventions or teaching practices will ultimately be very difficult due to other factors. As a result, Al-Hendawi (2012) recommended that further research be primarily focused on student learning outcomes, rather than behavioral observations.

Hayling, Cook, Gresham, State, and Kern (2007) analyzed classroom behavior in 90 separate classrooms, from grades 1-12, across 10 separate instructional activities. They determined that when students with EBD are off task, they are more likely to be disruptive in the classroom setting. They also determined that disruptive behavior occurs more frequently during independent seatwork, while engagement occurs less frequently. Hayling, Cook, Gresham, State, and Kern (2007) indicated that teachers spend entirely too much time conducting seatwork and whole-class instruction, which do not seem to be effective strategies for students identified with EBD. Hayling, Cook, Gresham, State, and Kern (2007) also suggested several ideas for further research related to students identified with EBD.

Lembke and Stitcher (2006) confirmed that students identified with EBD benefit from individualized interventions. They also suggested that students who are actively involved in the academic process will demonstrate fewer adverse behaviors. Lembke and Stitcher (2006) felt that when all students were included in the screening process, students identified with EBD were more likely to participate and produce authentic results. Clearer results about learning disabilities allow for better individualized interventions.
Mattison and Blader (2013) suggested that frequent assessment allows for greater academic intervention. In their evaluation of 196 students in the most restrictive special education environment, Mattison and Blader (2013) developed a series of assessment-based academic interventions. The foremost of these was that school programs value academic interventions over behavioral interventions for students identified with EBD, with these academic interventions individualized to address specific learning disabilities. They also suggested that special educators and psychologists should primarily work towards identifying ADHD. The identification of ADHD allows teachers to utilize well-documented methods for academic intervention. Interventions for students identified with EBD are not widely documented, and are not supported by much literature (Mattison & Blader 2013).

Standards-based instruction would be based on curriculum associated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Jackson and Neel (2006) suggested that standards-based curriculum is important for students identified with EBD. They suggested that these students’ learning activities are too strongly focused on deficit training, and as a result they do not have access to standards-based curriculum associated with NCLB. However, Jackson and Neel (2006) did not claim that there is an effective practice that would encourage standards-based learning for students identified with EBD, so they suggested that their access to standards-based curriculum is lacking. Research on standards-based curriculum changes and students identified with EBD needs improvement (Jackson & Neel, 2006). Jackson and Neel (2006) suggested that further research on effective instructional practices for this population of students is desperately needed.

Preus (2012) contended that authentic learning, emphasizing contemporary problems and higher order thinking, should be the focus for all students, regardless of special education status. Although students who receive special education services may produce artifacts that could be
perceived as of lesser quality, the instructional methods still provide important skills that all students need. Preus (2012) went so far as to suggest that teachers need to be less concerned about teaching assessed concepts and instead be working towards authentic problem-based learning. Students who are exposed to this sort of instruction, regardless of disability, are more apt to be able to participate in 21st century career fields (Preus, 2012).

Managing behavior is integral to the successful teaching of students identified with EBD (Neisyn, 2009). One of the most prevalent behavioral modification programs in schools is positive behavior intervention. However, many general education settings fail to implement effective behavior management strategies as part of the classroom setting, which may lead to a lack of student success among those who may have EBD (Neisyn, 2009). Neisyn (2009) made a short list of suggestions for effective behavior management. Clear classroom rules and precise teacher requests have positive outcomes for compliance. Student self-regulation is also a very effective method of behavior management (Neisyn, 2009). Strategies for self-monitoring primarily occur through teacher and student evaluations of student behaviors, corresponding behavior logs, and the creation of achievable goals for mastery of sought-after behaviors. These strategies are intended only for elementary populations.

In a study of 11 schools in Hong Kong from 2009-2010, Chong and Ng (2011) sought to identify teachers’ perceptions of what may work for students who are identified with EBD. By interviewing 102 teachers from various special education schools that serve students identified with EBD, they hoped to identify the emotional and behavioral problems teachers encountered and strategies for assisting the students. Their extensive research, which included not only interviewing teachers but also an evaluation of school leadership styles and psychological methodologies for treatment of EBD, reached some very broad results. First, teachers of students
who are identified with EBD need a large set of behavioral and academic skills to be effective in the classroom (Chong & Ng, 2011). Second, instructional practices alone do not predict behavioral or academic success for students identified with EBD (Chong & Ng, 2011). School leadership, statutory modifications, and professional development and collaboration may all lead to more effective educational systems (Chong & Ng, 2011). Chong and Ng (2011) echoed the need for further research on the instruction of students identified with EBD. They suggested that classroom observations, participation, and international comparisons focusing on best teaching practices may help discover how researchers can improve education for students with EBD. Unfortunately, Chong and Ng did not identify many classroom best practices in their research, but did suggest that a variety of strategies need to be attempted in order for teachers to be successful in the education of students with EBD. More importantly, they suggested that there are many different factors that impact the education of students with EBD. There are no one-size-fits-all practices for students with EBD (Chong & Ng, 2011).

Kostewicz, Ruhl, and Kubina (2008) found that engaging students with a positive speech pattern can be an effective way to manage the behaviors of students with EBD. This practice is particularly effective when rules and classroom regulations are related to students with positive adjectives rather than with negative connotations. For example, rather than relating to students that speaking out of turn is against the rules, the classroom rule should instead be “Be a good neighbor”. In addition, limiting the number of rules to overarching blanket statements creates less confusion in the minds of the students. This discussion of rule setting is important to this dissertation if researchers consider that effective and positive classroom rules allow for effective instruction and the opportunity for students with EBD to meet the academic demands of the classroom (Kostewicz, Ruhl, & Kubina, 2008).
Summary of Literature Pertaining to Instructional Practices for Students with EBD

One of the main themes that seemed to be echoed in all of the reviewed literature is the power of positive regard and kindness towards students with EBD. Teacher praise is an effective practice that is mentioned throughout the literature. Some of the literature did detail prescriptive methods, but many of these methods or practices were gathered through meta-analysis of case studies and were not broad practices that seem to work often. Therapeutic and authentic practices also seem to be effective for inclusion of students with EBD. Individualized education is an effective practice, but it is time consuming for the instructor, which could be detrimental to an entire classroom of learners.

There is limited research related to effective instructional practices for students with EBD. This perspective is echoed by the researchers themselves and in this literature review. The literature also seemed to emphasize behavior management more than access to curriculum. Controlling the student’s behavior may be paramount for accessing curriculum, but there was no literature to suggest this relationship. Furthermore, very little emphasis was placed directly on motivation or engagement, although it could be implied from the various studies. In this regard, only the concept that students with EBD do not prefer to work independently and alone was explored. This facet of teaching students with EBD is important, considering that these sorts of students are highly stigmatized and excluded. The current body of research did not consider the use of technology, changes in classroom settings, or specific instructional activities for students with EBD. For example, there were no lesson plans or activities that students with EBD respond well to. As a result, it is difficult to assess whether the portions of this literature review related to instructional practices would be effective in the modern era of teaching and learning.
Summary of the Literature Review

Teaching students with EBD is a daunting task due to the verbal and physical responses these students have in the school setting. While these behaviors may have neurophysical or childhood trauma roots, the actual cause for undesirable behavior is unknown. Students with EBD are a highly stigmatized and excluded group of students. Combining this with the inefficient identification process, it is obvious that there is a growing problem for students, families, and school systems. These problems only get worse given that these teachers are underprepared to educate students with EBD. These problems manifest in teacher attrition and a lack of quality instructors for students with EBD. Those who can survive this Darwinian teaching system may have unique qualities that allow them to be effective instructors despite the intersections of dysfunction in teaching students with EBD. However, the true perpetuation of problems for teachers of students with EBD could be in the antiquated teaching methods and lack of research regarding educating students with EBD. Despite the research presented, a majority of the scholars call for further research into educating students with EBD.

While this body of literature is thorough in identifying problems, it lacks any actual resolution with the exception of this clear need for further research. The literature fails to expand on the topics of improving education for students with EBD, lessening the issues of exclusion, addressing drop-out rates, or decreasing teacher attrition. This body of literature does not directly answer the question of academic engagement or motivation as it pertains to students with EBD. As a result of this limitation, the need that is echoed by many of the aforementioned researchers is once again expressed: there is a clear need for further research into the practices of educating students with EBD. This dissertation is justified in furthering research into the practices of educators who serve in schools that instruct students with EBD. In order to fill a gap in the
research, efforts to address this specific limitation related to academic engagement and motivation will address some of the many issues that plague special education for students with EBD.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This dissertation was conducted in the qualitative tradition, using interpretive phenomenological analysis practices that investigate the experiences of teachers who teach students with EBD. This methodology was selected in order to understand the experiences and deliberate practices of teachers with 7 or more years of experience teaching students with EBD. The research portion of this dissertation was intended to discover teaching practices that can be passed on to other teachers and that administrators can use to improve education and teaching for students with EBD. The primary question of this study was: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

Research Design

Phenomenology seeks to understand an occurrence from the perspective of a group of people who experience it (Henrichson & Friesen, 2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis allows the experience to be evaluated by a specialist in the field (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Both methodologies were considered for the research design of this dissertation. By taking an interpretative phenomenological approach, the researcher could identify and evaluate the observed phenomenon of experience and deliberate practices among veteran teachers of students with EBD. This relationship is explicit but not documented in research. With such a unique educational setting and population, teachers who experience the process of educating students with EBD must have an equally unique life experience. Phenomenology seeks to capture the human experience (Wertz, 2014). Interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed this dissertation to be extended further as these deliberate practices could be depicted through the lens of a specialist. The research looked at those who have experienced the phenomenon of teaching students with EBD and evaluated unknown aspects of the human
experience in regard to the research question. Throughout the interviewing process, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their deliberate practices. When participants are given the opportunity to reflect, aspects of the phenomenon can be revealed (Moustakas, 1995). In this reflection on experience, qualitative data was bracketed, extracted, and evaluated for commonalities.

During the research portion of this dissertation, the common experiences of veteran special educators who serve students with EBD were brought to light, particularly their instructional experiences and deliberate practices when teaching students with EBD. This dissertation has validity because instructional practices are elusive in contemporary research on considering students with EBD (Vannest et al., 2009). This dissertation hoped to be a cog in the machine of change in EBD education. There is very little research on instructional methods for students with EBD (Kauffman et al., 2007), which is why this dissertation focused solely on instructional practices. This may be related to the reality that teachers who serve students with EBD experience challenging behavior from their students that makes classroom instruction difficult (Male, 1997). Therefore, the research portion did not include students with EBD as participants, because the researcher is a novice and unprepared to deal with this difficulty. When students with EBD are off-task, negative and dangerous behaviors erupt in the classroom (Hayling et al., 2008). This issue could affect research due to the case-by-case situations that arise during research. In contrast to off-task behavior, on-task behavior may limit the negative behavior demonstrated by students with EBD (Wehby, 2011). Validating or categorizing behavior is not the intention of this research endeavor. Instructional practices that are engaging and motivating increase student participation in the curriculum (Al-Hendawi, 2012).
Teachers of students with EBD likely have a wealth of experiences and deliberate practices that could be used by other teachers and produce better results for students with EBD. These teachers should be interviewed and have their unique experience captured so that the field of educating students with EBD can progress. By capturing these experiences through interpretative phenomenological analysis practices, the reality that the participants experience can be extrapolated to others (Moustakas, 1995).

According to research conducted by Prather-Jones (2011), experienced educators who teach students with EBD over a career exceeding 7 or more years have developed intangible qualities and skills that make them effective instructors of students with EBD. Experience is also a key factor in a teacher’s likelihood to continue teaching students with EBD (Albrecht, 2009). This dissertation attempted to understand the experiences of teachers with 7 or more years in the field in order to better understand the phenomenon associated with expertise in the field of special education for students with EBD. These are the teachers who can help us better understand the relationship between student engagement, motivation, negative behavior, teacher attrition, and perhaps other issues that relate to emotional and behavioral disorders.

It was the hope of this research to capture deliberate practices of these seasoned educators in order to share them with the greater education community. Issues associated with teacher attrition and lack of preparation can be addressed through this dissertation. This research was not intended to be a solution to the intersectionality of issues surrounding education for students with EBD, but was intended to work with other bodies of research in order to construct a better way forward for the teachers and students with EBD.

Quantitative methods were not appropriate for this sort of research because of the nature of human experience. Human experiences can be analyzed and qualified for commonalities
(Moustakas, 1995). However, the human experience cannot be interpreted through numeric data. A mistake often made in education is quantifying everything in order to indicate performance and establish truths (Cooper et al., 2015).

**Research Tradition**

Human stories and experiences are not capable of being quantified (Moustakas, 1995). Many different philosophers and psychologists have shared their perspective on phenomenology, which has created this multifaceted approach within qualitative research (Dowling, 2005). Phenomenological research is a methodology deeply rooted in the philosophies of Husserl, who began his interpretation of human experience in the early 1900s (Wertz, 2014). Husserl can also be credited with the effort to authentically describe human experience, define human intentionality through an understanding of human experience, and critique the scientific value of psychology (Wertz, 2014). Throughout his career, his phenomenological philosophies would be critiqued, modified, and celebrated, which would lead to Husserl modifying his own methodology of phenomenological research (Ashworth, 1999). Although he was a mathematician, Husserl argued that the core of existence is not positivist constructs, but rather a series of phenomena experienced throughout life (Allsobrook, 2014). Phenomenology and other qualitative practices are conducted in situations when mathematics cannot be applied effectively (Moustakas, 1995). As a mathematician, Husserl likely saw the inadequacies of mathematics and quantitative practices and sought to describe reality beyond numeric values (Wertz, 2014). The description of these occurrences is commonly referred to as descriptive phenomenology (Reiners, 2012).

Descriptive phenomenology seeks to understand a phenomenon through the perceptions, knowledge, emotions, and thoughts that provoke human intentionality (Finley, 2009; Reiners,
Husserl argued that by using epistemology, knowledge can be pure when it is distinguished from belief and opinion (Reiners, 2012). By abstracting from bias via the hermeneutic approach, the core of an experience can be defined (Reiners, 2012). In the 1970s, Giorgi modernized descriptive phenomenology by categorizing it into a three-step process: phenomenological reduction, description of the phenomenon, and the identification of themes (Finley, 2009), unlike Husserl-like approaches that begin with intentional bracketing and end with a descriptive analysis (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Both of these qualitative research methodologies are common among researchers today and are useful outlines for future phenomenological research (Finley, 2012).

A protégé of Husserl, Heidegger, raised the question of being by trying to understand the human experience (Converse, 2012; Kim, 2012). Heidegger actually rejected Husserl’s epistemological practice in phenomenology and began the use of ontology combined with hermeneutics (Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutics seeks to find meaning behind action and experience (Moustakas, 1995). Through questioning and interpreting existence, interpretive phenomenology came to be (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger came to his rejection because it is impossible to deny that the way someone interprets an experience is true to that individual (Reiners, 2012). Finding meaning in experience is left to the reader and the intentionality of the researcher (Moustakas, 1995). Phenomenology evolved to interpret experience with hermeneutic influence through the efforts of Heidegger (Converse, 2012; Kim, 2012). The differences between Husserl and Heidegger may be caused by the subjectivity of interpretation as it relates to a researcher’s positionality (Finlay, 2009). Through the influence of hermeneutics on the interpretation of experience, Heidegger is seen as a catalyst for improving the function of descriptive phenomenology and ending early and contentious research practices (Reiners, 2012).
The evolution from phenomenology to interpretative phenomenological analysis has allowed researchers to begin to adapt their expertise to the field in which they research (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) emphasizes the identification of meaning in experience through the lens of the individual who experiences it and then evaluates it through the perception of the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This form of qualitative research encourages participants to be the experts within their own fields and share that valuable experience with the researcher (Smith, 2004). In many cases this involves both participant and researcher attempting to make meaning of the experiences of the participant in order to better understand a certain phenomenon (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

The complexity of the human experience is reflected in the complexity of phenomenological practices (Moustakas, 1995). This dissertation recognized the complexities of interpretative phenomenology and analyzed collected data using the IPA tradition. Both methodologies were considered, but IPA was found to be more applicable to this study due to the unique experience of the participants and the researcher. In an effort to make sense of the existence, experiences, and deliberate practices of veteran special educators, this dissertation followed interpretative phenomenological practices. Like all people, educators are subject to interpreting their own truth about reality (Cooper, 2008). This research sought to understand what their reality is in relation to the intersection of problems associated with teaching students with EBD and also identify the participants’ deliberate practices. Because the investigation is associated with the experiences of educators who teach students with EBD, interpretive phenomenological analysis was an ideal research methodology for this dissertation.

**Participants**
The participants for this research lived and worked in the greater Baltimore, Maryland, area. They were educators with 7 or more years of experience who worked with students identified with EBD. These classroom environments ranged from cotought environments in public schools, separate classrooms specifically for students with EBD in public schools, private schools for EBD, nonpublic centers, and residential treatment centers. This wide range of locations was intended to create a holistic picture of the experience of teaching students with EBD and engaging those students in the academic process.

The selection of these participants was intentional and therefore purposeful sampling was used. Snowball sampling occurred as participants recommended other people who met the participant requirements. This was a narrow group of participants, largely due to the attrition of teachers within the field. There were six participants in the study.

**Recruitment and Access**

Recruitment was done by the researcher through contacting local school administrators and teachers in search of people who met the criteria of 7 years of experience in EBD education. To protect the anonymity of participants, contacting their local school systems could give away their identity and could harm their career. Participation was advertised through social media and other digital means. Official recruitment was done through a standard email (Appendix A). The participants were made aware of the purpose of this research project ahead of the interviews and were given the opportunity to opt out at any point if they were not willing to proceed. No financial benefit or any other recognition was supplied to the participants for their time.

**Protection of Participants**

There was no direct risk to the participants. However, special considerations needed to be taken into account considering this unique population. The interview process exposed their lived
experiences related to educating students with EBD. Due to the nature of students with EBD, this interview process could bring up painful memories, such as the loss of a student or violence in the classroom. These situations could be traumatic to the participants and discussing them could cause discomfort. The process was completely voluntary and participants were given an opportunity to review the some of the data they provided, reflect on the data, modify any response, and remove any data they may not have been comfortable sharing. All participants were named using pseudonyms and any personal information that could indicate their identity was deleted from the interview transcripts. During the interviews the researcher allowed the participants to choose whether to continue the discussion. The dissertation followed guidelines established by Northeastern University and was conducted under the guidance of an established researcher.

**Data Collection**

After participants were recruited, they were contacted through email. Dates, times, and platforms for interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participants. The participants were given the opportunity to direct appointment times, dates, and platforms. This practice ensured optimal comfort through the interview process. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B).

The data collection process of this project was conducted following the research tradition of Seidman (2006), which includes two separate interviews:

1. a primary interview to obtain the experience of the participant, and
2. a secondary interview for reflection of the participant on the interview transcript and summations made by the researcher.
The interviews were conducted with open ended questions to allow the collection of rich data that shared the experience of the participants (Seidman, 2006). The specifics of the interview process delved deep into the experience of the veteran special educators. The first interview explored the demographics and experience of the participants. This interview shared the life experiences of the veteran special educators in reference to their teaching practices. After the interview, the data from the first two interviews was analyzed by the researcher. Prior to the second interview, participants were given the opportunity to look over data that pertained to themselves. The second interview allowed the participants to be prepared ahead of time and allowed them to omit information that they did not want shared in this dissertation. This process let the participants generate reflective information and created even more authentic and rich data.

Data Storage

In an effort to protect the identities of the participants, all records were secured in a private digital format and a single paper copy was kept in a locked filing cabinet. No person other than the researcher had access to the transcripts from the interviews. All persons were listed under pseudonyms and any identifying information within the transcripts was deleted prior to the bracketing process. Data and paper copies will be held for 3 years, and then destroyed. Access to all information will be available to the researcher only.

Data Analysis

In an effort to duplicate known methods and reduce bias, this dissertation used a coding process heavily influenced by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) and Moustakas (1995). The research included two sets of interviews conducted by the researcher. After the interviews, the researcher transcribed and reviewed the interviews without marking them. Throughout the reading, the researcher conducted the essential practice of interpretative phenomenological
analysis, which is relating back to personal experience and interpretation through the lens of an expert in the field (Moustakas, 1995). During a second review of the interviews, repeated words and phrases were identified. In order to uncover the phenomenon of this project, experimental materials needed to be synthesized repeatedly, not only for data analysis but to reduce bias (Moustakas, 1995). During the third read-through, themes were identified and a coding process was developed. This constant process of rereading allowed the researcher to practice continual reflection on the data, a process essential to qualitative research. The constant review of research materials allowed for the development of themes and commonalities among the interviews (Kleiman, 2004).

Coding is the part of the analysis process that identifies the core data ascertained from the interviews, while also generating commonalities and correlations between interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana 2013). By identifying key words within their context, the experience of veteran special educators in reference to their unique situation was ascertained. These key words became part of the coding process. This process was used to create thematic concepts that arose from the various interviews. These themes or codes were selected via cluster segments and abstracted from the interview transcripts. This project emphasized the evaluation coding method, which is primarily used to identify broad contextual codes and also subcodes within the themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana 2014). In another review of the interview data, broad codes were used to abstract quotes from participants. Subcodes were then applied after a review of the broad codes. All broad codes and subcodes were then cross-analyzed for commonalities and differences among the various interviews.

Through this abstraction of experience from the interviews, coding process, and cross analysis of interview data, the researcher gained a firmer experience of teachers who educate
students with EBD (Moustakes, 1995). These experiences were then generated into a final document that demonstrated the practices of veteran special educators and how they teach students with EBD.

**Trustworthiness**

The research portion of this dissertation was derived from a known and repeatable interview process that was typical of interpretative phenomenological analysis study, in the research tradition of Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005), Moustakas (1995), and Seidman (2006). The actual research of expertise within the field of special education for students with EBD is grounded in Ericsson’s (1994) theory, which suggests that humans become more adept at their domains through experience and deliberate practice. This theoretical framework was integrated throughout the data collection, interview, and analysis process. The dissertation proposal was member checked by members of the EdD cohort. This peer review process continued as the research progressed. This peer review allowed for constructive feedback from other researchers and infused further perspective on the standards of research expected in this sort of academic activity. Participants were given the opportunity to review excerpts and summary statements from their interviews. This member-checking process allowed the participants to refute or explain any issues with the interview process while preventing misunderstanding of what was said.

To further increase trustworthiness, the researcher employed other known and repeatable interpretive phenomenological analysis practices and qualitative traditions. The traditions of bracketing were honored during the thematic coding process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana 2014). Using the coding process with contextual evidence relevant to the field of special educators is a known repeatable process in qualitative practices (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The
researcher is an expert in the field of special education for students with EBD, as well as a
veteran special educator, which is an aspect of interpretative phenomenological research
(Moustakes, 1995). The dissertation as a whole was guided and continually reviewed by a
professional learning community and support system as part of the greater Northeastern
University EdD program.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

This interpretative phenomenological study was used to generate qualitative data through interviewing teachers with 7 or more years of experience educating students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). By interpreting the experience of these teachers, new teaching practices were revealed and other teaching practices were validated. The purpose of this dissertation was to identify the deliberate practices of teachers who educate students with EBD in order to inform stakeholders involved with teaching students with EBD and to improve teaching practices. The research was guided by the question: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

Study Context

The research in this study was conducted in the Baltimore, Maryland, metropolitan area. The teachers who participated taught a variety of subjects, settings, and grade levels. Many areas of education for students with EBD were represented, and the experiences of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers were shared. These teachers worked in public, non-public, and alternative education. The variation of setting and content was not intentional, but did provide eclectic data. The experience level of these teachers ranged from 12 to 45 years, more than the 7 years sought in the study’s parameters. Most of the teachers educated students in what they considered to be an urban environment, with some of their students coming from the suburban areas that surround the city of Baltimore.

The interviews were conducted at local libraries in the surrounding area. The libraries were proximate to the schools or homes of the participants, and tended to be a preferred location for the participants. One participant described the location as somewhere he had been going for decades. Another participant described the library location as a place she had spent a great deal
of time. As a whole, all participants described the library as a place of value prior to the beginning of the interview.

The interviews revealed certain aspects of the participants. The background of each participant was unravelled. Understanding the history of the participants is essential to understanding their deliberate practices as teachers of students with EBD. This eclectic group provided data that encapsulated nearly 100 years of experience in teaching this specific population.

**Participants**

All of the participants in this study were experienced educators who had a variety of experiences working with students with EBD. Some of the teachers were historically classroom teachers, while others had served in administrative roles and chose to return to the classroom. Some participants were teaching as a second career or had experience teaching different populations. As part of snowball recruiting, some of the participants recommended another participant at the end of the interview. Every participant was recommended by a stakeholder in this study, a former student, teacher, administrator, or parent.

**Deanna**

Deanna had been in education for 45 years and during that time she taught for 30 years. She also served as a school administrator and staff developer. At a certain point in her career, Deanna chose to return to the classroom. Nineteen years of her teaching experience had been dedicated to teaching students with EBD. Prior to that, her teaching experience was with students who had intellectual disabilities. Deanna intended to retire soon, but also wanted to continue her service to students with disabilities in some capacity. As an English teacher and senior adviser, her days were very busy teaching and guiding students as they transitioned from a private
separate day school to college or the workforce. These students lived in either the urban or suburban areas surrounding the city of Baltimore. Some of her students lived at the school in a separate residential component, while others commuted from the surrounding areas to attend school. She was influenced to become a teacher by the special education services that helped a family member to whom she was close during her upbringing.

**Tasha**

Tasha had been teaching for 14 years, and her entire experience had been in teaching students with EBD in a cotaught setting. The cotaught setting is a comprehensive classroom shared by a special education teacher and a content teacher. She had served as an elementary teacher and middle school teacher. Tasha described the settings in which she taught as urban, some in proximity to Baltimore, with prior experience outside the Baltimore area. She had taught all content areas during that time, but had spent the majority of her time teaching science. She had also served as the department chair of science and as an administrator for evening school students who had been removed from the general education setting. Tasha became a teacher at the recommendation of her friends and initially became a teacher of students with EBD because of administration-based decisions. She was given this responsibility because her school administrators felt she could succeed in that position. Over time, she acclimated to the role. Tasha believed that her ability to form strong relationships with students has allowed her to help educate students with EBD in the co-taught setting.

**Wesley**

Wesley described his 17-year career teaching students with EBD as a mixture of a variety of environments. He had worked in the most restrictive environments, such as locked facilities that educated only one to six students with EBD per classroom. Later in his career, Wesley
transferred to a less restrictive environment. During that time, Wesley served in leadership roles as the department chair of special education, IEP facilitator, and chair of several behavior-related committees. He also served as a member of the prevention and management of aggressive behavior team during his career. Wesley described his initial motivation for becoming a teacher of students with EBD as the need for a job when he was a young man preparing to enter the workforce. However, Wesley also described his relationship with Jesus Christ as a motivating factor for serving students with EBD, and indicated that he feels he is doing his Lord’s work. Throughout the interviews, Wesley described morality and faith as a motivating factor for teaching, following the path laid out for him. Wesley served his community as a choir and piano teacher in the morning, and managed an alternative learning center for students who had been removed from their classrooms due to behavior difficulties in the later part of his work day. This work was done at a high school with some classrooms that included a mixture of students who benefitted from special education services. Through this dual position, he functioned as both a music teacher and leader in special education.

**Beverly**

Beverly had just completed her 12th year of teaching science in a cotaught setting at a suburban middle school. In this inclusion model, students with EBD participate alongside general education students. Throughout her career, Beverly always worked in this inclusive setting. She had a great deal of passion for science education and felt that knowledge of scientific concepts and practices provided her students with opportunities for success beyond the classroom. Beverly shared that she believed students with EBD tend to enjoy science because of the inherit kinesthetic activity. One of Beverly’s teaching goals was to inspire students to pursue careers in science and to have those students make a difference in the world. Beverly believed
that students with learning differences can love, appreciate, and practice science. When she started her career, Beverly did not intend to work with students with EBD; she was simply placed in the cotaught setting, where she thrived and exceeded expectations.

**William**

William had spent the last 10 years of his 12-year teaching career working in a private separate day school for students with EBD. All of his students benefitted from special education services. The classes William led usually had anywhere from four to eight students in a classroom with one teacher. William taught Spanish, creative writing, and film studies. He was also a special education case manager, organized afterschool gaming for students, was a leader on his school’s positive behavior reinforcement team, and served as a translator for native Spanish-speaking students and parents at his school. Prior to coming to work at his current school, William taught English to Spanish speakers in Mexico. William primarily worked with urban students. William cited spirituality as a reason for becoming a teacher of students with EBD, as well as his confidence that he could do well in this job. When faced with choosing between teaching Spanish at a well-known school in Baltimore or working with a disadvantaged population, he intentionally chose to teach students with EBD partly because he wanted the challenge.

**Robin**

Robin was a high school mathematics, business, and college readiness teacher. When Robin first entered college, she originally had chosen to become a special education teacher, but described making a wrong turn at registration and ended up becoming a business major. After a successful 15-year career in business, Robin wanted to return to the career path she had originally set out for herself. She went back to school, earned her credentials, and sought a
teaching job. She was very confident in herself and her ability to make a difference. She intentionally applied to work at schools that suffered from the effects of economic disparity. Seventeen years later, Robin taught at a public alternative school for students with EBD and other school-related difficulties. Not all of the students at Robin’s school were placed there for emotional or behavioral difficulties. Some students attended this school as the result of a court mandate, drug use, or attendance-related issues.

**Exploration of Themes**

Several themes became evident during the interview process, as the participants shared and verified their experiences. These experiences showed some deliberate practices that these teachers used to educate students with EBD. Through analysis of data, coding, and subcoding, the following interconnected themes became clear:

- Emotional assessment
- Fluid instruction
- Structure
- Relationship building
- Individualization
- Emotional connection

**Emotional Assessments Modify Instruction**

By understanding the feelings of a student with EBD, teachers have a better grasp of the student’s academic capabilities in a given class period. When participants shared their experience teaching students with EBD, they often stated that throughout a given school day or class period they would check in on a student’s physical and mental wellbeing. This emotional assessment was used by the teachers to predict frustrations that the students may have and prevent the
outbursts that are common among students with EBD. This proactive practice allowed the teachers to modify the activities going on in the classroom. This emotional assessment can be placed into explicit and implicit categories. Implicit emotional assessment can be verbal or nonverbal.

In an explicit emotional assessment, teachers directly question a student. The participants asked their students directly about their physical or mental wellbeing. Wesley described the purpose of this sort of assessment by sharing, “Sometimes their home life is rough, I want them to feel safe, feel respected, feel supported.” Deanna described the process of explicit emotional assessment as, “For some students I can physically get close if they're sitting at a desk or table in my room and touch their shoulder, lean in, ‘How are you doing?’” The purpose of doing this is to measure the student’s response to this sort of basic question. Tasha shared a few different types of emotional probes she uses to gauge her students: “What's going on at home? What's going on in your life that you were different today than you were yesterday? What led to that?” These could lead to more elaborate questions, such as, “Your behavior is different today than it was yesterday, so is there anything going on that I should know about?” Tasha felt that inquiring about the feelings of the student created the trust needed to begin to foster relationships with her students.

Wesley used his explicit emotional assessments to delve into a student’s personal situation: “You'll have students that do have crisis or drama [in their lives]. So then discussions, based on their responses to ‘How are you today?’ can get into a lengthy conversation about what's wrong with the world.” During these emotional assessments, Wesley described how he presents himself: “I just try to be friendly to the students, just ‘Hi, how're you doing,’ that's it.”
Wesley shared that he begins this process the moment students enter the building, continuing until the time they leave the building.

William shared that he begins this process as soon as the students enter: “The kids come in and I'm feeling them out. Every day I'm feeling them out.” William described the frequency of emotional assessment of the students as, “I don't stop. I don't need to concentrate to… check on the kids.” William felt that he continually does this throughout a class period, and by doing so he can predict emotional or behavioral outbursts. He even went so far as to describe it as a survival technique for managing the most aggressive of behaviors.

Compared to the explicit ones, implicit emotional assessments are covert and involve classroom situations. This sort of assessment has the same purpose, to identify a student’s mood, frustrations, and instructional readiness. Some of these savvy techniques involve observable tendencies of students and tangible student motions more than cordial teacher-to-student questioning. These techniques include observation of body language, appearance, and other factors that might indicate emotional distress. Such displays can indicate to the teachers when the student is more prone to an emotional outburst or may withdraw from the classroom setting.

Deanna described using a rocking chair as a self-selected seat that students could gravitate towards if they’re struggling with other influences. She used that chair as a warning sign for students who may be struggling with something in their lives. Deanna shared that in her experience, when a student entered her class and headed straight for the rocking chair, she knew immediately that the student was in distress.

If a student immediately goes to the rocking chair, I'm assessing that there's something perhaps going on if they don't normally sit there. Everyone sort of treats the rocking chair as a calm place, so the beginning when we do the frame games and I'm establishing what
we're going to do in that lesson is really for me to assess, "How are we emotionally, behaviorally? How are we going to be working today?" And if I notice something that seems to be significantly different than what it should be, then I'm going to do something about that. It may be that I'll need to call someone early on in the class, it may be that other students are cuing me that somebody needs some sort of help, and then I want to deal with that now rather than let it linger throughout the class.

This sort of reactivity likely lessens the opportunity for undesirable situations in the classroom setting. Beverly also made use of a very similar classroom tool, an isolated area where students could go sit when they were in distress, which she referred to as a cubby. When a student traveled to this location, Beverly made an effort to then begin an explicit emotional assessment. Robin, similarly, used a counter space to allow students to sit separately from each other and shared that if a student headed to sit on the counter in the back of the classroom, she treated it as an observable warning sign that the student may be in distress. Robin also intentionally structured her classroom to have more seats than students, and could determine emotional struggles that students may be having based on where they chose to sit. Based on the social cues from the community of students, she could evaluate and predict behavior.

William also used implicit emotional assessment by gauging the volume of a student’s speech, and changed his behavior to match the tone of a student. He also attended to how they were speaking, noticing tone and speech patterns. Wesley also used this tool, and shared that he would strike up a conversation about sports or local news in order to observe a student’s speech pattern and body language, and thereby predict behavior. Other nonverbal cues, such as hygiene and how clothing is worn, could also be indicators of emotional distress that Wesley observed.
Robin felt that emotional assessment went beyond the simple “Hello, how are you?” In her experience she favored implicit emotional assessment on a case-by-case basis, which surrounded the idea of knowing the student’s story. Robin used specific questions about a student’s life to gauge emotional status. Topics such as birthdays, football games, and upcoming driving tests all could be used to evaluate a student’s emotional status.

Regardless of the type of emotional assessment used, the teachers reported that this practice was used to begin modifying their lesson plan. By realizing the emotional state of a student with EBD, they could then predict the difficulty of content that a student could attend to, the pace at which content could be delivered, and whether any outside services needed to be contacted. This practice allowed the teachers to modify their lesson plan to meet the current needs of the student, and individualize the student’s current capabilities. Also, this teacher behavior helped strengthen student-to-teacher relationships.

**Fluid Instruction Responds to Emotional Assessments**

When teachers know how a student is feeling emotionally, they can tailor a lesson to their current wants and needs. Fluid instruction and lesson planning refers to the practice of anticipating the students’ needs in the classroom, and retroactively modifying a lesson to those needs. Based on emotional assessment, these teachers could predict the best activity for the student at the time. Relationships and knowing a student’s history also played a part in this deliberate practice. Since negative behaviors among students with EBD can be aggressive and dangerous towards peers and teachers, this modification process allowed teachers to educate these students in a way that decreased the likelihood of negative behavior. Participants indicated that bell-to-bell instruction, having a multitude of activities, brief teacher-led lectures,
encouraging positive peer interactions, and short chunks of activity were some of the practices that could be used to modify a lesson plan to meet the needs of students with EBD.

The practice of changing and flowing one’s instructional activity is responsive to a student’s needs. Regardless of the background of a student, the interests of students change from year to year. Deanna described this process in her commentary:

My style is looser in terms of planning and it may reflect that I've been doing this for a long time and I've been doing some of the content for a long time, but I find myself every year when I come up to a particular unit, a hero unit or a creation story unit or whatever it is, I find myself designing some new activities just because the kids help me see things differently.

William adhered to practices similar to Deanna’s: “You could criticize me for being too ready to step away from the structure, but my freedom to improvise that I have enjoyed has enabled me to have a flexible approach.”

The flexible approach William described allowed him to step away from his original lesson plan into something more suited to the students’ needs at that moment. This reactivity and flexibility that William shared may have helped decrease negative behavior and increase student participation. Deanna described the fluidity of her lesson planning as a reflective process, which could be correlated to her emotional assessment and the interests of the students.

This is where I'm going to go from Monday to Friday and how it goes depends on how the students are doing, so if they need more on this than this and I don't know that because literature is like that, you dive in and then you learn something you hadn't expected to learn, and then somebody has a conversation about it.
In contrast, Wesley described the process as something he divided into periods of time, allowing for the emotional assessment and reflection piece that seemed to be intertwined in his practice:

It'll ebb and flow depending on what's going on with the students because some students will be in crisis for multiple days in a row and then other students, maybe they just need to get something off their chest and they can get back on track.

A combination of emotional assessment and then fluid lesson planning allowed Wesley to manage or even prevent student crisis, avoid disciplinary exclusion from school, and work towards academic participation. Allowing a student to verbalize concerns, rather than engage in academics, may be a way towards Wesley’s goal of avoiding disciplinary exclusion of students with EBD. Wesley also believed that in a given moment, academic activity can be a way to distract and empower students away from their emotional difficulties. He saw academic activity as something that could empower a student to overcome emotional disabilities. Therefore, based on an emotional assessment, Wesley felt he could encourage a student to complete classroom tasks in place of focusing on troubling events going on in the student’s life. Wesley had to decide whether to focus on emotional debriefing, academic engagement, or giving the student quiet reflective time.

Robin used a variety of spaces for fluid learning in her classroom. In one area she had an art integration activity, which was separate from a computer-based assessment area. She had activities on clipboards that encouraged students to get up and move. Different seating arrangements could be employed as needed. Robin also used emotional assessment to gauge what activity a student should engage in. If she noticed that a student was becoming frustrated, she might have her or him move on to a less intense activity. After the student relaxed, she might
have him or her return to the activity that was frustrating, but with teacher or peer guidance. This multi-faceted classroom was designed by Robin to keep students working on math.

Robin used this sort of multifaceted approach with her students, but also could take it a step further, as when she had the many different aspects blend into a single effort. Students in Robin’s class combined school data on office referrals and attendance into posters, graphs, PowerPoints, and spoken word presentations. They compiled information in order to make suggestions on school-wide problems and give students voice as to why they may be acting inappropriately during school hours. This effort took months and many smaller activities in order to culminate with a larger presentation that eventually went before the head of alternative schools. In this fluid practice, Robin took several smaller activities and scaffolded them into a larger student-led activity.

When planning for a fluid lesson, these teachers were all experienced professionals with many resources at their disposal. They created, collected, modified, and stored classroom activities as a habit. The experienced teacher of students with EBD would bring forth a specific activity at a whim, based on the needs of the moment. As Beverly shared, “Keeping the kids busy prevents behaviors you don’t want in your room.” In this concept, the students are always busy with curriculum, so there is no time to engage in negative behavior. This practice was encapsulated by Beverly when she stated, “There's never one activity for the day, there's always more than one. Just reach those different types of learners and I feel like kids are really busy, so it helps them.”

Fluid instruction and lesson planning seems to be the practice of having many different activities that the teacher or the student can choose from. Each of these activities relate directly or indirectly to the content and curriculum. Depending on the instructional level or emotional
state of the student, an appropriate activity can be selected in order to engage the student in the classroom learning and decrease the opportunity for student frustration. This practice is balanced with emotional assessment of students to determine if someone needs a break from curriculum and classroom activity. The deliberate practice of constant emotional assessment and fluid lesson planning seem to be reflective of each other, and may require practice for a teacher to utilize as a strategy in the classroom setting. The teachers who use these methods are constantly reflecting on their students, the school community, and their own availability to deliver content.

**Structure Creates Normalcy and Clarity for Students with EBD.**

Students with EBD can perform tasks with greater ease when they have clear expectations, rules, boundaries, procedures, and norms. Classroom structure and behavior norms are not to be confused with fluid lesson planning. While the activity for the day or moment may be fluid, the norms and expectations within the classroom are clear and frequently observed. From the moment students enter the classroom to the moment they leave, clear procedures are in place for almost every facet of the classroom. Grouping of students and seating seemed to be a trend among the participants, as it is essential for keeping an orderly learning space. These routines and rituals are in place to create normalcy, organization, and facilitate the learning process. Structure also applies to the organization of classroom materials and student classwork. Beverly summarized the purpose of this theme as, “If you don't have the structure in your classroom then, there's opportunity for behavior to run amok.”

When entering the classroom Deanna made sure to be at the door, greeting her students. These students were to have a seat and immediately begin the first activity, which tended to be a warm-up game. Tasha described a similar practice. The students were to enter and begin their warm-up quietly. There were color-coded expectations for certain activities in Tasha’s room, and
during the beginning of a class, Tasha expected it to be quiet and the students to immediately start their warm-up activity. After the warm-up, both Tasha and Deanna had a procedure for transition to the next activity, with clear behavior guidelines for transition and the next activity.

From the entrance to class and beginning the warm-up, William described a known pattern he presents to the students: “I'm going to have to have some kind of activity, some kind of attainable objective that starts to work that out. The presentation, it's a ritual because they deserve the presentation.” William did not always share this presentation if the previous day’s objective was not met, but he did perform the presentation quickly. This sort of direct instruction about the happenings of the classroom usually coincided with a new skill or topic in the curriculum. The information was presented to the students with a consistent pattern and without surprises.

The procedure for how students enter the classroom was a very important structure for Tasha, Deanna, Robin, Beverly, and Wesley. They used a daily pattern that met behavioral expectations. Beverly shared the pattern of behaviors she expects from her students when they enter the classroom:

When the students come in, there is a bin by the door. If there is papers in the bin, then the students know to pick those up, so that way we don't have to pass them out during the class. They get their notebook, there's a spiral ... with a bin in the front for all their spirals or composition books. And the first couple kids come in, they pick them up and pass them out to everybody. And they do their warm up in there and they write down the agenda.

This practice seemed to be teacher structured, but student led within the learning community. Every student was expected to perform the tasks described above. Considering
Beverly’s perspective that busy students do not engage in negative behaviors, it is evident that she used these routines and structures as a proactive measure to prevent negative behavior in her classroom. She also described this process as a way to create normalcy in patterns of behavior and to have clear expectations for entering the classroom.

Robin used bins that contained all of the student’s folders, which contained various artifacts of student work. This organization method was something she coached her students through, working towards making sure that no items that a student produced were ever lost. Robin also made sure that the students understood the format for assignments, and used similar formats for nearly every assignment. This practice seemed to decrease the opportunity for student frustration. She had a set format for notetaking, for practice, and for computer use. However, she made sure that all of the classroom supplies are readily available to her students: “Resources are just set out, so that they can grab whatever they need when they need it, so paper, pens, all of that stuff is there... There's markers, crayons, rulers, anything you can possibly need.” By providing the materials for the students ahead of time, the students could again avoid frustration and immediately engage in the activity that best suited them.

Tasha also relied on procedure to maintain classroom activity. Her description of the purpose of structure indicated that it facilitates academic engagement. The expectations for interaction were always explicit and understood by the students, so there was no gray area for behavior norms to be changed by the student. Tasha believed that the more structure she put in place, the less opportunity there was for the manifestation of negative behavior among students with EBD. Tasha rarely mentioned rules in her interviews, but was very clear that her behavioral structures were expectations that the students needed to work towards meeting.
The intersections of structure seemed to be evident in each of these teachers’ practices, Whether described as rules, expectations, rituals, or just keeping the students busy with learning activities, there were structures for keeping the students moving through the academic activities of the classroom. These structures were not whimsical, and were patterns of behavior regularly demonstrated by the teacher. This normalcy of procedures may allow students to predict the behavior of their teachers, and expect this sort of regularity in the classroom. This deliberate practice of having consistent procedures and structures in the classroom may be a way to decrease the negative behavior among students with EBD.

This practice should not be confused with fluid lesson planning, which allows a teacher to select the activity for the student to participate in. Structure is a detailed pattern of how the student will participate in the teacher-selected activity. Therefore, with known expectations and structures for completing a classroom activity, a student can flow into this activity by meeting the expectations of the task assigned by the teacher.

**Strong Relationships Have Instructional Value.**

Building a strong and professional relationship with a student identified with EBD leads to comfort and increases instructional ability in the classroom. Wesley shared his feelings about his students when reflecting on his experiences: “I know the young people… Sometimes their home life is rough, I want them to feel safe, feel respected, feel supported.” This genuine feeling of kindness and respect for the students with EBD seemed to be a deliberate practice of all the participants. By building relationships, these teachers were capable of addressing behavior and academic concerns and lift students beyond their emotional difficulties. This relationship building is not exclusive to student-teacher relationships, but also exists within a classroom and school community. These teachers seemed to work towards some sort of social construct and
normalcy in behavior among a group of students. Building a professional relationship with a student with EBD is a daunting task, due to the nature of trauma and comorbid factors. These teachers seemed to take the opportunity to build relationships throughout their instruction, using both direct and indirect means.

Building a positive teacher-student relationship begins with emotional assessment. Tasha would begin this process with explicit emotional assessment, followed by discussion of the happenings within a student’s life. This discussion may begin during class time, with the emotional assessment process, but the deeper discussion may occur after school or during lunch. Wesley conducted a similar process by greeting students in the hall and making sure his presence was positive during these interactions. Wesley reflected on this experience by sharing, “I can build up a relationship with them so it gives me an opportunity to talk with them. They recognize, oh, he'll listen to me. He won't just judge me.” Deanna would ask to speak to a student in her classroom, conduct an emotional check-in, and send the student to the appropriate location for that student’s emotional needs. To detail this practice in sequence, first the teacher would conduct a basic questioning of a student’s emotional status, followed by the opportunity to chat one-on-one with the student, then the teacher could decide among a variety of interventions. Most of the time there was no need for a direct intervention, and the venting process seemed to alleviate many concerns that student may have had. Based on this assessment, if a student was a danger to themselves or others, a counsellor, therapist, or parent would be contacted immediately. This preventive method could stop aggressive and undesirable behavior before it begins.

Robin described the relationship-building process as something that is different for every student. “Each student’s history is different, and you have to know their story,” she observed.
Robin made an effort not to judge, but to listen to a student’s story. She also used this tactic to perform emotional assessments. Robin described good teachers of students with EBD as people who have “thick skin,” elaborating that sometimes a student with EBD can say something negative and it is the teacher’s job not to react negatively. Robin was aware of her students’ relationships outside the classroom, particularly the relationships her students had with the community and their parents. These sorts of relationships could predict a student’s future behavior and academic participation.

William had a different perspective about relationships, for which he used the term social capital. By practicing the mantra of enforcing rules that really matter, and not berating the students with constant demands, he felt that he built up social capital. He saved this social capital for when he really needed to directly ask a student to change her or his behavior. William described this social capital:

I have capital. Making people do stuff that they might not want to do, convincing people to do thing that they might not want to do without them getting mad. It's spent. They are using their resources. They are using their emotional resources. They have finite patience. They have a finite ability to comply with things that they might not like to comply with.

Reflecting on this social capital, William realized that there were only so many requests that he could make of students with EBD before they became emotionally distressed. He would avoid making too many requests because he knew he could damage the student-teacher relationship by being overly authoritarian. William saw classroom control as collegial: “I'm not controlling for the sake of control. That's good. That makes me easier to get along with.” He also saw his students as people, with their own experiences and backgrounds. William was aware that
his students were his subordinates, but went to great efforts to avoid being an authoritarian. By maintaining this awareness, William believed he built positive relationships with his students.

Robin, Beverly, Deanna, and Wesley all went to great lengths to display themselves as people with their own personality to their students. Beverly decorated her classroom with artifacts that represented her as a person. Her use of science fiction memorabilia, particularly superheroes, let students have talking points with her, as some had common interests. Deanna decorated her classroom with thematic items related to content or items that represented her and her personal history. Robin shared her experiences with her students, and let them know about her persona and history, particularly her career before teaching. Wesley used sports and his interest in local teams to create conversation among his students. These teachers shared their personae with the students in a way that allowed commonalities to be displayed to them.

All of the participants engaged in their school community in a student-to-teacher capacity. Some participants engaged in afterschool activities such as gaming clubs, robotics teams, and choir. Others had more administrative roles, such as providing an alternative space for students to eat lunch or counselling students on the transition out of school after graduation. Each of the participants had the experience of leading these sorts of activities for many years. By doing so, they interacted with their students in a non-curricular and nurturing way to help foster relationships based on student needs and interests.

While the student-teacher relationship seems to be an important deliberate practice, the act of fostering relationships between students also seems to be a strategy for promoting learning and decreasing the opportunity for negativity in the learning environment. By promoting dialogue and collaboration among students through teacher discussion, students with EBD get
the opportunity to practice interacting in a positive way within the safety of a classroom environment.

Deanna reported that she had her students work collaboratively while fostering conversation about curriculum-related topics. This normalization of conversation about content allowed for positive conversation outside the classroom. Tasha and Beverly both went out of their way to group their students into teams based on their needs, usually based on reading level or relevant test scores. All three of these participants shared that mixing the students and encouraging dialogue was part of creating a community within the classroom. By creating community in learning, these participants felt they were creating a positive atmosphere that allowed students to support each other.

**Technological Individualization Meets the Current Needs of Students.**

Teachers can use digital technology to specifically target the instructional level of a student and deliver material that fits the needs of the student. Not all of the participants had access to student computers. Funding seemed to be a problem for some of the participants. The teachers who worked in less restrictive environments tended to have more technology. Other factors, like teacher experience with technology, may also have influenced the use of technology in the classroom. Those teachers who worked in schools that provided their students with access to technology tended to use it to individualize curriculum.

Tasha worked towards individualized curriculum in the classroom by using technology to self-pace a lesson. She placed all study materials in a student-accessible drive on the workstations in her classroom. The students could then access these materials when they were needed. She used online simulations and learning games to allow students to focus on activities that were educational but also allow them to withdraw socially and focus on academic activity. These
Simulations could replicate the laboratory environment in science and allow students to simulate participation in laboratory activities that would otherwise not be available to them.

Wesley made use of multiple rooms in his school building, as he served a dual role as a behavior intervention specialist and as a music teacher. In his music classroom, he created spaces for group performance as well as solitary spaces for individual practice. In his alternative learning center, each student was provided with quiet space and could use a computer. The classwork in his alternative learning center was individualized and self-paced. When describing the practice of having the students work on computers, Wesley shared that computer use in his learning center was “a benefit for [students with EBD] because if they like technology, they can focus on that. If they're socially awkward, they don't have to socialize because they can focus on the computer.” If a student was struggling with appropriate social interaction, Wesley allowed her or him to focus on the computer-based self-paced activity rather than trying to manage the social construct of a standard classroom.

Robin also used technology to individualize lessons for her students. Using various math assessments that challenge students at their instructional level allowed Robin to target certain skills in the classroom. She also used this tactic to reteach students who were not understanding concepts over long periods of time or to show the growth in a student who was working towards mastery. Data from these sorts of activities can indicate a student’s present level of performance in their content.

**Emotional Attachment to the Classroom and Curriculum**

Students with EBD are more likely to be engaged and care about the subject material if they are connected to their classroom and their curriculum. Participants shared that they worked to emotionally connect their students with the content and classroom. This practice helped set
structural norms for classroom materials, build relationships in the classroom, and allow certain items to be used in the fluid lesson planning process. Participants operated under the belief that if students with EBD liked and appreciated the content and curriculum, they were more likely to engage in the learning process.

William described his classroom as something he worked towards decorating, although he did not consider his classroom to be a splendid environment. He considered his classroom to be a constant work in progress, to fit the needs of the day. Considering that some of his students had been incarcerated or spent a great deal of their lives within a residential treatment center, he desired to make his classroom a nice place for students. As a Spanish teacher, he hung the flags of Latin American countries, student work, and sometimes popular memes. He did this because “I don't want my room to look like a prison cell.” By generating a different-looking environment, students at William’s school could have a different mindset while in his classroom. The students asked questions about the flags, commented on each other’s classwork, and laughed together about the funny memes posted on the wall.

William created individualized study materials for his students. Due to the nature of the students William served, he felt that they may have come into his class with limited background knowledge about Spanish language and culture. In an effort to remedy this, he created study materials that were instructional and independently effective for students. William also worked towards making these materials available for students outside of the classroom. By creating an organized folder of individualized study sheets, a student would not need to have prior knowledge to access curriculum inside and outside of the curriculum. William also felt that when the students were carrying these study materials, they felt proud of being a scholar and a member of his classroom community. These study materials were created daily, and were reflective of the
previous day’s assessment. William used both emotional and instructional assessments to tailor these study materials to the needs of the student. William believed that his students were aware of the effort he put into the crafting of these study materials, and that this effort to create something of value for his students that was content related allowed him to fortify his relationships with his students. This practice also showed that William was receptive to his students’ learning needs.

Robin displayed her students’ work throughout the classroom, including data from testing and online assessment. She also displayed student artwork in order to brighten up her classroom. One particular activity she used to reinforce math content was geometric symmetry art that her students created. These student-created artifacts were on display not only in her classroom but had also gone to local art shows. Robin believed that this demonstration of student success allowed the students to feel positive about something they created in math class. Even though they did not show numeric values, the artifacts did represent mathematical practices.

Beverly also tried to make the classroom an inviting place for her students. She best described this when she shared her experience as a classroom designer:

I like bright colors. And it's good to stimulate my brain at least and I feel like a lot of times I act like a middle schooler. So it would be helpful if, if it's helpful to me, it's probably helpful for them. I feel like empty walls would be very negative. I walked into my classroom, my new classroom for the upcoming year and I just had this awful feeling just being in there and I just can't wait to start hanging things up and making it feel like my own.
She built relationships with students by sharing her appreciation of all things science and science fiction, but she also described an environment that was exciting to be in, a place that was uplifting to students, a place they felt stimulated in.

I have positive statements to encourage the students. I have personal favorite things hanging up, like I have an X-men poster and butterflies, because I do want the students to see me as a real person. I add a lot of personality in my class, so I feel like it helps build that relationship with the students. It's very busy, I have student work hanging all the time. I make it very clear that I am a nerd and I am very proud of being a nerd and that it's okay to be a nerd. I warn before a day's activity or unit, that this is my favorite part of science and that I'm so excited to do this.

Deanna described her classroom as a comfortable place as well, literally covered in curriculum related artifacts:

I have a beautiful mancala board from Indonesia that students love to play, and I have works of art from China and Thailand and other places. I have terracotta warrior replicas and I have lots of things that make the room, to me, more interesting and allow me to say to students, "This is our space." So that we are all sort of protecting it and taking care of it, so I have some things there that are kind of delicate or might be a little valuable, but I trust that if the students see it as their room that they will take care of those things.

Deanna tried to make a comfortable environment, not only through decoration but also through the use of different types of seating and desks. She found that the use of a rocking chair, bungee chairs, and large conference-style tables worked well with her students. Students could choose chairs they found comfortable. In the placement of items and arrangement of furniture, Deanna deliberately sought to make a comfortable environment for her students to participate in
the curriculum. As she described her classroom, Deanna took the opportunity to reflect on her space: “Most people who come in, adults who come in, say that they feel very comfortable in it and the students, I think, regard the room as sort of a desirable spot to learn.” Perhaps by having a desirable space to learn in, students with EBD learned more often.

Beyond the physical structure and design of the classroom, these experienced teachers worked towards attaching their students to their curriculum. By connecting the students with curriculum that was relevant, reflected their personas, and inspired passion for their subject material, these teachers fostered student interest in the curriculum. This was also accomplished through the assignment of roles, tasks, or the creation of teacher items.

Beyond the practice of creating individual study sheets for his students, William also made an effort to connect curriculum to culturally relevant topics that were important to the students:

I got kids early in the year making comparisons in spoken Spanish between who's more famous between Beyonce and Rhianna, who's more talented between JAY-Z and Andrew K., more than one lesson like this occurred. I was thinking of the specific one that was teaching comparisons, around about October. The students took it away with them.

In order to teach a topic that may be abstract to the students, William looked to find concepts that they were familiar with in order to teach new or difficult content. The practice of making content relevant to the student likely has implications on how they view the content. This allows content to be less alien to a student, while also fostering relationships between students by finding common interests. This practice likely increases the comfort a student has with the curriculum and creates emotional attachment to a learning concept.
Deanna shared two practices she used to connect students to their curriculum. The first was the adoption of a character when reading a story. For example, she assigned students different characters from the story of Beowulf, not necessarily by having the student read the part out loud, but by interpreting how that character may feel in a given portion of the story. The adoption of a character could be teacher assigned or student selected. As characters developed in a story, Deanna actively tried to connect relevant issues in the student’s life with the issues the character may be facing. During instruction or a read aloud Deanna would actively look for this student’s perspective on what “their” character may be facing as part of the story. The student may even share how this compared with her or his own life or experience.

This emotional connection to the story of Beowulf and Viking heritage became so profound for one of Deanna’s students that the student went on to get tattoos of Viking runes that exemplified personal beliefs, such as loyalty and truth. This deep connection to the story and content related to Viking history allowed the student to take appreciation of content and embed it into a developing persona.

Deanna used curriculum to help students develop working skills in their interactions with others. She did this through the Greek argument styles logos, pathos, and ethos. During the lessons about argument and debate, students could verbalize how they used curriculum to communicate with others in a more positive way. These three types of argument allowed students to develop ways of approaching social problems in their lives with a manageable dialectic strategy. When counseling students after a negative interaction with another person, Deanna could ask the student if he or she used one of the argument strategies discussed in class. This is another and more advanced version of emotional assessment, as emotional assessment is also a check for understanding in curriculum.
These teachers worked actively towards connecting the curriculum to their students in a deep and meaningful way. This practice may create an interest in participating in curriculum on the part of the students. The teachers felt that when students were engaged, they were learning and there was less opportunity for negative behavior. This process of emotional connection also created structure within the classroom, normalized procedures for participation, and community.

**Summary of Themes and Practices**

Six major themes emerged from the interview process. These major themes were the emotional assessment of students, fluid instruction, structure, relationships, individualization, and emotional connections. Each of these themes lends itself to several deliberate practices of teachers who educate students with EBD. These practices have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Deliberate Practices of Teachers who Educate Students with EBD*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional assessment – explicit</td>
<td>Direct questions about how a student may be feeling, used to inform instructional planning or need for additional intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional assessment – implicit conversation</td>
<td>Conversation on indirect topics that indicate a student’s emotional state, used to inform instructional planning or need for additional intervention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional assessment – teacher observations</td>
<td>Observation of student body language or student intentional placement in the classroom, used to inform instructional planning or need for additional intervention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – organized plan</td>
<td>An organized linear daily, weekly, or monthly plan of activities for the students with EBD to engage in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – emotional assessment leading to a plan change</td>
<td>Changing the learning plan or activity based on a student’s emotional state in order to increase or decrease academic rigor that may frustrate a student with EBD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – use of academic activity to calm students with EBD</td>
<td>Using academic activity to distract students from social problems they may be facing, allowing them to focus on something productive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – multitude of activities</td>
<td>Teachers have on hand several relevant curriculum-related activities for students to engage in. These activities have known instructional levels and value. Procedures for participation usually are already known by the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – differentiated activity</td>
<td>When teaching content, teachers of students with EBD have a variety of different learning activities on hand that relate to the content of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluid instruction – multi-faceted project</td>
<td>Through several differentiated means, students work collaboratively on a central project or theme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure – warm-ups or introduction activity</td>
<td>Having an initial activity and procedure for that activity that students can immediately engage in when entering the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure - materials</td>
<td>Every item in the classroom has an appropriate place that is known to the students. All materials are readily available to the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure – organizing student artifacts and work samples</td>
<td>Using folders, bins, and other organization methods to hold student work in order to prevent the loss of student materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure – clear rules, procedures and expectations</td>
<td>All classroom behavior guidelines are clear and available to the students. These guidelines cover all possible behaviors that could occur in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships – know the student’s story</td>
<td>Teachers know the background and history of a student, and use this information to predict behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships – school presence</td>
<td>Teachers are known throughout the school community by committing to school activities beyond the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships – social capital</td>
<td>Enforcing single or a few important rules in order to prevent frustration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships – artifacts of persona</td>
<td>Teachers place artifacts in their classroom that represent themselves as people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological individualization – self pacing</td>
<td>Providing students with study materials in a digitally manipulable format that can be used for activity completion in which a student dictates the pace. Students can also take quiet space and avoid socialization to complete these sorts of activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological individualization – activity specific</td>
<td>Students have access to simulations, learning games, and other online activities that students can participate in independently or in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological individualization - assessment</td>
<td>Using objective specific online assessments in accordance with a student’s present levels of performance to gather further data about a student’s level of comprehension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional attachment – relevant curriculum</td>
<td>By making curriculum directly relevant to the student’s persona or history, students gain appreciation of content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional attachment – classroom artifacts</td>
<td>Teachers display or create classroom materials that are meaningful to the content and enhance student appreciation of content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional attachment – classroom decoration</td>
<td>The display of student work, content related items, teacher related items, and motivational posters allow students to develop a favorable opinion of their classroom.</td>
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</table>
Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the deliberate practices of experienced teachers who educate students with EBD by inquiring into their lived experiences. The medium for the collection of this data was semi-structured one-on-one interviews that occurred over two separate meetings. Six themes were identified, with several practices related to each theme.

During the interview process, the participants shared their experiences and made frequent reference to what they did in the classroom. Many of the activities that were shared were directly related to the management of behavior and the instruction of students with EBD. Some of the themes were described by all participants; others were only reflected in a single participant. Commonalities between the participants are described in these themes. Emotional assessment is a process by which teachers gauge a student’s volatility and willingness to participate in classroom. This practice informs the teacher as to whether they should continue with the standard lesson plan that was designed for the day or switch to an alternative curriculum activity. This fluid instructional practice is made possible by the structures that exist in the classroom. Structures are norms for behavior that the student has practiced throughout a school year. Teachers rely on building positive relationships as they utilize emotional assessment strategies and normalize classroom behavioral structures. Technology can be a useful tool for individualized classroom activity, and can be part of the fluid instruction practice. Due to the behavior that students with EBD can display, teachers may rely on emotional connections to classroom and content to encourage participation in the classroom environment and ease the stress of academics among students with EBD.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

**Problem of Practice**

Approximately 1 percent of students in U.S. schools have been identified with emotional or behavioral disorders (U.S. Dept of Ed., 2015); there may be a larger population of students with EBD who are currently unidentified (Kauffman, 2007). Students with EBD tend to experience suspension, expulsion, and eventually drop out of school (Osher, Morrison, & Wanda, 2003). Students with EBD demonstrate poor educational output (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartololitta, 2008). Disciplinary exclusion due to negative behavior causes poor outcomes and dropout (Bowman-Perrot et al., 2011).

There is a high rate of attrition among teachers who educate students with EBD due to the nature of teaching them (Cancio & Conderman, 2008). Students with EBD manifest behavior that is aggressive, disruptive, and not socially acceptable (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Universities are not preparing new teachers to educate students with EBD (Oliver & Reschly, 2010), nor are teachers being adequately prepared to manage the behaviors of students with EBD (Kindzierski, O’Dell, Marable, & Raimondi, 2013). This lack of preparation for teaching students with EBD may lead to disciplinary exclusion of these students because their teachers are stressed and unprepared to teach (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

Very few advances and academic interventions for students with EBD have occurred during the contemporary era of education (Vennest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, & Parker, 2011). Meanwhile, teachers of students with EBD who have lengthy careers tend to be successful and have different characteristics than their colleagues who experience burnout (Prather-Jones, 2011). Perhaps the experiences of this rare population can demonstrate the
academic interventions that may be successful for students with EBD. They may have techniques that address the problems of disciplinary exclusion and poor academic output.

**Review of Methodology**

The interpretive phenomenological analysis of this study examined the lived experiences of teachers who educate students with EBD. Only teachers with 7 or more years of experience were selected for this study. Semi-structured two-part interviews were conducted to obtain information about the participants and their experiences. Qualitative information was gathered from the interviews and coded into themes that identified the deliberate practices of the participants. The research was guided by the question: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

**Discussion of Themes and Practices**

The qualitative data yielded six themes that included several practices that these teachers use to educate, manage, and engage students with EBD. The six themes were emotional assessment, fluid instruction, structure, relationships, technological individualization, and emotional connection. Emotional assessment is a process by which teachers use conversation and body language to predict the mood and needs of their students. Fluid instruction refers to the practice of teachers being able to switch activities in the classroom to best suit a learner’s emotional and instructional needs. Structure is a set of rules, expectations, and behaviors that are normalized by the teacher in the classroom setting. Technological individualization is how teachers use the available computer resources to provide specific classroom-related activities and assessments tailored to a student’s present level of academic capability. Emotional connection involves connecting the student to the classroom and the curriculum.
Whether it is through questioning, conversation, or observation, the participants were constantly gauging their students’ emotional state of. Simple questions about students’ feelings or situations relevant to their life seemed to be the explicit way of gathering information about their level of emotional well-being. Participants also observed students’ body language, speech patterns, volume, and location in the classroom. Peer interactions could also be used to conduct emotional assessment. When social norms between students are broken, there may be underlying issues with a student that could impact instruction.

Given that students with EBD can display aggressive, disruptive, and dangerous behaviors, understanding how they are feeling can help predict behavior. However, the participants also shared a genuine care for their students, inquiring into how they were feeling and wanting to remedy any situation that would create adverse feelings. This process does not seem to adhere to any norms or clinical practices that a teacher would be trained to engage in.

The participants in this study described having a structured lesson plan that they could easily modify based on the needs of their students. If students with EBD became frustrated with the difficulty of an assignment or displayed emotional distress due to outside factors, the participants had a variety of alternative activities that students could immediately participate in. Student engagement and participation seemed to be the goal of this practice. Some of the participants felt that when a student with EBD was engaged in learning activities, comprehension of content increased and opportunities for negative behavior decreased. Therefore, the teachers always kept ready a multitude of activities for a student to engage in. When one activity was not working, they could quickly switch to something more appropriate for the given moment. This practice was influenced by instructional assessment, emotional assessment, and knowledge of a student’s present level of performance on that content.
The participants described this practice as constant. Due to the volatility of the students they taught, and the behaviors associated with EBD, teachers needed to have an inventory of materials to employ at a given moment. Classroom activities could include self-paced computer lessons, artistic content items, content related games, group discussion activities, individualized assignments, relevant contemporary connections, low level comprehension check assignments, standardized worksheets, quiet reading time, and classroom decoration activities. The activity selected was chosen by the teacher to fit the given situation. A great deal more information is needed about this teaching practice. Further research on this topic could be expanded into a wide array of diagnostics and prescriptive teaching techniques.

Rules, expectations, patterns of behavior, and rituals all point to normalized behavior on the part of the student and teacher. Predictability in the environment likely relieves the stress of being in school for all stakeholders in the classroom community. These structures included creating procedures for entering the classroom, seating arrangements, gathering of materials, participating in classroom activity, and the organization of student work. The structures were communicated clearly to the students, without the need for interpretation. Teachers worked towards constantly reinforcing and reminding the students of these structures.

The teachers actively worked to display themselves according to their preferences, interests, and personas. They asked their students about the same in order to identify commonalities. Building a relationship between student and teacher is a practice that likely eases tension between students and teachers. Some of the participants went out of their way to be flexible and accommodating to their students, which seemed to also ease potential tensions. Participants worked to facilitate relationships between their students. The organization of the seating arrangements, providing group tasks, assigning classroom roles, facilitating group
discussion, and setting community norms for behavior all enhanced the opportunity for peer–to-peer relationship building. In the experience of the participants, these activities also eased the tensions of being a student with EBD in an academic environment. However, the main goal of the participants was to facilitate curriculum participation and teach appropriate social conventions.

Technology in the form of computers, smart boards, and smart phones allowed students with EBD to work at their own pace on activities designed to meet their instruction and independent capabilities. Teachers who had the available resources could use various digital venues to meet their content needs. According to the participants, this practice of technological individualization seemed to allow students with EBD to focus on a single task, without the need to manage social relationships. Self-pacing created a situation where students need not rush through an activity, which may have been very effective for notetaking or reading comprehension. Laboratory simulations allowed students with EBD to participate in learning activities that would not typically be available to them.

The participants actively worked to create a comfortable and fun place to learn. They sought to make curriculum relevant and connected to the lives of their students. Classroom decorations, vibrant colors, non-traditional seats, more seats than students, student created items on display, funny memes, motivational posters, and other items that created emotional connections to students were described as the participants detailed their classroom setup. Some teachers thematically decorated their room according to curriculum, while others created displays that were relevant to their students’ interests. These teachers had their students engage in roleplaying to teach Beowulf or to participate in a laboratory investigation. Their students built
Discussion of Practices in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Superior performance and expertise is a series of learned behaviors that occur through experience (Ericsson 1994). This study examined the experiences of veteran teachers who had 7 or more years of experience teaching students with EBD. The purpose of the study was to elicit those expert practices that perhaps have allowed the participants to thrive in a field of education that has a low success rate among students and a high rate of attrition among teachers. Some of the teaching techniques and deliberate practices identified in this study may demonstrate expertise in action. The common practices among this unique population of teachers suggest that their actions are similar. Many of the participants shared similar experiences and practices when it came to teaching students with EBD. These participants worked in varying environments and differing contents. The core of the pedagogy seemed to have common themes.

In particular, the concept of constant emotional assessment seems to be something that the participants in this study did automatically, and some participants suggested that checking on their students’ emotional status is a constant process. Ericsson (2016) suggested that the more experience someone has, the less stressful and more automatic a practice might be. These teachers avoided the stress of negative behavior by constantly checking in on a student’s emotional wellbeing through a variety of means, thereby avoiding the stress of teaching students who are prone to violence and disruption. If teaching students with EBD is considered a practice, these teachers’ use of emotional assessment to avoid stress is an expert behavior.

Using knowledge of student background, emotional, and instructional assessment to inform quick changes to a daily lesson is also a daunting task that may only be learned through
experience over time. Certainly a lesson can be multifaceted, but identifying which activity a student can thrive in seems to be a complex series of learned behaviors. Ericsson (1993) likens expert performance to chess, as the expert makes moves that a novice cannot conceive. A novice may not be capable of the social cognition needed to calculate in a given moment how to engage a student in a task. This is not to say that the practice cannot be developed over time, if intentionally practiced. In the same realm of difficulty, connecting a student’s emotions to the curriculum and classroom also seems to be a practice that involves many social schemes, arrangements, and considerations. If asked to, a novice teacher cannot simply arrange a classroom to facilitate learning while creating bonds between students and the environment. Nor could a novice create an environment in which the students are comfortable enough to participate in potentially frustrating activities. Creating curricular connections that are relevant and meaningful to students is also a learned behavior that may stem from expertise.

Other themes identified in this study may not be the practice of expertise, but rather may be the innate behavior of someone who has a unique set of human characteristics. Prather-Jones (2012) suggested that teachers of students with EBD who are experienced in the field have unique human characteristics that allow them to be successful in their field. There may be no practice in the theme of relationship building. This may be a characteristic of the teachers in this study and not a practiced behavior.

Structure could also be seen as a deliberate behavior, but not necessarily an expert behavior. A novice teacher could create organizational systems, have clear rules, and make the students aware of any expectations. The same could be said of technological individualization. Assigning a student a computer task according to their present level of performance is a matter of matching two known values. While these two practices could be effective for working with
students who have been identified as EBD, these practices could easily be conveyed to a novice teacher.

**Discussion of Practices in Relation to the Literature Review**

The themes identified in the study support some of the literature that was examined for this dissertation. No conflicting information became evident through the study. The themes indicated a relationship between research and participant practice. Teachers of students with EBD need to have a wide range of skills and practices to successfully educate their students (Chong & Ng, 2011). The teachers who participated were unique people with a wealth of experiences that can be used to inform future decision making about classroom practices. The selection of participants was fueled by the works of Prather-Jones (2012), which suggested that teachers of students with EBD have unique personal characteristics that allow them to thrive in their otherwise difficult learning environment. Center and Steventon (2001) also suggested that experienced teachers of students with EBD have more coping skills and are more confident than new teachers. The participants confirmed these assertions through their unique experiences and teaching practices. These teaching practices could be considered coping skills that are unique to their profession.

Students with EBD tend to perform better when they are in programs that recognize that they have an emotional disability and provide emotional support (Tyler-wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). By frequently monitoring student emotional status, the participants were providing several forms of emotional support. Students with EBD are prone to disciplinary exclusion due to the manifestation of socially unacceptable behavior (Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007). Aggression by a student with EBD may be caused by frustration with the
classroom setting (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Participants used emotional assessment to combat disciplinary exclusion by predicting frustration and preventing negative behavior.

Having clear and explicit rules within the classroom is an effective tool for behavior management when educating students with EBD (Neisyn, 2009). The participants shared that they had many structured rules within the classroom. The participants worked towards having a normalized procedure for almost every activity in their classroom. Students with EBD respond to rules that are displayed positively and with understandable purpose (Kostewicz, Ruhl, & Kubina, 2008). All of the teachers in the study created expectations that were understood by their students. Some of the teachers shared that they only tried to enforce the most important rules, and did so with a light hand. Rarely did a participant discuss disciplinary procedures that included disciplinary exclusion.

The more experience teachers of students with EBD have, the more teaching skills and materials they have at their disposal (Wilkerson, Gagnon, Melekoglu, & Cakiroghlu, 2012). Teachers with experience educating students with EBD also have excellent coping strategies in the classroom, which leads to student success and decreased teacher burnout (Center & Steventon, 2001). Considering the multifaceted projects, the bank of teaching materials, and the ability to use them that the participants in the study described, it is evident that experience does yield skill when teaching students with EBD. Whether these practices examined in the study are skills learned over time or coping strategies for managing stress, is a parsing of words. Through the experiences of the participants and the reviewed literature, it is evident that having a variety of content-related classroom activities could be considered a best practice for teaching students with EBD.
Being engaged in an academic learning environment tends to improve students’ academic output (Al-Hendawi, 2012). The participants used fluid instructional practices to increase academic participation, and therefore increase academic output. When their students were not productive in certain tasks, these teachers intervened with alternatives to engage them in the learning process within the classroom. When students with EBD are off-task, they are more likely to engage in disruptive behavior (Hayling, Cook, Gresham, State, & Kern, 2007). The participants used fluid instruction and other practices to prevent off-task behavior in order to avoid disruptive behaviors by their students. Students with EBD who are active in the learning environment tend to produce academic results and learn at a faster pace than their disengaged peers (Lembke & Stitcher, 2006).

The concept of relationships between students and teachers was evident in the participants’ common practices. Using a positive speech pattern is a practice that tends to benefit students with EBD (Kostewicz, Ruhl, & Kubina, 2008). When the participants described their experiences, they themselves used positive speech when speaking of their students. Specific praise is a way that teachers can pinpoint positive behavior and decrease disruptive behavior (Allday, Hinkson-Lee, Hudson, Neilsen-Gatti, & Kleinke, 2012). Some of the participants talked about being proud of their students and the display of student work. Posting exemplary student work could be seen as specific praise because the shared work samples show students the appropriate way to complete assignments. Both specific praise and the sharing of student work seem to be effective ways to build relationships when teaching students with EBD.

Payne, Marks, and Bogan (2007) indicated that curriculum-based assessments can be used to generate an understanding of a student’s present level of academic performance. Robin’s use of technology-based assessment seemed to be a direct use of curricular assessment via a
digital format. Students with EBD respond well to individualized interventions (Lembke & Stitcher, 2006). By knowing a student’s present level of academic function, teachers are able to use individualized interventions in academics and behavior to provide appropriate learning opportunities. Mattison and Blader (2013) suggested that individualized assessments like these can be used to identify learning disabilities in students with EBD. The use of pinpoint assessments like the ones used by the participants could inform teachers of possible learning disabilities in their students. Learning disabilities in students with EBD can go unidentified because of the externalization of behavior, which can in fact be a student’s defense mechanism (Mattison, Hooper, & Carlson, 2006). Perhaps technology individualization and assessment could be used to identify specific learning disabilities in students with EBD.

If students with EBD are provided with relevant and authentic real-world problem-solving activities in the classroom, they are more likely to participate and produce responses to questions that demonstrate higher level thinking (Preus, 2012). The participants as a whole tried to make concepts relevant to the students either instructionally or non-instructionally. The use of specific praise (Allday, Hinkson-Lee, Hudson, Neilsen-Gatti, & Kleinke, 2012) may also be a way to build emotional connections in the classroom. If students feel empowered and appreciated, they may feel a closer connection to their classroom and curriculum. Many of the participants described their students as feeling smart and capable when in their classroom. Specific praise may be an avenue to this feeling. The concept of emotionally connecting students to their classroom and curriculum was not specifically mentioned in the literature examined for this dissertation.

Conclusion
The qualitative procedures used to capture the experience of teachers with 7 or more years of experience educating students with EBD were grounded in the interpretative phenomenological analysis tradition. The participating teachers shared their experiences and their practices were coded into themes. These themes were evaluated for identifiable practices. This process was born from the question: What are the experiences and practices of veteran educators who teach students with EBD?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to gain a better understanding of these experiences. Throughout the interview process, six themes were shared by the participants: emotional assessment of students, fluid instruction, classroom structure, relationship building, individualization, and emotional connections. These themes yielded a wealth of practices that are directly or indirectly supported by literature.

**Significance of the Study**

Teaching students with EBD is a daunting task. It is a field of education rotten with stress, burnout and frustration. Most people leave this field due to these issues. They either quit teaching or stop educating students with EBD. Meanwhile, the actual pedagogy of instructing students with EBD is left to spoil with antiquated methods of teaching. The issues of teacher attrition and lack of movement forward in the practice of teaching students are related; in some cases one could even be causing the other.

Meanwhile, the students with EBD suffer. Their teachers are quitting the field, just to have a new crop of teachers start their careers only to quit a few years down the road. These are traumatized children who are neglected, hurt, and abandoned by the American education system. Education is just one facet of the change needed for children with EBD, but it is an essential part of a greater reform. The practices identified in this study could be taught to that new crop of
teachers, and perhaps they in turn could then survive the pressures of educating students with
EBD.

The participants have not just survived, they have thrived while teaching students with
EBD. They continue to push forward and educate their students, changing lives and futures. We
should heed their words and practices. These practices that have been identified are ready to be
verified. Perhaps what is most significant in this study is that teachers and their practices are
listened to by the research community. Is the research community listening to teachers? Where
there is strife, we should listen to those who are gritty against the adversity. Those who have
lived to tell the tale of the road are the ones who know its pitfalls.

**Practice and Implications for Stakeholders**

The ultimate goal of this dissertation was to improve instruction for students with EBD.
The true purpose was not to improve instructional practice for teachers just to combat the issues
of attrition and burnout, it was to improve education for students with EBD and change the
current output of the American education system. If these practices do yield engagement and
increased academic output among students with EBD, then there could be a decrease in dropouts,
violece in schools, and disciplinary exclusion.

Parents of students with EBD need improvement in the instruction of their children.
Considering the drop-out rate and poor outcomes common among students with EBD, parents
must be very concerned about the potential outcomes for their children. As advocates for their
children they would welcome improved instruction for them. If there can be an improvement in
instruction, there could be an improvement in output. Parents should consider that this study
shows the value of building relationships between teachers and students with EBD, which could
increase instructional value in the classroom setting. Therefore, parents may need to act as a
liaison to forge stronger relationships between teachers and students. Parents should also consider the practice of emotional assessment as something they can use to predict the behavior of their child. Implicit emotional assessments, such as the raising of voices, body language, and shifts in location, could be warning signs that parents could use at home or share with teachers.

Teachers can use the practices revealed within this study to modify their classrooms and instructional practices to better suit the needs of students with EBD. With such limited progress in the actual instruction of students with EBD, there is an obvious need for improvement. Teachers should consider how they go about building a known and explicit structure in their classroom. Obvious signs of emotional dysregulation may become evident to teachers, but the skill of noticing more implicit signs of frustration among students with EBD is a practice worth exploring over time. Building a library of instructional activities to allow for fluidity during instruction may be time consuming in its initial stages, but could bear fruit over time as well. Using both emotional and instructional assessments to design and modify activities for students is a practice that will take time, but should be deliberately considered during a lesson and school year. Many of the practices shared in this study are honed over time, and it is time to practice teaching skills in order to improve education for students with EBD.

Administrators and school leaders should consider these practices for future professional development in special education schools, classrooms with co-taught settings, and self-contained education environments. An entire professional development course could be developed for teachers who educate students with EBD in these sorts of environments. School leadership groups should also explore the dynamics of technology for students with EBD. An odd combination of a highly restrictive school environment and a lack of classroom technology
existed in some of the participants’ classrooms. How can the students with the most needs be deprived of the tools that the future workforce will demand?

University systems also need to consider how they are teaching their coursework. The literature review revealed a startling lack of preparation for teachers of students with EBD. Although the participants were not asked, they did not indicate any university experience as influencing their practice when teaching students with EBD. Coursework needs to be developed that prepares teachers for educating students with EBD. Further research needs to correspond with the development of this coursework.

**Personal Implications**

During the dissertation and doctoral process, I left the classroom to become a department chair of special education at a middle school. My tasks include the leadership of special educators in both co-taught and self-contained classrooms. As a school leader I will be working to ensure that the practices from this dissertation, and others, will be implemented for students with EBD and other students who benefit from special education services. As I guide teachers as their instructional leader, I will encourage people to build relationships with their students, which will inform many types of emotional assessment and lead to engaging instruction. When teachers need technology for classroom use, I will ensure its availability and use available funding to make individualized technology assessment and differentiation available.

With permission from my school leadership, I will present the findings of this dissertation to my colleagues inside and outside our school. I will work to build relationships with all students, particularly those with emotional or behavioral difficulties. It is important that, as a teacher operating in a leadership role, I set the tone and standard for educating these young people. This relationship will also correspond with knowledge of their present levels of academic
performance. I will use this intersection of understanding a student’s instructional capability, relational understanding of student background, and constant emotional assessment to predict negative behavior and prevent disciplinary exclusion within my department.

**Future Research**

The practices that were abstracted from the themes of this study need validation. The next step would be to visit classrooms and see these practices in action. A researcher could travel to schools with programs for students with EBD and see if other teachers who would be considered experts in their field maintain these practices as well. There is a need for a greater understanding of the details of these practices and how they look in their natural environment. How do teachers react to knowledge of a student’s emotional wellbeing? How do they use emotional assessments to modify their instruction? What are the structures, expectations, and norms in a classroom for students with EBD? How do these structures affect behavioral data and disciplinary exclusion? How do students with EBD respond to having access to individualized technology assessments and activities? Do the schools that do not have access to this technology have a different rate of incidents of negative behavior? What does a classroom that has emotional connections between the students and the curriculum look like? What are the specific items used to design classrooms that spark emotional connections?

This dissertation has answered one question, but spawned many more. This spawning of inquiry suggests the need for further research on educating students with EBD. Further research in qualitative methods need to be applied, both in the specific case study methodology and further phenomenological traditions. These practices also need quantitative validation in the form of student performance, behavioral data, and attendance.

**Recommendations**
While these practices are not validated, they are worth implementing. Considering the current output of the educational systems in place for students with EBD, something needs to be done. It is not as if these practices are something new: they are the practices of people who have been using them for decades and will continue to do so even without any input from the educational research community.

The students with EBD who are in schools now, needed change decades ago. We as a community, not just the educational community but all those who seek social justice and change in our society, need to focus on these young people. Students with EBD are under siege in the form of rule systems and practices that do not work for them, which may cause the manifestation of behavior that no one wants, including the students themselves. We cannot simply ignore the most traumatized and beleaguered of our youth because of their lack of appropriate response.

Something is lacking in research within education as a whole: the evaluation of teacher experience. Teachers are doing the job of educating students daily, yet researchers prefer to look at single case studies or bodies of erroneous data. We need to ask the teachers what they think works for students, and support them in the implementation of practices that work for students. Teachers may have the answers to many of the questions that plague the modern education system.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter Sent to Teacher Participants

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

Doctor of Education Program

Hello,

You are receiving this e-mail because you have been selected to participate in a research study related to your experience as an educator that teaches students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. You have been selected because your experiences may be vital towards understanding the practices of teachers that educate students with emotional or behavioral difficulties. This two part research process will include two interviews, the first interview lasting approximately 60 minutes and the second lasting 30 minutes. Your identity would be kept confidential throughout the research process.

This research will provide no monetary value for the participants. However, the research process is an opportunity for experienced educators to impact research in education. Your knowledge and experience could influence educational practices for future teachers and students outside of your classroom.

If you are interested in participating, I can provide you with an informed consent letter which goes into greater detail about your participation in the study.

If you would like to participate, please e-mail me directly at bond.mi@neu.husky.edu.

Thank you,

Micah Bond, MAT

Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

Doctor of Education Program

Northeastern College of Professional Studies

From Principal Investigator: Dr. Reiss Medwed, Student Researcher: Micah Bond

The Experiences of Veteran Educators that Teach Students with EBD

Hello Participant,

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

You are being invited because of your unique experience in educating students with EBD. You have been identified by a stakeholder in our research study as a person that has 7 or more years teaching students with emotional or behavioral difficulties.

The purpose of this study is to identify deliberate practices of season educators that teach students with emotional or behavioral difficulties. The practices that you share could later be used to develop improvements that could be made in teaching students with emotional or behavioral difficulties.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in two separate interviews. The first interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked to share your teaching experience and practices you engage in when teaching your students. The interview will be transcribed digitally and put into text. In the second interview you will get to review the practices and information you shared during the first interview and reflect on the information gathered. The second interview will last approximately 30 minutes. These interviews can occur in-person, or via digital methods (Google Hangout, Gotomeeting, Skype). These interviews will be scheduled at your leisure and schedule. The total time for participation will be kept to a maximum of 120 minutes.

Teaching students with emotional and behavioral difficulties is a challenging job, and that is why your experience is vital to our study. Please note that sharing your experiences and practices may cause discomfort, particularly recollecting issues you may have experienced in the classroom or with your students that may have troubled you in the past. Throughout the process, you may omit any question or information you are not comfortable sharing.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating. However, potential benefits to others include learning about methods and practices used in teaching and educating. These practices will eventually be developed into classrooms that educate students with EBD. Ultimately, the purpose
in this study is to benefit students with EBD by discovering practices that work well with this population.

Throughout the process of the interviews and throughout this study, your identity will be kept confidential. Only the field researcher (Micah Bond) will be aware of your identity. In the literature this research produces, you will be recorded under a pseudonym. Only portions of what you share, particularly the teaching practices that are identified will be shared in literature. The records associated with this study will be held in a secure location for 3 years, and then destroyed.

If you do not wish to be part of this study, your refusal to participate will also be kept confidential. There is no potential for direct harm to you or anyone else in participation in this study. If you do choose to participate, you may stop participation at any point in time, or refuse to have your information shared.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact

Student Researcher: Micah Bond bond.mi@neu.husky.edu

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Reiss Medwedk.reissmedwed@northeastern.edu

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Participation will be at no cost to you, nor is there any payment for participation.

By signing the document below, you consent to participating in this research study.

Printed name of person above

________________________________________

Signature Date

________________________________________
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

The Experiences of Veteran Special Educators that Teach Students with EBD

By Micah Bond

Interview Protocol

Biographical Section

How many years have you been teaching?

How many years have you been working with students that are identified as EBD?

What content areas have you taught?

Would you describe the area in which you teach as urban, suburban, or rural?

Why did you become a teacher?

What led you to becoming an educator of students with EBD?

Experiences Section

Can you describe for me what your school-day is like?

Do you remember the best lesson you’ve ever taught? What was that like?

How would you describe your classroom setting?

Please describe how you go about teaching a lesson.

Could you explain how your structure your average class period?