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School Staff Perceptions of Post-Transitional Outcomes for Students Educationally Diagnosed with EBD

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School Staff Perceptions of Post-Transitional School Outcomes for Students
Educationally Diagnosed with EBD

Submitted by David G. Krygiel
May, 2012

MSW Clinical Research Paper

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

This study explored staff perceptions of post-transition school outcomes for students educationally diagnosed with EBD. This study conducted interviews with school staff professionals to learn about their perceptions of post-school outcomes. This research specifically looked at the areas of further education, employment, relationships, and housing. Consistent with previous research, the present study found that post-school outcomes for students with EBD are inadequate according to staff perceptions. Recommendations for areas of future research are stated.

Acknowledgement

To my wonderful wife, your continued support was unwavering.
Thank you for everything.

Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Acknowledgement..... 2

Table of Contents 3

Introduction 4

 Background/Need for Education 4

 Educational Accommodations/Mainstream vs. Special Education 5

 Definitions of Different Special Education Populations 8

Literature Review 9

 Definition of Transitional Programming 9

 Types of Transitional Programs 11

 Effectiveness of Transitional Programming for Students with EBD 15

 Graduation rates/Outcomes of students with EBD 18

 Perceptions of Professionals 23

Conceptual Framework 24

 Theoretical Lenses 24

 Professional Lenses 26

 Personal Lenses 26

Methods 27

 Purpose of Study 27

 Research Question 27

 Research Design 28

 Sample 28

 Participants 29

 Protection of Human Subjects 29

 Data Collection 30

 Data Analysis Plan 32

Results 33

 Participant Demographics 33

 Employment and Continuing Education 34

 Social Relationship Status 35

 Housing Status 35

 Staff Perceptions 36

Discussion 37

 Continuing Education 38

 Relationships 40

 Employment 40

 Summary 41

Implications for Social Work 42

 Social Work Practice 42

 Social Work Policy 43

 Social Work Research 44

Implications for Future Research 45

Strength and Limitations 46

References 47

Appendix A 52

Appendix B 53

Appendix C 54

Introduction

Background / Need for Education

The goal of an education “is to prepare them [students] to participate fully in the mainstream adult world” (Seigel & Sleeter, 1991, p.27). The education of the whole person is critically fundamental to receiving a well-rounded education. If the end goal of an education is, indeed, to prepare the individual for life post-school, then, all aspects and necessary skills must be considered in the education of that student. The aspects of a well-rounded education would be all-encompassing and include physical, mental, and emotional health. These are necessary areas of skill that an individual will need to possess in order to be successful in their life after their schooling.

According to the educational system in the United States, there are main content areas that constitute the parts of the whole. For example, a student in the Minneapolis public school system will need to pass state-required standardized tests in “mathematics, English/language arts, and written composition” (Minneapolis Public Schools, retrieved 12/22/11 from <http://speced.mpls.k12.mn.us/>). These core content areas, according to a public school system, are inclusive of the academic aspects of an individual’s education. These are the minimal academic requirement areas for a student’s graduation from high school. The physical and emotional health of the individual are neither stated nor implied in the core content areas.

When the whole of a formal education is complete, that individual, in theory, will have gained the skills necessary for them to live and function independently in the world post-academia. The educational system is a platform to ensure future success by instructing the individual to learn skills that will lay the foundation and translate in real

world knowledge. It is through education that individuals strive to gain the skills necessary to be successful.

“Graduation traditionally signifies a time of many challenges and changes, filled with hopes and dreams of successfully leaving high school and moving into employment and/or

post-secondary education”(Test, et al., 2009, p.160). According to Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, and Benz (1992), graduates “attempt to assume a *variety* of adult roles in their communities”(p.203).

However, there are different levels of education with different degrees or certificates being awarded for successful completion. Some individuals will be educated to the level of a high school diploma, a college degree, or an advanced degree.

Unfortunately, others will not complete their high school education whether this is through the traditional manner or through an alternative school.

These differing levels of education will have a direct impact on the type and level of job that one is able to realistically pursue, obtain, and maintain. In the United States, an education fundamentally opens doors and possibilities. Different levels of an education are thresholds that open new sets of possibilities. A job is a means of obtaining individual stability in regards to a means to shelter, food, and material options. A job is gained through the practical application of those skills gained through one’s education.

Educational Accommodations / Mainstream vs. Special Education

Some students will require a great deal of special assistance in completing their education. This individual assistance may come in the form of special education services. For some students, this assistance may be to get them up to grade level in

certain academic areas. Some students will continue throughout their education receiving special education services, whereas, others will not. For those that require special assistance, they may require assistance in achieving their goals all the way to and possibly post-graduation. Many of young adults with disabilities graduate high school and are reliant on the assistance of others (Lindstrom, Doren, & Meisch, 2011).

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA, 1994) was enacted to help all students overcome transitional barriers by mandating the teaching of career-related activities in the classroom. "Similar concerns reflected the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997; Transition planning was mandated for all students with disabilities to begin by age 14 years (or earlier as appropriate) through course preparation" (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). At that point in time, it was policy to help prepare students for their transitions post-school.

For students with disabilities, the right to an appropriate education was mandated by IDEA. According to Yell (1995), the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a setting as close to regular education classes as appropriate. This holds true for all students, especially, for those with disabilities. The goal of educational placement should be the most inclusive environment possible in their particular educational context. Mainstreaming is a functional term used interchangeably for inclusion in an educational context. Bateman and Linden (1998) aptly stated, "there is not now and has never been a requirement in the IDEA that all children with disabilities be included or mainstreamed in the regular class" (p. 13). Preference is expressed but not mandated under IDEA. An appropriate educational setting means different classroom contexts for different students.

Mainstreaming is a tool used by educators to include those students with special educational needs into the regular education classroom. According to Yell (1995), the goal of mainstreaming for special education students is to have them participate with their regular education peers as much as is appropriate (p. 193). *Inclusion* is when students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program. This is different from *mainstreaming*, which is when students with disabilities spend a portion of their school day in the general education program and a portion in a separate special education program (Idol, 1997).

Mainstreaming and inclusion begin at the IEP meeting. According to Claes, Van Hove, Vandeveld, van Loon, and Schalock (2010), “Person-centered planning is a well known and widely used approach to individual program planning in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Its purpose is to develop collaborative supports focused on community presence, community participation, positive relationships, respect, and competence” (p.432). “Person-centered planning covers a wide range of procedures and guidelines focused on the creation of fundamental changes in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities” (Claes, et al., 2010, p. 432). The goal of this process is to integrate the input and wishes of the student into their IEP so that they receive the most out of their education in regards to their personal educational goals. For all students, inclusion in the process of planning their own educational goals with their team members is a step towards self-advocacy. In theory, self-advocacy in the IEP process will translate into greater self-advocacy skills in the actual classroom and, thus, translate into greater self-advocacy outside of the classroom post-school.

Definitions of Different Special Education Populations

For those individuals requiring more intensive educational assistance, the special education process will, ideally, begin early during their education. “Early and appropriate identification is critical, especially because early behavioral patterns are most amenable to treatment” (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008, p. 6). Individual students must qualify for special education services based on their individual educational needs, hence, the Individual Education Plan (IEP). These qualifications vary depending on the severity of their educational, physical, and emotional needs. These special education services could be intellectual/academic, emotional, and/or physical supports needed for the specific individual in their educational goals.

There are many different disability areas included in special education in the United States. Among them are Learning Disability (LD), Developmental Cognitive Delay (DCD), Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EBD), and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), amongst many others. Special education services hope to afford the individual the right to live the most independent and fulfilling life possible. For Minneapolis Public Schools, the Special Education Mission is stated: “To ensure that all students with disabilities learn. We support their growth into knowledgeable, skilled and confident citizens capable of succeeding in their work, personal, and family lives into the future” (Minneapolis Public Schools, <http://speced.mpls.k12.mn.us/>, retrieved 10/29/2011).

The MN Department of Education has a list of Federal Settings. Minnesota public school systems are mandated to follow the federal guidelines. The list of Special Education Federal Settings are defined as follows:

1. SETTING I – Learners receiving the majority of their education program in regular class. Includes children and youth with disabilities, receiving special education and related services OUTSIDE THE REGULAR CLASSROOM for less than 21 percent of the school day.

2. SETTING II – Learners receiving education programs in resource room. Includes children and youth with disabilities receiving special education and related services OUTSIDE THE REGULAR CLASSROOM for 60 percent or less of the school day and at least 21 percent of the school day.
3. SETTING III – Learners receiving education programs in separate class includes children and youth with disabilities receiving special education and related services OUTSIDE THE REGULAR CLASSROOM for more than 60 percent of the school day. DOES NOT include pupils who received education programs in public or private separate day or residential facilities.
4. SETTING IV- Learners receiving education programs in public separate day school facilities. Includes children and youth with disabilities receiving special education and related services for greater than 50 percent of the school day in separate facilities.
5. SETTING V – Learners receiving education programs in private separate day school facilities at public expense for greater than 50 percent of the school day.
6. SETTING VI – Learners receiving education programs in public residential facilities for greater than 50 percent of the school day.
7. SETTING VII – Learners receiving education programs in private residential facilities at public expense for greater than 50 percent of the school day.
8. SETTING VIII – Learners receiving education programs in homebound/hospital placement. Includes children and youth with disabilities placed in and receiving education in hospital programs or homebound programs (Taken from MN Department of Education, 12/22/11, SPECIAL EDUCATION CROSS-SUBSIDIES REPORT - FY 2003 Data Sources ...)

Throughout the different public school systems of MN, there are different levels of educational settings. A Level I educational setting would be a standard regular education classroom. Level IV settings would include “a highly structured educational setting and individualized instruction. Adaptations and modifications in the general education setting are not sufficient to meet their needs” (Minneapolis Public Schools, <http://speced.mpls.k12.mn.us/>, retrieved 11/10/2011). The range of supports from a Level I to a Level IV setting would increase as the level increases.

Literature Review

Definition of Transitional Programming

“In 1983, when Congress passed amendments to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), the first federal initiative to facilitate the transition of youth with disabilities had been established (this became P.L. 98-189 and later was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA])” (Alwell & Cobb, 2006, p.3). The path had been cleared for individuals to begin receiving services that

would further enable them to more successfully transition into adulthood and, ideally, to their own independence. The beginning of federally mandated formal transitional programs in schools began.

Transitions, according to previous research, have been defined as a “coordinated set of activities that focuses on improving student academic and functional achievement and facilitates movement from school to post-school activities. These activities may include postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007, p. 33-4). Transitional education is broad to ensure that all areas of independent living are touched upon so to fully prepare the individual for life post-school. According to Fabian (2007), students ages “16 to 22” (p. 131) are considered to be of transition age. This has since been modified by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), “transition planning and services to be included in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) no later than age 16 (and, when appropriate, as early as 14) and to be reviewed on a yearly basis” (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, retrieved 12/23/11). They are at the stage of transition from school life to adult life. For the majority of individuals at this age, it is the transition from dependence to independence.

For many of those receiving special education services, it is a transition from supported to unsupported employment. The individual is transitioning from having an educational professional or paraprofessional who has provided needed employment and social supports to not having those necessary extra supports. “The lack of integrated supports in the community may further complicate issues” (Armstrong, Dedrick, &

Greenbaum, 2003, p.67). The individual is left to their own devices where they will need to advocate for their needs in a competitive employment setting. “This transition to adult life often means fewer options and services for the young adult in the community, as public school services are no longer available” (Armstrong, Dedrick, & Greenbaum, 2003, p.67). The hope at that point in time is that the individual has gained the necessary employment and social skills to appropriately defend and advocate for their needs.

In the United States, one way that adults typically identify themselves is through their occupation. “Employment is one important marker of adult success in our society... stable employment allows individuals to be self-sufficient” (Lindstrom, Doren, & Meisch, 2011, p. 423). All individuals have differing abilities when it comes to employment. However, the fundamental principal of having, doing, and maintaining a job is paramount to a person’s sense of accomplishment and self. This holds true for those individuals with and without disabilities.

In the United States, a job is an important aspect of a person’s identity. It is an important way that an individual relates to their world. A person’s job is a focal point through which they relate to the world as a whole. It is a foundational aspect of their reality. A job occupies a great deal of a person’s time if they are working full time. People often identify themselves through their occupation, for example, ‘I am a social worker’ or ‘I am an educator/teacher’.

Types of Transitional Programs

“In the mid-1980s, the first wave of students with disabilities summarily educated in public schools reached transition age” (Alwell & Cobb, 2006, p. 3). The goal of

transitional programming is to better prepare an individual for their life past school. The ideal goal of a transitional education is to prepare the student for an independent and productive life past their schooling by teaching them the skills that they will need to be successful in their everyday life. For some students with disabilities, this is an unrealistic goal due to their needs, however, for others, this goal is realistic and attainable.

Research in the area of transitional programming and outcomes is relatively recent. Since the beginning of transitional programs in the United States in the mid-1980's, there have been many types of transitional programs implemented. Some are research-based and others are not. Historically, there was a need identified for students and programs followed. The research is trying to learn the best and most effective practices for this relatively new area of study.

Test, Fowler, Richter, White, Mazzotti, Walker, Kohler, and Kortering (2009) studied transitional evidence-based practices and found that the two most effective evidence-based practices were a self-advocacy strategy and a self-directed IEP. They found 28 other factors with moderate levels of evidence in the areas of student development. Kohler and Field (2003) reviewed "three specific initiatives: (a) federal special education and disability legislation; (b) federal, state, and local investment in transition services development; and (c) effective transition practices research" (p. 174). Their research was designed to show the changing perspective of transitional programming and education. The perspective, theoretically, changed from school-based programmatic outcomes to an individual's functional outcomes. They found five areas of effective transition practices: student-focused planning, student development, interagency

and interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement, and program structure and attributes (Kohler & Field, 2003, p.176).

In the end, Kohler and Field concluded that there are many factors that come into play in order to achieve positive outcomes for students in their transitions from school. “Transition outcomes are strongly influenced by student and family characteristics, economic conditions, community contexts, and the availability of services” (Kohler & Field, 2003, p. 181). Based on the research of Kohler and Field (2003), it was shown that more than just the academic influences that are attributed to the success of the student. It is the academic knowledge in conjunction with those relationships that the individual has formed that have truly led to their success. Those relationships that have fostered success for the individual are at home, in the community, and at the school. The educational goals at the school are built upon outside of the classroom so that all systems or relationships that an individual has in place contribute to their success. All factors have a direct impact on the individual’s success. All factors are, thus, necessary for the individual’s success.

Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) conducted a review of the literature using 29 previous studies to find substantiated best practices in the field of transitional education. They focused their research on eight areas of transitional programming. These eight areas were: paid or unpaid work experience, employment preparation, family involvement, general education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills training, self-determination skills training, and community or agency collaboration. According to their research, paid or unpaid work experience was the best predictor of post-school outcomes for students. Employment preparation was the second best

indicator followed in descending order by family involvement, general education inclusion, and, finally, social skills training. Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) showed the effectiveness of practical work experience to be the best indicator of outcomes specifically for students with E/BD.

The implications of the research by Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) for transitional programming in the school setting are that the bridge between school and work must be created and applied when the individual is still a student. This bridge enables the individual student to learn the functional skills that are associated with employment. This is experiential knowledge that the individual gains in context. A specific context of an employment setting can, indeed, be simulated in a school setting, however, there is a different level of skill required when an individual is at a place of employment in a non-educational context. The 'soft-skills' required at a job must be learned on-the-job. Soft-skills, in essence can be spontaneous prosocial behavior and supportive and/or friendly behavior (Solomon, Watson, Delucchi, Schaps, & Battistich, 1988). For example, students may have to deal with customers in the service industry. The simulation at school does not truly simulate this interaction due to the fact that the students will have knowledge of the individual that they are servicing. This interaction is fundamentally different when the individual is a stranger. There is no context for redoing an interaction with a customer on the job. The real world has less patience for a 'do-over' when dealing with customer service and subsequent profits. A bridge between school and work must be formed for the benefit of the student's skills.

Transitional program sustainability was studied by Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, and Waintrup (2004). Their research was aimed at finding the factors that influence

sustainability of transition programs in local schools. They looked at stages of development and sustainability. They found that sustainability is increased when: the program has the support of one key administrator, the program produces positive student outcomes that are valued by school and community stakeholders, and, lastly, the program creates a clear and unique role for their services that meet identified needs within the district (Benz, et al., 2004). One key finding from their research was that success of sustainability was dependent on program adaptation for long-term success (Benz, et al., 2004). They found that “mutual adaptation was key to success” (Benz, et al., 2004, p. 48). This is a necessary two way street. The individual student and the employer must learn in context to work with each other successfully.

Best practices in the area of transitional programming are complicated due to the fact that every individual situation is different. However, the above research demonstrates that there are consistent factors that influence positive outcomes for students. Those consistent factors are considered best-practices and include self-directed programming, external validation, work experience, and employment preparation. So, theoretically, if an individual is personally invested in their programming, then their work experiences while in school will translate into external validation. External validation will lead to employment and, consequently, to greater self-sufficiency for that individual. This process begins when an individual is a student in a transitional program.

Effectiveness of Transitional Programming for Students with EBD

“State-reported data indicate that there are 471,306 students, ages 16-21 who have the primary label of EBD (U.S. Department of Education)” (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008, p. 6). According to Duchnowski and Kutash (2011), those students

labeled E/BD continue to have disappointing outcomes compared to their special education peers. Duchnowski and Kutash (2011) found that in the high school setting, those students that had higher rates of inclusion in the regular classroom setting had much higher levels of achievement compared to those that were included less with their peers. Those students with low levels of inclusion had also received less mental health services from community agencies (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011). According to Duchnowski and Kutash (2011), increased levels of inclusion correspond with higher rates of academic achievement.

In a study looking at the rates of exclusion for students with EBD and LD, Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) looked at the data from the SEELS National Data set (Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study). This study gives an extensive historical context for students with EBD from the elementary level. Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) found that African American male students with a diagnosis of EBD were excluded the most (p. 41). While this study was cross-sectional, rather than, longitudinal, the data still displays a presently ineffective strategy of dealing with problems in the classroom. The study looked at elementary students, rather than, transitional students. However, if a substantial amount of an entire population (EBD) has negative or ineffective outcomes in elementary school, then it is reasonable to assume that the same population will have negative outcomes later in their educational careers. “Poor outcomes experienced by youths with EBD could be the result of deficient social skills” (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008, p.14). A significant intervention would be necessary in order to alter the negative outcomes for this population.

The research of Neel, Cessna, Brook, and Bechard (2003) looked at quality program indicators in order to find effective programming for children with E/BD. Their research question looked at the components for a quality education for E/BD students. They found six program indicators: environmental management, behavior management, affective education, individuation and personalization, academics, and career/life skills/transitions. All aspects were necessary for a program to be successful (Neel, Cessna, Brook, & Bechard, 2003). Evidence demonstrated that an expanded curriculum based upon relevant academics, formal and informal instruction in life skills, and direct instruction that was E/BD specific were critical indicators of program effectiveness and success (Neel, Cessna, Brook, & Bechard, 2003). While transition programming for students is a relatively specific area of education, taking that one step further to look at transition programming for students labeled E/BD is necessary to effectively serve this even more specific population of students.

Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) looked at three different areas of interventions: “inappropriate behavior, academic learning problems, and interpersonal relationships” (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003, p. 148). They looked at the cause behavior eliciting the intervention implemented and found effective interventions; such as, precision requests and self-monitoring (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003, p. 148). Transition practices for students with EBD to be effective when correctly implemented. For students with an EBD label, specific instruction is effective.

Wagner and Davis (2006) discussed the principles of effective secondary programming (p. 87) and looked at relationships, rigor, relevance, addressing the needs of the whole child, and student and parent involvement in the transition planning process

(Wagner & Davis, 2006, p. 87). Positive relationships for 40.9% of students were the most important factor leading to success (Wagner & Davis, 2006, p. 89). They also found that 28.2% of coursework for students with Emotional Disorders (ED) was nonacademic/nonvocational. Wagner and Davis (2006) suggested that students with ED be kept in their local schools in academically rigorous programs with the appropriate supports (Wagner & Davis, 2006, p. 95). According to Wagner and Davis (2006), it would appear that relationships in the context of their immediate environment that were academically driven would prove effective.

Graduation Rates/Outcomes of Students with EBD

One measure used to determine the effectiveness of programming for students has historically been graduation rates (Dougherty, 1996). There appears to be an utter disconnect once graduation occurs. There is no evidence to indicate that the majority of schools are following students post-graduation for their outcomes. Once they are aged out of school, students are no longer eligible for educational services; therefore, there is no incentive or need for the district to keep data on these individuals. The school has completed their responsibilities to the student. The assumption at that point in time is that the students have the skills and/or resources to proceed on their own.

Bullis, Moran, Benz, Todis, and Johnson (2002) evaluated the ARIES (Achieving Rehabilitation, Individualized Education, and Employment Success) Project. The program was designed to look at the post-school outcomes of youth with ED. They looked at the impact of the ARIES project services on education, employment, and engagement experiences (Bullis, et al., 2002). They used a mixed mode/method design for their research. They found that 61% of the students completed their educational

program (Bullis, et al., 2002). Participants reported the importance of role models (ie. relationships) who aided in their success (Bullis, et al., 2002).

The work of Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) looked at a comparison of students with emotional or behavioral disorders compared to other students with and without disabilities. They looked at the history of post-school outcomes for students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) and found that they have experienced poorer school outcomes. They found that the estimated dropout rates for students with EBD are between 43% and 56% of students (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003, p. 148) and that these numbers are roughly double their peers with disabilities. These numbers are confirmed by the work Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) in their findings from a review of the NLTS data set. Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) found “48% of students with emotional disturbance dropped out of high school, 15% enrolled in postsecondary programs, 13% enrolled in postsecondary vocational programs, 52% were competitively employed (average compensation = \$11, 267), 21% lived independently, and 56% were fully participating in at least two aspects of community life” (p. 206).

In their longitudinal study of post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) used the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) data. The findings of this study were many as they focused on employment, wages, postsecondary education, and residential outcomes. The implications of their research pointed to the areas “regarding employment, postsecondary education, and movement toward independence over time” (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996, p. 399). Blackorby and Wagner found that those individuals with disabilities did not have nearly as positive outcomes as their non-disabled peers. Disparities by gender and race were

disproportionately poor (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Women and minorities had substantially poorer outcomes.

The most extensive research on transitional outcomes was conducted by Wagner and Davis (2006) using the data set from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). In this study, Wagner and Davis (2006) studied the outcomes for individuals with emotional disturbances (ED) compared with non-ED individuals. Wagner and Davis (2006) found “40.9% of students with ED "strongly agreed" that "there is an adult at the school who knows [student] and cares about [him/her]"” (p.89) compared to “students with other disabilities (get along with students: 84.9%, $F = 32.84$; get along with teachers: 86.1%” (p. 89). The rates at which students with ED foster positive relationships with adults are reportedly considerably lower than the rates for those other disabilities. This points out the deficiencies that students with ED have fostering relationships. In turn, this challenge of creating and maintaining relationships with adults will transfer to their relationships on the job, thus affecting their work lives. This will have a direct impact on the personal lives of those individuals as their work lives can directly impact their personal lives. Relationships for students with ED are important to their personal outcomes.

According to Wagner and Davis (2006), 58.0% of students with ED were in a general education setting compared to 70.6% of students with other disabilities (p. 90). Again, *inclusion* is when students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program (Idol, 1997). According to Wagner and Davis (2006), those with ED had a rate of inclusion of 5.6% (p. 90) in community-based instruction, whereas those with other disabilities had a rate of inclusion in community-

based instruction of 2.8% (p. 90). Community-based instruction is operationally defined as “instructional experiences outside of classroom settings” (Wagner & Davis, 2006, p. 90). It can be reasonably inferred from these statistics that students with ED are included in the general education setting less and were receiving community-based instruction more. However, there is a positive difference of “5.43%” (Wagner & Davis, 2006, p.91) for the rates of inclusion in school-sponsored work experiences for those with other disabilities compared to those with ED. Those with ED are included more in a community-based instructional setting, however, they are receiving less school-sponsored work experience. So, while those with ED are out in the community, they are not getting the rates of community-based inclusion as their peers with other disabilities. According to Wagner and Davis (2006), there was strong evidence “evidence suggesting social isolation came from lower rates of (a) participation in extracurricular group activities and (b) closeness to peers and teachers at school” (p. 95). According to Wagner and Davis (2006), the lack of positive relationship building is the antithesis of what EBD students need in order to produce positive outcomes.

Measures of effective programming are graduation rates and not necessarily post-school outcomes. For those students with the educational label of EBD, their success is measured by their ability to graduate. The post-school outcomes are secondary. The goal for those with EBD is to graduate. There is a lack of extensive research on the post-school outcomes for students diagnosed with EBD. Relationships with positive role models have a dramatic impact on the graduation rates and post-school outcomes of students with EBD according to the research of Wagner and Davis (2006), Bullis, Moran, Benz, Todis, and Johnson (2002), and Neel, Cessna, Borock, and Bechard (2003).

In summary, transitional programming areas “include postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007, p. 33-4). The goal is to ease the transition from school to life beyond school. According to Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010), paid or unpaid work experience was the best predictor of post-school outcomes for students in a transitional program. According to Wagner and Davis (2006), positive relationships were the most important factor leading to success (p.89). According to Bradley, Doolittle, and Bartolotta (2008), “students with EBD have the lowest high school completion rate of all of the disability categories, with only 56% completing” (p. 11). The research has shown that the post-school outcomes for students with an educational diagnosis of “emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) have high rates of school dropout, high incarceration rates, low rates of employment, and low rates of postsecondary school attendance following high school” (Murray, 2003, p.17).

“The data on students with EBD are conclusive: more needs to be done for these students, and quickly” (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008, p.15). Another previous study points to the need for long-term research for the post-school outcomes for the EBD population (Bullis, Moran, Benz, Todis, & Johnson, 2002). This point is confirmed by the recommendation of Murray (2003) for the collection of data from multiple time points. Multiple time point research was conducted by Wagner and Davis (2006) using the data set from NLTS2. The studies of Wagner and Davis (2006) and Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) found a need for greater implementation of best-practices with the EBD population, specifically (p. 96).

Perceptions of Professionals

The research looking at the perceptions of school staff on the post-transitional school outcomes of students educationally diagnosed with EBD is limited. There has been longitudinal research on the outcomes of students with EBD (Blackorby and Wagner, 1996). There has also been research on the effectiveness of intervention programs (Bullis, et al., 2002; Test, et al., 2009).

The research by Bullis, et al. (2002) discusses staff, parent, and student perceptions on the effectiveness of the Achieving Rehabilitation, Individualized Education, and Employment Success (ARIES) Project. The research obtained qualitative data from multiple time points. Survey data was taken at the entry into the program and at two-month intervals throughout. An interview was conducted at the point of exit from the program. This research design allowed the researchers to gather data from the beginning to end of the program. This allowed for effectiveness of the program to be closely monitored.

The research conducted interviews with educational staff on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. There were two educators, one administrator, and one case manager interviewed on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the ARIES Project. One teacher commented “As a district we need to look at best practices for “tough” kids, which may include LD, ED, and others, and address issues of academic development, social/emotional/behavioral skill development, vocational skill development, goal setting, and links to appropriate community agencies. (Special Education Teacher)” (Bullis, et al., 2002, p.54). It was through the qualitative interviews that information on the perceptions

of educators was obtained. These interviews are demonstration that much more detailed information can be obtained through a qualitative interview with a professional.

School staff are in a direct position to comment on the outcomes of individual students. They have a close proximity to the student throughout their educational career. As a result, they have built relationships with the individual students. Due to their relationships with the students, they are in a good position to comment on the outcomes post-school for these same individuals. When students with EBD graduate, the dynamics of these relationships change, however, the relationship still fundamentally exists. Perspectives of the school staff offer a good position of insight when it comes to the student's outcomes. This allows the staff to hear first hand what the individual student's found to be most helpful and least helpful. A multi-person perspective is gained from school staff. Staff perspectives offer unique insight into the outcomes, which, in turn, can help to make current programming more effective.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Lenses

The importance of research and evidence-based practices is fundamental to the field of social work. Research and evidence-based practices lay the foundation for moving forward in a clinical social work setting. They allow the practitioner to apply theory and the subsequent best practices in a clinical manner, thus, resulting in the most optimal outcomes for the individual being served.

With the theoretical perspective, "theoretical language, or a collection of ideas associated with the theoretical language, are [is] used to sensitize or orient social work practitioners to important aspects of reality" (Forte, 2007, p. 16). For the purpose of this

research, three different theories will be considered. These three theories are the systems, ecological, and strengths perspective. These theories support the research best by formulating a broad base from which to perceive the complexity of the of the research question.

The systems perspective “sees human behavior as the outcome of reciprocal interactions of persons operating within linked social systems” (Hutchison, 2008, p. 43). Given the nature of this research, all systems within a person’s environment must be considered. These systems include, but are not limited to, an individual’s school and home environments, a person’s relationships with others, and a person’s relationship with themselves in their environments. When looking at the outcomes for an individual one must consider the environmental interactions that influence the individual. It is those systemic interactions that have direct influences on the behavior of the individual.

The ecological perspective believes in a “comprehensive intellectual framework for understanding the person, the environment, and the transactions between person and environment” (Forte, 2007, p. 123). The ecosystems perspective maintains “a theoretical view of human system behavior that conceptualizes the exchanges between people and their physical environments as evolutionary and adaptive in context” (Miley, O’Melia, & DuBois, 2004, p. 463).

The strengths perspective views “people as resourceful with untapped mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual abilities and capacities for continued growth” (Miley, O’Melia, & DuBois, 2004, p. 463). The strengths perspective believes that individuals have the capacity for more. People are innately given tools to survive. The strengths perspective takes into account the individual adaptations for survival within

social systems. The strengths perspective sees the strengths of the individual as a contributing factor for survival within a system.

This researcher believes that a strength-based ecological systems perspective is the most encompassing viewpoint or lens from which to look at the topic of school staff perceptions of post-graduation outcomes for graduates with EBD. This viewpoint allows all areas to be considered in the inquiry of post-graduation outcomes. This includes both internal and external systems at play in the outcomes for individual students. This researcher believes that it will be a strength of this research to not have limitations in trying to view the systems of transitional education in the context of the whole.

Professional Lenses

The primary researcher of this study is working as a paraprofessional and a MSW intern in an urban public Transition school. This researcher has worked in the fields of education, disabilities, and social services for about 10 years. This researcher's interest was piqued by the lack of longitudinal outcome data for this specific population. Specifically, this researcher was interested in the outcomes for those individual's who have completed a transitional program. This researcher was interested in knowing where to improve the delivery of services from the social work perspective so as to improve individual outcomes for students within the transitional education system.

Personal Lens

This researcher is interested in what the outcomes are for graduates who were educational diagnosed with EBD. This researcher is interested to find out if the work is paying off for students post-graduation. This specific urban population of students (EBD) needs many advocates. Through the process of this research project, this

researcher will gain an intricate understanding of areas for improvement for this specific population.

Methods

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gather data regarding school staff perceptions of post-transition school outcomes of former students educationally diagnosed with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorder (EBD). The goal was to gather qualitative data from this specific population sample. The perspectives from the school staff offered insight as to the effective outcomes of transitional education. This research is vital to transitional programming at public transitional schools. The research confirmed effective practices and offers areas of improvement that, in turn, will aid student programming in the future.

Research Question

The fundamental question for this research is: What are school staff perceptions of the post-transitional school outcomes for students with an educational diagnosis of EBD in the areas of further education, employment, housing, and relationships?

This research gathered data on the perceptions of school staff regarding their experiences with the outcomes of former students post-graduation. For the purpose of this research study, staff interviewed were school social workers, special education administrators, and teachers/case managers currently employed within public school transitional programs. The research looked at the area of further education outcomes. Post-secondary education was considered enrollment in a university, college, vocational training program, or a technical college. Employment for graduates was considered a job that offers a regular paycheck. Inquiry was made as to the level of employment supports

that graduates utilize. For the purposes of this research, the level of employment supports was considered the setting of employment and/or outside agency involvement, such as, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). The three settings that were considered in this research study were independent employment with an organization or company, supported employment, and day program/per piece employment. Data was obtained of the staff perceptions of the living situations of graduates. The living situations for graduates was categorized as independent, supported independent living, a group home living situation, or living with relatives/guardians. The relationships of the individual participants covered their current relationship status' with former EBD students. Relationship status was considered frequency of communication whether in-person, over the phone, email, or Internet social network affiliation.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research method. Individual interviews were used to gather data from public school transitional program staff. This research design allowed for the gathering of contextual data that could not be obtained through a survey method.

Sample

Participants were obtained from the Internet via public school websites. This researcher contacted transitional program staff and facilitators in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area to locate possible participants. This study sought to gather data from school staff of transitional programs regarding their perceptions of the outcomes of former students who had an educational diagnosis of EBD. For the purposes of this study, only transitional programs serving students with an educational diagnosis of EBD were contacted.

Participants

This researcher gathered participants through their current listing of employment on a Twin Cities Metropolitan Area public school website. Participants were selected by this researcher based on identifying criteria and accessibility. These criteria included employment within a transitional program that serves students educationally diagnosed with EBD. Accessibility was considered an individual's contact information publicly available on a public school transition program website.

Researcher contacted case managers, teachers, social workers, and program facilitators in Twin Cities Metro Area public schools via phone or email for participation in this research study. This researcher contacted the case manager/teacher/social worker/program facilitator using a script to inquire about their possible participation (Appendix C).

Upon interest of participation in this research study, this researcher gave the purpose, design, human protections, and goals for the research to the participant. If the individual agreed to participate in this research, they were then asked to set a date and time for an interview in the future. This process continued until there were nine participants who agreed to participate in an interview.

Protection of Human Subjects

All precautions were taken to minimize risks of participation to human subjects in this research study. Steps were taken to ensure participant safety throughout the course of this research project. Participant safety and risk were monitored throughout the research process. Participation was always voluntary throughout the entire process of this research. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time.

Public identifying contact information was used to contact individuals for possible participation in this research study. This information was obtained from a public school's website. The researcher maintained the confidentiality for all participants throughout the research process. This researcher made all efforts to minimize any risks to an individual's participation in this study. The program at which the individual participant is employed remains confidential. Participation will be kept confidential for participant protection.

All research participant information was kept by this researcher alone in an encrypted digital file on this researcher's personal computer. Upon completion of the research study, all identifying information will be immediately destroyed by this researcher to maintain participant confidentiality.

Informed consent was obtained prior to the beginning of an interview. If informed consent was not obtained from the individual participant, participation was not allowed in this research study. Confidentiality will continue to be maintained for the individual participants regardless of status of participation. This researcher included and/or reviewed the informed consent form to ensure that participants had a complete understanding of the research process and their rights as participants.

Data Collection

This study measured perceptions of school staff on the post-school outcomes for transitional program graduates with an educational diagnosis of Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EBD). Staff perceptions of post-school outcomes were measured in the areas of employment status, further education status, housing status, and status of social relationship skills. Qualitative data was obtained through confidential interviews.

Nine school professionals were interviewed for the purposes of this research study. The goal of the individual interviews was to obtain staff perceptions of the post-school outcomes for former EBD students. The focus of the interviews was to gather details regarding the areas of employment, living situation, continued education, and social relationship skills. The questions for the interviews with individuals are listed in Appendix C.

The interviews began with some participant background questions. These questions covered the participant's age, gender, length of time in current position, length of time working with transitional students, length of time working with EBD students in transition, and current educational style used. Participant perceptions of EBD outcomes were then discussed. The participant's perceptions of EBD post-school outcomes were based around four areas. The four areas were employment, living situation, continued education, and social relationship skills. For the questions regarding employment, the status of graduate employment outcomes was addressed. The participant was asked for their perceptions of whether or not they believe graduates are presently employed, capacity of that employment, supports, if any, for maintaining employment. Participants were asked for their perception of whether or not their transitional program aided graduates in the area of employment.

Housing was the next area of inquiry. Participants were asked for their perceptions on the housing and living situations of their graduates. They were asked if the living situations were independent, semi-independent, supported or group living situation, or if the graduates were living with family or guardian(s).

Participants were asked of their perceptions of graduates' ability to further their education. They were asked if they believed if any graduates have pursued further education. Further education was defined as a 4-year college or university, technical school, vocational training program, or 2-year community college.

The last area of specific inquiry for participants was their perceptions of the social relationship skills of EBD graduates. Participants were asked if they felt that their program proved successful in building the social relationship skills of EBD students. Participants were asked how often they have had contact with EBD graduates and in what capacity. Participants were asked if there were any specific skills that graduates have expressed that they wished they had learned while in school.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data was obtained from audio recordings of the nine interviews. Audio was recorded by two different recording devices for each individual interview. Both devices were put between the researcher and interviewee or participant. Two recordings were taped on two separate digital recorders to ensure no technical difficulties. The clearer sounding recording was used for transcription and the other was destroyed by this researcher immediately following the completion of the transcription. This researcher personally transcribed the interviews verbatim. Qualitative data obtained from transcriptions by the researcher from the interviews was coded for content and analyzed for common themes in the areas discussed above. The identity of the participants will remain confidential for the protection of those participating. Research findings will only be shared in aggregate and thematic form so as to further protect the identities of participants.

Once all data was collected and coded for themes, the qualitative data was cross-referenced for validity of responses to related questions. Data is presented in the Results section of this research paper.

Results

Nine interviews were conducted in this research study with school professionals working with students with an educational diagnosis of Emotional Behavior Disorder. All participants were from the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area. For the data collection of this research project there were 18 questions asked in the individual interviews (Appendix C).

Participant Demographics

Participant ages ranged from 30 to 65. The average interview participant age was 47.4 and mean age was 46 years. There were 6 females and 3 males interviewed. The length of time in current position ranged from 1 year to 25 years. Average time in current position for participants was 7.16 years. Mean amount of time in their current position was 6 years. The sample consisted of two School Social Workers, two Special Education Coordinators/Program Facilitators, and five EBD Teachers. The average length of time in current position for school social workers was 6.5 years. The average length of time for the Coordinators/Facilitators was 13.25 years. Average length of time for the EBD Teachers was 5 years.

When asked about length of time working in Transitional education, participant responses ranged from 1.5 years to 14 years. The average response was 6.05 years. The median response was 7 years. When asked about length of time working specifically with EBD transition students, participant responses ranged from 6 to 25 years. The

average of responses was 11 years. The median length of time that individuals have worked specifically with EBD students in transition was 13 years. Participants average caseload size was 10 students. The average class size for EBD students was 5 students, however, the responses ranged from one-to-one to twelve per EBD specific class.

Employment and Continuing Education Status

In regards to employment status of EBD graduates, the responses were varied among different programs. Some of the responses were zero or one, and some of the responses were 40% (2 of 5). The majority of the respondents answered that one or two of the last years graduating class were employed. Of those individual's who were believed to be employed, about one third of individuals were employed without support. Those independently employed were reported by respondents to be working in the fast food industry. Support came from two areas for those receiving it. The first was through "Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)" where they received assistance with the initial placement and ongoing support with maintaining their employment. The second area was through a supported employment agency. According to respondents, all of those graduates that reported that they are working are very proud of the fact that they have a job.

The responses on continuing education seemed to be rather consistent among most respondents. One respondent reported two individuals had continued on to further their education (the exception). Two respondents stated, "a couple have tried unsuccessfully". The rest of the respondents reported that zero had continued on to further their education. As a whole, the percentage of last years graduates who had attempted to continue their education was 20%. To quote one respondent, "Honest to

God, they just don't have the skills. And that's not to say they don't have the smarts. They just don't have organization, persistence, and time management." As a whole, the idea of further education, whether through a school or job training program, seemed to be unattained for the vast majority of EBD graduates.

Social Relationship Status

There were two types of relationships considered in this research. The first was the relationship that EBD graduates had with staff. The second type considered were relationships with peers or classmates. All respondents reported to have an open-door policy at work. They welcome contact from graduates at school. "Some students come back for visits and I'll take time to talk with them...You were the one that was helping them for so long that they come back to you." On average, respondents heard from a graduate about one time per month. The one exception to this was the respondent who kept in contact via Facebook (with security settings in place). That individual heard from an average of one graduate per week.

In regards to peer relationships, those that were living at home had maintained relationships with those in their neighborhoods because "it's a neighborhood thing. I think those are maintained because people don't scatter after graduation". Only one respondent stated "YES" when asked about continued peer relationships post-graduation. The majority of respondents reported "NO" to whether graduates had maintained relationships with peers.

Housing Status

Of the nine respondents in this study, six responded that zero were living independently, two reported independent apartments in supported housing, and one

respondent reported that two were living independently prior to graduation from the Transitional program. This appeared to be the exception rather than the norm. As a whole, graduates were still living with assistance or support from others and, overwhelmingly, this was with family. Family was considered a parent/guardian or extended family, such as, an aunt, uncle, cousin, or grandparent.

Staff Perceptions

The first common theme was that the style of instruction of EBD students “depends on the class”. Different styles of instruction, formats, and use of “media” were dependent on “who showed up”. The second common theme was that respondents all believed that the relationship with the individual students greatly impacted instruction. One participant stated that they were “big on building relationships with students before we get to the actual instruction”. Another common theme was that participants as a whole were “loose” or “flexible”. All participants were very adaptive in their instruction of EBD students.

The skills that participants personally focused on with EBD students were employment skills and interpersonal skills. The employment skills focus was combined with a self-awareness and social-emotional focus. While employment was the end goal, participants focused on the practicality of the soft-skills of employment. Soft skills of employment would be considered skills in math, basic grammar, courtesy, honesty, reliability, and flexibility. While this list not complete, it does demonstrate the basic premise of the need for soft skills. Soft skills are the foundation for the job specific skills that an individual will need to acquire. Self-awareness and social-emotional learning were the two most mentioned. Participants perceived that the social skills of employment

were the most substantial barrier to obtaining and sustaining employment for EBD students.

Participants stated that they have heard from graduates regarding what they wished they had learned while in the transitional program. Overwhelmingly, the responses were “maturity” based responses. One participant aptly stated, the graduates said “a realistic understanding of what the real work setting and how demanding it can be”. Another stated, “how to work and how to behave”. The realistic expectations of what a real work situation were like were the common theme that graduates have stated they wished they had learned while in the transition program.

The changes that participants would make to transitional programming as a whole would be a greater focus on “work-oriented employment skills” such as found in “community work sites”. More than 50% of respondents believed that work-oriented results would be greater if there was a financial incentive for students; no matter how big or small. This would aid the students in a “paradigm shift” that would help them to better transition to the real world. All respondents reported satisfaction in their experience working with EBD students. “It’s a tough group, great, but tough”. EBD students “tend to be, to have a spirit about them” and “I love it”.

Discussion

This research gained a better understanding of staff perceptions of post-transition school outcomes for students educationally diagnosed with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD). According to the research of Bradley, Doolittle, and Bartolotta (2008) and Wagner and Davis (2006), students with an educational diagnosis of EBD have the poorest outcomes of any specific educational population. The research from this study

confirms that the post-school outcomes, according to staff perceptions, are a definite area of needed attention. This study, specifically, looked at the areas of further education, employment, housing, and relationships in terms of post-school outcomes. The results were consistent with previous research on the EBD population.

It should be noted that the EBD population, as a whole, has been elusive to post-school data collection. This is true with both previous research and the current study. The transition to life following school is difficult for anyone. As a result, the data that has been collected to date has been small percentage of EBD graduates from across the country. This research supports the findings of Rabren and Johnson (2010) in that there is a lack of appropriate research gathering practices nationwide for this specific population.

Continuing Education

The staff perceptions on the further education for EBD graduates proved to be rather consistent. Staff agreed that for the vast majority of the EBD graduates, the goal of continuation to further their education was unattained. The results from this study showed that 20% of graduates had attempted to further their education. The current findings were slightly higher but were supported by the findings from Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) stating that 15% of children with emotional disturbance enrolled in postsecondary programs (p. 206). More research needs to be conducted to explore the five percent variation in post-secondary education outcomes. Nationally, a five percent increase in this outcome would be rather substantial for this specific population. That being said, the data from the current study takes that information one step further. There was no mention of students attempting to continue their education in the previous research.

According to many of the respondents of the present study, there is a difference between enrollment and completion. One respondents stated, “Many of them want to but realize that they can’t pass the entrance Accuplacer exam. They can’t sit in a classroom all day long.” Another respondent stated, “Almost every year I have one student that is going to try a two-year, however, by the time of the middle of the school year comes along they are not still involved or didn’t start... In my viewpoint, in most situations it’s not realistic for my student population.” As a whole, with a few exceptions, the EBD population is not perceived to be able to be successful in college, no matter what level or setting. Participants seemed to agree with the fact that the idea of college for students educationally diagnosed with EBD is unrealistic for most of them.

One common theme that arose from respondents was the lack of skills of students across many domains. In theory, going to college is the next progression for students exiting high school. Fundamentally, that is the belief of students and what is socially expected of students this age. In the case of the majority of students with EBD, this is an unrealistic goal. The skills that are required for a student to complete college do not seem to be in the skill sets of EBD graduates. One respondent stated, “I feel that college success is really difficult when you are dealing with students that have not been mainstreamed in High School to think about college. They have not had a regular education setting. More restrictive settings are not conducive to this.” Fundamentally, they have not been in the position to learn the skills that are necessary for their success in a college setting. For students with EBD, academics appear to be secondary on a priority scale to the daily functional skills needed by these students.

Relationships

According to the findings of this research, for the majority, the relationships that EBD students have fostered while in school do not seem to be maintained outside of the school setting. Those relationships that were continued appeared to be maintained due to the close proximity of the individual's living situation. This appears to be consistent with the findings of the living situations of graduates. The majority of EBD graduates continue live at home post-graduation. Interpersonal relationships appear to be maintained based on convenience of proximity to the graduate.

School staff necessarily are in a unique position to form relationships with their students. School staff are an instrumental part of the student's education. According to Bullis, et al. (2002), role models were important for the long-term outcomes of EBD students in the ARIES Project. That being said, the outcomes for students with EBD have the least amount of research to support them of any educational group according to Wagner and Davis (2006). Post-graduation, the EBD population is extremely allusive to data collection. Relationships with the school staff are not maintained by an overwhelming majority of EBD graduates.

Employment

Employment has been a struggle for the EBD population post-graduation. The average employment rate perceived by participants of this study was 20%. The implications for this employment figure are many. Employment was considered a job with a steady paycheck for the purposes of this study. According to participants, the average job was in the fast food industry in some capacity. While the job may be stable, the wage for those that are employed within that industry is meager if not minimum

wage. Given the cost of living expenses, there is not a lot of room for extras for those employed within that industry. So, the 20% of graduates that are employed are earning enough to hopefully get by. Presumably, they are not making enough to live comfortably. This may help to explain why the majority of EBD graduates are still living with family. This may also help to explain why relationships are not readily maintained outside of their 'comfort zone'. This may also explain why the ability of EBD graduates to further their education is lacking.

Summary

From a financial standpoint, paying for college is tough. For those individual's who are lacking the skills to navigate through the systems of red tape involved with applying to be admitted, applying for scholarships and/or financial aid, choosing a major, and signing up for classes, only to find out that class is work, too, the process of going to college is daunting.

The idea to go to college is great. The actuality of the processes involved, for most EBD graduates, are insurmountable. This is the personification and manifestation of why a paradigm shift is surely needed for this population. Reality is tough when the skills necessary to maneuver through the systems involved in creating opportunities are complex. For the most part, EBD transition-school graduates have not mastered the skills necessary to enable them to attain the things of which they dream. Transitional education outcomes must be improved for this population, specifically. The transition-age EBD population needs to learn the skills that will help them to succeed. Fundamentally, transitional education must better prepare EBD graduates for the future. According to Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010), work experience, employment preparation, and social

skills training were among the top predictors of EBD post-school outcomes. This should be the primary place to invest the energy and resources of professionals.

Implications for Social Work

Social Work Practice

Social workers need to look at the individual needs of EBD students. The educational diagnosis of Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) is not formally recognized outside of the educational system and, specifically, in the medical system. One area that social workers can assist is finding the link between the educational and medical systems to assist in the continuity of care for EBD students. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR, 2000) does not formally recognize EBD as a disorder. Those with EBD may have a mental health diagnosis that has helped qualify them for EBD educational services. Social workers can advocate for a bridge that creates a seamless gap in services for EBD students between the educational and medical systems. This bridge will foster continuity of care between the two different systems. It will also keep the needs of the individual at the forefront.

Fundamentally, social workers can aid in the skill building for students with EBD. This can take place both within and outside of the educational setting. The increasing emotional and behavioral needs of the EBD population is an area of great concern for social work. The long-term implications for not addressing the issue immediately are many. A population of individuals is in need of help whether they currently perceive it or not. Social workers need to unite behind the cause of aiding this population to achieve greater outcomes.

Social workers are in a unique position to promote skill building in the areas of relationships through positive everyday interactions. Social workers can promote of the attainment of further education by stressing skills associated with positive school behavior. Social workers can promote job skills through advocating and stressing vocational education sites through the transitional program or outside community agencies. Social workers should also promote independent living skills through positive feedback and, ideally, experiential learning opportunities.

Recommendations for school social workers and social work practice, in general, are many. First, early interventions have the greatest impact. The earlier an effective intervention is made with a child with EBD, the greater the long-term impact on the positive outcomes. Second, relationships for students with EBD are an area of concern. Social workers are in a unique position to focus on building and maintaining relationships that support positive outcomes for EBD students.

Social Work Policy

The field of Social Work needs to look at the systems that are currently in place that are failing a population of students. These systems are educational systems and social policy systems. They are deeply interconnected and have a direct impact on the outcomes of the EBD population and, thus, on society as a whole.

First, social policy that does not adequately nor effectively address the needs of the students needs to be thoroughly examined. While test scores are important, individuals are educated. The needs of individuals need to be the focus. Social policy must to reflect this belief to the educational system.

Social policy needs to address the issues related to the mental health needs of children and young adults. Educating people about the issues associated with the mental health needs of children and how long term outcomes are impacted is the first step. Mental health plays a crucial part in the parodies associated with EBD outcomes. Policy makers need to look at the social stigmas associated with mental health and begin to change public stereotypes through education and access to appropriate services. Social programs or the lack of social programs for children's mental health need to be further explored. The mental health of our children directly impacts their school performance and, consequently, directly impacts their post-school outcomes.

The educational system needs to begin to address the increasingly imperative nature of this problem. Fundamentally, the question must be asked: Transitions to what? No longer can the EBD students fail to succeed by finishing their education without the fundamental skills socially expected of them. Social workers can advocate both within and outside of the educational system for the needs of students. Social workers can advocate for the appropriate resources to be made available for these students.

Social Work Research

Research on the overall effectiveness of education for students educationally diagnosed with EBD should be explored. To date, the research is minimal, yet conclusive. Social workers need to look at the social implications of not effectively educating students with EBD.

The areas of social skills, employment skills, and life skills for EBD youth need examination. Research needs to be conducted to further establish effective evidence-based practices. The implications of the present outcomes for this specific population

have direct implications to the fields of criminal justice, social welfare systems, educational programming of higher education, and society as a whole. One area of future research could be the impact of earlier implementation of transitional education programming.

Implications for Future Research

The majority of EBD transition school graduates have not learned the skills necessary to independently support themselves. More research needs to be done on the long-term effectiveness of interpersonal/social skills education. Research needs to be done on the long-term effectiveness of transitional education. Additional research needs to be done on the EBD population as a whole. In theory, research should be done with first-hand experiential knowledge of post-transition school EBD students. Graduates themselves should and need to be interviewed for the most current outcomes of post-transition school outcomes. A practical, accurate, and, presumably, cost-effective instrument for measuring post-school outcomes for this specific population is sorely needed.

The post-school outcomes for the transition-school EBD population and EBD population as a whole are troubling. The lack of data concerning this specific population is just as troubling. The EBD population as a whole is not gaining the skills necessary from our current educational system to independently survive. This fact needs to be explored by researchers as soon as possible so as to not let this population continue to fall through the cracks.

Strength and Limitations

The greatest strength of this research study was the richness of the individual responses during the individual interviews. The ability to have individual participant's expand upon the areas of inquiry during the interviews allowed this researcher to access background information, context, and motivations which cannot be obtained through a survey. Another strength of this research was the ability to gather data from this population of individuals. As demonstrated in the literature review, previous research on the perceptions of school staff on the post-transition school Emotional Behavioral Disorder population is extremely limited. The multiple client perspective that practitioners offered allows for a better generalizability of results to this specific population.

There were limitations to the present study. The study used a small sample size. This research targeted a highly specific population of professionals and, thus, limited the overall generalizability of the results for this research. The study gathered second-hand knowledge of the outcomes. While the sample had established relationships with this population, the relationships may not have been kept current or informed. Another limitation was not being able to include participants with an EBD diagnosis in this study due to time limitations.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a brief research study on school staff perceptions of post-transitional school outcomes for Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) students. You were selected because you have worked with students with educational diagnosis of EBD. Your contact information was found on your district website via the Internet. Voluntary participation in this study would involve completing a short survey, which should take about 5-10 minutes and will remain anonymous. You may have also voluntarily chosen to participate in a brief interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. In addition, you would be free to discontinue participation at any point, should you so desire.

Your participation is important because I believe that the study may provide relevant data to public schools and transitional programs. This data is particularly useful to school social workers, teachers/case managers, and program facilitators in planning social work curriculum and activities for students labeled EBD. The study will also be used as part of the requirements for my MSW degree from the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University.

If you decide to participate, your responses to the survey will be completely anonymous. All interviews will be kept confidential by this researcher. Further, all the qualitative data collected for this study will be presented in aggregate form only (Numbers, No names). Individual responses will be published anonymously. By completing and returning the informed consent, you will be signifying your informed consent to participate. There are no risks to you. Similarly, there are no benefits.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the survey and interview experience, please feel free to contact me at XXX-XXXX.

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the study when they become available, I would be happy to provide one. You may call me or email me using the above information.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
David Krygiel

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____
Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B**Phone/email script for case manager/teacher/social worker**

Hello. My name is David Krygiel. I am a current MSW student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University conducting my clinical research project. I would like to tell you about an opportunity for you to participate in a research study on staff perceptions of post-transition school EBD outcomes. The study is looking at staff perceptions of the outcomes for EBD transition program graduates. The study will ask about your history and capacity working with the transition-age EBD population. I am hoping to find out what has proved effective for graduates after their transitional education. I am also hoping to find out if there are any improvements that you would suggest for transitional programs as a whole. I am wondering if you would be willing to partake in a 45 minute interview regarding your perceptions of outcomes for EBD transition program graduates. Your participation will be confidential. Your name and the name of your program will not be mentioned. If you would be willing to set aside about 45 minutes for an in-person interview, I can schedule that with you now. Your decision to participate is greatly appreciated. There will be no intended harm to you as a participant in this study. It is exploratory in nature to figure out the perceptions of staff on the outcomes of EBD graduates.

Appendix C
Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is and how long have you been in your current position?
3. How long have you worked in the field of transitional education?
4. How long have you worked specifically with EBD students in transition?
5. What is your class size?
6. What is your style of instruction?
7. How many of those students who graduated last year are currently employed?
8. Of last year's graduates presently employed, have they reported that they happy with their job field? Was there any specific training in their transitional program that has helped them to succeed on the job?
9. Of last year's graduates who are employed, how many are employed without supports?
10. What skills do you personally focus on the most in your transitional setting?
11. Do you still maintain relationships, whether in-person, over the phone, or via social networks, with EBD graduates? What does that look like? What is the frequency of contact?
12. What skills do graduates say they wish they had learned while enrolled in the transition program?
13. How many of last years graduates are seeking to further their education, whether at a 4-year college or university, vocational training program, 2-year community college, or technical college?
14. Have EBD graduates voluntarily maintained relationships with any of their classmates after graduation? If so, in what capacity?
15. Of last year's graduates, how many are living independently? What does their independent living look like (setting)?
16. Of last year's graduates not living independently, what is the most common living situation? Group setting or family/relatives?
17. What changes that you would make to transitional education programming as a whole?
18. Looking back, what has been your overall experience working with EBD students?