

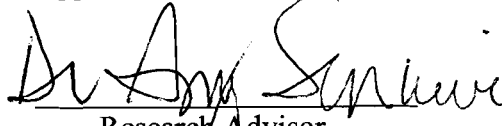
How Did I End Up Here:
Why do EBD teachers burnout?

by

David Schwartz

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in
Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Research Advisor

Dr. Amy Schlieve

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

March, 2006

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

Author: Schwartz, David W.

Title: *How Did I End Up Here: Why Do EBD Teachers Burnout?*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Education

Research Advisor: Amy C. Schlieve, Ph.D.

Month/Year: August, 2006

Number of Pages: 34

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

Why do EBD teachers have a high percentage of burnout, and what can be done to alleviate it? The purpose of this thesis is to review the current and recent past literature to explore why burnout happens so often among teachers of students with EBD and try to find some solutions to the problem. A high percentage of EBD teachers, 36%, plan to leave the field in the coming year and another 10% are not making any plans. By contrast, only 9% of other types of special educators planned to leave in the near future. With that in mind the objectives of this study are to answer the questions: 1) What are the primary causes of burnout among EBD teachers? 2) What are solutions for burnout among EBD teachers?

Results indicated that workplace condition was the most important consideration for staying in or leaving teaching. This was followed by high stress levels, job

dissatisfaction, training, organizational structure, and excessive paperwork. Some changes to be made include: principal support, better training, reduction of paperwork, and more collaboration with outside service agencies to better meet the needs of the students.

Acknowledgements

I feel as though I'm standing at a podium with a golden award waiting for the crowd to calm so I can spew forth with untold wisdom....isn't going to happen. I really would like to thank my family and closest friends though, for persevering through all of my procrastinations in getting this thesis on the road. Without them I'd still be contemplating the meaning of tonight's sunset.

There is no way I would have been able to complete this thesis without the kindness, gentle prodding, and when all else failed, setting deadlines of Dr. Amy Schlieve and Dr. Amy Gillett. You two are my inspirations of what is good in the world. You'll never know just what all of you mean to me. I thank you from the bottom of my erratically beating heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Abstract.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem/Purpose of the Study</i>	6
<i>Research Questions</i>	6
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	6
<i>Assumptions and Liabilities</i>	7
Chapter II: Review of Literature.....	9
<i>History of Special Education</i>	9
<i>Causes of Burnout among EBD Teachers</i>	13
<i>Solutions for Burnout among EBD Teachers</i>	19
Chapter III: Summary.....	24
<i>Summary and Recommendations</i>	24
References.....	32

Chapter I: Introduction

Why I Became a Teacher of Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities...my life in a nutshell.

A little background on myself would probably include the fact that in my younger years, I was on a first name basis with most of the police officers in the city of Eau Claire. Probably more repugnant was the fact that my dad was too, a benefit of being associated with the likes of me. Little did I know that this association with the police would actually become one of my biggest assets in later life. Before my infamous rise on the Eau Claire Police Department radar, I attended parochial grade school for the first three years, then public school and ended with all four years and graduation at a Catholic high school where I met the most influential person in my life to date.

During high school, at Regis in Eau Claire, my academic experience was practically non-existent. My major interest seemed to be partying and staying away from school as much as possible. My one saving grace was our principal, Father John Rossiter. His niche was being there when you needed him. He readily identified with students like me, who always seemed to have an uncanny knack for sniffing out trouble in one way or another. In later years, he told me what a hellion he had been in his youth and how a teacher he had never forgotten had reached out to him. Likewise, he inspired us with nurturing, understanding, and support. He strongly encouraged us to always do our best as we traveled through life. It seemed he was more of a “father” figure than a teacher or a priest.

I graduated from a technical college in 1970, and then Uncle Sam called. Later on I attended a small college in Colorado for gunsmithing. By this time I was in my late

twenties and early thirties. This is not the regular route for most teacher wannabees. My work interests varied: building houses, renting out houses, gunsmithing, rebuilding wrecked cars, DNR certification as a water plant operator, office work at city hall and heavy equipment operator. I injured my back as an operator and after surgery was subsequently told my career as a heavy equipment operator was over. What do you do to start over when you are thirty-five years old? Where do you go? I was married with two sons and a comfortable lifestyle. My answer soon followed. In 1985 on a cold, snowy day a deranged individual entered Father Rossiter's church, in Onalaska, and unexpectedly ended his life. I wasn't prepared. He has always been there; I couldn't imagine him not being there.

Reflecting after the funeral, I reassessed my own life and realized it was time to follow a path I had planned long ago but never finished--the pursuit of a teaching degree. It was as if his death held his final inspiration for me--to pass the torch. Today, he means more to me than ever. I visit his grave in LaCrosse, think of him often, and wonder if he would be pleased with what I have done with my life. Going back to school with a purpose in mind and graduating with honors, after what I had done in high school, makes me proud of myself. In trying to emulate what he did for us has enabled me to find my own niche in education. Since graduation, I have been teaching in the Emotional Disturbance program at North High School in Eau Claire. Almost nothing, short of my marriage (at which he officiated) and the birth of our children, has given more fulfillment in life.

Never could I have dreamed that my past life of trouble and running wild would aid me and give me something to draw from in dealing with my students today. Looking

back, it seems only natural that I feel so at ease with these kids even in the most difficult situations. I think perhaps insight is best learned from what we have lived and survived and can “bring to the table” on a daily basis. The ability to survive is a component found necessary to go the long haul when teaching students with EBD (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p. 136). According to Zabel and Zabel (2001),

Today’s special educators average more than 40 years of age, 11 years of experience in special education, are likely to be fully endorsed and have at least a masters degree. They might be compared to so-called “resilient” or “invulnerable” children whose experiences place them at high risk, but are able to overcome those factors and survive and even thrive in school and later on in their lives. Researchers (e.g., Rutter, 1990) have identified common traits of resilient children, most notably high intelligence and ability to find support systems in the form of adults who take special interest in them. (p.138)

Some liabilities had played a part in my life that needed to be addressed before I could go back to college. These liabilities, my perception was, pre-empted me from becoming a teacher in the first place. All of my life, I have been a stutterer, I am an individual with ADHD, I am an accomplished procrastinator, and I am a recovering alcoholic. Now, taking that into account, I have overcome most of the stuttering and am proud of my late-blooming fluency. The ADHD diagnosis didn’t come until I was in college; I suspected it from my studies in special education—it helped me understand why I did what I did when I was younger. The doctors came to the conclusion that I have developed coping mechanisms over the years so was not put on medication as it would

interfere with my heart medications. What this showed me was how much I had let these liabilities rule my life, but most importantly, I could do something about them.

At school, my students sought me out for my listening skills, my understanding of their problems (knowing I have been there), for being honest and straightforward with them, and supporting them in good times as well as bad. We would laugh together and we would cry together. We practiced survival skills together and looked at each day as a new day, a fresh start, a new opportunity to reach someone. We laughed hard and often, especially when all you wanted to do was cry or get angry. We looked at the big picture; situations can be pretty bleak if you focus on the little things, especially when they are negative; let it go. We tried to surround ourselves with people who care; we risked a little and played a lot. We also did progressive muscle relaxation together, something I learned in biofeedback at the hospital for my heart. Research now suggests that “progressive muscle relaxation is one of several relaxation techniques that attempt to reduce arousal and enhance self-control” (Lopata, Nida, & Marable, 2006, p. 21).

Kids with EBD have been my life for the past fifteen years. Twelve of those years were spent teaching them and the other three were as a paraprofessional while I was going to school. I knew from the paraprofessional experience that this was what I really was destined to do. What I didn't know was that it would come to an end all too soon. Since I was thirty-one, I have had heart issues, most of them, the doctors say, from my drinking years. I had been sober for eight years when my problems were discovered. I was devastated to think that, here, I had been sober for eight years and still, it comes back to haunt me. My health condition has worsened over the years, I was in need of more and more medication, suffered a heart attack in 1997, and underwent heart surgery at the

Mayo Clinic in 2004. At the end of the 2005 school year my cardiologist told me it was time to “hang it up.” Be careful what you wish for, when you are not ready to be retired, it really is no picnic. When you are so used to being an integral part of something for so many years and put so much of yourself into it, and all of a sudden it’s gone--it gives you cause to think.

One of the reasons the doctor had me retire was because he said being in the classroom with students with EBD was too much stress on my heart. I know that in the last year it was a struggle to get up in the morning and I noticed I was losing something in the classroom I had treasured for so many years, my energy level and especially my sense of humor. My get up and go had got up and gone. In my mind’s eye, I didn’t view the kids as much of a problem as the politics that go along with being in a large school, dealing with unreceptive regular education teachers, and the inordinate amount of paperwork special educators are required to perform. My feelings are backed up by research, I have since found, that substantiates that I am not alone in my thinking. Poor teacher working conditions have contributed to the high rate of special educators teaching students with EBD leaving the field. This includes teacher burnout and leads to sub par quality of education for students with these special needs (Fore III, Martin, & Bender, 2002). With everything happening to me so fast, I wanted to see if there really is a problem with other EBD teachers and burnout. What I found amazed me.

High stress levels and job dissatisfaction are likely reasons for EBD teachers to leave their jobs. A high rate of attrition affects the quality of education students with EBD receive and their behavior by nature demands more skilled and reliable teacher support (Nelson, 2001). Organizational structure can have a large impact on a teacher’s

work environment. An ineffective administrator can horribly affect the work life of a teacher, much the same as a carefully organized structure can conceivably promote confidence leading to job satisfaction (Wrobel, 1993). One of the most alarming findings, at least for me, is that an EBD teacher's temperament is related to his/her susceptibility associated with stress. Further, an injury rate of one in five among EBD teachers perpetrated by a student is associated by teacher temperament. Temperament is a variable that can be used to help understand which teachers are at risk for injury by students and for attrition rates. This can be helpful for trying to remedy the situation of possibly who should or who shouldn't enter the field (Center & Calloway, 1999).

Statement of the Problem/Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to do a literature review on the topic of burnout among EBD teachers. Over the years, in my discussions with colleagues, attending seminars and conventions, as well as my own experiences, I have come to the conclusion that a problem really does exist. I decided to do a literature review because I thought it would be more reaching than a questionnaire of my colleagues. During the fall semester of 2005, I conducted research in the databases at UW-Stout, as well as the internet databases of periodicals and papers.

Research Questions

There are two questions this study will attempt to answer. They are:

1. What are the primary causes of burnout among EBD teachers?
2. What are solutions for burnout among EBD teachers?

Definition of Terms

There are three terms that need to be defined for clarity in this study. These are:

Burnout – “fatigue, frustration, or apathy, resulting from prolonged stress”

(Costello, R. B., 1991, p. 184).

EBD teacher – special education teacher of students diagnosed with Emotional/Behavioral Disability. The EBD teacher may serve students with EBD in a special education classroom or in an inclusion setting where the EBD teacher assists or co-teaches the class with the regular education teacher.

Emotional Disturbance is defined as follows:

- (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Hallahan as cited in Livingston, 2003, p. 9).

Assumptions and Liabilities

In a review of the literature, a study I first found indicated that teachers of students with EBD perceive limitations of their ability to provide adequate academic instruction to their students and is even exacerbated with less experienced emergency-

licensed teachers. This is worrisome because most students with EBD are lacking academically from a negative development pattern which can further challenge their teachers in subsequent years (Sutherland, Kenton, & Gunter, 2005). Another study from as far back as 1995 showed that over one third of the EBD teachers surveyed (36%), planned to leave the field during the upcoming school year and that another 10% were not sure and were not making any commitments to the future at that time. To contrast, a study of the remaining areas of special educators showed that only 9% planned to leave their jobs in the near future (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995).

This all sounds like enough problems to go around for some time. As I stated earlier, I was amazed at, first, all the information on EBD burnout that I found, and secondly, the myriad of reasons for the burnout. There seems to be a recurring theme to all the studies, so there must be merit in what they say. Whenever I have attended EBD conferences, there was always talk of the burnout among us. I was happy, so really didn't pay too much attention to the idle banter. Maybe it wasn't just banter and perhaps not just idle either; what I've stumbled on to gives a whole new validity to EBD teacher burnout. I can look back and reflect, now that I'm out of the classroom, but what about those still on the "front lines?" Like a happy ending to everything, the studies had recommendations for resolutions to the existing problems that make sense. The research was done on smaller populations as well as larger school districts and states, so the limitations should be minimal. The representation should reflect fairly accurately what is going on in our school system regarding EBD teachers.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The purpose of the study is to conduct a review of literature. What I found was more than I bargained for. I never really realized the scope of problems an EBD teacher faces on a daily basis, even though I'd been a practicing EBD teacher for twelve years. When regular education teachers would tell me they felt sorry for me for being an EBD teacher, I would reiterate I felt the same way about them. When I took my students with EBD into an inclusionary class setting, in the regular education environment, it seemed the regular education students were out of control; I had my kids under control. It's all in one's own perception.

First, in this chapter, I will discuss a brief history of special education. Second, I will try to bring an understanding what the causes are for burnout among EBD special education teachers--the trials and tribulations. There can be real rewards in dealing with this population as well as a downside where you heart is aching for them. The third part of the chapter will discuss solutions for EBD teacher burnout.

History of Special Education

Looking back in history, the idea of educating every child to their maximum performance possible is a relatively new idea. The United States has made many strides since the Spartan practice of killing malformed babies, but it has taken centuries (Kirk & Gallagher, 1986) There are four stages of social attitudes toward children and adults with disabilities:

1. Pre-Christian era: Children with handicaps were neglected or mistreated.
2. Christianity: Children were protected and pitied.

3. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Institutions were established to provide separate education for exceptional children.
4. Twentieth Century: A movement existed for accepting people with handicaps and mainstreaming them into society as much as possible (Kirk & Gallagher, 1986).

By the early 1900s, nearly all of the states had written compulsory school education laws, yet the exclusion of students with disabilities was more common than not (Aiello, 1976, as cited in Coleman, 1992). The first three decades of the twentieth century hosted a number of milestone events as well as the establishment of national organizations principally for the welfare of disturbed individuals. In 1909, Clifford Beers and a psychologist named William James created the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. Beers, himself, had been a patient in three institutions where he received poor treatment. He wanted the public to be aware of the mistreatment happening in these housings. This created a widespread mental health movement across the country and by 1930, better programs existed. In 1922, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) was formed mainly by educators and parents of children with handicaps. CEC has been instrumental in the passage of positive legislation for the handicapped. The White House Conference on Child Health and Protection was held in 1930 and was instrumental in recommending that the Office of Education include a department of special education (Coleman, 1992).

The advocacy movement, undertaken for individuals with disabilities, was specific to the development of special education services in the present day. The workings of the interest groups were important in providing necessary information, stimulus, and support to Congress while they were developing and acting on legislation.

“The progress made in special education can be attributed in great part to the success of parents as advocates for their children” (Yell, 1998, p. 222).

One common misconception inferred in public education is that it is guaranteed by the federal Constitution. The truth is education is the business of the states. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution hands states that education of children is the responsibility of the state government. The fact was that the founding fathers thought it essential the state governments handle education because it was felt they were closer, more connected and responsive to the needs of the people (Yell, 1998).

The modern era of special education services goes back to roughly the middle of the twentieth century. Many things have since changed: our whole understanding of children with disabilities, technical definitions of these disabilities, classification systems, different views of the role that families play, curricula, assessment, professional standards, service delivery, education of teachers, and the changing roles of the professionals providing educational services (Paul, Churton, Rosselli-Kostoryz, Morse, Marfo, Lavelly, & Thomas, 1997). The Civil Rights Movement, more specifically the United States Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), supplied groundwork for following legislation and litigation giving students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education (Yell, 1998).

The early 1970s ushered in a number of federal legislative works designed to improve education for students with disabilities. Two major pieces of legislation from this decade were Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, better known as Public Law 94-142 (Yell, 1998). Events leading up to the passage of this act consisted of money for other special education

programs that was not being put to good use, in spite of the growing number of programs. Children were still not receiving appropriate educational services, and there was much inconsistency among the different state programs mandated by the courts (Kirk & Gallagher, 1986).

PL 94-142 was passed in 1975 and took effect in 1977. The law outlined rules for identification of the students and the special education services they could receive. It has shaped special education over the years. Six key principles lay out what schools need to implement: 1) zero reject; 2) nondiscriminatory evaluation; 3) individualized education programs; 4) least-restrictive environment; 5) due process; and 6) parental participation (Kirk & Gallagher, 1986). The law was amended in 1990 to include language, identification and transition planning. Additionally the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It was further amended in 1997 to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with disabilities in the regular education environment as well as in the special education environment (Yell, 1998). "Today, a powerful influence on educational policy is being exerted by the principle that to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be taught alongside students without disabilities" (Braaten & Gable, 1995, p. 4).

Even though IDEA has helped make great strides in ensuring that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education, the service delivery model to students with emotional or behavioral disorders has been a constant battle (Katsiyannis, Landrum, Bullock, & Vinton, 1997). In my research, I found that at the root of this problem is a bigger question of how you train teachers to deliver a consistent delivery

model. Wrobel (1993) stated that “teachers burn out or fail in their careers for complex and varied reasons, but the training that teachers receive is thought to be a primary contributor to their success or failure” (p. 2).

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Education Act of 2001 was primarily established to guarantee that all students in our schools will be taught by teachers who are “highly qualified.” All the while, a large percentage of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are not fully licensed teachers. This trickles down to multiple areas such as the quality of academic instruction and teacher attrition. (Sutherland, 2005). Personnel shortages in the special education field, as well as the widely practiced use of unqualified personnel to fill these special education teaching positions, are commonplace. The shortage situation causes many problems leading to reduced and inadequate delivery for the students (Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

Causes of Burnout Among EBD Teachers

What causes teachers of students with EBD to burnout and leave the profession? “In our view, the stress produced by student-teacher interactions provides only a partial answer to the problem of teacher attrition” (George, 1995, p. 235). Literature has explored teacher characteristics, behavioral characteristics of students with EBD, and working conditions as factors that lead to teacher stress, job satisfaction, commitment, and attrition as well as retention (Nelson, 2001).

Organizational structure can have a large impact on a teacher’s work environment. An ineffective administrator can horribly affect the work life of a teacher, much the same as a carefully organized structure can conceivably promote confidence leading to job satisfaction (Wrobel, 1993). Excessive paperwork and lack of

administrative support are consistently listed as sources of stress, attrition, and dissatisfaction for EBD teachers. Positive working environments often indicate satisfaction among teachers of students with EBD. Teachers of students with EBD report isolation from colleagues, disappointment with non-participating parents, frustration with an overabundance of paperwork, and lack of principal support (Nelson, 2001).

From another perspective in this recurring theme:

The most frequently mentioned source of dissatisfaction was the increased “paperwork” associated with legal and regulatory requirements in special education. If job satisfaction is to be improved for special educators which will allow them to devote more of their energies to directly working with students and colleagues, this concern must be addressed. Approaches to help ameliorate this condition could involve reducing federal and state bureaucratic requirements, preparing teachers to be more efficient in handling paperwork, providing more clerical assistance, and differentiated staffing arrangements that allow individual members of intervention teams to focus on roles and responsibilities which they prefer and which they are proficient (Zabel, 2001, p. 138).

There is no wonder that teachers of students with EBD face daily misgivings and a sense of being overwhelmed. In the review of the literature, I found a strong recurring theme: it wasn't as much the kids themselves that created the stress, but the whole work environment. In a study by Center, only three of the top ten stressors for teachers of students with EBD were directly associated with the EBD students themselves (Center & Steventon, 2001).

Center and Steventon (2001) interpreted the results of *The EBD Teacher Stressors Questionnaire*, a self-report instrument, developed by Center and Callaway that assesses occupational stressors in teachers of students with EBD. Teachers of students with EBD reported greater stress and role problems than other special education teachers. Literature indicates a definite link between stress and occupational burnout in all special education fields, but particularly among those teaching students with EBD. High on Center and Steventon's (2001) list of stressors include:

1. Amount of time spent on paperwork.
2. Lack of administrative support for EBD program.
3. Parents who do not get involved.
4. Responsibility for legal requirements and confidentiality.
5. Unrealistic parental expectations for their child's performance at school.
6. Unrealistic parental goals set for their child.
7. Lack of motivation by the students.
8. Students who are disrespectful towards the teacher.
9. Acts of cruelty by the students.
10. School politics involved with the job.

Overall, only three of the top ten stressors identified were directly associated with the EBD students themselves. The teachers' concerns with the students included disrespect, lack of motivation, and acting out in a cruel manner. Other top concerns involved administration, parents, administrative duties, and school policies (Center & Steventon, 2001).

Behaviors of students with EBD have been implicated as causes of teacher stress and attrition. Some studies indicated that students with EBD can create dissatisfaction in teachers by not making expected progress and that the stress of teachers of students with EBD can be traced to physical and verbal attacks. Another study, in the same time frame, indicated that teachers of students with EBD reported their greatest job satisfaction was their students (Nelson, 2001). Substantial evidence exists that shows a connection between academic failure and behavior in students with EBD. Students with EBD gravitate towards behavior that tends to be anti-social, aggressive, oppositional, and defiant. That, in turn, leads to negatively affecting their academic scores and prevents them from having meaningful relationships with their peers (Livingston, 2003).

We live in difficult and complex times where the stress level on children and their caregivers seems to multiply with each succeeding generation. Educators, above others, are attuned and understand these phenomena. Each generation of students, with all of their difficulties, will be followed up by the next generation, and multiplied with the next generation with no ending in sight (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

In a national survey of special education directors, deep concern was expressed about the availability of qualified teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Only about half (53%) of the surveyed directors said that all of their teachers were fully certified in behavior disorders. "Emergency certification" staff (less than full certification), in behavior disorders, ranged from 25% to 33%. These are estimates, but representative of the situation. Rural districts further lagged due to more problems being able to recruit (less to offer) fully certified teachers than larger districts. Compounding

the shortage are significantly high rates of teacher attrition from emotional and behavioral disorder programs (George, 1995).

It is common knowledge that a shortage does exist among special educators, particularly those educators teaching students with EBD. Shortages mean short of staff, and for those who are currently teaching translates into an extra workload. It also has many negative implications for students with EBD because personnel shortages often lead to reduced and inadequate services provided for these students (Singh, 1996).

The amendments to IDEA in 1990, included provisions for improving the effectiveness of programming for students with EBD. Expanding service delivery models and maintaining an adequate number of qualified personnel were highly encouraged. Included in these, were development and support for enhancing professional knowledge and skills; collaboration strategies; and adequate staff development strategies designed to decrease professional burnout and attrition (Katsiyannis, 1997).

Wrobel (1993) reviewed recent literature and found the following:

Teachers burn out or fail in their careers for complex and varied reasons, but the training that teachers receive is thought to be a primary contributor to their success or failure. It would seem that the current training system as a whole is not adequately meeting either the need for EBD teachers or the EBD teachers' needs. The apparent recent increase in formal studies in the area of teacher attrition in special education is encouraging, but a clear need remains for studies focused specifically in the field of EBD. At a minimum, training programs must ensure that individuals seeking a career in EBD are aware of the significant potential for burnout and failure so they can make informed career decisions. Individual coping

strategies and skills for managing stress and avoiding burnout are important and should be taught as part of EBD teacher training. Preservice training should focus on competency building in those activities in which the teacher will be spending the most time. Finally, the EBD teacher must be given a mechanism for evaluating his or her practice and developing new skills. (p. 17-21)

Another study (Bullock as cited in Katsiyannis, 1997) came to the conclusion that the number of skills and competencies, needed by teachers of students with EBD have been gradually increasing over the last thirty years. One area of increased importance will be on collaboration with other service delivery agencies (Mental Health, etc.), regular education teachers, and parents. In a separate study by Grosenick (1991) it was noted that a lack of communication and collaboration with service outside the realm of the school district, is specifically distressing because many students with EBD require multiple agency services (Katsiyannis, 1997). Almost without exception, the students I worked with were involved, in one way or another, with an outside service agency. I dealt with Human Services, group homes, foster care, police services, probation agents, counselors, physicians, nurses, treatment programs, day programs, incarceration, and the list goes on.

Although the search for competency-based approach for training teachers of students with EBD has continued for 30 years, we have yet to finalize a set of validated knowledge and skill competencies. The identification of areas of training and perceived training needs is a requisite step in the development and delivery of preservice and professional development programs (Sutherland, 2005, p. 43).

Sutherland's study suggests that the licensed teachers they investigated stated they were significantly more comfortable in managing the classroom and planning for instruction than did the teachers investigated with emergency licenses (Sutherland, 2005). It is apparent that the current training system, as we know it, is not adequately meeting the EBD teacher's needs or the need for EBD teachers (Wrobel, 1993).

Special Education is no longer a new phenomenon, but an integral and prominent feature of our education system. Over the past two decades, there have been many changes in the field of special education, including several revisions of federal legislation, tremendous growth, increased concern over documenting outcomes, increases in funding, development of professional standards, and increased use of multi- and non- categorical and inclusionary models (Zabel, 2001, p. 128-9).

It is no small wonder that special education teachers of students with EBD have a sense of being overwhelmed.

Solutions for Burnout Among EBD Teachers

In the study done by Fore III, Martin, and Bender in 2002, they researched causes of burnout with EBD teachers and came up with some recommended solutions. One additional option, different from the others, is that they felt the profession must soon address the shortage of male role models. It has long been known that 60% to 76% of all students receiving special education services are male and that, in general, male students experiencing behavioral problems seem to relate more positively to male teachers. For some students with behavior problems, maybe there is some merit in the provision of more male teachers with whom the students might better relate (Fore III, 2002). Their suggestions for reducing burnout are as follows:

1. Smaller class sizes as well as smaller caseloads are recommended to school districts to induce retention for EBD special education teachers.
2. Reduction in the myriad of paperwork for EBD special education teachers is recommended to retain these special educators.
3. More support as well as interaction from colleagues, administrators, and special education coordinators, in the same school, is recommended in helping reduce stress and burnout for EBD special education teachers.
4. Being able to observe other EBD special education teachers, for professional development purposes and collaboration, is recommended to decrease stress and burnout.
5. Planning periods for EBD special educators are highly recommended for school systems to help with retention.
6. Mentor programs, designed to assist new EBD special education teachers, are recommended for help in reducing stress.
7. Professional development workshops specifically designed for dealing with stress are recommended for school districts to try to help alleviate stress and burnout.
8. Developing a clearly defined job description can lead to reducing stress and burnout.
9. Proper placement of students with EBD and special needs can further help in reducing stress and burnout.

When you are an EBD teacher, you never know what you will encounter next; the more and varied training you receive is most important. There is no manual that tells you

what the right thing to do for your student with EBD is and no two students with EBD that are alike; they all have their own specific needs.

At a minimum, training programs should address the skill and knowledge needs of the teacher-as-person. In the long run, it may be more feasible and effective to provide new teachers with a set of skills aimed at maintaining their physical and psychological health than to attempt to prepare them for the host of demands they are likely to encounter. With this focus, training would prepare teachers to identify the early signs and symptoms of stress and burnout. Training would also ensure that teachers develop a series of effective coping strategies for the stress they will surely face (Wrobel, 1993, p. 21).

As an EBD teacher, you need to have outlets for stress relief, which is something not taught in most college courses. I developed a network of peers I could go to and interact with in humorous ways and be just plain crazy. This notion is backed up by Klaus Wedell (1999): “it is regarded as standard practice for those dealing with others’ problems, to have access to regular support and supervision from designated colleagues or senior staff” (p. 1). These same peers I could be crazy with would check in on me every so often if I didn’t show up at their door. Humor was one method I used with my students which usually broke the ice in a tense situation.

Biofeedback is another method of stress relief I used for myself, and eventually taught to my students. They liked it so much I made tapes for them to listen to outside of class and finally taught them a class on biofeedback utilizing the quietness of the wrestling room where we practiced biofeedback on the mats. I always thought it better to be proactive than reactive.

A type of biofeedback that I used with the kids most often was progressive muscle relaxation. “Environmental factors and events in many classrooms that include students with EBD can elevate arousal and thereby increase aggression. Anxiety, tension, and stress, are examples of factors that can contribute to elevated levels of arousal” (Lopata, 2006, p. 21). Educators can reactively use relaxation procedures after a stressful event, but the greatest benefit might be to be proactive and practice relaxation as a way to enhance self-control to prevent physically aggressive behavior. Training students to practice eliminating arousal and tension can lead to a more relaxed and calmer state that is not compatible with aggressive behavior (Lopata, 2006).

McEvoy and Welker conducted a study on antisocial behavior, academic failure, and school climate. They found that the school climate literature emphasizes the capacities of students to succeed; it carefully avoids the all too often tendency to demonize EBD students in ways that lead to diminish their chances for success. The research provides a basis for assessing which prevention and intervention programs have likelihood to succeed in the relationship between academic failure and antisocial behavior (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). They go on to recommend some principles of promising school practices:

1. At the district, building, and classroom levels, educators should review practices that are not working to address antisocial behavior and academic problems and eliminate or modify these practices.
2. Schools should establish appropriate assessment practices for all students directed toward the early identification of problem behaviors and academic skill needs. Early identification of students defined as at risk is essential to

designing effective interventions.

3. Develop a school wide approach to modifying the learning climate in accord with research on effective schools.
4. Emphasize staff development as one of the top school priorities, and align staff development to building goals and programs. Ongoing staff development is essential if programs to reduce antisocial behavior and improve academic success are to be effective.
5. Increase the amount of adult-child contact time. Research on antisocial children reveals two related problems: lack of bonding with caring adults and lack of adult monitoring and supervision of children. Both problems imply too little time spent between adults and children when they are meaningfully engaged with one another (McEvoy & Welker, 2000, p. 138-9).

All the programs in the world won't help students with EBD if a human component doesn't exist. With every student, I tried to find something in common where we both had an interest. I used that common interest to develop a relationship which lead to respect and trust on both sides. I agree with Fore's (2002) suggestions for reducing burnout; everyone of them is important. McEvoy's (2000) suggestions for workable programming could be combined with reducing burnout while focusing on the students with EBD. Adult-child time is all important for the success of any program.

Chapter III: Summary

The purpose of this study was to conduct a review of the literature about the burnout with teachers of students with EBD. Two questions were asked:

1. What are the primary causes of burnout among EBD teachers?
2. What are solutions for EBD teachers with burnout?

A study showed that over one third of the EBD teachers reached (36%) planned to leave the field during the upcoming school year and that another 10% were not sure and were not making any commitments to the future at that time. By contrast, a study of all types of special educators showed that only 9% planned to leave their jobs in the near future (George, 1995). High stress levels and job dissatisfaction are likely reasons for EBD teachers to leave their jobs. A high rate of attrition affects the quality of education students with EBD receive and their behavior by nature demands more skilled and reliable teacher support (Nelson, 2001).

The modern era of special education services goes back to roughly the middle of the twentieth century. Many things have changed: our whole understanding of children with disabilities, technical definitions of these disabilities, classification systems, different views of the role that families play, curricula, assessment, professional standards, service delivery, education of teachers, and the changing roles of the professionals providing educational services (Paul, 1997). PL 94-142 was passed in 1975 and took effect in 1977. The law outlines rules for identification of the students and the special education services they could receive. It has shaped special education over the years (Kirk, 1986). The law was amended in 1990 to include language, identification, and transition planning. The name, also, was changed to the *Individuals with Disabilities*

Education Act (IDEA). It was further amended in 1997 to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with disabilities in the regular education environment (Yell, 1998). The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) *Education Act* of 2001 was primarily established to guarantee that all students in our schools will be taught by teachers who are “highly qualified.” All the while, a large percentage of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are not fully licensed teachers. This trickles down to multiple areas such as the quality of academic instruction and teacher attrition (Sutherland, 2005).

We live in complex times where the stress level on children being raised, as well as the adults who are their caregivers, seems to multiply with each succeeding generation (McEvoy, 2000).

Couple this with the above mentioned laws and there is no wonder that teachers of students with EBD face daily misgivings and a sense of being overwhelmed. In the review of the literature, I found a strongly recurring theme: it wasn't as much the kids themselves that created the stress, but the whole work environment. Studies showed surprisingly that the stress produced by student-teacher interactions is only part of the problem of teacher attrition (George, 1995). In a study, Center discovered that only three of the top ten stressors for teacher of students with EBD were directly associated with the EBD students themselves (Center, 2001)

So what are these other workplace stressors and what can be done about them? Organizational structure can have a large impact on a teacher's work environment. An ineffective administrator can horribly affect the work life of a teacher, much the same as a carefully organized structure can conceivably promote confidence leading to job

satisfaction (Wrobel, 1993). Excessive paperwork and lack of administrative support are consistently listed as sources of stress, attrition, and dissatisfaction for EBD teachers. Positive working environments often indicate satisfaction among teachers of students with EBD. Teachers of students with EBD report isolation from colleagues, disappointment with non-participating parents, frustration with an overabundance of paperwork, and lack of principal support (Nelson, 2001).

From another perspective in this recurring theme:

The most frequently mentioned source of dissatisfaction was the increased “paperwork” associated with legal and regulatory requirements in special education. If job satisfaction is to be improved for special educators which will allow them to devote more of their energies to directly working with students and colleagues, this concern must be addressed. Approaches to help ameliorate this condition could involve reducing federal and state bureaucratic requirements, preparing teachers to be more efficient in handling paperwork, providing more clerical assistance, and differentiated staffing arrangements that allow individual members of intervention teams to focus on roles and responsibilities which they prefer and which they are proficient (Zabel, 2001, p. 138).

It is common knowledge that a shortage does exist among special educators, particularly those educators teaching students with EBD. Shortages mean short of staff, and for those who are currently teaching translates into an extra workload. It also has many negative implications for students with EBD because personnel shortages often lead to reduced and inadequate services provided for students (Singh, 1996).

Wrobel (1993) reviewed recent literature and found the following:

Teachers burn out or fail in their careers for complex and varied reasons, but the training that teachers receive is thought to be a primary contributor to their success or failure. It would seem that the current training system as a whole is not adequately meeting either the need for EBD teachers or the EBD teachers' needs. The apparent recent increase in formal studies in the area of teacher attrition in special education is encouraging, but a clear need remains for studies focused specifically in the field of EBD. At a minimum, training programs must ensure that individuals seeking a career in EBD are aware of the significant potential for burnout and failure so they can make informed career decisions. Individual coping strategies and skills for managing stress and avoiding burnout are important and should be taught as part of EBD teacher training. Preservice training should focus on competency building in those activities in which the teacher will be spending the most time. Finally, the EBD teacher must be given a mechanism for evaluating his or her practice and developing new skills. (p. 17-21)

McEvoy and Welker (2000) conducted a study on antisocial behavior, academic failure, and school climate. They found that the school climate literature emphasizes the capacities of students to succeed; it carefully avoids the all too often tendency to demonize EBD students in ways that lead to diminish their chances for success. The research provides a basis for assessing which prevention and intervention programs have likelihood to succeed in the relationship between academic failure and antisocial behavior (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). They go on to recommend some principles of promising school practices:

1. At the district, building, and classroom levels, educators should review practices that are not working to address antisocial behavior and academic problems and eliminate or modify these practices.
2. Schools should establish appropriate assessment practices for all students directed toward the early identification of problem behaviors and academic skill needs. Early identification of students defined as at risk is essential to designing effective interventions.
3. Develop a school wide approach to modifying the learning climate in accord with research on effective schools.
4. Emphasize staff development as one of the top school priorities, and align staff development to building goals and programs. Ongoing staff development is essential if programs to reduce antisocial behavior and improve academic success are to be effective.
5. Increase the amount of adult-child contact time. Research on antisocial children reveals two related problems: lack of bonding with caring adults and lack of adult monitoring and supervision of children. Both problems imply too little time spent between adults and children when they are meaningfully engaged with one another (McEvoy & Welker, 2000, p. 138-9).

In the study done by Fore III, Martin, and Bender in 2002, they researched causes of burnout with EBD teachers and came up with some recommended solutions. One additional option, different from the others, is that they felt the profession must soon address the shortage of male role models. It has long been known that 60% to 76% of all

students receiving special education services are male and that, in general, male students experiencing behavioral problems seem to relate more positively to male teachers. For some students with behavior problems, maybe there is some merit in the provision of more male teachers with whom the students might better relate (Fore III, 2002). Their suggestions for reducing burnout are as follows:

1. Smaller class sizes as well as smaller caseloads are recommended to school districts to induce retention for EBD special education teachers.
2. Reduction in the myriad of paperwork for EBD special education teachers is recommended to retain these special educators.
3. More support as well as interaction from colleagues, administrators, and special education coordinators, in the same school, is recommended in helping reduce stress and burnout for EBD special education teachers.
4. Being able to observe other EBD special education teachers, for professional development purposes and collaboration, is recommended to decrease stress and burnout.
5. Planning periods for EBD special educators are highly recommended for school systems to help with retention.
6. Mentor programs, designed to assist new EBD special education teachers, are recommended for help in reducing stress.
7. Professional development workshops specifically designed for dealing with stress are recommended for school districts to try to help alleviate stress and burnout.
8. Developing a clearly defined job description can lead to reducing stress and

burnout.

9. Proper placement of students with EBD and special needs can further help in reducing stress and burnout.
10. Assistance provided with special education policies, procedures, and paperwork for new, EBD teachers is recommended to try to improve recruitment and retention.
11. Assistance for new EBD teachers with discipline and classroom management should help improve recruitment and retention.
12. Having an orientation for teachers new to the school district and including school policies and procedures will enhance the recruitment and retention of EBD special educators (Fore III, 2002).

I think McEvoy and Welker (2000) summed it up best:

We live in complex times where the stressors on children, and on the adults who care for them, seem to be more complicated with each generation. Educators, in particular, understand the generational quality of their work. Each group of students, with all of their challenges, will be followed by the next group, and the next—perhaps with even greater challenges facing them. Each generation will demand a consistent effort to build relationships and to capture the energy and commitment for success in school and beyond. In such complex times, hope must be a part of the relationships we establish with children. Hope depends on a shared purpose, on the belief that the future will be better, and on the belief that our past has meaning. (p. 141).

I miss being a teacher of students with EBD, not everyone else who retires says the same thing. I learned from them. I learned for a program to be successful you need to treat the students like you would want to be treated. I learned you need to spend time with the students, both inside the school setting and in the outside world. I learned that respect works both ways. I learned my education was never finished and I'll never finish educating others, especially about students with EBD.

References

- Braaten, S., & Gable, R. A. (1995). *Preventing school failure*, 39(3). Public Law P.L. 94-142.
- Center, D. B., & Callaway, J. M. (1999). Self reported job stress and personality in teachers of students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders*, 25(1), 41-51.
- Center, D. B., & Steventon, C. (2001). The EBD teacher stressors questionnaire. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 24(3), 323-325.
- Coleman, C. C. (1992). *Behavioral disorders theory and practice*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Costello, R. B. (Ed.). (1991). *Webster's college dictionary*. New York: Random House.
- Fore III, C., Martin, C., & Bender, W. N. (2002). Teacher burnout in special education: The causes and the recommended solutions. *High School Journal*, 86(1), 36-45.
- George, N. L., George, M. P., Gersten, R., & Grosenick, J. K. (1995). To leave or stay? An exploratory study of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Remedial and Special Education*, 16(4), 227-236.
- Katsiyannis, A., Landrum, T. J., Bullock, L., & Vinton, L. (1997). Certification requirements for teachers of students with emotional or behavioral disorders: A national survey. *Behavioral Disorders*, 22(3), 131-140.
- Kirk, S. A., & Gallagher, J. J. (1986). *Educating exceptional children*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Livingston, C. (2003). Get them out of my classroom: the effectiveness of the inclusion for students with EBD (UW-Stout Thesis, 2003).

- Lopata, C., Nida, R. E., & Marable, M. A. (2006). Progressive muscle relaxation: Preventing aggression in students with EBD. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 38*(4), 20-25.
- McEvoy, A., & Welker, R. (2000). Antisocial behavior, academic failure, and school climate: A critical review. *Journal of Emotional & Behavioral Disorders, 8*(3), 130-141.
- Nelson, J. R. (2001). Sources of occupational stress for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional & Behavioral Disorders, 9*(2), 123-131.
- Paul, J. L., Churton, M., Rosselli-Kostoryz, H., Morse, W. C., Marfo, K., Lavelly, C., & Thomas, D. (1997). *Foundations of special education*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Singh, K., & Billingsley, B. S. (1996). Intent to stay in teaching. *Remedial and Special Education, 17*(1), 37-47.
- Sutherland, K. S., Kenton, D. R., & Gunter, P. L. (2005). Teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders reported professional developmental needs: Differences between fully licensed and emergency-licensed teachers. *Preventing School Failure, 49*(2), 41-46.
- Wedell, K. (1999). '...and what about the "E" needs in EBD?'. *British Journal of Special Education, 26*(4), 1.
- Wrobel, G. (1993). Preventing school failure for teachers: Training for a lifelong career in EBD. *Preventing School Failure, 37*(2), 16-21.

Yell, M. L., Rogers, D., & Rogers, E. L. (1998). The legal history of special education:

What a long, strange trip it's been. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(4), 219-228.

Zabel, R. H., & Zabel, M. K. (2001). Revisiting burnout among special education

teachers: Do age, experience, and preparation still matter? *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(2), 128-139.