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THE PREPARATION AND SELF-EFFICACY OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH
EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES

A Dissertation Presented

by

CLAIRE F. HIGGINS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2016

Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies Program

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ABSTRACT

THE PREPARATION AND SELF-EFFICACY OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES

May 2016

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Inadequate preparation, combined with challenging work conditions, contribute to the shortage of skilled special educators in the United States (Levenson, 2011). Because teacher quality is linked to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2001), the discrepancy in access to qualified teachers has remained a serious issue, particularly for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD), whose intensive needs present great obstacles to learning. Although the research identifies strong content knowledge and social emotional competence as critical skills for educators (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2012; Shulman, 1986), current standards for licensure (as they apply to EBD teachers) largely overlook these attributes (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education, 2011a), leaving teachers poorly equipped to address the needs of the students in their classrooms and making them more vulnerable to burnout (Adams, 2013).

This mixed methods study explored the issues of teacher preparation and self-efficacy as they relate to secondary special educators who serve students with EBD in Massachusetts. This research employed a sequential explanatory design, utilizing 118 surveys and six telephone interviews to: (a) identify how secondary special educators who teach students with EBD are prepared; (b) explore their self-efficacy regarding their ability to teach secondary level content and to respond to the social and emotional needs of their students; and (c) understand how they explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom. Results revealed the limited effect of credentials (such as licensure and/or a degree) on EBD teacher self-efficacy as well as the impact of school culture. In particular, several implications emerged related to the preparation and support of this population of teachers: (a) content area credentials had no bearing on teacher self-efficacy and (b) special education credentials negatively impacted self-efficacy for teaching content, while (c) training in social and emotional learning positively impacted self-efficacy related to social emotional responsiveness and special education pedagogy. Additionally, results suggested that (d) private school employment increased self-efficacy for teaching content and (e) administrative support strengthened self-efficacy for applying special education strategies. Findings may be useful to school districts, educator preparation programs, and policymakers as they consider how to support educators in this field.

DEDICATION

For Imette, who will always inspire me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Across the nation, policymakers consider licensure (or certification) status to be a fundamental indicator of teacher quality that influences access to jobs, salary levels, and school evaluations. Title II-A, a part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), was designed to raise standards and increase accountability in public education—particularly for the achievement of vulnerable populations, including students with special needs—by establishing Highly Qualified (HQ) requirements for teachers (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MA DESE], 2011a). Specifically, it aimed to:

- (1) increase student academic achievement through strategies such as improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom and highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools; and
- (2) hold local educational agencies and schools accountable for improvements in student academic achievement. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

The policy established Highly Qualified (HQ) criteria that teachers and administrators must meet in order to work in specific roles in public schools. To obtain

HQ status, teachers must be fully certified (i.e., licensure cannot be waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis) (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MA DESE], 2011b) and must meet specific standards of preparation outlined by their state (Boe & Cook, 2006). In addition to possessing full certification, a highly qualified teacher (HQT) is defined as one who possesses (at minimum) a bachelor's degree and demonstrates content knowledge in each of the core subjects taught. Core academic areas include English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, civics, government, economics, history, geography, foreign languages, and arts (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), and subject-specific proficiency is typically measured through university degrees or teaching tests (MA DESE, 2011b). Social-emotional and behavioral competencies are not addressed in the HQT label.

Inadequate preparation, combined with challenging work conditions— a student population with multiple, complex diagnoses, scant curriculum, and low expectations of success— contribute to the persistent shortage of skilled special educators in the United States (Levenson, 2011; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010). Because teacher quality is linked to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Wayne & Youngs, 2003; Boe, Shin & Cook, 2005; cited by Boe & Cook, 2006), the lack of skilled special education teachers is a critical issue, particularly in light of the culture of accountability in public education. Its impact is wide-ranging, as unprepared special needs populations adversely affect schools' test scores, resulting in various sanctions to schools and faculty. Providing these students with highly skilled teachers will help to prepare them for general education classes and will narrow the achievement gap that exists among students who have disabilities and those who do not (Darling-

Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; cited by Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007).

Further, access to many postsecondary opportunities requires students to be optimally educated. Because special needs students, particularly those with emotional and behavioral disabilities, are more likely to be court-involved (Doren, Bullis, & Benz, 1996; National Center on Inclusive Education, 2013), life after graduation requires students to be equipped with the skills necessary to ensure their own welfare and safety as well as that of their communities. It is therefore a serious issue for students, parents, schools, and communities that, according to the Office of Postsecondary Education (2004), “More than 45% of high school students with special needs are being taught multiple subjects by special education teachers with minimal expertise in high school academic subjects” (cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010, p. 56). The problem disproportionately impacts Black students, eight percent of whom receive services for emotional disturbances accounted under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), compared with six percent of children overall (Kena et al., 2015). Children poor families and single-parent households are also overrepresented in the EBD population (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005, cited by Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009). In low-income areas, which include a high proportion of urban schools, the problem is even more pervasive (Boe, 2006; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010).

Nathan Levenson, former superintendent of Arlington, MA Public Schools, described his experiences in “Something Has Got to Change: Rethinking Special Education” (2011):

One day, in a special education room in a secondary school, I watched a bright, caring, passionate veteran teacher stand at the board and try to explain the day's math to one student, Earth science to another, biology to a third, and U.S. history to a fourth. This was the extra help intended to allow students with special needs to master rigorous grade-level material.... Every student sitting in front of her had already been taught that day by a certified teacher in that subject and was still struggling. We were sending the students to a generalist after they had not learned the material from an expert in the field. (p. 7)

Such a finding exemplifies a paradox in special education staffing: While general education teachers are expected to possess certification in their specific field, special educators, particularly those who serve emotionally and behaviorally disturbed students in substantially separate programs, are often required to teach a multitude of subjects outside of their field. Emotional and/or behavioral disturbance (EBD) is defined as:

One or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011a)

Schizophrenia is included in this label (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Substantially separate (sub-separate) or self-contained settings are those in which "IEP (Individualized Education Plan) services are provided outside the general education classroom more than 60% of the time" (Wilkins, 2011) due to the complex learning profiles of students.

Title II-A requirements, which allow many EBD teachers to retain Highly Qualified status despite teaching a multitude of subjects outside of their field through the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE), exacerbate the issue. Phased out from general use in 2007, the HOUSSE option remains available only to specific populations, including special educators who were deemed Highly Qualified in math, science, or English language arts at the time they were hired. Because the policy recognizes special education teachers who teach multiple core academic subjects as “generalists,” they are able to pursue the HOUSSE option to demonstrate expertise in each discipline.

The HOUSSE is defined by the state, which in Massachusetts is an Individual Professional Development Plan approved by a principal or supervisor that reflects subject-specific preparation. The example described below applies to generalist teachers:

At least 96 PDPs in their [special educators] plan should be distributed across each of these core areas, with a minimum of 10 PDPs in each core subject they teach. If there is a reason for the plan to focus more PDPs on one core academic subject than the other (such as alignment of PDPs to school/district goals, or specific professional development needs of teachers), then the PDPs may be

flexibly distributed as long as the distribution ensures that the teacher has at least 10 PDPs in each of the core academic subjects that he/she teaches and maintains 96 PDPs across the core subjects included in the plan. (MA DESE, 2011a)

Because the HOUSSE is designed by individual states and the federal guidelines that dictate its development are vague, the process through which teachers demonstrate content area proficiency and the level of skill they must exhibit could vary widely across states. Thus, the subjective nature of the HOUSSE detracts from its stated intention to establish national, uniform standards for educators. Further, the inconsistent application of subject matter competency requirements that the HOUSSE option affords enables EBD teachers to obtain HQT status in spite of unequal—and often weaker—levels of content expertise, which has significant implications for student achievement among sub-separate special needs populations (Higgins, 2015).

The intensive needs of students in sub-separate environments further complicate the work, leading to increased stress, particularly among educators who are unprepared to respond to such challenges (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In fact, one of the most critical shortages in educational staffing exists within this field: Teachers of EBD students have the highest rates of attrition (Brownell, Smith, & Miller, 1994; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Pullis, 1992; cited by Prather-Jones, 2010), estimated to be between nine and 10 percent (Hill, 2011; cited by Boe, 2013). They also have shorter careers than teachers of students with other disabilities (Singer, 1993; cited by Prather-Jones, 2010) and often leave within three to five years of entry into the field (Billingsley, 2007; George & George, 1995; Ingersoll, 2003; cited by Boe, 2013). In the 1999–2000 school

year alone, 25 percent of positions for teachers of students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders were left vacant or filled by substitutes because candidates holding the appropriate certification were not available (Division of Educational Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 2001; cited by Prather-Jones, 2010).

However, the number of teacher preparation programs nationwide that award degrees in the education of students with emotional disturbances is limited: Only 34 universities in 15 states offer programs specifically for this purpose, 13 of which award Bachelor's degrees while 24 offer advanced training. (Three universities offer both). The majority of these programs are clustered in Michigan (six) and Minnesota (seven). There are none in Massachusetts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). These statistics suggest a need for further examination of measures to improve both the preparation and retention of qualified special education teachers while also increasing the number of teachers entering the field (Boe & Cook, 2006).

Personal Interest in the Topic

The misalignment between what is expected of special educators serving EBD populations (the knowledge and skills they are required to demonstrate for the purpose of certification) and what is essential for them to perform effectively (the practical information necessary to execute lessons in specific high school disciplines) is an area that has interested me since I began working in special education eight years ago. After working as a mainstream (general education) English teacher for three years, I entered the field of special education when I accepted a job as a literacy specialist at a therapeutic alternative school for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. All of these students had been referred to the school from public districts that failed to meet their

needs. They came from disadvantaged backgrounds and many suffered abuse and neglect. Some had been psychiatrically hospitalized for months at a time; others had moved among foster families and group homes repeatedly, never settling in one place for long. As a result of their histories, these students entered school with significant gaps in their learning and with low self-concepts regarding their abilities. They had earned few high school credits and were at risk of dropping out. Because of their histories of failure, many students entered the classroom resistant to the work, sometimes unwilling even to make an attempt. They were unable to see the relevance between their schoolwork, the present state of their lives, and their hopes for the future.

My first few months in this role were marked by novel experiences and ignorant missteps. I often refused students' requests for breaks, stating that they had not worked long enough to earn them. I did not realize these were accommodations written into their IEPs and that shorter intervals enabled students to remain focused and motivated. When students paced around the room, I penalized them through redirections and lost points. I was not aware that they were entitled to movement breaks that provided sensory input and did not consider providing them with alternate tools. When students put their heads down as class started, my initial response was one of annoyance rather than support. The "high expectations" I believed I held for students led to dismal outcomes. Needless to say, those first few months were challenging for both me and my students. I began to wonder if this issue was pervasive. How prepared do most teachers of EBD students feel to respond to the intensive cognitive and emotional needs of this population?

I learned a lot from these experiences, which ultimately positioned me to earn certification in special education. With dual licenses in English and special education, I

achieved “highly qualified” status, and indeed, I had received training in a multitude of areas: I had completed coursework on exceptional needs and studied techniques with which to differentiate instruction. I had attended conferences and workshops addressing specific learning disabilities, emotional issues, and behavior management strategies. I had never been at a loss for resources regarding literacy development and the writing process, and both my undergraduate and graduate studies provided me with an understanding of literary analysis and secondary language arts curricula.

Though my experience and training to that point had informed my approach to working with students in crisis, I still lacked the skills to effectively teach the various subject areas I was responsible for presenting to students each day. One of my primary responsibilities was to teach supplementary courses that enabled students to recover lost credits. Throughout my tenure at the school, in addition to my content area of language arts, I taught health, physical education, business, and world cultures classes. These are disciplines in which I lacked background knowledge and credentials, and each class presented so many unanswered questions – for the students as well as for me. I often found myself faced with questions to which I was unsure how to respond. At first, I believed I was offering students valuable opportunities in teaching these courses, enabling them, in a sense, to expedite their own graduation. With experience, though, I began to question at what expense this was achieved.

In an effort to engage students, the curriculum for my classes included practical information on topics relevant to their lives. In health, for example, I covered issues such as nutrition, substance abuse, stress reduction, and reproductive health, using hands-on projects to complement unit objectives. I tried to appeal to students’ interests and

welcomed their questions as signs of their intellectual curiosity and academic engagement, but I worried about the impact of my limited knowledge base on my ability to teach them effectively. Would these students be better served by a teacher whose area of expertise lies within the discipline? Are secondary special educators adequately prepared to teach content outside of their field? Based on my own experiences and those of my colleagues, it seems they may not be.

These experiences have fueled my desire to research the preparation of special educators who work with EBD students, particularly from the perspectives of this population of teachers. I hope to explore what “highly qualified” should mean as it pertains to the quality of teachers of students with EBD and to use their input to identify guidelines regarding teachers’ social-emotional competence and content knowledge. I would like to investigate how both school districts and universities are preparing and supporting secondary special educators to teach students of diverse abilities across a variety of content areas and how prepared teachers feel upon beginning their work with students who have emotional and behavioral challenges.

Problem Statement

The intensive needs of students in sub-separate programs present great obstacles to learning. Many of these students have been diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders and are arguably the most challenging and vulnerable population in our schools: Although the percentage of students with EBD in public schools is small, they account for more than 50 percent of behavioral incidents and require significant resources to effectively serve (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002; cited by Boe, 2013). Compared to students in other disability categories, they have the highest dropout rates, are twice as

likely to become teenage mothers (National Center on Inclusive Education, 2013), and are 13 times more likely to be arrested while still in school (Doren, Bullis, & Benz, 1996). Only 40 percent of students with EBD graduate from high school, and only 10 to 25 percent pursue postsecondary education of any kind (National Center on Inclusive Education, 2013). In spite of the increasing frequency of EBD diagnoses (Levenson, 2011), the social-emotional domain is often neglected in teacher preparation and credentialing, leaving a population of educators poorly equipped to address and respond to the needs of the students in their classrooms (Adams, 2013). In fact, only 47 percent of high school teachers nationwide reported having any training in social or emotional skills related to learning (Bridgeland, Bruce & Hariharan, 2012). Further, although enrollment in EBD programs disproportionately impacts students of color (Kena et al., 2015; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005, cited by Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2009), cultural competency is not specifically emphasized in the training or licensure of such teachers (MA DESE, 2011b; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). For students in sub-separate settings, many of whom are at increased risk of dropping out of high school due to the unique challenges they face, the issue of teacher quality becomes even more acute.

In order to close the achievement gap that exists among students who have disabilities and those who do not, students in special education must have access to “content rich learning experiences based on academic standards” (Drame & Pugach, 2010, p. 58) that are complemented by “thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to [their] social-emotional skills” (Elias, 2006, p. 5). This is more likely to occur when special educators are qualified to teach intrapersonal skills as well as core content.

However, research that centers on the preparation of sub-separate special educators is limited; thus, I explored the issue of teacher quality as it relates to secondary special educators who serve students with emotionally and behaviorally disabilities. Teacher quality will generally be defined by the licenses teachers hold and teachers' perceptions of their content, pedagogical, and social-emotional knowledge.

The following questions guided my research:

- (1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?
- (2) What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in teaching students secondary level content?
- (3) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?
- (4) How do these educators explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?

Historical Context

The focus on teacher quality has existed since 1848, when the first school for children with special needs (The Experimental School for Teaching and Training Idiotic Children) was founded in Massachusetts. Although special educator preparation has long been considered a critical issue, students with disabilities have been denied consistent access to capable teachers—those who facilitate their success with challenging and appropriate curricula as well as their social and emotional growth—since the inception of

the field. At the time, a competent, well-trained teacher was considered one of the most important factors in the success of students with intensive needs, who were commonly referred to as “mentally handicapped,” “mentally deficient” and/or “mentally defective” (League for Preventive Work, 1917).

In the early 1900s, as increasing numbers of children with special needs received their education through local public districts (rather than state-run residential institutions), schools became responsible for providing “a type of instruction adapted to the needs of the [mentally deficient]” (League for Preventive Work, 1917, p. 3). Dr. Walter E. Fernald explains the role of the teacher in these segregated “special” classes in *Importance of the Early Discovery and Treatment of Defectives in Small Public School Classes* (1906):

Many of the “mentally deficient” children are apparently so nearly normal that their defects are only noticeable to a discerning teacher or to persons who have made a study of this class, and many are bright looking and attractive; but all are weak in will power, deficient in reasoning power and judgment, hence easily influenced for evil. Unless they are properly cared for and influenced they will retrograde, fall into evil ways and become willing victims of the vicious.... Will it not pay a city to develop and educate these children so far as possible to a standard of useful, self-supporting, self-controlling citizenship, rather than later on to support them and their numerous progeny in almshouses and prisons? (cited by the League for Preventive Work, 1917, p. 12).

Teacher Training and Quality

A “special class” teacher was not considered qualified unless “she understands the signs and symptoms of mental defect and has actually observed and studies groups of defective children” (League for Preventive Work, 1917, p. 6). Thus, special educators were expected to be able to identify those with disabilities and to teach them enough to live independently and to avoid incarceration or otherwise burdening society. To “make such preparation a part of the required course of instruction” (League for Preventive Work, 1917, p. 6), training programs for “special” teachers emerged in Massachusetts, commonly known as normal schools. For example, the State Normal School in Salem offered weekly conferences facilitated by “special class supervisors” or other educational leaders. Further, resources such as *The Boston Way*, a curriculum guide developed in 1917 by special educators in Boston, were published and widely utilized among those new to the field. However, the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers was a challenge. According to the League for Preventive Work (1917), “Most persons look only to the amount they will receive in payment for their services.... Few, very few, are fitted for the work” (p. 19).

Although professional development for teachers was offered in the early twentieth century, it primarily addressed ideas for curriculum development based on the past experiences of special teachers (League for Preventive Work, 1917). The curriculum for special classes varied greatly, as their establishment was so novel that few definite regulations and laws existed to guide school practices. For example, the Experimental School for Teaching and Training Idiotic Children (which later became known as the

Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Youth), placed the greatest emphasis on the development of practical skills:

As it is not from a knowledge of books that such children are to receive material benefit, but from an acquaintance with the duties of every-day life... we have given more attention to the muscular development, moral culture and exercise of memory, than to the routine of exercises peculiar to schools for those more favored children and youth whose powers will be developed with much less assistance from their teachers than these children require. (Howe, Jarvis, & McDonald, 1858, p. 20)

Students were taught to dig, saw, and split wood, all chores which were performed regularly at the school. They were sent on errands to purchase goods and deliver messages. Girls were taught to sew and knit, and the older ones helped their younger peers to dress and groom themselves. Similarly, in special schools in Beverly, girls were assigned domestic duties like cooking and cleaning, while boys performed maintenance tasks and landscaping, carpentry, and metalwork. In Newton, however, the curriculum emphasized drawing and music, along with basic arithmetic and literacy skills.

Storytelling was used to teach geography and labor skills, and students spent much time in workrooms. Though content varied throughout the state, the curricula of the special schools informed the development of teacher training programs— and expectations for teacher knowledge and skill sets— in spite of the low expectations they reflected for students with disabilities.

Conceptual Framework

In the United States, the discrepancy in students' access to qualified teachers remains a serious issue (Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; cited by Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011, p. 246). This is particularly true for middle and high school students who have been diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders and are taught in substantially separate settings by teachers who are often unlicensed in core academic areas (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2004; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010). In Massachusetts, which has one of the most comprehensive special needs identification processes and services in the nation, combined with strict accountability guidelines that do not exempt special needs students from state-mandated testing requirements in content area subjects (MA DESE, 2014), this problem is especially critical.

Because this issue is relatively new, no theoretical framework exists through which to analyze it. Thus, I have attempted to synthesize a framework by combining concepts about competence in teaching from three bodies of literature: 1. the role of subject-specific knowledge, 2. the role of social-emotional competence, and 3. the role of self-efficacy. The work of Shulman (1986; 1987), Jennings and Greenberg (2009), Bandura (1977; 1994), Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998), and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) informed the development of this conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1.1.

EBD Teacher Self-Efficacy



Figure 1.1. All the pieces of the puzzle: Factors in the self-efficacy of teachers of students with EBD

The Role of Subject-Specific Knowledge

Lee Shulman's work (1986; 1987), in its exploration of teachers' skill development and the sources of their knowledge, aimed to contribute to the professionalization of the field by clarifying standards for educators. Shulman's ideas (1986; 1987) inspired further research on teacher quality measures as well as educational reform efforts through their implications for teacher preparation. His perspective on teacher knowledge offers insight into the depth of understanding necessary for effective instruction and. In his article, "Those who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching"

(1986), Shulman provides a brief history of teaching exams, highlighting the contrast between those of 1875, which focused almost exclusively on content knowledge, and more recent tests, which favor knowledge of teaching strategy over subject expertise.

Shulman (1986) argued that research on teaching overlooks subject-specific competencies, and his work reflects an attempt to remedy this, tracing teachers' "intellectual biograph[ies]", the "source of their comprehension of the subjects they teach" (p. 8). Through interviews, activities and classroom observations over the course of a year, he distinguished three forms of content knowledge essential to skillful teaching: subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curricular knowledge. Shulman's ideas remain influential in the field and continue to have application in discussions of teacher quality today. Thus, they provide an appropriate framework for my own research.

Shulman (1986) defined subject matter content knowledge as "the amount and organization of knowledge... in the mind of the teacher" (p. 9), while pedagogical content knowledge refers to "the aspects of content most germane to its teachability.... the ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others" (p. 9). Finally, curricular knowledge entails knowledge of a variety of alternative educational materials for a specific subject; familiarity with materials students are using in other classes at the same time; and awareness of past and future curricular content in the same discipline (Shulman, 1986). According to Shulman (1986),

Teachers must not only be capable of defining for students the accepted truths in a domain. They must also be able to explain why a particular proposition is deemed

warranted, why it is worth knowing, and how it relates to other propositions, both within the discipline and without, both in theory and in practice. (p. 9)

Though Shulman (1986) addresses three types of teacher knowledge and recognizes that each is essential, he places an emphasis on the importance of subject matter content knowledge. He refers to this as the “missing paradigm” (p. 6) and questions the impact of teachers’ limited expertise on students’ learning: “What pedagogical prices are paid when the teacher’s subject matter competence is itself compromised by deficiencies in prior education or ability?” (p. 8)

The research of Boe, Shin, and Cook (2007), which explored the preparation of general and special education teachers (GETs and SETs, respectively), supports Shulman’s beliefs. According to their findings, “Beginning SETs lag behind GETs in knowledge of subjects taught; therefore, SETs should become better prepared in the subject matter they teach” (p. 165). Redefining what highly qualified means as it refers to sub-separate teachers may hold promise for the achievement of students with disabilities (Levenson, 2011).

The Role of Social-Emotional Competence

Patricia Jennings and Mark Greenberg’s (2009) theory of teachers’ social-emotional competence (SEC) also has application in defining teacher quality. Teacher SEC contributes to “a classroom climate that is more conducive to learning and promotes positive developmental outcomes among students” (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 491), influencing “everything from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout” (Jones, Bouffard, &

Weissbourd, 2013, p. 62). These skills are especially important for special educators in alternative settings, many of whom serve students with emotional impairments, who are “in greatest need of a supportive relationship with their teacher” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999, cited by Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 501).

According to Robitaille (2007),

Successful interpersonal relationships are the foundation for the development of cognitive competencies (attention, motivation, problem- solving and self-esteem), social competencies (peer relationships), and emotional competencies (emotional awareness, appropriate emotional expression and emotional regulation). Although all students benefit from positive relationships with teachers, for EBD students, emotional engagement between teachers and pupils is viewed as a prerequisite to successful practice and is the basis upon which successful practice is built (Greenhalgh, 1994; Murphy & Duncan, 1998; Pianta, 1999). (p. 8)

A teacher’s thoughtful and sensitive responses to the behavioral challenges of these students could have a long-term positive impact on the students’ social and emotional development (Lynch & Cichetti, 1992, cited by Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Further, a number of specific behaviors, including the ability to maintain a positive demeanor, show empathy toward individuals from a diversity of backgrounds and cultures, demonstrate assertiveness rather than aggression, provide encouragement and meaningful praise, listen, and use effective communication skills are indicative of teachers’ skill in fostering strong relationships with students (Colwell & O’Conner, 2003; Huges, 1997; Landrum et al, 2003; Murphy & Duncan, 1998; Pianta, 1999; Polk, 2006; Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson et al., 2001; Visser, 2000; Vissor, Cole, &

Daniels, 2003; Walls, Nardi, VonMinden, 2002; cited by Robitaille, 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2012).

Conversely, educators who lack the skills necessary to effectively respond to misbehavior may have lasting negative effects on students, leading to increased time off-task, more frequent undesirable behaviors, and a decline in student achievement. Additionally, teachers may suffer increased levels of stress, which is heightened when teachers have multiple disruptive students in a classroom (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1992, cited by Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Thus, EBD teachers who lack these competencies are particularly vulnerable to burnout, exacerbating the shortage of educators in the field (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). However, in spite of a wealth of research that indicates its importance on outcomes for both students and teachers (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben & Gravesteyn, 2012; cited by Zinsser, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2013), the critical role of teachers' social and emotional competencies is often overlooked (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

The Role of Self-Efficacy

The notion of self-efficacy, defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71), also has significance for the professional development of teachers. Bandura (1977) identified four factors in the development of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments (successful experiences), vicarious experience (observation of a peer's success with a task), verbal persuasion (credible and encouraging feedback), and physiological state (a positive mood). Performance

accomplishments bear the greatest impact (Bandura, 1977). Conversely, experiencing failure firsthand or witnessing another's struggles, receiving discouraging feedback or none at all, and feelings of stress and anxiety can negatively impact one's belief in his or her abilities. More recent research has built upon Bandura's sources of self-efficacy.

Applied to teaching, self-efficacy is a "judgment of [an educator's] capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Armor et al., 1976; Bandura, 1977; cited by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783). According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), such perceptions impact teachers' efforts and goals in the classroom, and those with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate greater willingness to try new and varied strategies to reach students. They tend to plan more and to persist in the face of obstacles (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Such qualities become particularly important when working with EBD students due to the unique challenges they both experience and present. As Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001) explain,

Greater efficacy enables teachers to be less critical of students when they make errors (Ashton & Webb, 1986), to work longer with a student who is struggling (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), and be less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Soodak & Podell, 1993).... [They] exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1984; Hall, Burley, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1992), have greater commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Trentham, Silvern, & Brogdon, 1985), and are more likely to stay in teaching (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982). (pp. 783-784)

Not surprisingly, teachers' self-efficacy also influences student achievement, motivation, and self-concept (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). As Figure 1.2, below, depicts, the construct of teacher efficacy is cyclical: it is both a factor in and a product of itself (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), as it incorporates a “feedback loop whereby performance and its consequences become new sources of efficacy information” (De George-Walker, 2010, p. 4).

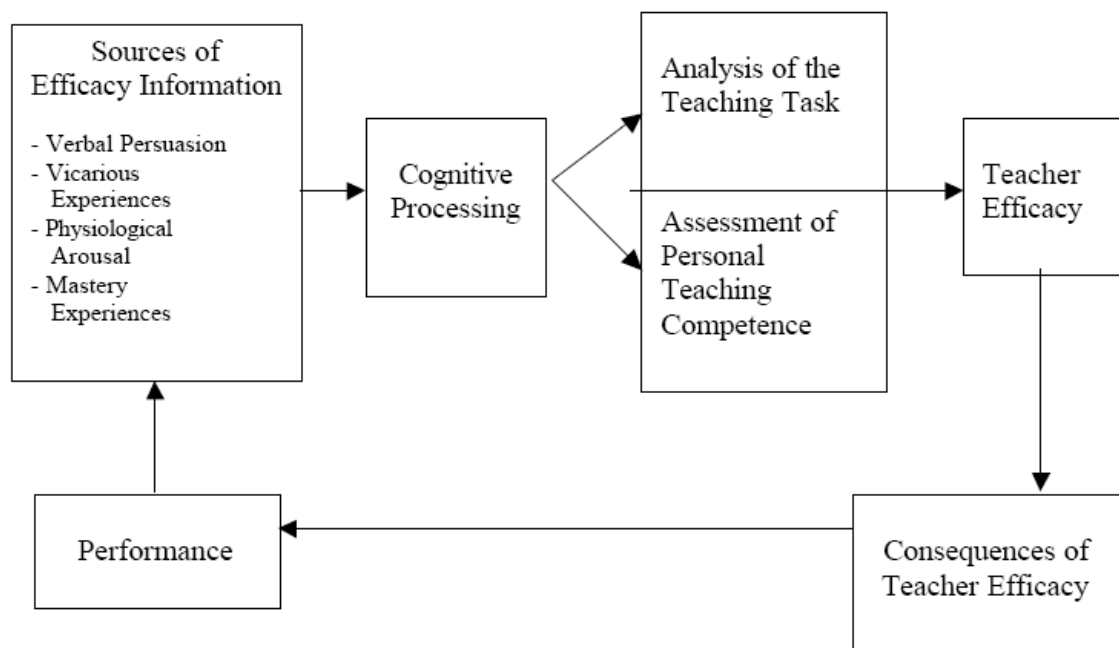


Figure 1.2. Model of teacher efficacy (Source: Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 228; cited by De George-Walker, 2010)

The work of Shulman (1986), Jennings and Greenberg (2009), and Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001) raises thought-provoking questions that concern me, as I have observed classrooms where teachers lacked content expertise, erring in explanations of key concepts and skills, and have also witnessed staff members initiate hostile

interactions with students, destroying trust in relationships. For students in alternative programs, many of whom have specific learning disabilities or low frustration tolerance, these missteps bear an even greater impact. Although their work does not focus on a specific population, it has particular application to those who come from low-income backgrounds or have special needs, as these are the groups that are most likely to have under-qualified teachers. The issue, then, becomes one of social justice.

Types of teacher knowledge, informed by Shulman's theory (1986), combined with educators' social-emotional competence (as defined by Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (1998) beliefs regarding the self-assessment of one's teaching competence, together comprise a complete puzzle. The ideas of these theorists provided a framework that guided my study of the literature as well as my interpretation of the factors that contribute to the self-efficacy of teachers of emotionally and behaviorally disturbed students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although a great deal of existing research centers around subject-specific knowledge, social-emotional learning, teacher preparation, self-efficacy, and special education, less attention has been paid to the intersection of these areas. In order to find research studies more closely aligned with my area of interest, I explored a wide range of resources, using a host of search terms. These included *content knowledge, pedagogy, social and emotional learning, social-emotional competence, emotional intelligence, teacher efficacy, self-efficacy, and teacher self-efficacy*. I also used terms such as *special education, substantially separate, therapeutic education, students with disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, highly qualified teacher, teacher preparation, and teacher education*. I eventually narrowed my scope by identifying and consulting academic journals, websites and publications I found to be especially concerned with these bodies of literature, including *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, Journal of Teacher Education, Child Development*, and the website of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

The Literature Review below draws heavily, but not exclusively, from these sources, and is organized under five headings: 1) Pedagogy and Content Knowledge, 2)

Social and Emotional Learning and Competence, 3) EBD Teacher Quality, 4) Teacher Self-Efficacy, 5) Conclusions about the State of Literature. Throughout the Literature Review I was mindful of the need to synthesize a research base for my exploration of this topic, because currently very little research has concentrated in this area of intersection, particularly as it applies to EBD students.

Pedagogy and Content Knowledge

Research in the areas of content knowledge and pedagogy is diverse and extensive: Studies have been conducted at the local, national, and international levels and encompass varied methodologies, including interviews, surveys, exams, and secondary data analysis. Sample sizes are wide-ranging as well, along with the focus of the research, which has explored the prevalence of out-of-field teaching assignments for special educators, the impact of alternative licensure options on teacher preparation, components of teacher education, and retention rates of special education teachers, among other issues. However, research that centers on the amount and type of preparation teachers of EBD students have received is far more limited. In this section, therefore, I will concentrate on a small number of recent (2007-2012) studies that build on and incorporate a wide range of previous work, and as a group represent the variety of methodologies currently being used to explore this problem.

Boe, Shin, and Cook (2007) analyzed the preparation of general and special education teachers through secondary data analysis across various dimensions, including content knowledge and pedagogical techniques. In their work, Boe et al. (2007) address the contradiction between federal policy developed in 2001 (i.e., NCLB) to promote

teacher quality and the findings from a 2002 U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) report which stated that teacher preparation had little to no effect on student achievement. Because this report concluded that solid verbal ability and content knowledge are the most significant factors in teacher efficacy (U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), 2002, cited by Boe et al., 2007), the USDOE emphasized content knowledge in its interpretation of NCLB's definition of a highly qualified teacher— largely ignoring other elements of full certification— and focused its efforts on enhancing teacher quality through increased attention to subject mastery in professional development, for both general and special education teachers (GETs and SETs, respectively).

The conflict inherent in this interpretation presented a dilemma regarding resource allocation within teacher education programs; that is, whether or not resources should be distributed proportionately to support the promotion of content knowledge, pedagogy and practicums equally. Through the analysis of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Boe et al. (2007) examined relationships between amount of teacher preparation and educator quality factors, such as full licensure, a degree in one's primary teaching field, degree level, and self-reported feelings of being well-prepared to teach (including the ability to teach subject matter, plan lessons, adapt instructional materials, use varied methods, incorporate technology, assess students, and manage discipline). Because several reviews of the research (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004; cited by Boe et al., 2007) suggested that teacher preparation programs that involve intensive instruction in pedagogy as well as a student-teaching experience tend to produce more effective teachers, Boe et al. (2007) analyzed the relationship between the amount of preparation in these specific areas and the teacher

qualification outcomes identified above. Provided it included these features, the type of program (traditional teacher preparation, which involves student-teaching and leads to a degree in education, or alternative teacher preparation programs, which “vary widely in the amount of preparation provided and in their institutional sponsorship” [Feistritzer, 2005; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; cited by Boe et al., 2007, p. 158] but are designed to provide a faster route to a career in education) did not appear to have an impact.

Their sample consisted of 10,952 K-12 public school educators who had completed the SASS (1999-2000) and were in their first five years of teaching. Of these, 1,214 were special education teachers and 9,738 were general education teachers. Chi-square tests and logistic regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between each teacher preparation and each teacher qualification variable. These tests were conducted separately for general and special educators, and results revealed that 85 percent of GETs and 83 percent of SETs had extensive preparation (characterized by the length of teaching practicums, of which approximately 10 weeks was typical, and amount of instruction in pedagogy, including methods courses, supervision, and mentorship) upon entering the field. Seventy-five percent of SETs with extensive preparation were fully certified in their principal teaching assignment, compared to 33 percent of SETs with some preparation and 14 percent of SETs with little to no preparation. Higher percentages of extensively prepared SETs were teaching in-field (i.e., the focus of their undergraduate or master’s degree corresponded with their main teaching assignment) than those with lesser preparation. Those with extensive preparation were also more likely to report being well equipped to teach content, plan lessons, and use varied instructional methods, among other tasks.

The self-reported information was positive for both GETs and SETs with extensive preparation, though it varied slightly with respect to the competency. However, GETs reported feeling well prepared to teach subject matter in much greater numbers (11 percentage points) than SETs. These findings suggest the value of instruction in pedagogy and field experience in producing special educators who are fully certified and teaching in-field, thus challenging the conclusions of the USDOE report (2002) regarding the efficacy of these components.

In a 2010 study, Drame and Pugach addressed the issue of teacher quality in high-needs classrooms, particularly with regard to the content expertise of special educators. Because extensive research indicates that the quality of instruction influences student learning (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Salinas, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010), Drame and Pugach (2010) assert that “a high quality teacher is the most important element in the education of children and youth” (p. 58). Thus, the number of special educators teaching out-of-field negatively impacts students who have disabilities.

To address this issue, the HOUSSE (High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation) process was developed. This policy allowed states to create their own evaluation systems “for documenting the quality of subject matter or content knowledge possessed by veteran teachers” (Blank, 2003; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010, p. 56). The HOUSSE provision enabled special educators who were highly qualified in science, mathematics, or language arts but who taught multiple core content areas in sub-separate settings to achieve highly qualified status in the other subjects within two years of employment. To do so, they could demonstrate competence in those areas through a

single HOUSSE covering multiple subjects. However, the HOUSSE provision is vague, particularly for special education teachers (Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007; Education Trust, 2003; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010), as states were allowed to develop a separate HOUSSE specifically for them “provided that any adaptations of the State’s HOUSSE would not establish a lower standard for the content knowledge requirements for special education teachers and meets all the requirements for a HOUSSE for regular education teachers” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

By conducting a mixed methods study that surveyed teams of “teacher quality policy experts” (p. 59), Drame and Pugach (2010) investigated the extent to which HOUSSE was used to “evaluate in a rigorous yet reasonable fashion those who teach multiple subjects to students with a variety of needs” (p. 58). They found that interpretations of HOUSSE varied widely, and the lack of clarity has challenged districts’ ability to staff high schools with qualified special education teachers (Drame & Pugach, 2010).

Kirchhoff and Lawrenz (2011) also investigated content knowledge and teacher retention. Through an inductive qualitative research study, the authors explored the shortage of highly qualified STEM teachers in high-needs schools. Their study was guided by one initial research question: “What are Noyce scholars’ reasons for the decisions made on the career paths of becoming and remaining teachers in high-needs schools?” (Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011, p. 247)

Employing an interview protocol that addressed broad areas of interest to and later zeroed in on scholars' particular career paths, Kirchhoff and Lawrenz (2011) conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 38 Noyce scholarship recipients

(“scholars”). The Noyce program has high academic standards and includes specific criteria about where recipients may teach. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, and the majority of respondents were White. Coding was used to validate relationships among factors addressed by the participants as impacting their career paths. Through a grounded theory approach, three major areas of interest emerged: factors that influenced participants’ 1) decision to enter the teaching profession, 2) choice of where to teach, and 3) election to remain teaching in high-need settings.

Findings suggest that support within their teacher preparation program (in the form of faculty and cohort members) as well as within their teaching environment (from colleagues, mentors, and administrators) greatly influenced participants’ decisions both to teach in high-needs settings and to remain teaching in such environments. Lack of support contributed to discontentment and led to burnout from participants’ current setting and in some cases, from the profession entirely. Realistic expectations, developed as a result of teacher education programs, and the alignment of content preparation and actual courses taught were shown to contribute to teacher retention (Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011). By exploring the individual motivations of teachers and suggesting critical components of teacher preparation programs, the work of Kirchhoff and Lawrenz (2011) has application to teacher recruitment and retention in shortage areas and high-needs environments.

Kleickmann et al.’s (2012) study also addressed teacher knowledge and education. Focusing specifically on the expertise of secondary math teachers, their research built on the work of Freidrichsen et al. (2009), which identified various sources of educators’ knowledge, including teachers’ K-12 experiences, teacher education

programs and professional development, and teaching experiences. The article also addressed the importance of reflection on instructional practice and ongoing participation in formal and informal learning activities in improving teaching skills (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Park & Oliver, 2008; Van Driel, 2010; Zembal-Saul et al., 2002; cited by Kleickmann et al., 2012).

Through a quantitative study involving objective tests, Kleickmann et al. (2012) compared the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and content knowledge (CK) of four groups of math teachers in Germany at different points in their careers. Because teachers' knowledge of subject matter is closely linked to student achievement in mathematics (Baumert et al., 2010; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; cited by Kleickmann et al., 2012), developing a greater understanding of how the structure of teacher education programs and professional training affects the development of CK and PCK could be a key component in educational reform. Their investigation of the elements of teacher education programs found that intentional learning opportunities, including university coursework, professional workshops, and participation in mentoring, are "especially conducive to the development of CK and PCK, and that teaching experience alone is insufficient" (Kleickmann et al., 2012, p.100). Their work suggests that ongoing opportunities to engage in a variety of forms of professional development are effective in enriching content knowledge and improving pedagogical skills.

Social and Emotional Learning and Competence

The research on social and emotional learning tends to be diverse with respect to sample sizes, populations, and methodologies. Based on my review, most of the relevant

studies are large in scale and were conducted at the regional or national levels. A reasonable starting point for reviewing this literature can be found in Elias (2006) who, along with Jennings and Greenberg (2009), articulated the need for social-emotional learning (SEL) and competence in schools. In his work, Elias (2006) argued that SEL has the potential to address significant school-related issues that have received widespread attention since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999, including bullying, violence, and mental illness. Elias' (2006) work provides practical guidelines for preparing and supporting teachers as they develop and implement curricula related to SEL, highlighting the critical nature of staff training and guidance in such efforts.

A study conducted by Bridgeland et al. (2012) explored the role of social and emotional learning in schools and teachers' and students' beliefs about SEL. SEL "involves the processes of developing competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (Bridgeland et al., 2012, p. 4). SEL includes "the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures" (Bridgeland et al., 2012, p. 16) and is related to cultural competence and sensitivity (National Education Association, 2002-2015). Through a series of focus groups with teachers in Philadelphia and Chicago, a national telephone survey of 605 prekindergarten through twelfth grade teachers, and personal interviews with 15 middle and high school students, their research focused on teachers' beliefs about the impact of SEL. Several important themes emerged from the research, including the findings that teachers understand, value, and endorse SEL for all students and believe it contributes to achievement in school and in life. Their work suggests that SEL has a profound impact on student learning and supports the need

for explicit instruction and modeling of SEL in schools. However, all participants in the study had ties to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the organization that published the report, potentially creating bias in the responses.

The research of Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, and Schellinger (2011) further support the value of SEL. Durlak et al. (2011) presented findings from a meta-analysis of 213 studies of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 270,034 K-12 students. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted searches in four types of sources (online databases, reference lists, print journals, and websites oriented toward youth development) to create a nonbiased, representative sample of relevant studies. Studies in the sample were written in English prior to December 31, 2007; addressed the development of at least one SEL skill; focused on students between the ages of five and 18 without identified learning or behavioral issues; included a control group and reported sufficient information to determine effect sizes.

The studies were coded for intervention format (classroom-based; those administered by researchers or other non-school staff; and multicomponent, which typically included interventions implemented by various school personnel and/or family members), use of recommended practices, and student outcomes across six dimensions. These categories included interpersonal attitudes, social and emotional issues, emotional distress, conduct issues, positive social behaviors, and academic performance. Coding was conducted by research assistants and inter-rater agreement of 0.90 was established, and data was analyzed “based on a random effects model using maximum likelihood estimation procedure” (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001, cited by Durlak et al., 2011, p. 411).

Findings indicated that participants in SEL programs showed substantial progress toward desired outcomes. Additionally, the study revealed that classroom-based interventions demonstrated statistically significant positive effects in all six areas, while multicomponent interventions produced four significant outcomes, and those implemented by non-school personnel generated three. These findings suggest the widespread positive impact of SEL programs across a range of ages and indicate that teachers and other school-based staff are capable of successfully implementing these programs. The work of Durlak et al. (2011) highlights the promise that social and emotional learning holds for student achievement. Like the research of Bridgeland et al. (2012), however, it should be noted that this work has ties to CASEL as well. One of the study's lead researchers and authors, Roger Weissberg, serves on the Board of Directors at CASEL, which raises the possibility of bias in the study.

Because much of the recent research has been associated with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and identifies only positive effects of SEL curricula on outcomes for students while acknowledging very few limitations, findings in this area should be interpreted with caution. Additional, independently conducted research is warranted.

EBD Teacher Quality

Research specific to teachers of students with who have emotional and behavioral disorders has been predominantly quantitative in nature. The studies tend to have sample sizes of fewer than 75 participants, perhaps due to the narrow population focus and thus limited accessibility of potential study participants. Due to relatively small sample sizes,

findings may not be representative of the larger population of special educators who serve EBD students. However, the research that exists addresses a range of issues relating to this population of educators, including teacher preparation, attrition and retention, and emotional intelligence, and most of it has been studied from the perspective of teachers in the field.

Wanyonyi-Short's (2010) quantitative, survey-based study explored educators' beliefs regarding the relative value of specific skills and attributes for teachers serving populations with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) as well as their proficiency in those areas. The sample consisted of 75 educators who graduated from teacher preparation programs with a focus on serving EBD students. Though the sample size was small, it was not unexpected, as a higher percentage of teachers of EBD students enter the profession through alternative certification routes than other special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2006, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Participants' certification status was reflective of that of most teachers in EBD programs: many beginning teachers are not fully licensed, are licensed in other fields, or have emergency certification (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez, & Bradley, 2005; cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Survey items included questions about teacher preparation experiences as well as a rating scale for 88 specific competencies, which were adapted from the Qualification and Preparation of Teachers of Exceptional Children study (Mackie, Kvaraceus, & Williams, 1957; cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). These were correlated to the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) content standards and skill sets for teachers of EBD students, which are the most widely used by state education agencies (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010).

Wanyonyi-Short's (2010) findings revealed that participants viewed competencies related to the development and features of learners, classroom environments, students' interaction, and instructional planning as very important. A clear understanding of EBD and "knowledge of causes of such behavior as temper tantrums, stealing, enuresis, and nail biting" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72) also received a high mean rating and was ranked tenth overall. An understanding of "the advantages of providing experiences in which students can be successful" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72), knowledge "of techniques adaptable to classroom situations for relieving tensions and promoting good mental health" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72), and the ability to counsel students about personal and vocational goals were also considered very important.

The study reflected participants' regard for the value of individualized instruction as well: The ability "to interpret special educational programs for, and the problems of pupils to the general public, regular school personnel, and non-school professional staff" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72) was ranked seventh and "an understanding of the advantages of flexibility of school programs and schedules to permit individual adjustment and development" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72) was ranked thirteenth. Additionally, proficiency in developing "a pupil-centered rather than subject-centered curriculum based on individual interests, abilities, and needs" (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 72) came in sixteenth out of 88.

Findings indicated that teachers' perceived proficiencies, level of education, and years of experience contributed to a great deal of variance in their ratings of the

importance of selected competencies. Typically, competencies rated as “very important” were correlated with ratings of “good” with regard to personal proficiency. Respondents with a doctoral degree were more likely to view instructional competencies with greater importance than those with an undergraduate or master’s degree. However, educational background did not have a statistically significant effect on ratings of importance for skills pertaining to knowledge of special education and learning differences. Participants with over six years of teaching experience tended to view competencies in these areas as more important than less experienced teachers, however, perhaps due to greater experience in developing education plans and assessments for students (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010).

Wanyonyi-Short’s (2010) study has significant implications for the direction of teacher preparation. By examining generational differences between teachers, future research could highlight “gaps that can be bridged to ensure effective and productive delivery of services for students with EBD” (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010, p. 75). Future studies should also aim to refine the 88 competencies to more closely align with CEC content standards as well as with current educational terminology. The findings also suggest that training programs for teachers who serve EBD populations could benefit from an increased focus on curriculum and remedial instruction, as many students with EBD perform below grade level. Additionally, programs for general educators should increase the emphasis on teaching exceptional children in order to support the movement toward more inclusive settings (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010).

Short and Bullock’s 2013 study investigates teachers’ perceptions of the practicum component of their preparation programs. The authors found that teachers of

students who have emotional and behavioral disorders felt that field-based experience working with this population prior to entering the classroom as a lead teacher was “very important” (p. 396), and positively impacted their ability to build relationships with students, the efficacy of their instruction, and their skill in managing a classroom and responding to inappropriate behavior.

Prather-Jones (2010) also explored the feelings and attributes of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Through a series of in-depth interviews with 13 educators with more than six years of experience teaching EBD students, Prather-Jones investigated the factors that contribute to retention in the field. These educators taught in public elementary and secondary schools in the Midwest, which varied in size (with populations ranging from 40 to 1,230) and in students’ socioeconomic status (with 4 to 100 percent of free or reduced-price lunch eligibility). Participants ranged from 37 to 56 years old, and had between 7 to 28 years of experience teaching students with EBD. They worked in different types of learning environments, including substantially separate, general education and resource rooms.

Participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling techniques, as the author relied on her professional contacts to target several participants, whose own contacts produced several more participants. Survey items solicited information about teachers’ beliefs regarding external, employment, and personal factors, which have been thought to influence career decisions (Billingsley, 1993, cited by Prather-Jones, 2010). Because few studies exist that explicitly target teachers who are satisfied with their field, Prather-Jones employed open-ended interviews, along with a focus group that included seven of the participants, to examine the relative influence of each of these types of

factors, as well as personal characteristics, on the job satisfaction of EBD teachers.

Two major themes emerged from Prather-Jones' (2010) research: the importance of professional support and of being a "good fit" (p. 5) for the field on job retention. Teachers' perceptions of support from administrators and colleagues, especially during their early years in teaching, were identified as critical factors in their decisions to stay in education. However, the study focused on the personal qualities of participants, who expressed strong commitment to teaching, which they felt was rooted in being a "good fit", defined as being "personally suited to a career in educating students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders" (Prather-Jones, 2010, p. 5). Each participant felt that he/she was a "good fit" for the work, citing the possession of skills, dispositions, and traits such as intrinsic motivation, flexibility, genuine interest in children with emotional and/or behavioral disorders, acceptance of one's own limitations, and the ability to depersonalize student behavior as important to success in and dedication to the field.

Prather-Jones' (2010) analysis and interpretation of the findings provide valuable insight. For example, because the teachers "did not commonly get to experience significant student successes" (Prather-Jones, 2010, p. 6) or other tangible incentives, a high degree of intrinsic motivation was essential to their retention. Participants "seemed content with the internal rewards" (Prather-Jones, 2010, p. 6) of their positions, such as witnessing small-scale student growth or feeling that they were "making a difference" (Prather-Jones, 2010, p. 6). The participants also identified flexibility as an essential characteristic for EBD teachers, who must constantly adjust and adapt their lessons and agendas to meet the complex needs of their students (Prather-Jones, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants expressed an appreciation for the variety their

job offered and an enjoyment of the challenges and uncertainty that accompanied each day.

Prather-Jones' (2010) study contributes to the body of research on EBD teachers by highlighting several important considerations for teacher preparation programs. Throughout the article, she addresses the notion of teacher dispositions and identifies the conflicting beliefs surrounding the construct, along with their implications for teacher education. Dispositions are primarily viewed either as stable traits or as dynamic qualities that evolve over time (Diez, 2007, cited by Prather-Jones, 2010). Each approach has the potential to impact teacher training in very different ways: For example, university officials who subscribe to the former may recommend that advisors in teacher preparation programs counsel candidates who lack the aforementioned dispositions to consider alternate career paths, while those who share the latter view may consider the dispositions (and means of fostering their growth) in the development of coursework for EBD teachers (Prather-Jones, 2010).

Along with intrinsic motivation, flexibility and an interest in EBD students and in helping others are typically viewed as innate dispositions that cannot be taught- but could possibly be strengthened through teaching experiences (Prather-Jones, 2010). Such a finding has implications predominantly for teacher recruitment. Targeting recruitment efforts toward individuals who have expressed interest in any human service, such as social work and mental health, may prove worthwhile. Conversely, participants expressed the belief that teachers can learn to separate themselves from students' misbehaviors with experience. This seems to support the need for a student-teaching component involving the EBD population as a requirement of programs designed to

prepare this population of teachers. It also suggests the need for teacher education programs and school districts to increase awareness of the realities of the field and for to better support EBD teachers with strategies to manage these challenges. These could be varied and should address stress relief for teachers, conflict resolution with or among colleagues and students, and the implementation of new interventions for students. Through this study, Prather-Jones (2010) calls attention to the influence of personal attributes, an area that had previously “gone virtually unstudied” (Billingsley, 1993, cited by Prather-Jones, 2010, p. 3), on the retention and attrition of teachers who serve children with emotional and/or behavioral disorders. Her findings suggest that personal qualities may be even more significant than environmental conditions upon educators’ decisions to remain in the field.

The research of Kindzierski, O'Dell, Marable, and Raimondi (2013) addressed the issue of teacher attrition in special education and built on the findings of Prather-Jones (2010). Kindzierski et al. (2013) utilized open-ended surveys to identify participants’ perceptions of skills that are essential for or lacking in teachers of children with EBD. Their sample consisted of 88 teachers at three private schools, each located within 30 miles of a mid-sized northeastern city. Each school served children with emotional and behavioral disorders through residential or day treatment programs. Six categories emerged from survey results, with the use of best practices, management skills, teacher preparation (defined as “courses in special education techniques and pedagogy”, p. 187) and possession of particular dispositions being cited most frequently. Collaborative skills and teaching experience were also identified as important, but to a lesser extent.

Interestingly, participants identified the same skills as lacking in new teachers in the field. Twenty-five percent felt that new teachers lacked experience in the use of best practices, and almost as many indicated that classroom management skills and adequate teacher preparation were critical prerequisites but lacking in teachers new to the field (Kindzierski et al., 2013). Findings also suggest the importance of specific personal characteristics, supporting the conclusions of Prather-Jones (2010). This research has implications for teacher education and retention, as it revealed the need for more extensive training in pedagogy and classroom management, which could reduce rates of attrition among EBD teachers. However, it is important to note that surveys were distributed by participants' principals, so participants could have felt pressured to respond a certain way rather than express their opinions with complete honesty.

Overall, the number of studies published within the past six years suggests that research in the area is growing, perhaps in response to increased attention to and emphasis on mental health interventions in schools. Though many teachers enter the field without a previous interest in the EBD population, most of these studies involve participants with extensive training and/or experience specific to EBD students. Further research would enhance our understanding of this demographic of educators.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

The shape of the research in this area differs somewhat from that of the previous areas examined. Recent findings regarding teacher self-efficacy corroborate research from the past 30 years, which has consistently demonstrated a relationship between teacher self-efficacy and teacher attitudes and actions (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ebmeier,

2003; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1988; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Soodak & Podell, 1993, Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; cited by De George Walker, 2010).

De George-Walker (2014) argued that the self-efficacy theories developed by Bandura (1997) and Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) have application in enhancing the capacity of teachers to foster the development of social and emotional skills in their students. Her work (2010; 2014) built on their theories in its focus on teacher self-efficacy for supporting student wellbeing. De George-Walker's 2010 study investigated the sources of teachers' self-efficacy for supporting students' social and emotional wellbeing and informed the development of the Teacher Self-Efficacy for Supporting Student Wellbeing (TSESSW) Scale. Research was conducted in three phases, beginning with interviews with seven teachers in Queensland, Australia.

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling via professional networks, and the sample was diverse with respect to grade level taught, position held, type of school environment, and years of experience. A phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002, cited by De George-Walker, 2010) was employed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the teachers' role in supporting students' welfare and to identify commonalities as well as areas of distinction in the responses. Findings from the interviews were used in the creation of the TSESSW scale, which was validated with a sample of 152 pre-service teachers. In the third phase of the research, an additional instrument, the Teacher Self-Efficacy for Supporting Student Wellbeing- Sources (TSESSW-S), was developed and validated with a sample of 102 practicing teachers. The TSESSW-S was designed to measure the four sources of teachers' self-efficacy

identified by Bandura (1977): mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological and affective states. First- and second-order factor analyses indicated strong internal reliability and validity of the scales, which were then used to determine the antecedents and effects of teachers' self-efficacy for supporting students' wellbeing. Multiple regression analyses revealed that mastery experiences were the strongest predictor of high levels of self-efficacy for supporting students' social and emotional health. As expected, a stronger sense of self-efficacy was correlated with more positive attitudes and greater engagement in the work related to social and emotional supports for students. The study has implications for teacher education, as professional development that has led to effective social and emotional learning programs has involved components related to sources of efficacy (De George Walker, 2014).

The research of Koçoğlu (2011), which explored the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and emotional intelligence, supports that of De George Walker (2014). Through a survey of 90 pre-service English language teachers at a university in Turkey, findings revealed a significant, positive relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy beliefs. According to Koçoğlu, emotional intelligence “is based on the premise that emotions and cognitions shape each other” (Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997; cited by Koçoğlu, 2011, p. 471) and can “influence beliefs about teaching, which in turn determine effective teaching and student learning” (Anderson, 2004, cited by Koçoğlu, 2011, p. 473). Koçoğlu utilized the abbreviated version of the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory ([Bar-On EQ-i:S], Bar-On, 2004) and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale ([TSES], Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The Bar-On EQ-i:S includes 51 items and uses a five-point Likert scale to measure

emotional intelligence across five domains: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood. The TSES includes 12 items and three subscales (Efficacy for Student Engagement, Efficacy for Classroom Management, and Efficacy for Instructional Strategies), and a five-point Likert scale was utilized with this instrument as well, with 1 representing that “the student teacher believes (s)he can do ‘nothing’ while 5 indicates that “(s)he can do ‘a great deal’ to successfully organize and execute the task to which the item corresponds” (Koçoğlu, 2011, pp. 476-477).

Descriptive and inferential analyses were performed from the data: For the Bar-On EQ-i:S, raw scores were converted into standard scores with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Standard scores were then compared with a normative sample of 3,174 adults across North America. Although the overall emotional intelligence of pre-service teachers was found to be within the average range (with a mean of 102), the highest subscale scores were for Stress Tolerance and Assertiveness, indicating that these student teachers felt skilled in managing challenging situations and with expressing their feelings and maintaining positive relationships. Data from the TSES suggested that they felt more efficacious in classroom management and instructional strategies than in engaging students. Such findings reflected what they learned during the practicum (various strategies for classroom organization, discipline, and pedagogy) but also what was lacking (an understanding of group dynamics and interpersonal relationships).

Koçoğlu’s study (2011) also revealed positive relationships among the self-efficacy of student-teachers and their emotional intelligence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the strongest correlation exists between interpersonal intelligence (i.e., skill in managing relationships and demonstrating social responsibility and empathy) and self-efficacy

beliefs regarding student engagement. The correlation between general mood (including optimism and happiness) and efficacy for classroom management was also high, which suggests the importance of a positive outlook and cheerful demeanor in running a classroom effectively. No significant relationship was found among adaptability and stress management scores and any of the efficacy subscales. This could be attributed to the direct supervision and support provided by veteran teachers and university faculty: Because they were more likely to be told what to do than in-service teachers would be, the potential for stress may have been lower and opportunities to demonstrate flexibility limited.

Koçoğlu's research (2011) has value for teacher education, as it highlights the need for universities to increase the focus on the development of efficacy and emotional intelligence in teacher candidates. Courses designed to teach strategies for emotional regulation and responsiveness, combined with intensive support and encouragement throughout their program, would increase the self-confidence of pre-service teachers and better prepare them for their roles. In spite of its contribution to the field, Koçoğlu's study (2011) has several limitations: Participants were strictly pre-service English language teachers based in Turkey. The use of such a specific sample means that the findings may not be generalizable to other populations. Additionally, self-reported data increases the possibility of bias and impacts the reliability of results. Thus, future research in this area should be extended to involve more diverse populations, including in-service teachers, and utilize methods that are not exclusively self-reported or triangulate the data sources to increase reliability.

Shillingford's 2011 study applied similar methodology to examine the development of self-efficacy in teachers as well. Through the use of the Teacher Self Efficacy Scale (TSES) and the Knowledge of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders questionnaire, Shillingford collected data from a convenience sample of 230 pre-service general and special educators. Teacher candidates were predominantly White (85.7 percent) and female (80 percent) and ranged in age from 19 to 51. Their knowledge and familiarity with EBD children varied, though most with prior experience in the field worked in inclusive classrooms. Of this group, 27 percent reported that there was a student with EBD in that classroom, while many were uncertain if any children had this diagnosis.

Scores from the Knowledge of EBD questionnaire indicated that pre-service teachers had reasonable knowledge of this disability category: most answered four through nine (out of a possible 15 items) correctly. Interestingly, there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of those participants who had previous field experience, had worked with a child with EBD, or had prior related coursework, and those who had none of those factors. However, there was a significant difference in knowledge of EBD between juniors and graduates, suggesting that the additional experiences of graduate students may have enriched their knowledge. These findings imply that educator preparation programs may not provide pre-service teachers with sufficient information about emotional and behavioral disorders. Such results support prior research that has shown that "teacher preparation programs are finding it impossible to include all the items on the Council for Exceptional Children's list of the minimum knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by teachers for effectively working

with students with EBD in their coursework” (Manning et al., 2009; cited by Shillingford, 2011, p. 72).

Results from the TSES also support prior research which revealed that pre-service teachers felt efficacious in the use of instructional strategies, classroom management, to a lesser extent, student engagement (Main & Hammond, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007; cited by Shillingford, 2011). These findings substantiate those of Koçoğlu (2011) and reflect the need for increased instruction around engaging students with disabilities within teacher training programs. Surprisingly, there was no significant difference between the self-efficacy levels of participants who had previous experience and those who had none; thus, it may be inferred that teaching practicums “may not be providing the authentic experiences needed to further increase their self efficacy beliefs” (Shillingford, 2011, p. 75), or that more extensive experience is necessary to raise self-efficacy levels. Knowledge of EBD also had no effect on their self-efficacy, nor did familiarity with children with EBD.

These unexpected findings point to shortcomings in student-teaching assignments, including the possibility that practicums may not offer opportunities for participants to interact with EBD children in a meaningful way. The research highlights the value of fieldwork that includes mastery experiences, defined as situations in which student teachers “are encouraged to implement strategies with the assistance of a coach” (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; cited by Shillingford, 2011, p. 75). Although the study could inform the development of more specific criteria and objectives for pre-service fieldwork, its findings must be interpreted with caution: Because of its quantitative nature, information regarding the practicum component was limited. Further

detail could have been yielded through interviews or another qualitative measure. Additionally, the low reliability of scores on the Knowledge of EBD questionnaire, attributed to lack of variability in responses, makes it difficult to generalize its findings to a larger population of pre-service teachers.

Boe's research (2013), which investigated the factors that contribute to the career longevity of EBD teachers, built upon prior research in the area of teacher self-efficacy. Participants included eight in-service teachers who had worked with EBD students in one self-contained school for five or more years. All had degrees or certificates in Special Education, and six had licensure to teach EBD students specifically. Employing a phenomenological approach, which captures "rich description of phenomena and their settings" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Kensit, 2000; cited by Boe, 2013, p. 47), Boe collected data through interviews, a focus group, and field notes. Results were analyzed through a series of coding, and findings revealed two major themes that contributed to career retention: environmental factors and personal attributes, including self-efficacy, resilience, empathy, and patience. According to Boe (2013),

The participants were able to remain optimistic and persistent by employing strategies that they had control over in their environment, and their colleagues supported these strategies or provided other suggestions. The collaborative and supportive nature of the environment provided participants with the ability to maintain a sense of well-being and optimism, which helped them push through the frequent difficult events. These factors supported the teachers' feelings of self-

assurance and competence in their work. (Deci & Ryan, 2000; cited by Boe, 2013, p. 90)

Participants explained their persistence through their self-confidence: They were able to continue in the field in spite of the stressful nature of the work because of their belief in their ability to find creative solutions to challenging behaviors and provide support for students' needs. Additionally, the teachers "really feel as if they are making a dramatic difference in the students' lives. The rewards enabled them to continue when faced with the daily challenges of lack of motivation, verbal and physical aggression and other maladaptive behaviors" (Boe, 2013, pp. 91-92). Humor was also noted as an important outlet for stress and a critical factor in the ability to recover from difficult or trying experiences. Findings from Boe's study (2013) support prior research which has shown that teachers who believe they have control over what happens in the classroom are more likely to be successful in their work (Howard & Johnson, 2004; cited by Boe, 2013) and substantiates the importance of self-efficacy in the field. Means of supporting the development of self-efficacy are recommended through the provision of mentorship, regularly scheduled meetings designed to support staff, and consistency in the assignment of educational assistants in EBD classrooms. Findings also suggest a need for pre-service education regarding EBD schools and programs and exposure to such settings in order to more accurately shape entering teachers' expectations of the environment. In-service professional development focused on crisis prevention techniques and training in depersonalization of student misconduct could be beneficial as well.

While Boe's (2013) study has important implications for EBD teacher education

and retention, a number of limitations exist. The small sample size limits generalizability, even to the broader community of EBD teachers, as all participants had experience and training specific to EBD students. Additionally, the sample was taken from a single school and was not representative of the larger population work at the same school. Finally, the researcher was a colleague of the participants in her study; such familiarity would likely create bias. This is particularly important to note in light of the warm regard all participants expressed for their colleagues and the value they ascribed to professional support. To substantiate the study's findings, additional research should be conducted involving a larger, more diverse sample and with an objective researcher with no prior connection to participants.

The body of research on the self-efficacy of teachers continues to grow, providing valuable insight into means of fostering self-efficacy in pre-service teachers or those early in their careers. In spite of the varied approaches applied to explore this area, the reliance on samples limited by size or homogeneity presents challenges in generalizing the findings to larger communities of educators. Thus, additional related research should involve a more diverse sample to increase generalizability of the results or an underrepresented population to yield novel information.

Conclusions about the State of the Literature

Much of the existing research in the area of teacher quality has been diverse: large-scale quantitative studies have highlighted the scope of particular issues (Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011), such as teacher shortages or lack of credentials, often at the state or national level. While these studies provide valuable information about widespread trends,

they are often unable to explain individual attitudes and actions. Conversely, many qualitative studies have assumed a narrower focus, relying on interviews or focus groups to investigate particular schools, populations, policies, or teacher education programs. Although these studies provide more specific information, the application of such may be limited to the particular setting or population involved in the research.

However, the research consistently suggests that teacher knowledge—demonstrated through licensure, subject-specific degrees, “performance on academic measures” (Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011, p. 246), and the ability to model social-emotional skills that respond to students’ individual needs—improves student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; cited by Kirchhoff & Lawrenz, 2011; Bridgeland et al, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). More specifically, studies have supported the value of extensive instruction in pedagogy, supervised teaching experience, and the presence of certain personal attributes, including self-efficacy and resiliency, in producing effective teachers committed to teaching students with EBD. The issue of teacher quality is particularly critical for students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities and are taught in substantially separate settings. However, our understanding of the preparation of teachers who work in such environments is limited, and additional research is needed to explore the issue in greater depth and to apply promising findings in practice.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1 established the existence of critical staffing shortages in classrooms that serve students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, while Chapter 2 highlighted the value of specific knowledge and skills in teaching. Chapter 3 provides an overview of my research design. This chapter explains the rationale for the design, identifies measures of validity and reliability for the survey and interview items, and discusses methods of analysis for the findings.

In my dissertation research, I employed a mixed methods study that paired a relatively large-scale survey with a smaller set of individual interviews. Using an explanatory sequential design, I explored four overarching research questions:

- (1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?
- (2) What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in teaching students secondary level content?
- (3) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?

(4) How do these educators explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?

Quantitative Methods

Because the quantitative phase of my study was designed to address research questions one, two, and three, I began with quantitative data collection and analysis. A survey allowed me to broadly explore participants' preparation for and perceptions of their role. The subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data targeted research questions two, three, and four and informed my interpretation of the initial quantitative results. These findings enabled me to explain why participants feel as they do. A mixed methods approach allowed me to expand my understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding their preparation and efficacy and to confirm my findings from each phase of the study against one other (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

I recruited 168 participants for the survey, though the responses of 50 were excluded from the analysis because participants did not meet the stated criteria: they had either never taught middle or high school students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders in substantially separate environments or they contained large amounts of missing data. My population included current and former secondary school teachers in Massachusetts who work (or worked) in self-contained classrooms that serve students who have significant emotional issues. Participants in the quantitative study were

selected through convenience sampling, a method that may have produced a degree of bias. Snowball sampling was also used to generate additional survey participants.

I recruited survey participants by emailing superintendents and/or special education directors from every district in the state, as listed on the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (n.d-a), with requests to forward a link to my survey along to colleagues who met the stated criteria. Using the MA DESE (n.d.-b) website, I generated a list of approved special education programs and schools statewide and visited their websites to identify whether they served children with emotional and behavior disorders. I emailed the program directors and principals of schools that appeared to serve EBD populations with the same request I sent to district superintendents and special education administrators. However, if I was able to obtain teachers' email addresses from the schools' websites, I reached out to them directly with a link to my survey and a request to share it with colleagues in similar roles. I also emailed employees at the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC) with the request, and I posted a link to the survey on the Facebook pages of the Massachusetts Council for Exceptional Children (MA CEC) and the National Association of Special Education (NASSET) to raise awareness of my study. Finally, I relied on my professional network to generate additional respondents.

Instrument Design and Rationale

Employing a survey allowed me to generalize my findings from my sample to the population of EBD teachers (Babbie, 1990, cited by Creswell, 2003). It is an efficient method of data collection with regard to the time required for and the expense of

administration. Turnaround time from the distribution of surveys to the collection of data tends to be quick (Creswell, 2003). However, because survey responses are self-reported, participants may not have responded to all questions honestly and/or accurately, which could have adversely impacted the reliability of my findings.

I developed the survey (shown in Appendix C) under the guidance of Wenfan Yan, Chair of the Department of Leadership in Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and uploaded it to SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com), a web-based program that facilitates quantitative data collection through the use of hyperlinks in email and on other social media. The survey began with simple, direct questions that solicited categorical data such as teaching licenses, years of service, degrees, and subject areas taught. Questions regarding self-perceptions and beliefs were also included, and the survey concluded with a request for volunteers to participate in the qualitative phase of the research.

The survey items were determined through a review of the literature. Some items were adapted from pre-existing instruments, including the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and a survey of teacher competencies used in a study conducted by Mackie, Kvaraceus, and Williams (1957). Due to the age of the Mackie et al. (1957) study, the only items taken from this instrument were those ranked by teachers as “very important” in a 2010 study conducted using the same instrument (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Of the 25 items ranked as very important in the latter study (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010), five were adapted for my own instrument, and the original language was largely preserved. Six items came from the long form of the

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001); again, the language of the researchers remained virtually intact.

The remaining items reflect competencies included in these surveys; however, I revised the language in these statements to improve its relevancy to the participants and objectives of my intended study: specifically, to identify teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skill regarding secondary level content, special education instructional techniques, and social-emotional learning strategies. Items intended to evaluate perceptions of social-emotional competence were developed in consultation with literature published by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL defines the five facets of social-emotional learning (SEL) as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2012). Eleven of the survey items were statements related to these skills. I included fewer belief statements related to content matter and special education pedagogy because earlier questions in the survey inquire about teachers' credentials, providing information about knowledge (or a lack of such) in these areas. The remaining eleven items relate to factors that previous research found to influence teacher efficacy (Kindzierski et al., 2013; Short & Bullock, 2013; Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Table 3.1 outlines the rationale for the research design and the items included.

Table 3.1

Research Questions, Indicators, and Survey Items

Research Questions	Information Needed	Relevant Survey Items & Rationale
(1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?	Subconstruct: Training & credentials	The survey focused on obtaining factual information about teachers' education, licensure, and coursework, which the interviews will supplement with greater detail. The information solicited to address this research question through the survey was not particularly sensitive; thus, the survey involved a series of closed-ended questions. (Interviews that followed explored this research question further in order to measure participants' attitudes about the topic of training and credentials.) The survey included the questions below:
	Indicator #1: Content matter credentials	Do you possess teaching licenses in any of the following subjects? Check all that apply (followed by a checklist). Do you possess degrees in or related to any of the following subjects/fields? Check all that apply (followed by a checklist).
	Indicator #2: Special education credentials	Do you possess a teaching license in special education? Yes No Do you possess a degree in special education? Yes No Did you complete a student teaching assignment/practicum with students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities? Yes No

	Indicator #3: SEL training	How many courses or professional development sessions have you participated in that addressed social-emotional learning (SEL) as the primary focus? SEL refers to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making. 0 1-2 3-4 5 or more
What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in teaching students secondary level content?	Subconstruct: Self-efficacy regarding content knowledge & special education pedagogy	The survey included the following statements and asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). Because the survey measured attitudes (teachers' perceptions), I followed up with telephone interviews to increase the reliability of my data and further explore themes that emerged from the analysis of the survey data. Telephone interviews enabled me to contact participants across the state and facilitated the recruitment of a geographically diverse sample.
	Indicator #1: Self-efficacy regarding content knowledge	<p>I have a solid understanding of every content area I teach.</p> <p>I can respond to difficult academic questions from my students with ease.</p> <p>Sometimes during lessons, I accidentally give students the wrong information.</p> <p>I frequently have to review skills related to my content area (i.e., correct use of commas in an English class) before I teach them to students.</p> <p>Additional training in my content area(s) would help me.</p>

	Indicator #2: Self-efficacy regarding special education pedagogy	<p>I am able to develop student-centered curriculum based on individual interests, abilities, and needs.</p> <p>I understand how students with various types of emotional and behavioral disabilities learn.</p> <p>I am skilled at adjusting my lessons to the proper level for individual students.</p> <p>I know how to modify materials for students with diverse abilities.</p> <p>It is hard for me to provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused.</p> <p>Additional training in instructional strategies for special education students would help me.</p>
(3) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?	Subconstruct: Self-efficacy regarding social-emotional knowledge and skills	The survey included the following statements and utilized the Likert scale described above. Because these statements also measured attitudes (teachers' perceptions about their social-emotional knowledge and skills), I followed up with interviews to increase the reliability of my data and further explore themes that emerged from the analysis of the survey data. I used a sequential explanatory process for data collection and analysis.
	Indicator #1: Self-efficacy regarding social-emotional learning (defined by 5 facets: self-awareness; social awareness; self-management & organization; responsible decision-making; &	<p>I know how to help my students believe they can do well in school.</p> <p>I am able to motivate students who show low interest in school work.</p> <p>I have strong relationships with my students.</p>

	relationship management)	<p>I empathize with students' feelings and experiences.</p> <p>I know techniques to relieve stress (verbal calming strategies, scheduled breaks, etc.) in the classroom.</p> <p>I understand the causes of problematic behavior (school refusal, aggression, etc.) among students.</p> <p>I am able to tolerate antisocial behavior.</p> <p>I know a variety of strategies to minimize disruptive behavior (verbal outbursts, refusal to follow directions, etc.) in the classroom.</p> <p>I regularly encourage students to reflect on their actions and decisions.</p> <p>I am able to reach students of cultural backgrounds that are different from my own.</p> <p>Additional training in responding to students' social and emotional needs would help me.</p>
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Validity and Reliability of Survey Findings

Measures of validity and reliability were provided for both pre-existing instruments. The Mackie et al. survey of teacher competencies (1957) was assessed for validity through review by a panel of experts (special education coordinators, professors, researchers, and other specialists) and was later piloted with a sample of 75 teachers of students with emotional and behavioral challenges. This data was used to further refine the survey items to increase both reliability and validity, and 88 competencies were

identified and described in short, clear phrases for inclusion in the survey (Mackie et al., 1957). In the 2010 study that employed the same instrument, Wanyonyi-Short (2010) coded these competencies into nine themes that correspond to the professional standards outlined by the Council of Exceptional Children (2009) for teachers of this population. These served as indicators of the larger construct of teacher quality. The relationship between teachers' work setting, education level, and years of experience and ratings of importance and of personal proficiency with each competency was determined through a factorial ANOVA, while the Spearman rho (alpha) correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between ratings of importance and of proficiency (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Although detailed statistical tables were included for each survey item, the author did not provide a thorough interpretation of this data.

The construct validity of *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was assessed by determining the correlation of the survey items to pre-existing measures of teacher efficacy, including an influential two-item study conducted by Rand researchers in the 1970s (Armor et al., 1976, cited in Henson, 2001) and the Hoy & Woolfolk adaptation (1993) of the Gibson and Dembo Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES; 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Both the validity and reliability of the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) were further evaluated in three pilot studies, the results of which were used to refine items and improve these measures. The final study involved a sample of 410 participants, which included both pre-service and in-service teachers. Through principal-axis factoring with varimax rotation of survey items and a scree test, three factors related to the larger construct of teacher efficacy were identified, along with their reliabilities: efficacy for

instructional strategies, 0.91; efficacy for classroom management, 0.90, and efficacy for student engagement, 0.87. Intercorrelations between these three subscales were 0.60, 0.70, and 0.58, respectively ($p < 0.001$), and eigenvalues were 10.38, 2.03, and 1.62.

Through a second-order factor analysis, one primary factor emerged that accounted for 75 percent of the variance. The strength of this factor, combined with the correlations of the three subscales, suggested that the survey “could be considered to measure the underlying construct of efficacy and that a total score as well as three subscale scores could be calculated” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 801). Finally, a principal-axis factor analysis of efficacy as the single factor revealed a reliability of 0.94, indicating that the instrument could be used to assess overall teacher efficacy (through the total score) as well as the three more specific components (through the individual subscale scores). In the development of the survey items in Table 1, I included a diversity of statements from the subscales, indicating efficacy for each of the three factors: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.

Quantitative Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I used multiple regression analyses to examine relationships between a number of variables. As depicted in Table 3.2, below, the independent variables involved formal training and credentials (including possession of teacher licenses, university degrees, a practicum with students with EBD, and teacher education/training in social-emotional learning), years of experience, program type (public or private), and perceived support from school administration. The dependent variables, analyzed in distinct regressions, related to teachers’ self-efficacy with regard to

their ability to teach secondary level content, to use special education techniques, and to respond to students' social-emotional needs.

Table 3.2

Multiple Regression related to Teacher Self-Efficacy across 3 Domains

Dependent Variables (Teacher Self-Efficacy across 3 Domains)	Regression Analysis 1: Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge	Regression Analysis 2: Self-Efficacy regarding Special Education Instruction	Regression Analysis 3: Self-Efficacy regarding Social-Emotional Learning
Independent Variables (Determined through the Literature Review as Factors that Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy)	Training & Credentials related to Content Knowledge: Content License Content Degree	Training & Credentials related to Special Education Instruction: Special Education License Special Education Degree Preservice Experience with Students with EBD	Training & Credentials related to Social-Emotional Learning: SEL Courses
	Years of Experience	Years of Experience	Years of Experience
	Program Type (Public)	Program Type (Public)	Program Type (Public)
	Perceived Support from School Administration (Any Level)	Perceived Support from School Administration (Any Level)	Perceived Support from School Administration (Any Level)

Based on my findings from the analysis depicted in Table 3.2, I performed additional analyses to further explore the impact of specific factors. These include the influence of private school type (residential or day) on content self-efficacy, shown in Table 3.3; of level of administrative support (perceptions of strong support) on special education self-efficacy, displayed in Table 3.4; and of credentials in each of the three

domains (content credentials, special education credentials, and SEL courses) on self-efficacy in each of the 3 domains (content knowledge, special education instruction, and social and emotional learning skills), presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.3

Multiple Regression related to Content Self-Efficacy to Compare Program Types

Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge (to Compare Program Types)			
Dependent Variables (Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge)	Regression Analysis 1:	Regression Analysis 2:	Regression Analysis 3:
Independent Variables (Determined through the Literature Review as Factors that Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy)	Content License	Content License	Content License
	Content Degree	Content Degree	Content Degree
	Years of Experience	Years of Experience	Years of Experience
	Program Type (Public)	Program Type (Private Residential)	Program Type (Private Day)
	Perceived Support from School Administration	Perceived Support from School Administration	Perceived Support from School Administration

Table 3.4

Multiple Regression related to Special Education Self-Efficacy to Compare Levels of Support

Self-Efficacy Regarding Special Education Instruction (to Compare Levels of Support)		
Dependent Variables (Self-Efficacy Regarding Special Education Instruction)	Regression Analysis 1:	Regression Analysis 2:
Independent Variables (Determined through the	Special Education License	Special Education License

Literature Review as Factors that Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy)	Special Education Degree	Special Education Degree
	Preservice Experience with Students with EBD	Preservice Experience with Students with EBD
	Years of Experience	Years of Experience
	Program Type (Public)	Program Type (Public)
	Perceived Support from School Administration (Any Level)	Perceived Support from School Administration (Strong)

Table 3.5

Multiple Regression related to Teacher Self-Efficacy across 3 Domains (to Compare Credentials across 3 Domains)

Dependent Variables (Teacher Self-Efficacy across 3 Domains)	Regression Analysis 1: Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge	Regression Analysis 2: Self-Efficacy regarding Special Education Instruction	Regression Analysis 3: Self-Efficacy regarding Social-Emotional Learning
Independent Variables (Determined through the Literature Review as Factors that Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy)	Content Knowledge Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Content License & Degree)	Content Knowledge Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Content License & Degree)	Content Knowledge Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Content License & Degree)
	Special Education Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Special Education License & Degree)	Special Education Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Special Education License & Degree)	Special Education Credentials (Composite Variable comprised of Special Education License & Degree)
	Preservice Experience with Students with EBD	Preservice Experience with Students with EBD	Preservice Experience with Students with EBD
	SEL Courses	SEL Courses	SEL Courses

This method helped to explain variance in participants' feelings and to identify the most influential factors on self-efficacy, which I continued to investigate in greater depth qualitatively.

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative phase of my research allowed me to explore themes that emerged from the surveys in greater detail. Using the quantitative findings to inform its design, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol (shown in Appendix F) to explore educators' perceptions of the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the field. Interview items addressed all four research questions, but focused particularly on question four (How do educators of students with EBD explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?), which was not addressed through the survey.

Participants

Interview participants were recruited through the preceding survey, which concluded with a request for volunteers to participate in further research. From the 49 individuals who responded to the request, purposive sampling was employed to select a pool of 14 for telephone interviews. Selection was based on specific demographic characteristics. Participants' self-efficacy scores for content knowledge, special education instruction, and social-emotional learning skills were considered in order to include teachers with varying levels of efficacy. Additionally, age, employment status, and subjects taught were reviewed to ensure diversity with regard to these factors. Based on my quantitative results, I was interested in exploring the impact of experience,

workplace setting, and teachers' perceptions of support from school administration in greater detail, so I also considered these variables in soliciting a sample.

Additionally, to increase the potential for diversity in educational background, participants' formal credentials and training, including licensure, degrees, student teaching experience, and SEL coursework were taken into account as well. I also wanted to ensure that individuals licensed in content only, special education only, and both content and special education were included. Of the 14 individuals identified who met my criteria, six agreed to participate in interviews. This sample size allowed for an in-depth exploration of key issues identified in the survey results.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Although I initially had planned to use a focus group for data collection, I was unable to recruit focus group participants due to issues of distance and scheduling, as prospective participants were located across the state. Thus, I changed my methodology to include telephone interviews instead, as they offer a degree of convenience that in-person meetings cannot match.

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992),

The intent... [of focus groups and interviews] is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something. Such a broad-scale approach is directed to understanding phenomena in their fullest possible complexity. The elaborated responses you hear provide the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents' perceptions. (p. 93)

Interviews offer the advantage of collecting rich data from individual participants. In addition, they may elicit information that a focus group would not and reduce bias in responses, as they could encourage participants to share opinions they may not be willing to in the presence of a group. Using interviews also allowed me greater control over the discussions, which facilitated the collection of data specific and relevant to my research questions (Creswell, 2003).

Through the voices of educators, I attempted to depict the human side of the focus on teacher quality, particularly as it relates to substantially separate special education settings. Throughout the interviews, I revised the content and sequence of my questions as necessary. Interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist, who signed a non-disclosure agreement to protect the confidentiality of all data. After each interview discussion was transcribed, I listened to the corresponding audiotape while reviewing the written document to correct any inaccuracies I noted. I sent my work to all participants for their feedback in order to ensure that I accurately and adequately captured their insights. One participant identified an error regarding the type of master's degree she earned, which was corrected. No other errors were found. By employing member checks of this nature, I attempted to improve the trustworthiness of my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I coded and analyzed the results using Dedoose (www.dedoose.com), a web-based software program designed to support qualitative and mixed methods research. I uploaded the transcripts and created an initial code list based on my research questions and quantitative findings, which I input into Dedoose. I coded each interview in its entirety before moving on to another, and continuously wrote notes related to emerging

themes and the evolution of the codes. Because qualitative researchers should “redefine or discard codes when they look inapplicable, overbuilt, empirically ill-fitting, or overly abstract” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65), I refined my code list repeatedly as I continued with the work. The initial and final code lists are presented in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Code List

Initial Codes	Final Codes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Content preparation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Licensure process b. Degree program c. Professional development 2. Special education preparation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Licensure program b. Degree program c. Professional development 3. Social and emotional skills preparation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Degree program b. Professional development 4. Perceptions of self-efficacy <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Content knowledge/subjects b. Special education techniques c. SEL/crisis management 5. Other factors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Administrative support b. Workplace environment c. Teaching experience 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University/licensure credentials and experiences <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Positive b. Negative c. Neutral 2. Topics and features of professional development/trainings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Positive b. Negative c. Neutral 3. Student teaching and on-the-job learning 4. Workplace culture <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Relationships with administrators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Supportive ii. Unsupportive iii. Neutral b. Relationships with co-workers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Supportive ii. Unsupportive iii. Neutral c. Practices and policies 5. Personal Factors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Internal rewards/benefits b. Beliefs about students <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Belief in “goodness” of students ii. Belief in legitimacy of disability iii. Relationship building c. Personality characteristics d. Habits that build resilience

-
- e. “Bad”/discouraging feelings
 - f. Other
 - 6. Entry into the field
 - 7. State regulations
-

Once all the interviews were coded, I began check-coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), reviewing each again with the revised code list, and continued to make changes to the categories and sub-categories as I worked. I repeated this step several more times until the codes seemed to align with the data and I no longer felt compelled to alter them. At this point, I organized the data and documented the findings.

Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research is “fundamentally interpretive” because the researcher “filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment” (p.182). Certainly my experience as a teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities informed my perspective on the topics addressed in this study. I approached the data collection and analysis with this in mind and took a number of steps to reduce the potential for bias. I employed techniques such as member checking (through participants’ review of their interview transcripts), reflexivity, and triangulation of the data. Reflexivity is “an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Through consistent note-taking during the data collection and analysis processes, I aimed to practice reflexivity in my documentation, categorization, and interpretation of the results. Additionally, the triangulation of my data—the survey results, coupled with

findings from the interviews— further increases the reliability (Creswell, 2003) of my analysis.

Interviews can serve as a validity check of the responses given to the survey items, and the use of two data sources allowed me to confirm my results from each stage of the research against one another (Creswell, 20003). As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain,

Probing in depth with a small sample of respondents who account for what they meant when they disagreed or agreed can indicate whether different respondents perceived the question in reasonably similar terms, as well as what underpins their reactions to it. (p. 68)

Ethical Considerations

Although this research poses minimal risk for participants, it would be imprudent to suggest that none exist. The primary risk associated with this study is the emergence of negative or distressful feelings during the survey and/or interview. To minimize risk of any kind, I notified all participants that their engagement in the research was voluntary and that they may decide to terminate participation at any time without consequence (as explained in the consent form in Appendix B). I also reminded them that their names and any other identifying information, such as schools and districts, would be changed to maintain confidentiality. Further, I assured them that all data would be secured on a password-protected computer and/or a locked cabinet in my home. All participants were encouraged to ask questions about the research at any time during engagement in the study.

In each interview, I explained to participants that the discussion would be taped, and each provided their written consent (through a consent form shown in Appendix E) to do so. I also informed them that they may decide to have the tape erased immediately after the interview if they chose to withdraw their consent for participation in or recording of the discussion. Finally, as noted, because my background and experiences color my interpretation of the data, all participants received a transcript of their interviews for their review and approval in order to ensure their comfort with the documentation of findings.

CHAPTER 4

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the issues of teacher preparation and self-efficacy as they relate to secondary special educators who serve students with emotionally and behavioral disabilities (EBD) in Massachusetts. Through an online survey of 118 EBD teachers, the following research questions were explored:

- (1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?
- (2) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in teaching EBD students secondary level content?
- (3) What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?

My final research question (How do these teachers explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?) will be explored in the qualitative phase of this study, addressed in Chapter 5.

Specifically, the survey investigated the impact of (1) content area licensure, (2) possession of a subject area degree, (3) special education licensure, (4) possession of a special education degree, (5) preservice experience teaching EBD students, and (6)

number of courses taken on social and emotional learning on such teachers' perceptions of their efficacy. It further examined whether demographic variables such as (7) years of experience, (8) program type, and (9) support from administration affect EBD teachers' self-efficacy regarding teaching secondary level content and in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students. The interviews that followed explored the experiences, training, and self-efficacy beliefs of these teachers in greater depth. This chapter presents the analysis of the survey data obtained. Survey data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 22) and includes descriptive statistics and the results of a series of multiple regression analyses.

Demographic Data

A total of 168 respondents attempted the survey; however, 50 of those surveys were excluded from the data analysis because they did not meet the stated criteria (i.e., they had never taught middle or high school students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders in substantially separate environments) or they contained large amounts of missing data. Ten of the 118 surveys contained some skipped questions.¹ While the sample was relatively diverse with regard to gender, age, workplace type, subject areas and grade levels taught and years of experience, it was less so regarding race.

Of the 118 surveys included in this analysis, 58.5% were completed by women, 40.7% were completed by men, and 1 respondent (.8%) did not identify his/her gender. Ninety seven percent of respondents identified as White, while 2.5% identified as

¹ Surveys contained between 18 and 20 items in total, with the final number dependent on how participants responded to previous items. Those included in this study contained 13 or more responses.

Hispanic or Latino, 1.7% as Black or African American, and 0.9% as American Indian or Alaska Native. Asian and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders were not represented in this sample. The largest percentage of participants (37%) was 30-39 years of age, with the smallest percentage (5%) 60 or older. Table 4.1, below, details these numbers, along with a percentage breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the larger population. Because I was unable to obtain data of this nature on EBD teachers in Massachusetts, the population documented is that of special educators serving students of all disability categories in grades 9-12 in public schools across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Although my sample was not entirely representative of the population, both were predominantly female and White. Percentages of participants within specified age ranges were also fairly close, ranging from differences of 0.2% to 10.3%, as enumerated below.

Table 4.1

Summary of Descriptive Statistics by Gender, Race, and Age

Demographic Variable	This Study's Sample		Population
	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Percent (%)
Gender			
Female	69	58.5	71.0
Male	48	40.7	29.0
Male to female transgender	0	0.0	0.0
Female to male transgender	0	0.0	0.0
Other	0	0.0	0.0
Total	117	99.2	100.0
Race/Ethnicity			
Hispanic or Latino	3	2.5	4.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.9	0.5
Asian	0	0.0	1.7

Black or African American	2	1.7	8.4
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0.0	N/A ²
White	115	97.0	84.0
Total ³	121	102.5	99.0
Age			
Under 30	15	12.7	12.2
30-39	44	37.3	27.0
40-49	27	22.9	23.1
50-59	26	22.0	28.3
60 or older	6	5.1	9.5
Total	118	100.0	100.1

The sample was fairly mixed with regard to the types of settings in which participants worked, with 42% employed in substantially separate classrooms in public schools (including charter schools) and 50% employed in private programs. A small percentage (7.6%) reported working in other types of substantially separate settings. The majority of respondents (75.4%) were current EBD teachers, while 24.6% no longer worked in the field. Table 4.2, below, displays these findings.

Table 4.2

Summary of Descriptive Statistics by Program Type and Employment Status

Employment Attributes	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Program Type		
Public		
Substantially separate program/classroom within a public school	49	41.5
Substantially separate program/classroom within a charter school	1	0.8
Total Public	50	42.4

² This information was not provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012).

³ In some instances, numbers and percentages do not match the size of the sample or population due to respondents' selection of more than one choice and/or rounding.

Private		
Educational collaborative	16	13.6
Therapeutic day program	21	17.8
Residential program	19	16.1
Juvenile facility	1	0.8
Hospital	2	1.7
Total Private	59	50.0
Other	9	7.6
Total Responses	127	100.0
Employment Status		
Current EBD Teachers	89	75.4
Former EBD Teachers	29	24.6
Total Responses	118	100.0

Research Question 1: EBD Teacher Preparation

Of the 118 participants in my sample, 96% responded to the question regarding possession of subject area teaching licenses. Only 25% reported to hold licensure in every subject area they taught. The numbers of subjects taught varied widely, ranging from one to a maximum of nine. Fifty eight percent of the sample reported teaching multiple subject areas, while 44% reported teaching three or more subjects. Table 4.3 details the specific subject areas and licenses of these participants, revealing a mean of 2.5 for the number of subjects taught. The highest percentage (58.5%) reported teaching English, while 53.4% selected “Other”. Responses provided in this category included vocational preparation (11), life skills (8), social pragmatics (7), and study skills (4), among other areas. Additionally, most respondents possessed a license (79.7%) or degree (61%) in special education or both (59.3%). Of the larger population of public high school special education teachers nationwide, 70.9% held a degree in special education (National Center

for Education Statistics, 2012). Statistics regarding other credentials of this population could not be found.

Table 4.3

Summary of Descriptive Statistics by Content Area/Field, Licensure, and Degree(s) Held

Credential	Frequency (N)	Percent of Subject Area Teachers (%)	Percent of Sample (%)
English			
English teachers	69	100.0	58.5
License in English	20	29.0	17.0
Bachelor's degree in English	16	23.2	13.6
Master's degree in English	4	5.8	3.4
Doctorate/other post-graduate degree in English	1	1.4	0.9
License and degree (any level) in English	13	18.8	11.3
Math			
Math teachers	56	100.0	47.5
License in math	12	21.4	10.1
Bachelor's degree in math	3	5.4	2.5
Master's degree in math	3	5.4	2.5
Doctorate/other post-graduate degree in math	0	0.0	0.0
License and degree (any level) in math	4	7.1	3.4
Science			
Science teachers	48	100.0	40.7
License in science	7	14.6	5.9
Bachelor's degree in science	7	14.6	5.9
Master's degree in science	2	4.2	1.7
Doctorate/other post-graduate degree in Science	0	0.0	0.0
License and degree (any level) in science	6	12.5	5.1
History			
History teachers	51	100.0	43.2
License in history	18	34.6	15.3
Bachelor's degree in history	21	41.2	17.8
Master's degree in history	3	5.9	2.5

Doctorate/other post-graduate degree in History	0	0.0	0.0
License and degree (any level) in history	14	26.9	11.9
Other ⁴			
Teachers of other areas	63	N/A	53.4
License in other area(s)	66	N/A	55.9
Degrees (of any level) in other area(s)	70	N/A	59.3
Special education			
License in special education	94	N/A	79.7
Degrees (of any level) in special education	72	N/A	61.0
License and degree (any level) in special education	70	N/A	59.3

Research Question 2: Self-Efficacy regarding Teaching EBD Students Secondary

Content

To investigate my second question, I conducted a series of multiple regression analyses in order to examine relationships between several independent variables (formal credentials, teaching experience, workplace setting, and perceived administrative support) and, individually, the dependent variables of self-efficacy related to content area knowledge and of self-efficacy related to special education instructional skills.

Content Knowledge

I began by analyzing the relationship between the independent variables, including those related to content expertise, such as (1) content area licensure and (2) content area degree of any level, and (3) years of experience (teaching EBD students), (4) program type, and (5) perceived support from school administration, and the dependent variable, self-efficacy regarding content knowledge. Program type refers to whether a participant works in a public or private setting.

⁴ Includes special education.

The dependent variable, self-efficacy related to content knowledge, was measured through participants' responses to five statements using a 4-point Likert scale, with 4 meaning strongly agree, 3 meaning agree, 2 meaning disagree, and 1 meaning strongly disagree. Statements included (1) "I have a solid understanding of every content area I teach", (2) "I can respond to difficult academic questions from my students with ease", (3) "Sometimes during lessons, I accidentally give students the wrong information", (4) "I frequently have to review skills related to my content area (i.e., correct use of commas in an English class) before I teach them to students", and (5) "Additional training in my content area(s) would help me", with numbers closest to 4 suggesting strong self-efficacy for the first two statements, which indicate subject area proficiency. Conversely, numbers closest to 1 suggested high levels of self-efficacy for the final three statements, as they suggest deficits in content knowledge. The values for these three items were recoded in the reverse for consistency in the representation of self-efficacy levels through numerical values: Higher scores reflect higher self-efficacy.

From responses to these survey items, I created a composite variable to measure self-efficacy regarding content knowledge by identifying the mean of participants' responses to statements about perceptions of one's content knowledge. This composite variable, content self-efficacy, had a Cronbach's Alpha reliability rating of .60. Participants' content self-efficacy scores ranged from 3.6 (reflecting the strongest self-efficacy relative to the sample) to 2 (suggesting the weakest self-efficacy in this area). In order for data to be considered valid, participants must have responded to all five statements assessing content self-efficacy. Because 105 participants met this criterion, their answers were considered valid and therefore were included in this reliability

analysis. However, there were only 71 valid cases included in this regression analysis, which drew from responses to nine survey items. The results of the multiple regression are summarized in Table 4.4, below.

Table 4.4

Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge

	M ₁ (License)	M ₂ (License + Degree)	M ₃ (License + Degree + Experience)	M ₄ (License + Degree + Experience + Program)	M ₅ (License + Degree + Experience + Program + Support)
Content Area License	.30*	.07	.18	.11	.09
Content Area Degree	----	.16	.16	.08	.09
Years of Experience	----	----	-.02	-.10	-.10
Program Type	----	----	----	-.49***	-.47***
Perceived Support	----	----	----	----	-.07
R ₂	.08	.07	.06	.28	.27

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Summary of findings. The findings indicate that possession of teaching licenses in all content areas taught has a statistically significant slight positive impact (.30, p<.05) on content self-efficacy, but when degrees in all content areas taught and other factors were considered, the difference was no longer statistically significant. Content credentials, including teaching licenses and degrees in all content areas taught, together explain only 7% of the variance in participants' responses. All independent variables combined explain only 27% of the variance in these responses. As shown in Table 4.4,

the factor that is most strongly related to higher levels of content area self-efficacy is program type, which is the only independent variable with a statistically significant ($-.47$, $p < .001$) impact upon content self-efficacy when the weight of all of the other independent variables was considered. While the mean score for the content self-efficacy composite variable (of this sample of 71) was 2.9 (with 4 representing strongest self-efficacy), the mean score of participants who worked in a public program was 2.5, indicating weaker self-efficacy. These findings suggest that working in a public school has a statistically significant negative impact on teachers' self-efficacy regarding content knowledge. This may be due to increased pressure from stringent accountability and teacher evaluation measures, such as MCAS administration and scores, imposed upon public schools and their staff (MA DESE, 2014).

To further explore the impact of program type, I conducted additional multiple regression analyses to identify which type of private setting had the greatest impact on self-efficacy. In place of the independent variable *program type*, which distinguished between programs in traditional public schools and private settings or educational collaboratives,⁵ I used more specific variables: *day school* and *residential school*. Day school encompassed both therapeutic day schools as well as educational collaboratives, while residential schools included residential programs (where students live on campus and attend school), juvenile facilities, and hospitals. The results, presented in Table 4.5,

⁵ Educational collaboratives, which are formed by local school committees and charter boards, “supplement and strengthen the programs and services” of member schools (MA DESE, 2015). In order for prospective students to attend a therapeutic private school or educational collaborative, a referral (typically made by a public school district that is not able to meet a student's needs), and admissions process (determined by the private school or collaborative) is employed.

indicate that working in a residential school has a moderate positive effect (.47) on content self-efficacy that is significant at the .004 level.

Table 4.5

Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge: Impact of Employment in Residential School

	M ₁ (License)	M ₂ (License + Degree)	M ₃ (License + Degree + Experience)	M ₄ (License + Degree + Experience + Residential)	M ₅ (License + Degree + Experience + Residential + Support)
Content Area License	.28*	.11	.10		.17
Content Area Degree	----	.24	.24	.19	.18
Years of Experience	----	----	-.05	-.07	-.07
Residential School	----	----	----	.46**	.47**
Perceived Support	----	----	----	----	.07
R ₂	.05	.06	.04	.24	.23

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Day school employment was found to be positively correlated with participants' self-efficacy regarding content knowledge as well (.32, p<.05). However, as shown in Table 4.6, this impact was not as strong or as significant as that of residential school employment on content self-efficacy.

Table 4.6

Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge: Impact of Employment in Day School

	M ₁ (License)	M ₂ (License + Degree)	M ₃ (License + Degree + Experience)	M ₄ (License + Degree + Experience + Day School)	M ₅ (License + Degree + Experience + Day School + Support)
Content Area License	.30*	.18	.18	.07	.04
Content Area Degree	----	.16	.16	.11	.12

Years of Experience	----	----	-.02	-.10	-.10
Day School	----	----	----	.35*	.32*
Perceived Support	----	----	----	----	-.14
R ²	.08	.07	.06	.14	.15

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Special Education Pedagogy

Using a similar method, I created a composite variable to measure self-efficacy regarding special education instructional techniques as well. By identifying the mean of participants' responses to four statements about perceptions of one's special education pedagogy, I created a composite variable, special education self-efficacy, which had a Cronbach's Alpha reliability rating of .80. Statements included (1) "I am able to develop student-centered curriculum based on individual interests, abilities, and needs", (2) "I understand how students with various types of emotional and behavioral disabilities learn", (3) "I am skilled at adjusting my lessons to the proper level for individual students", and (4) "I know how to modify materials for students with diverse abilities". Participants' responses were measured through the same 4-point Likert scale that was used with the composite variable representing content knowledge self-efficacy. For this set of items, responses with numbers closest to 4 suggest strong self-efficacy, as each item reflects a perceived area of strength, and participants' scores for self-efficacy in this area ranged in strength from 2.5 to 4, with a mean of 3.4. In calculating the reliability for the special education self-efficacy composite variable, 106 cases were included.

Through this regression, I analyzed the relationship between the independent variables related to special education pedagogy, which include (1) special education licensure, (2) special education degree (of any level), and (3) preservice/student teaching experience (with EBD students), along with (4) years of experience (teaching EBD students), (5) program type, and (6) perceived support from school administration, and the dependent variable, self-efficacy regarding special education instructional techniques. For this regression, there were 100 valid responses included in the analysis. The findings are displayed in Table 4.7, below.

Table 4.7

Self-Efficacy regarding Special Education Instructional Techniques

	M1 (License)	M2 (License + Degree)	M3 (License + Degree + Preservice)	M4 (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience)	M5 (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience + Program Support)	M6 (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience + Program + Support)
Special Education License	.09	.14	.14	.15	.15	.16
Special Education Degree	----	-.11	-.11	-.20	-.17	.15
Preservice EBD Experience	----	----	.01	-.14	-.01	.001
Years of Experience	----	----	----	.23*	.22*	.20
Program Type	----	----	----	----	-.07	.01
Perceived Support	----	----	----	----	----	.22*
R ²	.00	.00	.00	.02	.02	.05

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Summary of findings. The results suggest that special education credentials did not have a statistically significant effect on self-efficacy beliefs regarding special education skills. Years of experience was found to have a statistically significant slight

positive impact (.22, $p < .05$) on these beliefs, but once participants' feelings of being supported by school administration were taken into account, the effect of experience lost its statistical significance. However, the impact of perceived administrative support was slight but statistically significant (-.22, $p < .05$). Surprisingly, such support had a negative effect, a finding that conflicts with prior research highlighting the importance of collegial support on feelings of professional competence and EBD teacher retention (Prather-Jones, 2010). Taken together, these independent variables explain only 5% of the variance in responses. Possession of a special education license, a degree, and student teaching experience with children with emotional and behavioral disabilities appeared to have no bearing on participants' self-efficacy beliefs about special education pedagogy. These findings call into question the effectiveness of preparation programs for special educators.

To shed light on the relationship between administrative support and self-efficacy regarding special education strategies, I performed an additional multiple regression analysis. In this case, I isolated the responses of those who noted that they "Strongly agree" with the statement "I feel supported by school administration regarding work with students who have emotional and/or behavioral disabilities" and included this as an independent variable (rather than combining the responses of those who selected "Agree" and "Strongly agree", as I had done in my earlier analysis). As documented in Table 4.8, perceptions of strong administrative support were found to have a moderate positive impact (.32, $p < .01$). This variable alone (feeling strongly supported by school administration) contributed to 9% of the variance in responses, which represents an impact more than four times greater than all of the other independent variables combined.

This discrepancy may be attributed to acquiescence bias, a tendency to agree with statements, to some extent without much consideration to their content (Johns, 2010). It is possible that participants selected “Agree” when faced with feelings of neutrality, uncertainty, or when they simply did not disagree with the statement. The difference in my results due to the degree of support felt indicates the value that clear expressions of support from administrators may have upon teachers of this population, not only in fostering self-efficacy, but also perhaps in improving retention rates among educators who work in substantially separate programs.

Table 4.8

Self-Efficacy regarding Special Education Instructional Techniques: Impact of Strong Support

	M ₁ (License)	M ₂ (License + Degree)	M ₃ (License + Degree + Preservice)	M ₄ (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience)	M ₅ (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience + Program Support)	M ₆ (License + Degree + Preservice + Experience + Program + Support)
Special Education License	.09	.14	.14	.15	.15	.17
Special Education Degree	----	-.11	-.11	-.20	-.17	.15
Preservice EBD Experience	----	----	.006	-.01	-.01	.03
Years of Experience	----	----	----	.23*	.22*	.20
Program Type	----	----	----	----	-.07	.01
Perceived Strong Support	----	----	----	-----	----	.32**
R ²	.00	.00	.00	.02	.02	.11

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Research Question 3: Self-Efficacy regarding Social and Emotional Responsiveness

To analyze my third research question, I used multiple regression to investigate relationships between several independent variables, including (1) courses in social and emotional learning, (2) teaching experience, (3) workplace setting, and (4) perceived administrative support, and one dependent variable, self-efficacy beliefs related to social emotional learning and competence.

Social and Emotional Learning

I used the same procedure that I employed for the composite variables of self-efficacy regarding content knowledge and special education techniques to create a composite variable that measured self-efficacy related to social and emotional learning and responsiveness, SEL self-efficacy, which had a Cronbach's Alpha rating of .86. This variable was developed by calculating the mean of participants' responses to 11 statements about self-efficacy regarding social and emotional learning and competence, contained in Table 8 below. For the first 10 statements, which focus on areas of strength, numbers closest to 4 suggest high self-efficacy. Conversely, numbers closest to 1 suggest high levels of self-efficacy for the final statement, which reflects perceptions of weakness. As with the composite variable representing content knowledge self-efficacy, responses to this item were recoded for uniformity in the values of measurement. Participants' SEL self-efficacy scores ranged from 3.91 (reflecting the strongest self-efficacy relative to the sample) to 2.73 (suggesting the lowest SEL self-efficacy in the sample), with a mean of 3.3. There were 110 valid cases considered in determining the reliability of items included in this composite variable, and 103 valid cases were included in the multiple regression analysis.

Table 4.9

Self-Efficacy Statements regarding Social and Emotional Learning and Competence

I know how to help students believe they can do well in school.
I am able to motivate students who show low interest in school work.
I have strong relationships with my students.
I empathize with students' feelings and experiences.
I know techniques to relieve stress (verbal calming strategies, scheduled breaks, etc.) in the classroom.
I understand the causes of problematic behavior (school refusal, aggression, etc.) among students.
I am able to tolerate antisocial behavior.
I know a variety of strategies to minimize disruptive behavior (verbal outbursts, refusal to follow directions, etc.) in the classroom.
I regularly encourage students to reflect on their actions and decisions.
I am able to reach students of cultural backgrounds that are different from my own.
Additional training in responding to students' social and emotional needs would help me.

Summary of findings. The findings indicate that training in social and emotional learning had a slight positive impact on self-efficacy related to social and emotional skills. In the first regression model, this effect was found to be statistically significant (.21, $p < .05$). However, when other variables were included in the analysis, the difference attributed to SEL training was no longer statistically significant. Table 4.10, below, enumerates these values.

Table 4.10

Self-Efficacy regarding Social and Emotional Learning and Competence

	M ₁ (SEL Training)	M ₂ (SEL Training + Experience)	M ₃ (SEL Training + Experience + Program)	M ₄ (SEL Training + Experience + Program+ Support)
SEL Training	.21*	.14	.14	.13
Years of Experience	----	.17	.17	.16
Program Type	----	----	-.06	-.04
Perceived Support	----	----	----	-.05
R ²	.03	.05	.04	.03

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Relationship of Types of Credentials across Three Domains

To further explore the impact of educator preparation on self-efficacy across these domains, I performed a series of multiple regression analyses to identify to what extent credentials specific to one domain influence self-efficacy in other domains. To do so, I created a composite variable for content area credentials (by combining independent variables indicating possession of a subject area license and of a subject area degree), and one for special education credentials (which included the variables related to possession of a special education license and a degree in the field).

Impact of Special Education and SEL Training on Content Self-Efficacy

The first model analyzed the correlation of (1) content area credentials, (2) special education credentials, (3) preservice experience with EBD students, and (4) SEL training to content knowledge self-efficacy. A total of 98 cases were included, and the results, summarized in Table 4.11, indicate that the strongest relationship exists between special

education credentials and self-efficacy related to content ($-.30, p < .05$) when all other independent variables were considered. However, this relationship is negative. While the mean score for the content self-efficacy composite variable was 2.7 (with 4 representing strongest self-efficacy), the mean score of participants who possessed a special education license and/or degree was 2.4, indicating weaker self-efficacy.

It is possible that teachers who completed special education preparation programs received less training in content than those without a formal background in special education, whose degree or preparation programs likely offered subject area concentrations. If this is true, the finding supports prior research that has identified disproportionately high percentages of special educators in substantially separate environments who teach out of field (Drame & Pugach, 2010; Levenson, 2011). Training related to social and emotional learning was not found to have a statistically significant impact on content self-efficacy and did not contribute to the variance in responses (as indicated by the $-.01$ difference in the R^2 value between the second and third models).

Table 4.11

Self-Efficacy regarding Content Knowledge as it relates to Teacher Preparation in 3 Domains

	M ₁ (Content Credentials)	M ₂ (Content Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice)	M ₃ (Content + Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice + SEL Training)
Content Credentials	.35**	.21	.21
Special Education Credentials	----	-.30*	-.30*
Preservice Experience	----	.05	.05
SEL Training	----	----	.02
R ²	.11	.16	.15

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Impact of Content and SEL Training on Special Education Self-Efficacy

The second multiple regression examined the relationship of (1) content area credentials, (2) special education credentials, (3) preservice experience with EBD students, and (4) SEL training to special education self-efficacy. The analysis included a sample of 99, the findings of which are shown in Table 4.11. Based on the results, content credentials had almost no impact on special education self-efficacy. Special education credentials also failed to yield a significant impact, a finding that supports data presented in Tables 4.7 and 4.8 and challenges the value of special education degrees and licensure. The independent variable with the greatest influence on special education self-efficacy beliefs was SEL courses (.23, $p < .05$). It appears that training in social and emotional learning has a slight positive impact on participants' perceptions of their efficacy related to special education practices. This idea supports the literature that addresses the importance of social-emotional competence among educators who serve EBD students (Wanyonyi-Short, 2010; Prather-Jones, 2010; Koçoğlu, 2011; De George-Walker, 2014) and on the benefit of SEL in schools (Elias, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2012; Durlak et al, 2011).

Table 4.12

Self-Efficacy regarding Special Education Instruction as it relates to Teacher Preparation in 3 Domains

	M1 (Content Credentials)	M2 (Content Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice)	M3 (Content + Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice + SEL Training)
Content Credentials	.02	.09	.08
Special Education Credentials	----	.16	.16
Preservice Experience	----	-.07	-.07

SEL Training	----	----	.23*
R ²	.00	.00	.03

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Impact of Content and SEL Training on SEL Self-Efficacy

The third regression in this series examined the relationship of (1) content area credentials, (2) special education credentials, (3) preservice experience with EBD students, and (4) SEL training to SEL self-efficacy. Like the previous regression, this analysis also included a sample of 99, the data from which is displayed in Table 4.13, below. The findings indicate that SEL courses remain the most significant factor in self-efficacy related to social-emotional skills (.33, p<.01), even when credentials in other domains are considered.

Table 4.13

Self-Efficacy regarding Social and Emotional Learning and Competence as it relates to Teacher Preparation in 3 Domains

	M ₁ (Content Credentials)	M ₂ (Content Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice)	M ₃ (Content + Credentials + Special Education Credentials + Preservice + SEL Training)
Content Credentials	.00	.07	.07
Special Education Credentials	----	.15	.15
Preservice Experience	----	-.11	-.13
SEL Training	----	----	.33**
R ²	.00	.00	.09

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the quantitative data produced in this study, which explored the first three research questions. This included multiple regression analyses that determined the weight of factors such as educational credentials and training, experience, work environment, and administrative support on EBD teachers' self-efficacy in three domains: content knowledge, special education pedagogy, and social-emotional responsiveness. Educational credentials were found to have little to no impact on teacher self-efficacy in most areas. Chapters 5 and 6 will present the qualitative findings, which provide insight into the quantitative results.

CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS, EDUCATION, AND EXPERIENCE

While Chapter 4 presented the results of the quantitative phase of my study, the aim of this chapter is to report the qualitative findings, which are based on six telephone interviews. The purpose of the qualitative research is to explain the quantitative findings in greater depth; to inform my interpretation of survey results related to research questions one, two, and three; and to examine research question four:

- (1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?
- (2) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in teaching EBD students secondary level content?
- (3) What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?
- (4) How do these educators explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?

With regard to teacher self-efficacy, the interviews investigated participants' beliefs about the value and impact of their educator preparation programs, in-service training opportunities, workplace practices, relationships with co-workers, and other

sources of support and frustration. Interview data was analyzed and coded using Dedoose qualitative analysis software (version 6.2.21). Four overarching themes emerged from participants' responses: (1) university preparation, including student teaching experience, (2) professional development, (3) workplace culture, and (4) personal factors. This chapter will report findings related to educational background and professional development, while those related to workplace culture and personal factors will be explored in Chapter 6.

Demographic Data

The qualitative study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants who possessed specific characteristics of interest to my study. Interview participants were recruited through the survey, which concluded with a request for engagement in further research in the area. From the 49 individuals who responded to the request, 14 were identified who met the criteria of interest, which considered experience, workplace setting, and perceptions of support from school administration, as well as self-efficacy scores for content knowledge, special education instruction, and social-emotional learning skills. Age, employment status, and subjects taught were also reviewed to ensure diversity with regard to these factors. Table 5.1 summarizes these demographics.

Table 5.1

Descriptive Background of Participants

Name	Age	#/Yrs. Exp.	Subjects Taught	Prog. Type Employ. Status	Perceptions of Admin. Support	Self-Efficacy Scores ⁶ Content/ Spec. Ed./ SEL		
“Andrew”	40-49	16-20	Art English History Math Science	Residential Current teacher	Very supportive	3.0	3.0	2.5
“Bob”	50-59	11-15	English History Math	Public Former teacher	Supportive	2.6	3.5	3
“Dave”	50-59	3-5	English History	Public Current teacher	Unsupportive	2.8	3.0	3.27
“Eva”	<30	<1	English History Math Science	Therapeutic day Current teacher	Supportive	2.4	3.0	3.0
“Jennifer”	30-39	16-20	Art English Culinary History Math Science	Educ. collaborative Current teacher	Very supportive	3.6	4.0	3.82
“Justine”	40-49	3-5	English Health History Math Science	Public Former teacher	Unsupportive	3.2	3.5	3.56

In addition, the educational backgrounds of participants, including licensure, degrees, practicum experience, and training in SEL were also considered to increase the potential for diversity in these areas. From the pool of 14 individuals who met my criteria, six participated in interviews. The sample was varied with regard to these factors, as shown in Tables 5.1, above, and 5.2, which follows.

⁶ As measured by the mean of participants’ survey responses, in which 4 indicated high self-efficacy and 1 indicated low self-efficacy.

Table 5.2

Educational Background of Participants

Name	Licensure Area(s)	Degrees Held	Preservice Experience ⁷	#/SEL Courses
“Andrew”	Special Education (Mild-Moderate)	Bachelor’s, Philosophy Master’s, Special Education	Yes	3-4
“Bob”	Special Education History	Bachelor’s, History Master’s, Educational Administration Master’s, Special Education Doctorate, Educational Leadership	Yes	5 or more
“Dave”	Special Education History	Bachelor’s, Political Science Master’s, Teaching Social Studies Master’s, Special Education	Yes	1-2
“Eva”	Special Education (Severe)	Bachelor’s, Psychology Master’s, Special Education	Yes	1-2
“Jennifer”	Special Education (Mild, Moderate, & Severe)	Bachelor’s, History & Sociology Master’s, Intensive Special Needs	Yes	3-4
“Justine”	History	Bachelor’s, History J.D., Law	Yes	1-2

The group was relatively diverse in terms of gender as well, with three male and three female participants. Because the survey sample was 97% White, race was not considered in recruiting this subsample, and all members were White.

Research Question 4: Factors that Influence EBD Teacher Self-Efficacy

The interviews were analyzed and coded for recurrent topics and ideas related to the development of self-efficacy. Several themes emerged from this process, and the results were organized into five categories: participants’ views of their (1) educational background (including degree and/or licensure programs and professional development

⁷ Refers to student teaching experience with EBD students.

opportunities), (2) preservice and in-service teaching experience, (3) workplace culture (including practices, policies, and relationships with colleagues), and (4) personal factors (such as internal rewards, beliefs, and habits). The sections that follow discuss the themes of educational background and teaching experience. Questions from the interview protocol that helped to generate responses along with data that supports the categories identified are also included. The remaining themes will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Perceptions of Educational Background

The theme of *educational background* is broad and includes degree programs and university coursework related to teacher preparation; school-, district-, and state-mandated trainings; as well as other forms of professional development sought out independently by participants. Participants' beliefs about these programs were elicited through the questions identified in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Questions related to Educational Background

Pertinent Questions:

- I am curious about how you got involved in working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Can you tell me about your teaching experience, if any, before you began teaching students with emotional and behavioral disabilities?
- Help me to understand what credentials you had when you first began teaching EBD students.
 - Did you earn any as you continued in the field? Why?
 - What elements of these educational/training programs did you find most useful? Why?

- Which did you find to be least useful?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspect of your role?
- What type of professional development do you believe would be most beneficial in making you feel more effective?
- Please tell me about the outlets you have, if any, to meet and discuss your work with other EBD teachers. Do you think this has been /would be beneficial?

Degree and Licensure Programs

Some interview participants described the strengths and limitations of college coursework and university experiences in building their self-efficacy for teaching content, special education, and social-emotional skills. Their responses have been organized around these three domains. Their evaluation of their preparation in content area (including programs leading to subject matter degrees and/or licensure), special education instruction (including programs leading to special education degrees and/or licensure), and social and emotional learning and skills (including college and university coursework with a focus on skills related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and decision-making) follows.

Strengths in content area preparation. Two participants, Dave and Jennifer, felt their undergraduate studies were beneficial in preparing them to teach content matter to their students. Dave identified his study of political science as a college student as more useful than his master's degree in teaching social studies, and stated that "the content areas are very, very helpful." Of his graduate degree, he stated that "not a whole lot applies" to his current role as a special education/history teacher. Jennifer also discussed the impact of her undergraduate degree by describing her graduate program, which led to

a license that qualified her to teach special education in all disability categories (mild, moderate, and severe), grade levels (K-12), and subject areas, a certification that is no longer available in Massachusetts. According to Jennifer, this offered advantages but also presented challenges:

What sets me apart from many of my colleagues, which is a good thing on one hand, but on the other hand, because I am certified to teach so many different subject areas, last year I taught 4 sections of AP Biology and this year I'm teaching middle school geography, pre-algebra, and English language arts, so I tend to get bounced around because of my certification.

However, although Jennifer does not possess individual content licenses, she felt that her undergraduate education adequately prepared her to teach multiple subject areas. Jennifer obtained a bachelor's degree in history and sociology, with a double minor in fine art and women's studies. As she explained, "I have my undergraduate degrees to back me teaching in a bunch of different areas but I've never had an issue. I've never been questioned. My licensure was just recertified and I'm recertified until 2019."

Strengths in special education preparation. When asked to discuss the most useful components of his training, Bob, who works as a principal and graduate level instructor, identified his master's program in special education as "the best" and "most formalized training" he received because "we really hyperfocused in on disabilities and how to modify curriculum for those children." In elaborating on what he learned from a curriculum modifications course, he described the professor's beliefs about working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities:

My professor really kind of hit home, that it's not like a broken leg where you can see it. You kind of have to go with what works, trying the different teaching practices until you find one that meets the kid's needs. You don't want to stay on one type of teaching that just isn't effective. You move through the different learning styles and you kind of move through what the kid is showing you.

Bob also mentioned the application of William Glasser's choice theory, which he studied in his courses, to his work with EBD students. He noted the importance of "helping kids realize that choices have a powerful impact on you and on your life.... and around what that means for learning opportunities in and out of the classroom." Further, Bob expressed appreciation that the program addressed state regulations and led to licensure: "Every course... was aligned with the state's mandate and what the state requires for licensure. There really weren't a lot of courses that were useless, to be frank."

In addressing the utility of her special education degree, Jennifer also spoke about licensure. Unlike Bob, however, she highlighted the ability to earn a professional level license through her graduate program, rather than initial licensure (which is standard in educator preparation programs in Massachusetts) as advantageous. She felt that her professors' experience teaching and working with challenging populations made this possible, explaining that "a lot of it is because a lot of the professors have worked at that and they understand the actual day-to-day dealings of your job. I was really lucky with that." Further, the professors, she said,

looked at emotional/behavioral disorders but also looked at the physical emotional impact of having an emotional/behavioral disorder. It wasn't just like, this kid had

ODD⁸ but how does the ODD manifest itself with their confidence, their self-esteem, how does that link into self-injurious behaviors?

Additionally, Jennifer discussed the benefits provided through her university's partnership with a local education and research center serving children with autism. The collaboration between the two institutions enabled her "to participate in a tremendous amount of research with video modeling and working with students that were communicating in alternate ways." As she explained it,

I didn't get a degree in teaching. I ...got a degree in science— like, how does the brain change?...How does this impact [children's] daily life?— so I think with that background it's a lot easier for me to separate and identify that there are behaviors which are a manifestation of something that's internal, and that it's separate from what the child actually is.

Like Jennifer, Dave found value in studying specific disabilities as well as widespread social issues. He cited the coursework involved in obtaining special education certification, explaining that "probably the most beneficial was learning about autism spectrum issues and probably classes in current behavioral things [such] as addictions."

Strengths in graduate courses related to social and emotional learning. Dave spoke extensively about the importance of addressing prevalent social issues such as substance abuse. When asked what type of professional development he believed would be most beneficial to his sense of self-efficacy, he named "addiction counseling" without hesitation. Dave explained,

⁸ Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

I am most effective when I know what's going on. I have kids of my own, so I have some degree of knowledge, so I can relate to some of the kids in my classroom. But things change, whether it's the names that they call the drugs, places. As long as I have the ability to be aware and have a connection with them I can understand exactly what's going on. I can know where to look for the problems, whether it's a nickname of a drug or It's great to have training in certain things, but to have it more in the social pieces, the societal pieces, that's what's really important. Learning about family systems is really important. That I would view as more important than some of what we get, yeah.... Look at the incidence of police using Narcan and things like that. If we are not continually updated, then we're kind of fighting a losing battle. It's not just the kids that I deal with. It's across the school. Marijuana is a huge issue. To me, it's not addressed, it's not viewed.

Limitations in special education preparation. Five of the six interview participants attended graduate programs for special education. While Jennifer viewed her master's program relatively positively, most interview participants shared criticism related to their graduate school experiences. Dave and Bob expressed frustration with regard to the utility of specific topics addressed through their coursework, while Justine and Andrew identified broader concerns with the quality and relevance of special education preparation programs. Eva described issues of both natures.

Dave expressed the frustration he felt with two courses: one that focused on the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and another that centered on inclusive practices. Dave explained,

Some of it may have actually been the teacher, the person who was doing the actual teaching, but one of them was developing IEPs. It was just a lot of busy work really. Because standards change and everyone has different ideas and within a school system every school has different requirements and different things that they want, I struggled with that a lot... There really are no standards. It applies to one and not to another, so that was very frustrating... The other issue that I found frustrating was just as far as ... This is going to sound terrible from a special ed teacher, but learning about the inclusive classroom. Again, not that it's subjective, but everybody has a different standard and there's so many variables that go into it, so many moving parts, that it's nothing you can teach. It has to be on the job. I know it's a requirement, but it's just something that ... You can't create it in the classroom.

Bob also noted two areas that he felt were somewhat neglected in his master's program and could use improvement:

The ones that were needing a little bit more attention and TLC was probably philosophy of education and teaching practices. More the teaching practices aspect than the philosophy. When a person can articulate the philosophy, that's important as a teacher in your role, because that helps kind of frame out what you're good at in your teaching practices and what you need to work on.... The other one I think needs a tremendous amount of attention is the literacy courses that are put in play and courses around communication for this type, for this [EBD] category of students.

Eva expressed strong feelings about a required research class, the purpose of which was unclear to her:

The class that I feel has no value to what I'm doing right now was the research class. It was probably one of the biggest classes and most challenging classes that I had to do. It was at the very end of my master's. It was... I want to say it was called 'Teacher as a Researcher'... I probably blocked it out at this point...but basically we had to research a topic which, it wasn't so much that that was the bad thing...part of it was having to, probably the biggest headache was writing it in APA format. That was probably one of the biggest headaches of all time.... I found that to be probably to be the most useless thing ever. With that, I had to go through articles and summarize the article that I would be using and referencing within the paper. I don't even remember what my topic was. That's how awful it is. I just found it to be very useless. I don't even remember it. I don't know. For some of those, it's like 'Why are you making us do this?'

Eva described additional concerns about the efficacy of her graduate program and its application to her work as a teacher:

I actually find school to not prepare you in any way, shape, or form for teaching and probably other fields as well. I can't speak for those.... Probably going for my master's was the most useless for what I deal with daily in the classroom with the children. No one can prepare you for that. No one and nothing can really prepare you for that. I do believe that.

Although Andrew called his graduate studies “interesting”, he described similar concerns about the relevance of what he had learned and identified alternate resources that he found greater value in. He explained,

I often tell people I've learned more from really good paraprofessionals than I ever did in my experience in master's programs. I attended a couple different schools... I'm a thinker. I found it interesting. It's kind of hard to find it relevant, to be really honest, to my day-to-day life in the classroom.... A lot of the psychiatric background and even some of the neurology kind of things that I've picked up at conferences along the way, that has been more useful to me probably than the master's work that I did....

Andrew also addressed the breadth of special education licensure in Massachusetts as problematic:

One of the things that I notice is that special education is so incredibly broad, even if you break it down. For example, my area is mild to moderate disabilities. There's a dozen different disabilities there, and it just seems like a lot of lip service was paid to each of those, but there's ways in which getting somebody ready to work with somebody with multiple physical disabilities is a really different ball of wax than working with somebody who's working with behaviorally troubled kids.

Justine, who currently works as a special education director and superintendent, shared some of these concerns. She explained why she chose not to pursue a graduate degree in special education:

One of the reasons I did not pursue special ed certification as a teacher, we've had as a company, but also as a public school district, grave concerns about the content

of teacher preparation programs in Massachusetts, and one of the questions we always ask is, 'Is it because we're in Western Mass, compared to Eastern Massachusetts?', and that's a little bit of the issue, but even with our teachers who are prepared in a bigger, metropolitan program, we've had the same, and that's across all disabilities. The other thing I would say is that the idea that a special education certification is okay enough without content certification is insane to me, and that there's this idea, on paper it works because you look and say, 'We have content coming in from content teachers and true integration and inclusiveness, and then the sped teacher is just supplemental, or a substantially separate special education program is not a long-term placement.' In practice, that has never been true. Never. Never.

Justine explained that teacher preparation programs “really do so little” to deal with the problem of students’ learning gaps and social emotional challenges that teachers must seek out their own sources of professional development:

You do what I did, you go back, you kind of cobble together your own curriculum with the research behind it being not for that population, but it assists because it gets kids to succeed on some level. Most of the successes are way below their academic level. Socially-emotionally, they're appropriate.

Professional Development and In-service Trainings

All interviewees described the topics and/or structure of professional development sessions they found most useful to their work, which were numerous. They were also asked to identify those with less value. Topics included (1) behavioral interventions, such as the use of positive reinforcement and crisis prevention strategies; (2) clinical features,

including the principles of specific therapies, trauma treatment, and self-care; (3) cognitive and academic strategies, including support in teaching content and communication and literacy skills; and (4) supports for program improvement, such as program evaluation and site visits. The benefits of trade associations were also mentioned. Criticism centered on government-sponsored trainings and the lack of resources available to teachers of EBD students. Participants expressed mixed feelings about content-based professional development.

Behavioral interventions. Jennifer spoke in detail about behavior management systems that she had been taught at the schools in which she worked. Because her current school recently adopted Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (PBIS), staff members were trained in its principles in order to implement the program. Jennifer stated that much of PBIS “is what special educators have been doing for years and years and years” and that implementation “was like nothing for me because I’ve always been doing that”. Jennifer discussed the practical applications of PBIS to children with challenging behaviors, which she uses “all the time”. She explained,

When you work with children with severe autism, they live their lives on a token economy. It's like, ‘Good job! You pointed to the letter A. Here's a piece of candy.’ Obviously that's a very simplistic approach, but it translates. Right now, when I'm teaching geography I'm like, ‘Nice job! You're on the right page.’ ‘Good job! You've got your pencils and your materials.’ It sounds so ridiculous but you are theoretically reinforcing students for demonstrating the expected behavior 3-4 times per minute... It's a really high rate of reinforcement but for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, they need that because they

have not been getting that in their everyday lives. They are not getting that at home and it's not ... They're not used to being positively recognized in an educational setting because educational settings have traditionally been an area where they'd flame out.

Justine also spoke of the efficacy of positive reinforcement with her students and the value of trainings that centered on modifying student behavior. Justine had high praise for the Syracuse Curriculum for the Developmentally Delayed in particular and described their resources as “fabulous”. Unfortunately, however, Justine noted that the program was terminated five years ago, which was “just amazing” because “they used to be leaders at all sorts of curriculum, mostly developmentally delayed/severe special ed”. As she explained,

It really helped me get my head around chunking out curriculum, chunking out individual supports for kids, into minute pieces so they were given immediate success for mastering every piece, whether that was literally walking down a hall in a line to get to gym and not acting out or not showing some kind of defiance, or whatnot, it really helped me as a teacher to kind of figure out every single step in what could go wrong or right for individual kids, and give them success immediately, immediate gratification around doing something, even meeting basic expectations in a school environment.

Further, as a special education director, Justine guides the teachers she works with on its application to the challenges they face in working with disruptive students:

Two months ago, I was sitting down with teachers who were just to tears about these kids purposely tantrumming and whatnot, and walking through it, like,

‘Look, I understand that by the book this is not an appropriate curriculum, but just look how it's built, look at the mechanics, and now let's take your material that you know your students... well one, they need it; two, they can do it, cognitively, but it just blows them out of class; let's now apply the mechanics.’

Eva echoed the sentiments of the others, identifying the utility of training in the use of positive reinforcement with her students. Like Jennifer, she spoke of learning about such techniques through professional development sessions at her school. Of her boss, who led these sessions, Eva explained,

He will show us ways to approach the kids. He will show us ways to get the desired result, which is ultimately a demand that's being placed on the child. We want them to honor that demand and then they can have something in return for doing whatever the demand is. Often he just points out that we're going about it in the wrong fashion, and how we should go about it and there's a lot of truth to what he has to say.

Jennifer and Justine also addressed the importance of training in de-escalation and crisis prevention strategies. Jennifer described how one program taught her skills to guide students in emotional regulation and to help maintain a safe learning environment within the school. She explained,

The most important [training] has been, it used to be called NVPI, which was Nonviolent Physical Intervention, then it was called CPI, and then it was called NVPI calm-verbal. Basically, it's how do you deal with a student that is in crisis? How do you recognize the different stages of their outburst, whether it be the starting of the outburst? Obviously the goal of these courses has been ‘How do

you basically physically manage them in an educational setting?’ But what you learn through that is to recognize the different stages of crisis and what response is most helpful for the person actually in crisis, whether it's validating their concern, whether it's reassuring them that there's a strong rapport and we're concerned about their safety. I think that is something that I use in every single class every single day.

Justine also identified several workshops that centered on crisis prevention and social pragmatics. These were clinical in nature, and although the trainings were run through state agencies and by scholars in the field, they were offered by her school as opportunities for professional development. She explained,

The Department of Mental Health came in and ran this with our lead teacher rep, was Applied Nonviolence. That was very helpful. Ross Greene came in and did stuff around *Explosive Child*. His partner Stuart Ablon came in and worked actually with our speech and language pathologists around social pragmatics, and I'm trying to think of what the name [is]. One of those doctors has a website called like, Think Kids... Live Kids⁹, Think Kids... and this is like version 4.0 of his work, but we actually brought him to our school, and did a partnership with the public school districts around that curriculum, and now we actually still have teachers when they first started, and they go back to it on their own. They watch, it's like a webinar without assessment, and then we do the assessment. That's really helpful stuff.

⁹ The title of the program referred to is Think:Kids.

Clinical features. In her discussion of professional development for teachers of EBD students, Justine also described the structure of trainings she found the most effective. She stated,

The schools that I worked in and then ended up actually running, had pretty in-depth training for all staff, including teachers, around kids who had for whatever reason, some kind of an emotional disturbance/disruptive component. For those they brought in outside speakers, and the most effective training would be where you had a teacher who was highly qualified, coupled with a clinician, whether it be a psychiatrist, or a psychologist, or a social worker, and together they had put together some stuff based in research, not too deep, like an hour, and you get a professional credit. That's because what happened is you had that kind of clinical perspective of why this can happen, and honestly the biggest part of that clinical part, especially in the beginning, was that they validated this disability as being real, and not being behavior, and not being— maybe manifested in a behavior that was the opposite of what you needed really to do in a classroom, but it was being more of an exclusive behavior as far as time on learning rather than an inclusive behavior. They really knew it.

She elaborated by highlighting the impact of trainings that provided both clinical and educational perspectives:

At first, I can remember sitting there as a pretty young educator, thinking, 'Wow, these guys really believe this exists, and if I hold their belief, well I think this would work.' Really it was about the belief. It wasn't about, let's say, sitting down at a training for autism, and you say you believe it; well, it's understood it is.

Those things were just so helpful because I understood the curriculum and the expectation, but none of the curriculum really was modified; there were no accommodations for a kid who was emotionally involved on a clinical level, and those were most helpful. Harvard actually now has, and has had for about the last 10 years, a Mental Health in the Public Schools, and there's a large chunk of that around this disability, and that's probably the best stuff of recent years I've gone [to].

Justine noted the lack of understanding around emotional disabilities repeatedly. When asked about the most challenging aspect of her role as a teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, she replied,

I didn't have enough time to really understand where it [EBD] came from. I didn't understand, I didn't have enough information on a professional development level to really dig into it, and then, I didn't have enough time with my students to figure out how it manifested personally in them.

She explained that this was due to a lack of appropriate resources for teachers who served the population, an issue that she feels “is changing a little bit”:

The material around the diagnosis of the disability was just so fragmented.

Again, I'll go back to, say, a communication disorder, or autism: it took me five minutes to either find an expert in my area, a listserv, a body of material on the internet, or at a teacher's warehouse. It was just so easy to find something, and for social-emotional, it was... I ended up looking at the Syracuse Curriculum. I just didn't have time to find good resources, and then if I did, I was never quite sure,

they always seemed adapted from another set of data, another set of research that wasn't spot-on.

Like Justine, Eva also expressed appreciation for trainers with clinical expertise. She described the professional background of her supervisor: As a licensed mental health counselor, he “has a psychology piece...but more than that, he's worked with the population,” and he also had experience teaching. According to Eva, “he's kind of done it all”, which she appreciated because “you don't really want to talk with somebody that hasn't been in the classroom because they don't know what it's like”. Of her boss and the training provided through her work, Eva elaborated, “I feel that I get most of my knowledge daily and from those professional development days from within the school I work at rather than the school I went to.”

Jennifer also spoke at length about the value of trainings with a clinical focus. According to her,

The ones that have been most helpful have been, ironically ... I'm certified in DBT, which is dialectical behavioral therapy, and our entire school, every teacher, is certified in DBT because a lot of the times before we can even impart knowledge, we need to address their social, emotional, and behavioral needs first.

Once that's addressed, we're able to move forward with curriculum.

Jennifer also described her training in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) as having great value, particularly with students who have histories of trauma, stating that she applies its principles in her work “everyday”. She elaborated, “I'm not saying it's an end all/be all, but it's pretty incredible the results you can get from EMDR, especially in a short time period, if you're dealing with one incident of trauma.” Jennifer

noted that every student in her school engages in psychoeducational group counseling daily, and although these are typically run by a school therapist, at times “a teacher has to jump in and run one”. In such cases, knowledge of various clinical approaches becomes even more useful.

In addition to DBT and EMDR, Jennifer called social thinking “awesome” and “really helpful”. She felt that these practices help teachers “understand the real issues that their students are facing as opposed to, ‘Oh my god! This student is lazy. He won’t do his homework.’” She elaborated by sharing, “I think that there are a couple of us in my building that are of a similar mindset and we tend to be a lot more successful with those students.”

Andrew also addressed the relevance of trauma-focused trainings. He called a professional development session he attended at his current school “really profound” and “incredibly useful”. Though he could not remember the name of the workshop, Andrew described it as “like a cornerstone for trauma-informed care” that was designed by trauma victims themselves. When asked what type of professional development would be most beneficial to his self-efficacy as a teacher, Andrew responded, “I think self-care would be huge. It took me a long time to wrap my brain around that part of it, of stress reduction and just taking care of my own self.” He continued that self-care would have had even greater value to him when he was new to the field. Andrew also mentioned his interest in learning more about “the more therapeutic-based approaches” including Applied Behavioral Analysis because “I don’t know a ton about that, but everything I know about that is really interesting to me.”

In addition to trainings conducted by schools and educational researchers, Justine also had a lot to share about professional associations, their offerings, and their reach. She spoke about the resources they offered to teachers who serve various populations, including students with trauma histories, social-emotional skills deficits, and behavioral challenges. Justine described how advances in technology have enabled these organizations to spread their influence across a wide audience:

Professional associations, trade associations, the NEA¹⁰ has a separate kind of arm for alternative students, which isn't exactly social-emotional. To say the least, there's some crossover. That has been, especially with technology, chat rooms, listservs, so key. A couple of times when we build up professional development plans for teachers who clearly have great natural skills and are really passionate about the population, we will put into their plan that they need to join one of these listservs, they need to join a chat room so that they can work through stuff that's going on in the classroom, and it doesn't have the stigma or the uncomfortableness of going to a new supervising teacher.

Our trade associations in Massachusetts are super supportive around this population, around explaining funding, around using funding creatively, but also interventions and modifications to federal mandates like PBIS and RTI¹¹, so Massachusetts [Association of] Approved Private Schools, MAAPS, they have really stepped up to that challenge. They, as a trade association, the schools that they represented, and the districts that they partner with, really was around severe

¹⁰ National Education Association.

¹¹ Response to Intervention.

physical and cognitive disabilities, or deaf/blind, and they've had to look at kids who are based or coming out of a neurological perspective of trauma, and social-emotional gaps. They're fantastic, and they've actually pulled around ASE, the Association of Special Education Directors, who have now broadened their reach to teachers....

Trade associations have been, and I think they will be more and more important because they can be so much more responsive, and funding is much more fluid because of fees... The MAAPS conference... a one-day conference in the middle of Massachusetts, is pretty amazing. If you just looked at their offerings last year and this year and workshops, they'll have a strand for leadership, or a strand for social-emotional teachers. It's spot-on. It's really great stuff.

Justine also spoke about trainings offered by the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health, which provided information about services available to individuals in need. Justine explained that “a lot of the kids I dealt with were foster kids or lived with grandparents and needed significant services outside the school day, and I would go to those training sessions, or those info sessions, parent sessions, to hear what supports were out there.” The information enabled her to make referrals to public agencies and other resources to better meet her students’ needs. Justine did this “all the time” and explained that sometimes “we would even end up filing a protective report because there was a kid who was really emotionally disturbed, who was unsafe, where parents, grandparents, or caretakers were unable to keep them literally physically safe, or siblings, and to get services.”

Cognitive and academic strategies. In addition to agencies that support the mental health of school populations, Justine also identified two organizations that provide valuable content-related materials. She pointed to a “pretty good” conference run by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents:

In the last four years, there's a big joint conference with the special ed directors, and a little bit of math, and the content is really getting appropriate. We will actually send teachers. Sometimes we'd send one or two people, just to kind of pick up materials and bring it back to our teacher meetings.

Justine also discussed the Teaching Tolerance curriculum developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Of this resource, she stated,

That's amazingly effective and useful because it deals with so many sub-issues and co-morbid issues of this population. I talked to other teachers up in Maine, and then in Connecticut, through MAAPS, who find it the same. The materials are just fantastic. They really go at hard issues: integration and class bias and race bias. Our clinical team will probably switch 100% to using their curriculum to base all of their in-school clinical groups because the materials are so interactive; their technology, they are hands-on, their content is very strong, and it's a great jumping-off point to a whole bunch of issues that are really important all over this population's IEP.

Bob also discussed specific resources related to literacy development and communication skills that he was able to apply to his practice:

I mentioned the communication piece. It was through my work with just seeking out additional PD on my own that I had an opportunity to meet Joan Sedita of

Keys to Literacy, and then come in contact with a number of other literacy specialists. They were the ones that kind of helped me formalize and understand more of the pieces of communication difficulties that these students had. I think seeking that out really was tremendously helpful.... Always looking to continuously improve, always looking to get better as a professional was something that was important to me. And in meeting people like Joan Sedita and Sue Nichols and others I was able to kind of see in a more effective way.

Back in the day, they used to use things like Orton-Gillingham and Wilson and today there's so many different ways to teach literacy and communication in a far more effective way. But for those kids who need it, those programs are there, and that's why they're there. I think that's something else that was really helpful to me in an informal way.

Bob echoed Justine's point about the need to take initiative in seeking out high quality, relevant professional development and explained that he was able to engage in such trainings "because I was willing to go to my bosses and continue to ask for PD, and continue to reach out not because it was built in the system." Further, he continued, "There has to be more formalized PD built in for people in this field that are special ed, general ed, or alt ed, doesn't matter what you call it, what matters is that our teachers have those opportunities available to them." Bob also addressed the value of content training for special educators, which he felt those in public schools were not getting enough of:

These special educators have been so well-trained in special ed, but not been exposed to general curriculum a whole lot, and that's purposeful. When you think

about why did they go to school? They went to be a special educator, not a general educator for content, and yet that's why you're seeing this disconnect. Because they have to then turn to the person in a team meeting and say, "Hey, what are you doing in enVision, that math program, and how can I modify it?"

The question for me is, as a special educator, I have to figure that out now. I have to really lean on you as a general educator. If the district didn't include special ed in the training, that's a problem. That's a huge disconnect and a massive loss of opportunity from a professional development standpoint.

While Andrew expressed his preference for “therapeutic-based” workshops over those focused on content, he explained why additional content training could be beneficial to colleagues in substantially separate placements:

One of the reasons I love my job is I'm like a jack of all trades and a master of none. I watch a lot of my colleagues who might ... I'm a self-contained class. I do everything, and I love that because I love to do math, and I love to do it all, but I do know that's a little bit unusual and that there's lots of people who might not have a ... Math seems to be a particular one that a lot of people just are not comfortable with. Maybe they're more of an English person and whatnot. For them, I can see that the content would be a big deal, and of course, everybody always can stand to learn more.”

Jennifer expressed a similar sentiment as Andrew. She explained,

I've done some professional development courses that are content-based, which are really interesting and while I enjoy them, I'm not necessarily able to apply those techniques into my classroom. If I was teaching inclusion, sure, but I'm not.

My kids are all at a therapeutic day school because they cannot handle a general education setting.

When she spoke of trainings sponsored by the state, however, she became more critical:

Pretty much any training provided by the Department of Education has been completely useless. Anything that has been MCAS- related, completely useless. Anything that is standardized, completely useless.

In addition to government trainings, Jennifer also addressed content-based professional development provided by her school. This is done through the use of shared preparation periods among teachers in each academic department, a “valuable” practice that she has participated in for the past four years as a member of the school’s literacy team.

Supports for program improvement. Two participants, Justine and Eva, addressed training related to the development of effective policies and practices in special education schools. Justine mentioned NAPSEC, the National Association of Special Education schools, which offers a certification accreditation process for schools “that is so much more, not just rigorous, but helpful for special education programs, than anything the Department of Education does.” She described it as “a hard process” but one that was worthwhile because “everybody at the end of it says, ‘That kind of hurt, but now we have these practices and policies in place that are so helpful.’”

Eva agreed that program evaluation is important. When asked what type of professional development she would benefit from, she said,

I think it would be really great if we could visit other sites, other schools like ours.

It really probably wouldn't probably serve us much to visit a public school

because we're not like that. That would be really awesome.... basically a field trip for the staff.

Eva suggested devoting time “maybe every other month” to this endeavor and explained, I would want to see their model, how they handle the kids. See how far off we are, if we're similar or if we're different. Is what they're doing better? Anything to better ourselves as educators and models would be great because we're far from perfect.

In addition to the value of site visits, Eva mentioned the utility of training related to the development of Individualized Education Plans and special education paperwork: “I found it slightly useful. IEPs, I obviously work with those and most documents I've learned along the way— and I'm still learning of course.”

Perceptions of Preservice and In-service Teaching Experience

Preservice experience refers to student teaching or practicums, most of which are unpaid, while *in-service experience* refers to paid employment as a lead teacher.

Interview participants spoke emphatically about the impact of experience on their feelings of efficacy in the field. The questions listed in Table 5.4 were used to generate the responses included in this section.

Table 5.4

Questions related to Experience

Pertinent Questions:

- I am curious about how you got involved in working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Can you tell me about your teaching experience, if any, before you began teaching students with emotional and behavioral disabilities?
- Help me to understand what credentials you had when you first began teaching

EBD students.

- Did you earn any as you continued in the field? Why?
- What elements of these educational/training programs did you find most useful? Why?
- Which did you find to be least useful?
- Have you felt more effective, less effective, or the same since you started teaching EBD students?

Preservice Experience

Bob and Eva spoke at length about the impact of student teaching on one's practice. While Eva primarily described the value of her time under the guidance of a mentor teacher, Bob also addressed some concerns related to practicums. He felt that the EBD population "is probably one of the needed areas" in practicums. He explained that

Working with students with social and emotional/behavioral disorders to help to engage them and work with them is probably the biggest issue and biggest concern that new teachers coming out of school come out with. Really, there's only one way to get that. That's hands-on in the classroom. You've just got to experience it."

Eva agreed that "experience is the best" and described her own student teaching experiences. When asked if she found her practicum helpful, she replied,

Absolutely. Absolutely. I actually wish that could have been longer. I had an expedited one because I had been working in the field, so I was able to transfer some of those hours into credits and not have to do the full... It was a 12 credit practicum initially you had to do, but I got it reduced to six. That was every bit...

helpful, worthwhile, because we were doing it. We weren't sitting in a separate classroom writing a paper. I clearly felt very passionately about. I really did find the practicum to be helpful. I wish I didn't get the hours reduced actually. The only reason why I'm glad I did is because I actually wasn't getting paid.... Aside from that, I wish that could have been longer because nothing prepares you for teaching and I wish I could have had more time with a teacher looking over me, watching over me, telling me what I'm doing right and wrong.

According to Eva, an ideal length of time for student teaching would be “probably six months”, though hers was under two. She described the structure of her practicum below:

Four weeks in an inclusion setting and four weeks in my sub-separate setting, which was my job. I did get partly employment-based. I was four weeks in the inclusion; granted, as you know, my license is in Severe¹². Inclusion was a slight waste of my time, but I did learn things from it and I wish I could have stayed in it longer, but at the same time, it wasn't the bulk of my license. My license was Severe. I wasn't going to get that in an inclusion setting. The kids just aren't being kept in the district, the kids that I want to work with anyway.

However, Eva expressed concern about the financial implications for prospective teachers of increasing the length of practicums:

There has to be a way that people can go without either getting paid or set something up with their work that they can come back in six months. Financially

¹² Refers to a license in Special Education, Severe Disabilities.

it's not ideal, but for experience in learning, it's very ideal. Six months I would think, maybe even longer.

She continued,

I had to save up my PTO¹³ to use it in the four weeks, which actually ended up only being three because They ended up messing up my setting and it took them a week to figure it out.... I ended up losing a week, which, because it wasn't the bulk of the practicum— because it wasn't the most important part of the practicum— people just kind of shook their heads and looked the other way and that was that. I would have appreciated probably two weeks in the inclusion setting and more time in my sub-separate [setting], a.k.a. my work, a.k.a. where I am now, and all of that, because that is the population I was seeking.

Bob disagreed, instead identifying limited opportunities for reflection as the larger issue with student teaching experiences. In his discussion, he focused on state-mandated standards:

From my experiences with the 300 hours, I don't think the problem is with the 300 hours they have to go through. I think the problem is, from experience and what I've seen, not setting the stage for reflection so that when we're talking about ethical practices and the standard, or curriculum, instruction, and assessment in standard one for instance.... In that standard, taking the time to talk to the student teacher about what they're seeing, and what they're experiencing, and how that

¹³ Personal time off.

change in what they're doing is impacting the child with this type of learning need, his emotional need.

Further, Bob explained,

It isn't until you're putting together your portfolio for the state and for your panel to review in your master's degree, it's not until then that you take some time to reflect. Whereas when you're in the actual three hundred plus hours or so that you're doing, you really oughtta be reflective and have a leader, a professor who is willing to work with you to be more reflective, and a reflective practitioner. I think more than anything today, that's probably the part that is most needed. Yet teachers are getting hammered with every new mandate there is every day. So, to be reflective, that's not necessarily the easiest thing to do.

Bob attributed teacher attrition to insufficient preparation, stating that new teachers are leaving the profession “in the first five years at a rapid rate” because “they’re not very well prepared for what they're seeing or what's being seen in the classroom”. Bob explained that, in his current work at a local university, “making sure those classroom experiences are rich has been a priority of mine”.

In-service Experience

To illustrate his point, Bob shared his memories of his entry into the classroom and what he learned through trial and error:

My whole first year was horrific. My first year of teaching was definitely on the job training in terms of teaching strategies, teaching practices, things that worked, things that didn't. What worked with one group of kids didn't work for another, and what worked for one kid didn't work for another.

Bob went on to describe how his skills grew as he continued in the field. He pointed to his ability to build relationships with students as a factor in his efficacy with the work.

According to Bob,

In my second year, I thought that was when I really took off and learned a ton, not only about the procedures of how to have an effective classroom, how to function in a classroom and be effective as a teacher, but how to really meet the kid where they are and help them come forward. My whole first year with any student that I had in year one, progress and learning didn't really take place until year two because they didn't trust or have faith or know that I was there for them. It wasn't until I came back that second year that they said, 'Okay, he's here, he's not going anywhere.'

Bob also discussed the value of experience in one's ability to work with students who have trauma backgrounds and other mental health issues. In such cases, however, he felt that more significant experience was required to identify effective appropriate interventions with ease. Bob explained that at this stage in their career, teachers "have it figured out and they've been around these types of kids. They know, okay, this is stuff that works with this type of report and this type of a kid".

Dave shared similar sentiments regarding the value of experience in developing confidence and competence. He noted,

There are things you learn along the way. There are tools you pick up and there are things that happen that you just figure out. I make mistakes. The next time I'm presented with that issue, I cannot make that mistake again. It's a learning curve, like anything. You have a skill set entering into it and you build on it.

Summary

This chapter presented a portion of the qualitative findings in this study, which addressed all four research questions through interviews with six teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Particular attention was paid to question one, which examined how teachers of students with EBD are prepared, and question four, which explored teachers' beliefs about factors related to their self-efficacy in the field. Participants discussed their educational background, professional development, and experience with regard to the domains of content knowledge, special education instruction, and social and emotional learning. They reported strengths in their university coursework related to the development of their content knowledge and social and emotional competence. However, they reported more weaknesses than strengths in their special education coursework, although they found value in the practicum experience.

Respondents identified professional development that focused on skills related to social and emotional learning (such as specific behavioral interventions and clinical approaches) as positive influences on their self-efficacy as teachers. They also noted the utility of training in cognitive strategies, particularly those related to communication, and related to policy development in their schools and programs. Some participants expressed concerns about government-sponsored trainings.

CHAPTER 6

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: WORKPLACE CULTURE AND PERSONAL FACTORS

While Chapter 5 reported demographic information and presented interview findings related to educational factors and teaching experiences, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss factors related to workplace culture and personal qualities. Through this discussion, I aim to further my understanding of the quantitative results, particularly as they relate to the fourth research question, which investigates how secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom.

Workplace Culture

Workplace culture includes relationships with administrators and other staff members as well as the practices and policies employed in one's program or school. Through their surveys, participants reported feeling various levels of support from school administration, and findings suggested that strong levels of support impact EBD teacher self-efficacy. Additionally, quantitative results indicated that program type (i.e., public or private) also influences teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. This section will discuss these factors, among others, based on interview responses to the questions displayed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Questions related to Workplace Culture

Pertinent Questions:

- What factors do you feel have been important in your effectiveness as a teacher? In helping you to recognize your own effectiveness (or to feel successful or effective)?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspect of your role?
- Please tell me about the outlets you have, if any, to meet and discuss your work with other EBD teachers. Do you think this has been /would be beneficial?
- Can you give me some examples of how your administration has supported you? Or how they have not?
- My survey findings suggest that working in a sub-separate program in a public school (rather than a private placement) negatively impacts the self-efficacy of EBD teachers as it relates to teaching content. Can you help me to understand why this may be?
- How long do you plan to stay in this field? What factors have played a role in your decision to stay or go?

Relationships with Administrators

When surveyed, Andrew and Jennifer “strongly agree[d]” that they feel supported by their administration, while Bob and Eva “agree[d]”, and Justine and Dave “disagree[d]”. In the interviews, each discussed their relationships with supervisors and provided examples of administrator behaviors that conveyed support.

Supportive relationships with administrators. Andrew, Eva, and Bob discussed the value of moral support and understanding from their administration. Additionally, they spoke of the knowledge their bosses offered in improving their

efficacy with students. Andrew also touched on the importance of trust in the teacher-administrator relationship. About his supervisor, Andrew said,

My boss is very, she's a great mix of very knowledgeable about what she does and also good at interpersonal relations. She was really masterful at knowing when she needs to just be quiet and be an active listener about the fact it was really a crappy day, and when she should speak up with really powerful and useful suggestions about what I might do in the class, because she cultivated that when she would say, 'Hey, I think I'd like to come in and watch and see what's going well or what's going poorly.' It didn't ever feel like she was playing 'gotcha,' but she'd come in and say, 'You know, these were the good things, and these were the things you might try differently.'

Andrew explained that his boss is able to support him as a result of her expertise with the population. He described an example in which he sought her advice regarding a challenging student:

I had a kid who just lived for negative attention, and she came in, and she told me about something that ABA calls the 'hero protocol,' where we found out something that would benefit the whole class that was based entirely only on his behavior. It created all of this positive social pressure for him to do the right thing. He was still able to get attention because his main motivation was, 'Everybody notice me. I don't care if it's positive or negative,' but when he was able to be the hero and earn this incentive for everybody, it was ... It's those practical things that I think she's really helpful with. It is knowing her stuff and

knowing her field and also being a good people-person, I guess, is how I'd summarize it.

Eva shared a similar perspective, stating that she feels her administration is accessible and that she feels comfortable approaching them about “absolutely anything” and does “not have to feel like I'm tiptoeing around the subject”. However, although she reported that she “always can get ideas”, Eva clarified that “they might not necessarily be the right ideas, but I can always get an answer.”

In considering the positive relationships he had with administrators, Bob discussed how his assistant principal encouraged him to seek him out when he was struggling during his first year of teaching. Bob shared this anecdote below:

He'd ask every week how I was doing. He knew I was struggling, I knew I was struggling. Right around Thanksgiving, ...we went out to this little diner and we had a cup of coffee. He said, ‘So how's it really going?’ And I said, ‘I'm not going to tell my boss that I'm failing and that I hate my job and that I stink and I'm just a complete and utter failure.’ And I said, ‘Yet, that sounds like what you want to hear.’ And he laughs. He says, ‘I can't help you if you don't tell me how you're doing.’ He said, ‘So you can keep telling me you're okay, and you can tell me that you're fine. Or you can tell me how you're really doing and we can deal with it together.’

I think that was really very powerful. Two reasons; one, he knew enough to get me off campus... Just get me out of there, get me in a different environment, one-on-one and just really get to the heart of it. The next thing that

he did in the same conversation was, 'Well, who are the kids that are most challenging? Who are the ones that are really making you crazy? If you could put them in a boat and push them out to sea, who are those children?'

I named about four or five of them, and he said, 'That's the four or five kids that need you the most.' He said, 'You need to work the hardest for them.' Again, very powerful. It was very, very real. You could see it, I could take these kids, put them in a boat, push them out to sea and say goodbye, or I could say, 'Hey, you're the reason I'm here.' The way my boss framed it really made it very visual in my mind, very real. I appreciated it a lot because, again, he had me identifying not the kids that were the issue, but the kids that really needed the most help. And he was right, those were the kids that needed me the most.

By doing that, after Thanksgiving, I came back and was far more purposeful in just setting up my procedures, far more, 'I'm going to do this, this and this. These three things today.' Just be very simplistic and if I didn't get the content done, oh well. But I was going to be there for the kids. I was more focused on the kids and their needs. I think that's something that a good administration...does, is has us focus on our students. On what's working and what's not, but having the opportunity to talk with administration and meet with faculty and staff is very important.

Jennifer also described feeling supported by administrators in her building. The example she provided was one in which her supervisors inspired her to feel confident in her abilities by expressing their beliefs about her skills. She shared,

We used to submit curriculum maps that were for 6-8 week periods for the unit ... whereas now, we need to complete monthly UDL lesson plans, which is Universal Design for Learning. When I got that information, I freaked out. I got it in the end of August. We're starting work in a week. I'm like, 'I already have all my curriculum maps done. What the hell am I gonna do now?' I lost my shit.

They wouldn't give us exemplars. They were like, 'No, you know, here's information, here are YouTube videos. Get a feel for it.' I literally was freaking out. I went in to talk to my big boss. She was like, 'Look. There is no right or wrong here. This is a process. I'm not gonna give you an exemplar because...you know what you need to do in a classroom and the key is recognizing that what you're already doing fits into these categories.'

Unsupportive relationships with administrators. Participants shared far more examples of behaviors that made them feel unsupported in their work with EBD students. These behaviors were related to a variety of issues, including IEP compliance, expectations for EBD teachers, ignorance regarding the disability category, and lack of resources available to teachers.

Although Jennifer indicated that she found her administration very supportive, she was able to describe instances where she felt unsupported, such as the example below:

Up until about a year ago, I was writing every single IEP for the entire building. I was writing IEPs for 65 children, 75% of which I never even saw. I didn't teach them, but I was the only one in the building that knew how to write an IEP apparently. I would come to administration and be like, 'We're out of compliance

on this, we're out of compliance on that. Our time on learning numbers don't add up,' and she would be like, 'Oh, it's fine. It's fine. It's fine. Just do it.'

I had to deal with the fact that I knew what I was doing was wrong and illegal and probably unethical. A lot of the times, I understood... for example, if you have a student, you're doing progress notes, it has to be on the last signed IEP. But we have students that their IEPs are so out of date because they're in DCF custody that you know it's just because DCF is dropping the ball and you don't want to hold that kid back, so you start providing new services, which is illegal. For me, it wasn't unethical because we were doing exactly what that kid needed. On the flip side, it could be unethical when parents are rejecting an IEP and going into mediation with DESE.

Eva raised issues about administrative support regarding compliance with special education regulations as well. In contrast, however, she perceived her administration as prioritizing compliance over her concerns about the mental state of a student and the safety of staff working with her. According to her,

At times I feel as though my boss can just shake his head and say 'You're not trying,' and appear almost as, without saying 'You're not trying hard enough,' or 'You just don't want to send the kid to work'... The kid's having an off day and you just don't want to send her to work because it's in the student's repertoire that she has bashed people's noses in and broken them, and she's come in, she has a hard time with transitions, and she's coming in like a bat out of hell. This was an actual situation where I felt completely unsupported. I said, 'Well, I'm not comfortable sending the student in this kind of shape.' 'Yeah. Well that's not an

option. It's in the IEP, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.' He just looked at it as very black and white, but I was like, 'I'm looking at it as staff safety. I understand it's in her IEP... There's a lot more at risk here. The student is a bolter. The student is very anxious.' She is the one that immediately I go to anxiety for when thinking about emotional disorders. She's also autistic....

Dave addressed the low expectations school and district leaders held for him as a teacher of students with behavioral challenges.

In all honesty, the biggest problem that I feel we face in my program is a lack of support or the kind of 'sweep them under the rug.' When the superintendent comes for a visit, they never stop by my classroom. My feelings aren't hurt, but I know why they don't stop by my classroom. They would prefer we didn't exist.

We are the problem. We're the red-headed stepchild. We're the ones that they don't want around, but we kind of have to be.

Dave clarified by explaining that public school districts do not want to serve EBD students in "in a separate setting off-site" because that "looks really bad", and that funding an out-of-district placement is "extraordinarily expensive". Dave also highlighted the breadth and scope of the perception that "we're not teaching and these kids are incapable of anything other than being caged", noting that it is "one of the biggest problems" he faces and that other teachers in the field "have heard the same thing".

Such perceptions may lead teachers of EBD students to feel isolated and alienated. Dave mentioned that his administration refers to the overall student body as "our kids" except for those in his classroom— in that case, he said, it's "your kids". He

also noted the lack of resources available to him and explained that he must “go basically begging for books” to teach his English, social studies, and elective classes. Dave attributed the scarcity of resources to a lack of advocacy for his department.

Andrew noted similar concerns during his time in a public school; he reported that administrators “would rather not have to support me with either administrative discipline or any of those sorts of things, even at the expense of nobody ever learning anything”.

Andrew also spoke in detail of a change in leadership during his tenure at the public school, during which time he oversaw a program for students with EBD. Andrew explained,

It was the first time they'd had a behavior classroom, and the principal and the director of SPED, they were all on the same page with me in terms of wanting therapeutic interactions, about knowing what is reasonable, and all those sorts of things. The changing of the guard happened, and one of the things I realized is that it's not just like a math class. Occasionally, you're going to have discipline issues, but this place where we live with behaviorally troubled kids, so many really fundamental questions live there. Should we be punitive in our interactions? Or should we be more therapeutic? Do these kids have any control over these negative behaviors, or....?

We could argue somebody into understanding our side, but when the person's your boss and they've been around 50 years, if somebody has decided that punitive is the way to go, and that these kids can really control their behaviors all the time without creating new incentives for them, it's really difficult to work in that world. When the guard changed, and there were people who didn't have a

lot of experience with behaviorally troubled classrooms, didn't want to put the time and the effort into making it work and all those sorts of things, I think that added to the isolation of the fact that I was the only teacher doing that anyway.

Justine also identified administrators' lack of understanding of the EBD population as a challenge to teachers' sense of self-efficacy. At times, as she described, this ignorance led to underservicing students in need and created unnecessary disruptions in the learning environment. Justine explained,

A lot of social-emotional kids, they move around, so you get a social-emotional kid in the middle of a school year, in the middle of a semester, and it's just like, 'Hey, that's just one more kid. You're not even at capacity in your classroom,' and there's no support to deal with this kid who doesn't tolerate transition, is already behind, and it's very hard to get them to join in. They're resistant. There's no real data or documentation of what really motivates this kid, what's their strength in a classroom. There's no additional staff given, even for a transition period. Not only is that kid falling further behind, the culture and tone of the classroom now are severely disrupted, and that can go on for the rest of the semester, too.

In addition to providing limited supports to transitioning students and their teachers, administrators' misconceptions of the EBD population could lead to improperly evaluating teachers in substantially separate programs. Justine described how her school administration perceived the volume of a class, unfairly penalizing teachers and discouraging them from creating appropriate and engaged learning environments. She explained,

One of the unsupported [instances], and this is a public and more severe setting, is the level of noise in a classroom. If you have a noisy classroom, you were evaluated negatively on that component of your eval... In the teacher observations the class was noisy, it was chaotic, without looking at the lesson, or not looking at maybe the noise or activity level was completely appropriate for the lesson, for the kids in there. We have done very little to support those teachers who actually create those environments appropriately, and the noise is not automatically a dysfunction.

Relationships with other Co-workers

Participants also discussed their relationships with co-workers, and many of the issues regarding administrators applied to teachers and other staff members as well. Eva described her co-workers as “accessible” and “an excellent support system”. She explained that her colleagues regularly check in with one other and work as a team when students are particularly challenging, and called the assistants “veteran staff” who were “a huge help.” Bob also spoke highly of his team, particularly when serving students with communication disorders, which he said “every single child I worked with who had some sort of a social or emotional disability or an EBD categorization always, always, always” had. Bob explained that therapists, school adjustment counselors, and other personnel on the team became “integral to getting a mode...of communication for the child.”

Interviewees also identified attitudes and actions of co-workers that felt unsupportive or interfered with their efficacy with EBD students. Dave shared that the behavior of his co-workers contributed to his feelings of alienation within his building.

As with his administrators, Dave believed that guidance counselors and other staff members did not seem to share a sense of responsibility for his students. He explained that instead of responding to student misbehavior, they ignored it and instead informed him. Dave recalled one such conversation: “‘Did you stop him?’ ‘Well, no.’ ‘Did you write him up?’ ‘No.’ ‘Did you report it? Then why are you telling me? I didn’t see it.’”

Additionally, Dave commented that other teachers did not respect his work and explained, “I’ve got teachers that will send a kid to my classroom. It’s like, ‘Wait I’m teaching a class.’ ‘Not really.’” Andrew felt similarly about his work in public school, where he ran the only behavioral classroom. According to him, “There were lots of people who didn’t understand what I did, lots of people who had unrealistic expectations about what I did, and nobody who really had any good answers in those places.”

When discussing her relationships with colleagues, Jennifer also identified some ways that she felt unsupported by staff members at the educational collaborative where she worked. She identified the tendency of others at her workplace to be “lazy” as an obstacle to her efficacy in serving her students. Jennifer explained,

Once you go above eight students in a classroom, you need a teaching assistant.

And my middle school right now is at eight and I have two referrals that are slated to begin in January. A colleague who’s been there for 20 years was like, ‘Oh, well, we’re gonna have to close to them. We can’t take more middle schoolers.’ I was like, ‘Well, we can take more middle schoolers. I just need a TA.’ She was like, ‘We don’t have the staffing for that. We’re gonna have to hire someone.’

And we do have the staffing. We have plenty of staffing. It’s just that people get lazy.

Jennifer mentioned that co-workers' resentment impacted her work as well. When she was given the responsibility of writing IEPs for every student in her school, she explained that her co-workers grew resentful because she "would hound them" for information on students' academic performance, which was required to draft the education plans.

School and Program Practices

Participants discussed the impact of staff meetings, student grouping systems, and state-mandated measures of accountability as factors in their self-efficacy. Andrew, Jennifer, Bob, and Eva spoke about regular "debriefs" at their schools, which were informal and used to keep staff apprised of student issues both in and out of the classroom. Andrew, Jennifer, and Bob discussed more formal meetings as well and noted the emotional support such opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving offered.

Staff meetings. Jennifer described her school's daily debriefs as "super-duper helpful" at times, depending "on the state that we're all in." She elaborated, "If we've had to hospitalize kids, if ...we've been down 3 teachers and we've all run our butts off, they're not helpful at all because our brains are done.... But we have an administration that recognizes that". Jennifer explained that in addition to a 15-minute daily debrief, staff at her school participated in afternoon meetings, each of which served a specific purpose. Mondays were dedicated to logistical issues for the coming week; on Tuesdays, clinicians and teachers met in teams to discuss students' academic issues; and Wednesdays involved larger professional development topics, such as token economies or special education legislation. On Thursdays, clinicians presented student case histories

and the staff engaged in problem-solving regarding the case, while Fridays served as a recap.

Bob reported that the meetings at his school were intended for “troubleshooting, action planning, and then rolling out that plan as a team” in order to address students’ emotional needs, which “relate to everything outside of academics.” He explained, “It’s hard to have a kid learn if they don’t have a relationship with their teachers.” Andrew described meetings at his school that served the same purpose. These took the form of regular one-on-one supervisions with the school’s principal, which occurred monthly or bi-monthly, along with group supervisions, consisting of six other teachers and the principal. Andrew reported that “those outlets are some of the reasons that I stay...and I really love my job right now because I have those things.”

However, Andrew reported that in the past, when it was clear that morale was suffering, his school took measures to change things:

They put together a committee, which I’m on, which is built around addressing some of those kind of morale and turnover kind of questions. Some of the work we’ve done there has just been ... Silly volleyball games. We had a staff volleyball game last week, where we were able to be stupid together and things. Creating incentives, opportunities for staff to praise other staff, and that’s all posted on a bulletin board. Those are things that we within the morale committee did, and those are outlets that I think are really useful in helping things along.

Andrew also identified the knowledge of therapists and other staff regarding the EBD population as an asset unlikely to be found in public schools, and one that supported his work as a teacher.

Unlike the others, Dave reported that he had no outlets to discuss his work with others who serve behavioral students, although he believed it would be helpful. When Justine was asked about such outlets, she referred to networking and learning opportunities through trade associations which did not occur within her school.

Student grouping systems. When asked for insight about why teachers in private placements may have higher levels of self-efficacy than those in public schools, Andrew pointed to a student grouping system unique to schools like his. He explained,

We're more or less ungraded. Obviously, there's legal expectations around... 48 months or so that everybody has to be within, but when I get to the end of a school year, it's not the case that I will never see that student again. We have a summer program..... There are cases where I might have somebody for two or three years within my class.... I think the public schools don't necessarily work on that same model in that in a lot of cases, I've got somebody for their seventh grade year in a public class, and then they're going to go to the other EBD teacher who teaches all the eighth grade kids. The most you're ever going to see is a year's worth of growth from somebody. The long view, being able to have the long view with kids... I think is huge.

State-mandated measures of accountability. When presented with the same question, both Eva and Jennifer identified measures of accountability, such as MCAS and Massachusetts special education laws, as factors that were likely to be more of a concern for public school teachers, and which may negatively impact EBD educators in those settings. Although Eva acknowledged that she had never worked as a public school teacher, she speculated that “their goal or their job.... is Common Core, Common Core,

Common Core and MCAS, MCAS, MCAS. Emotional disorders? They're not trained in that.”

In contrast, Jennifer had experience in public education, which she says “was almost harder than DYS¹⁴” and explained that,

Public schools are so mired in their own legislation and their own administration and the workings of the state, that you have so little opportunity to think outside the box, and actually educate, that it's frustrating.... I couldn't be like, “Oh, my god, my kids are off the wall today. I'm going to take them outside, we're going to do some jumping jacks, we're gonna run some laps.” I have that flexibility. I can see that my kids are struggling and I can meet those needs so that they can be more on task when they're in the classroom.

In a public school, no way in hell. You know, you're being judged on everything. They're looking at every MCAS bubble, you know, and it's absolute bullshit, and it's the reason I left public education and why most of my friends left public education Whereas I am currently assumed to be effective until proven otherwise, in a public school setting, you are assumed to be ineffective unless proven otherwise.

Jennifer also addressed the ability to more effectively individualize instruction for students in private placements. She attributed this to the philosophies of such settings, which she felt placed a greater focus on the individual needs of students. Jennifer also believed that private placements provide teachers with more detailed information about

¹⁴ Working as a teacher at a Department of Youth Services facility.

students' personal backgrounds and academic histories than public schools would. She explained,

You have to look at who they are as people and then, maybe, you can be effective.... Because, you know, the first thing we get when we get a new student is a big, fat folder of interviews and kind of a "Who is this kid?" The last thing we see is their last report card. We don't care. It's not important. It's "Who is this kid? How do they learn? How can we help them be successful?" And then down the line, it's like, "Okay, well, he's failed the past three years. How can we help that?"

Jennifer concluded, "I feel like I'm lucky, compared to what my friends in public school have to deal with. I feel like Miss Universe."

Personal Factors

Personal factors include attributes, beliefs, feelings, and habits. Throughout the interviews, participants named a number of personal qualities that impacted their self-efficacy as an EBD teacher, including (1) internal rewards; (2) belief in the "goodness" of students; (3) personality characteristics; (4) habits that build resilience; and (5) negative factors. The first four factors were identified as increasing self-efficacy. Negative factors included fear related to personal safety, paperwork and logistical tasks, and macro-level misconceptions about students with EBD. Responses in this section were elicited through the questions in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Questions related to Personal Factors

Pertinent Questions:

- What factors do you feel have been important in your effectiveness as a teacher? In helping you to recognize your own effectiveness (or to feel successful or effective)?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspect of your role?
- How long do you plan to stay in this field? What factors have played a role in your decision to stay or go?

Internal Rewards

Most interview participants reported finding their work rewarding. Andrew explained that he believed he was “making a difference” in the lives of his students and giving back to the world:

I have consistently felt like I make the world a better place and have consistently had a sense that I had a lot of blessings and benefits that these kids didn't have, so I have a sense of wanting to pay back some of the good things I have that I watch these kids and see that they don't have. I think those things keep me going a lot.

He also spoke about witnessing student progress:

Being able to watch somebody going from throwing chairs and instigating physical assaults and all those sorts of things, watching somebody who's just a mess when they walk in, and by the time they're ready to leave us, watch them kind of be a young man or a young lady. That's a pretty awesome thing.

One of my earlier successes when I started, I had a kid who was 16 at that time and was really illiterate, barely had letter-sound correspondence down.

Then, I worked my tail off for that kid. Having him read to me a Dr. Seuss book was tremendous. The kid was 16 years old, so in anybody else, it would have been a lot of nothing. You'd expect a 16-year-old to do that, but I knew where he started. The smile on his face when we got to the end of that book, and he knew he had done it by himself, that was huge. That's something I carry around with me.

Further, Andrew addressed the ripple effect of small successes in building his self-confidence as a teacher. He explained, "My experience is that success breeds success, so.... having that one successful day is enough to maybe energize me to try something new and different the next day." Eva also described the gratification of observing students' growth and pride in their achievements, particularly as they relate to independence and self-advocacy "because they can be taken advantage of so easily."

Jennifer spoke of her love for the job and stated, "I think that doing the work that I do makes me a better parent.... I think it makes me a better person."

Dave also described the way teaching made him feel, stating that "when I'm in front of the classroom, I'm alive, I'm on. I know it. It's where I fit perfectly." Dave elaborated,

I am passionate about it. I love my job. I get up every morning happy to be doing it. I've dealt with typical kids. It's great, but they have their own set of problems that go along with it. My kids are unpredictable and I never know what I'm going

to get on a daily basis, but they know what they're going to get. It sounds selfish, but I get as much out of it as they do.

Bob also shared his feelings about his students and the work and stated that, “I truly, truly loved my students very, very much. I cared about them deeply. It broke my heart, some of the things that they had gone through and been through.... I loved teaching then, I love it now.” He explained that he left the classroom because “I felt I’d done as much as I could do, and it was time for me to move into administration.... I wanted to impact a lot of different types of people.”

Belief in the “Goodness” of Students

Bob, Justine, and Dave spoke about the adversity their students had experienced and expressed that their beliefs about students’ potential for good enabled them to feel successful in their work. They felt that effective teachers must recognize the impact of students’ circumstances on their behavior and the good within each. For Bob, although some of his students’ behaviors made him “the most insane”, the hardships they had endured motivated him to continually improve his practice. He explained,

I had a student jump out a second floor window, run up the street screaming, he tried to run away. I had another student try to slit his wrists. Someone who just hated his mother and never was going to go anywhere near his mother, and wanted nothing to do with his family and would never go home. A father who burned another student with cigarettes and cigars and set the kid's bed on fire. Now this kid's homeless and has nowhere to go....

These were kids that had come from circumstances that were not great. Helping them find resiliency and factors of resiliency in themselves, helping them

to identify what makes them good, and helping them have success and build toward that whether it be in the classroom, whether it be on the sports field, whether it be in clubs or after school activities, the dorm, in the dorm or anything else. I was in private school for seven years and I think there are opportunities in the private schools that are offered that aren't afforded in public schools. And there's nothing wrong with that. That's why they're those types of schools. That said, I found it to be extremely powerful, but my emotions and how I felt about the kids, they made me crazy. The reason I was there and why I got up the next day ready to go, but everything from the second I left the classroom with them or the soccer field, to the next time I had them back in class, I was always thinking about what could I be doing different and better?

Dave shared similar sentiments, stating that he must “find something good to work with in every kid”. He reflected on his own experiences in developing empathy for and acceptance of his students:

I'm fortunate in that sense that I didn't grow up with some of the issues, like parents in prison and things like that. I had my own set of screwy situations in my family and I can draw on that. I can remember, ‘Wait a minute, you know what? People judged me or my family because of this. I'm not going to do that.’ I have to accept a kid for what he is- or she is.

Justine's views supported those of Dave and Bob. She expressed her belief that students and their families do “the best they can” and explained,

Every kid wakes up in the morning and wants to do well. Nobody walks you into school, and parents, too; no matter what a parent does, even to the point of abuse,

in that point in time they did the best they could do. It's horrifying, it's illegal, but it's still the best they can do; you have to hold that belief with this population. [Otherwise,] you'll tear your hair out.... I believe that about all kids, but in the face of this, how it presents, and people have this belief, it's key. That whole idea refreshed my commitment to the population maybe 10 years ago.

Personality Characteristics

Respondents identified a number of qualities— such as passion, empathy, humor, and flexibility— that contributed to their self-efficacy in working with students with EBD. A team-oriented nature, a strong work ethic and the ability to “not take things personally” were also identified as positive factors. When Jennifer was asked what played a role in her decision to stay in the field, she began by sharing an anecdote that illustrated the importance of avoiding cynicism while recognizing one’s own limits when working with such a challenging population. She explained,

I spent the first three years of my career, when I got dressed to go to work, I had to put on arm pads, jean jackets, a hat, because I was being assaulted.... I was in a setting that my ass was being kicked. I have multiple scars, I have several long-lasting injuries, I have cracked vertebrae in my neck.... I had kids flinging their feces at me.... There is nothing that a kid could show up in my classroom and do that would surprise me. I've buried students. I've had students that were murdered by their parents. I've had students that were murdered by their boyfriends. I've had students that have murdered other people, and I'm not jaded.

Every time anything bad happens, I mean, I had a student commit suicide two and a half weeks ago. And you cry. And it's so hard, and you're just like,

‘What more could I have done?’ But you recognize that you're just one piece of the puzzle. You know, like [the student who committed suicide], two and a half weeks ago, his parents refused to medicate him. He was an emerging paranoid schizophrenic. With no medication, he's gonna kill himself. Because the little green men are gonna come get him... I am not jaded. A kid of mine is having a tough day, I get home, and it's hard. Because I definitely cry. I reach out to other colleagues, not in my school, but that do similar work. We talk about it, and we vent, but I can't imagine doing anything else.

Jennifer repeated her belief that she is “not jaded” in spite of all she has witnessed as a teacher in juvenile facilities, public schools, and in her current tenure at an educational collaborative. Her empathy for students has allowed her to continue with the work, along with the realistic expectations she has about her role. She explained, “My job is to help children access education.... And I can't always do that. It's not like every kid I ever teach is going to be a winner. My incarceration versus college rate is pretty even.”

In addition to these qualities, Jennifer identified her “garrulous personality”, “great sense of humor”, and tendency to “roll with the punches” and accept change as factors that have helped her in this line of work. Her personal experiences have also played a role as well. She explained,

Being exposed to wide variety of opportunities to express myself, whether it being painting, drawing... helped me get the fact that not all knowledge can be shared with an essay... that there are multiple ways to demonstrate comprehension.... Just as there are multiple ways to demonstrate those things, there are also multiple ways in which our insecurities and our fears and our

mental status manifest themselves. Timmy's not being rude when he doesn't make eye contact when I say good morning. He's struggling, like something is going on. I think that has given me a bit of a leg up in this industry that some colleagues don't necessarily have.

When Dave and Bob were asked to share factors that influenced their self-efficacy as teachers, they expressed some of the same views as others. Dave responded,

Empathy. Fairness. A healthy self-esteem. Most especially in the population I deal with, you have to know it's not about you. You can't take everything personally. You have to really be passionate about what you do. You have to be able to overcome things, you have to be able to look beyond things... You have to just know that what you're doing is the right thing and be confident in it.... When I walk in a classroom, everything else has to be left at the door.

To be effective with EBD students, Bob suggested that teachers must be hardworking, patient, and collaborative. They must be willing to provide individual guidance and support which can be “very time consuming [and] very taxing.... That's something that people have to be invested in.” He also noted that because special education services are determined as a team, effective teachers must be able to work well with others.

Habits that Build Resilience

Jennifer noted habits and activities that she believes have increased her self-efficacy by protecting her from the burnout that is so common in the field. Of teaching, Jennifer stated that, “It's not all that I am”, and pointed to a number of creative interests that she engages in, such as catering, blogging, comedy, and theater. She also mentioned her “spiritual support group” in the Unitarian Universalist Church, which she called “very

helpful” and “really important”. She described the group as a place to “safely vent and feel supported without being negative, like ‘Whoa, why do you do what you do? That's terrible. You should quit.’” Without these outlets, “it would be very hard.”

Negative Factors

Andrew, Jennifer, and Justine also described factors that interfered with their efficacy in the classroom. Jennifer identified the most challenging part of her job as logistical chores and documentation, “keeping up with the must-dos”, and “the checking off of the boxes”. These tasks include lesson plans, paperwork, self-evaluation, and outreach to parents. According to Jennifer, “It's not teaching the kids. It's not coming up with fun activities. It's writing down what that activity is.” She continued, “That makes it a lot harder to do what I do in the classroom, because there are days when I'm like, ‘Here's some busy work because I have to submit this form.’”

Andrew spoke about the impact of concern for his personal safety and that of others on his self-efficacy:

Something I think people outside of our field don't understand is when you're actually afraid, when it's a physical fear because somebody has a really violent behavior in front of you and those sorts of things, that it's so natural to go back to your lizard brain and to just revert to your most basic things.

He continued,

There's nothing that is worse than either feeling like I'm going to have to put my hands on a kid in order to keep them safe, or a feeling like somebody's about to throw a punch at me. That stuff happens, and I'm less scared of it now that it's happened a few times than I would have been when I started in this field.

Justine identified the “grave false assumptions” that administrators and policymakers held about EBD students. She elaborated,

I felt that really strongly, like I was really insulted as a teaching professional, and I was mortified, honestly, on a personal level to see what does happen with these kids. There wasn't even data, there wasn't even tracking around their failures. You see these dropout rates, and these kids who have qualifying disabilities on a state and federal level are lumped in with kids who are pushed or walked out of school because of completely different reasons that don't have anything to do with a disability...every part of that is horrifying.

It was in part due to these feelings, along with her belief that “teaching didn't match my personal strengths,” that Justine left the classroom. She explained,

I had no thought, and I still don't; I'm not going to restructure the entire conversation, I'm not going to change the conversation, but I felt like I could be a voice at a bigger table, at a more macro-level that would maybe give space, yes, to the teachers, but also to these kids, give them more of a chance.

Summary

This chapter presented the remaining qualitative results, which investigated research questions two, three, and four through interviews with six teachers of students with behavioral challenges. Participants discussed the culture of their workplaces and a variety of personal factors in their self-efficacy as teachers. Respondents spoke about the relationships they share with administrators and other colleagues and identified accessibility, strong interpersonal skills, and expertise with the EBD population as qualities that supportive co-workers demonstrate. In contrast, they discussed lack of

respect, low expectations for themselves and their students, ignorance of the population, and unwillingness to provide appropriate materials and resources as attitudes that unsupportive co-workers possess. Participants also identified a sense of internal reward, feeling positively about students, and engagement in stress relieving activities as factors that fostered their self-efficacy. Specific attributes such as empathy, humor, and flexibility were also noted. Excessive paperwork and administrative tasks, safety concerns, and misguided policies regarding students with EBD were all cited as factors that negatively impacted self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Chapter 7 summarizes the study, discusses its relationship to the existing literature, and provides an interpretation of the entire body of data regarding the preparation and self-efficacy of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. This chapter also addresses the implications of the findings, identifies limitations of the research, and offers recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

Summary

Inequity in access to skilled teachers remains a serious issue in the United States (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010), particularly in substantially separate settings for students with significant emotional needs (Levenson, 2011). Although previous research has identified strong content knowledge and social emotional skills as essential competencies for educators (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2012; Elias, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Shulman, 1986), current standards for licensure in Massachusetts (as they apply to EBD teachers) do not reflect these attributes (MA DESE, 2011a), leaving teachers underprepared to address the needs of the students in their classrooms and increasing their risk of burnout (Adams, 2013).

Through a sequential explanatory design involving survey and interview research, this study explored the issues of teacher preparation and self-efficacy as they relate to secondary special educators who serve emotionally and behaviorally challenged students in Massachusetts.

The following questions guided the research:

- (1) How are secondary special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students prepared?
- (2) What are the perceptions of educators of EBD students regarding their efficacy in teaching students secondary level content?
- (3) What are these educators' perceptions of their efficacy in responding to the social and emotional needs of their students?
- (4) How do these teachers explain the factors that influence their self-efficacy in the classroom?

A self-designed survey was used to collect data from 118 teachers, the results of which were analyzed through a series of multiple regressions. Survey findings informed the development of a semi-structured interview protocol, which was used with a sample of six. Qualitative results were then coded and analyzed. My interpretation of both phases of the research will be shared in this chapter.

Discussion

Chapter 4 reported survey findings, while Chapters 5 and 6 presented interview results. While each chapter revealed important information about teachers' backgrounds and beliefs, examination of the findings as a whole allows for greater understanding of the sources of teacher self-efficacy, the content of teacher preparation coursework, and its

value in practice. Quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed sequentially and then collectively. Results from both phases of the research will be presented with respect to three domains of teacher preparation: social emotional learning and skills, special education instructional techniques, and content knowledge. Findings related to other sources of self-efficacy will also be revealed.

In integrating the data, it was important to reexamine the backgrounds of the subsample of interview participants, particularly with respect to the variables of interest identified by the quantitative findings. Table 7.1, below, compares factors related to educational background, experience, and work environment of the subsample with those of the larger survey sample. Content training was not included due to the variety of subjects taught and licenses held, as these were not always in the same field. For example, many participants reported licensure in a single subject area but teaching assignments in multiple areas. In fact, the mean number of subjects taught by the teachers in the larger sample was 2.5, while that of the subsample was 4.

Table 7.1

Educational Background, Experience, and Work Setting of Both Samples

Description	Group (N=118)	Subsample (N=6)
Educational background		
Special education license	94	5
Special education degree	72	5
Preservice EBD experience	74	6
#/SEL courses		
0	9	0
1-2	29	3
3-4	20	2
5 or more	60	1

Years of experience		
Less than 1	2	1
1-2	7	0
3-5	31	2
6-10	30	0
11-15	23	1
16-20	13	2
More than 20	11	0
Program type		
Public (total)	50	3
Private (total)	59	3
Educational collaborative	16	1
Therapeutic day school	121	1
Residential school	19	1
Juvenile facility	1	0
Hospital	2	0
Other	9	0
Administrative support level		
Very supportive	36	2
Supportive	53	2
Unsupportive	17	2
Very unsupportive	6	0

While the interview group is not perfectly representative of the larger sample, it is important to note the diversity present in the variables of interest determined by the survey results. This subsample allowed me to explore the perspectives of teachers who brought varied experiences and knowledge to the discussion.

The impact of formal credentials and training appeared to vary across the domains of social-emotional competence, special education pedagogy, and content knowledge.

The survey results indicate that training in SEL, which includes “the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive

relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2015), fosters self-efficacy related to both SEL and special education practices. Interview participants also expressed the value of trainings related to these skills, such as behavioral interventions and crisis management.

These findings substantiate prior studies that have reported a relationship between social emotional competence and teacher self-efficacy (Koçoğlu, 2011), teachers’ endorsement of SEL instruction in schools (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2012; CASEL, 2015), and positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students (Durlak et al., 2011). Other research centered on essential skills for teachers of students with EBD reflects the importance of knowledge of the underlying causes of disruptive behaviors and strategies for emotional regulation and stress relief. The value of relationship-building skills is also addressed in the literature (Mackie et al., 1957, cited by Wanyonyi-Short, 2010). Further, a 2010 study conducted by Prather-Jones also suggested that the social emotional domain has been overlooked in EBD teacher education and recommended that preparation programs and school districts increase the emphasis on training in self-care, behavioral interventions, and conflict resolution.

A license and degree in special education, considered nationwide indicators of expertise in the field, appeared to have no significant effect on respondents’ perceptions of their competence in special education pedagogy or social-emotional learning. Most interview participants questioned the relevance of the coursework to practice and criticized the content of specific classes, such as educational research and IEP development. These findings appear to stand in contrast to prior survey research on educators in therapeutic settings, who identified the completion of coursework in special

education strategies and pedagogy as an essential attribute of EBD teachers (Kindzierski et al., 2013). However, the coursework identified in that research centered on very specific topics (such as functional behavior assessments, intervention plans, and crisis management) which are particularly pertinent to the EBD population, and which my results corroborate.

Survey findings also revealed that preservice experience did not influence self-efficacy in any of the three domains, substantiating the findings of Schillingford, whose 2011 quantitative study on teacher self-efficacy found no significant difference in the confidence levels of teachers who had prior experience and those who had none. However, qualitative results conflicted with the quantitative data, as interview participants described the impact of student teaching on their learning. This discrepancy may be explained by the brevity of preservice experience: some participants felt a longer practicum would be more impactful. Other literature on EBD teachers documents the value of student teaching (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; cited by Schillingford, 2011) and indicates that preservice experience with students who have emotional and mental health issues has been shown to increase teacher's understanding of the disability category, an area that is often misperceived (Boe, 2013; Short & Bullock, 2013). Though mixed, these results call into question the quality and length of practicums.

The possession of content area licensure and degrees was not found to have a significant effect on participants' self-efficacy in any of the three areas (when other factors were considered). This appears to contradict the literature that addresses the impact of content proficiency on student outcomes and teacher efficacy, such as Wanyonyi-Short's 2010 study, which suggested that preparation programs for EBD

teachers should increase the focus on curriculum to support the instruction of students who perform below grade level. However, both the survey and interview results suggest that it is common for EBD educators to teach multiple subjects, a finding documented in numerous studies on the topic (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2004, cited by Drame & Pugach, 2010; Levenson, 2011). Because the alignment of content preparation and subjects taught has been shown to contribute to teacher retention in high-needs settings (Kirchoff & Lawrenz, 2011), it seems likely that possession of credentials in a fraction of those content areas would not have a significant impact on teachers' self-efficacy, job satisfaction, or retention. Preparation toward a broader knowledge base that extends across multiple disciplines may have a greater effect on self-efficacy for teaching secondary level content.

In addition to preparation, other variables were identified as factors in the development of teacher self-efficacy. Personal qualities such as genuine concern for students with EBD, the ability to depersonalize student behavior, and flexibility were noted in the interviews as factors that strengthened participants' self-efficacy, corroborating existing literature on the topic (Boe, 2013; Kindzierski et al., 2013; Prather-Jones, 2010). Some teachers described the internal rewards of the work and the belief that they were making a difference, both of which were discussed in Prather-Jones' 2010 study as factors in EBD teachers' commitment to their work. Program type and perceptions of administrative support appeared to have a significant effect on self-efficacy related to content knowledge and special education instruction, respectively. For example, through the surveys, teachers employed in private schools expressed stronger self-efficacy regarding their ability to teach secondary level content. Interview findings

suggest that this may be due to specific characteristics which are more likely to be found in private settings, such as regular opportunities for teacher collaboration, a greater understanding of students with EBD, increased attention to mental health issues, and a reduced emphasis on state-mandated measures of accountability.

Those who “strongly agreed” that they felt supported by their administration demonstrated higher self-efficacy for special education pedagogy. A number of studies on teacher retention (Kirchoff & Lawrenz, 2011; Prather-Jones, 2010) revealed the value of support from administrators and colleagues in protecting against burnout. The research of Kleickmann et al. (2012) addressed the potential of engagement in mentoring and ongoing professional development to strengthen teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, defined as “the knowledge needed to make subject matter accessible to students” (Shulman, 1986; cited by Kleickmann et al., 2012, p. 2). Findings from a later study on veteran teachers in substantially separate environments (Boe, 2013) provided further evidence of the value of these and other practices, including regular meetings to support staff, in increasing educators’ feelings of self-efficacy.

Implications of the Findings

Although a teaching license and related degree are required to work in public education, they appear to have a limited impact on EBD teachers’ self-efficacy. However, the majority of survey respondents recognized a need for further preparation: 78% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that additional education in their content area would help them; 85% felt that way about training in special education; and 90% felt that way about training in SEL. This section will address the specific types of

learning opportunities this population of teachers values as well as those that have less utility and relevance to their work.

Training in Social and Emotional Learning and Skills

Quantitative findings reveal that SEL-related training contributes to self-efficacy related to both social and emotional learning and special education practices. When asked to describe examples of training they found effective, five interview participants identified professional development related to social and emotional learning and skills, such as practical behavioral interventions (including positive behavioral intervention and supports, de-escalation strategies, and crisis prevention), social pragmatics, and therapeutic approaches (such as cognitive behavior therapy, trauma-informed care, and addiction counseling). Teachers also noted the value of workshops facilitated by clinical professionals because, as one participant explained, “they validated this disability as being real”. Additionally, trainings that provided information about local social services were also found useful in order for teachers to make appropriate referrals to students in need.

However, in spite of its apparent value to EBD teachers, only one participant reported receiving education of this nature in his graduate program for special education; the others attended brief workshops provided by the schools where they taught or at outside agencies. Based on these findings and in conjunction with prior research, the need for greater emphasis in teacher preparation programs on social and emotional learning and how to incorporate such skills into the classroom is apparent. This holds true particularly for programs geared toward individuals who serve children with significant emotional needs, the implications of which are far-reaching. Through

increased attention to the domain of SEL in graduate coursework for EBD teachers, universities could better prepare special educators to foster these skills in their students, whose disabilities place them at greater risk of dropping out of high school and render them more vulnerable to substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, and incarceration (Institute on Disability/University Center for Excellence on Disability, 2014).

Training in Special Education

The quantitative results indicated that special education credentials appeared to have no significant impact on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as they relate to special education pedagogy or social-emotional learning. One teacher offered an explanation as to why this might be by highlighting the breadth of special education licensure in Massachusetts. About his own license in Mild-Moderate Disabilities, he stated, "There's a dozen different disabilities there, and it just seems like a lot of lip service was paid to each". Not only was their impact on teachers' sense of competence in other domains negligible, but special education credentials were also found to negatively impact teachers' self-efficacy beliefs related to content proficiency.

Another participant attributed this to a limited exposure to the general curriculum as a result of department-based subject matter trainings, many of which exclude special educators, which "creates a huge disconnect" in knowledge between special educators and their counterparts in general education. These findings reflect a need for further research that investigates the content and quality of preparation programs for special educators. However, it seems clear that in order to bridge the disconnect described,

graduate special education programs that serve prospective EBD teachers or others interested in substantially separate settings should increase their focus on content knowledge across multiple disciplines, particularly in the core areas of English, math, science, and history, which teachers are most likely to be tasked with. Additionally, school districts should ensure that special educators teaching multiple subjects or out-of-field have access to content-based training.

Although most participants expressed criticism of special education coursework, one former teacher described his master's program in special education as "the best" training he received, and credited the university's attention to state licensure regulations and instruction in curriculum modification as contributing factors. However, because this participant currently teaches in the graduate program he attended and has not worked as an EBD teacher in over 10 years, the nature of his present position must be acknowledged as a potential source of bias in his responses.

Another participant described her university's research-based focus as an asset that enabled her to understand the physical and emotional impact of specific behavioral disabilities. Further, its collaboration with a local education center afforded opportunities for prospective teachers to work with challenging populations. Unlike the others, she found the content of her courses to be relevant to her current role serving students with EBD, and the experience she gained through the partnership enabled her to develop realistic expectations about teaching children who have significant needs. However, this participant explained that her undergraduate studies in various fields in the humanities effectively prepared her to teach the multiple subject areas for which she is presently responsible. Because she felt her bachelor's degree provided a strong foundation to teach

varied content areas, coverage of content knowledge was likely less important to her in her special education program than it would have been for others with a different undergraduate experience.

In spite of the weaknesses in their special education coursework, participants reported finding preservice experience highly beneficial, particularly with students with behavioral needs. This finding conflicts with survey results that indicated that student teaching experience has no significant impact on teacher self-efficacy in any of the three domains. However, several participants suggested that increasing the length of practicum assignments would more effectively prepare prospective EBD teachers for the challenges of their role. For example, one novice teacher who reported a preservice experience in which only 3 weeks were spent in a substantially separate setting identified 6 months or longer as the ideal amount of time for such work. Thus, it is possible that the brevity of many prospective teachers' preservice experience, which typically lasts 10 weeks (Boe et al., 2007), is not adequate to impact self-efficacy, and that extending it may yield greater influence. Modifying the length of the practicum, either by increasing its duration or allocating the time disproportionately to the specific population or disability category of interest, may increase EBD teachers' comfort in the classroom as well as their sense of efficacy.

While special education credentials were not found to increase teacher self-efficacy in any of the three domains, experience and strong administrative support were correlated with greater self-efficacy regarding special education instruction. Qualitative data substantiated these results, as members of the subsample identified the ways in which administrators can express support—or lack thereof – and described the impact of

such on their perceptions of competence in the classroom.

Supportive administrators were characterized as accessible, understanding, and knowledgeable about the population. Teachers who felt supported by their school leaders reported being able to approach them about “absolutely anything” without fear of being judged negatively; rather, these administrators understood and acknowledged the unique challenges of the work and offered moral support when teachers felt disheartened. They were able to provide practical, specific, and effective guidance due to their own expertise with students with EBD and told teachers they were doing a good job. As a result, teachers reported feeling greater trust in their administrators, increased confidence in their abilities, and “more focused on the kids and their needs”. Each of these examples, though shared by teachers in varied educational settings, referenced experiences that occurred while employed in private programs.

In contrast, teachers identified lack of respect, low expectations for themselves and their students, ignorance about the population, and unwillingness to provide appropriate materials and resources as attitudes that unsupportive administrators demonstrated. Several teachers expressed the belief that administrators and other staff perceived their work as “babysitting”, not teaching, and that “these kids are incapable of anything other than being caged.” Another explained that his administration refused to provide disciplinary support, while yet another described how he had to “go basically begging for books” to teach his classes. Although examples of these behaviors were cited in both public and private settings, the majority of instances occurred in public schools.

Training in Content Knowledge

Formal content credentials, including subject-specific licenses and degrees, were not found to significantly influence participants' self-efficacy in any of the three domains (when other variables were taken into account), which raises further questions about EBD teacher preparation. Although content knowledge was touched upon by some members of the subsample in their discussions of self-efficacy, its mention was brief and participants referred to undergraduate degree requirements as the sources of their proficiency in particular disciplines. Subject matter was not mentioned in connection to formal special education degrees or teacher preparation programs at all, although some participants spoke of the utility of professional development related to cognitive strategies, especially those with an emphasis on communication and literacy.

Unlike credentials, workplace environment appeared to be a significant factor in participants' self-efficacy regarding content proficiency, suggesting that teachers in public programs tend to feel less confident in their subject matter knowledge than their counterparts in private placements. As previously noted, multiple interview participants described feelings of isolation and/or alienation in public schools due to the low expectations and lack of respect for them as well as their students, misconceptions regarding the disability category, and inequitable access to resources. Several interview participants addressed the issue of the lack of understanding of emotional disabilities and their manifestations, which they found to be prevalent in public districts. One teacher characterized his administration's approach to working with EBD students as "punitive" rather than therapeutic, while another mentioned the "super common" issue of supervisors writing negative evaluations of EBD teachers due to the noise level of

classrooms, without considering student engagement and other factors. Another participant explained, “In a public school setting, you are assumed to be ineffective unless proven otherwise.” Numerous participants cited the inflexible nature of public school regulations as an issue, particularly with regard to emphasis on the Common Core and MCAS, state-mandated means of instruction and assessment.

Further, private school teachers spoke extensively of opportunities built into their school day for collaboration and problem solving as a team. These took the form of daily debriefs, individual and small group supervisory sessions, department-based meetings, and staff social events. One teacher noted that these outlets are “some of the reasons that I stay ...and I really love my job right now because I have those things”. However, it appeared that participants based in public schools were less likely to have such opportunities in their workplaces, if at all. It appears that these practices have the potential to increase teachers’ self-efficacy for the work and protect against burnout and attrition, as noted in previous studies (Boe, 2013).

Other Sources of Self-Efficacy

Participants discussed a variety of personal factors in their self-efficacy as EBD teachers. Excessive paperwork and administrative tasks, safety concerns, and misguided policies regarding students with EBD were all cited as factors that negatively impacted self-efficacy. However, specific attributes such as empathy, humor, and flexibility were noted as factors that strengthened their self-efficacy. Teachers also identified the ability to consistently see the good in students and the belief that they are “making a difference”

in the world as sources of efficacy that inspired and maintained their commitment to the work.

Limitations of the Study

As is true of any research, my background and experiences informed my perspective on the topics addressed in this study. As a teacher of EBD students, my familiarity with the issues discussed may have increased the potential for bias in my interpretation of the data. As described in Chapter 3, I attempted to minimize its influence by exercising reflexivity throughout the processes of data collection and analysis.

Other limitations involved the sampling methodology and the design of the research. Participants in the quantitative study were selected through convenience and snowball sampling. Although the relatively small number of participants that met my criteria necessitated these methods, they may have resulted in a sample that is not representative of the larger population of EBD teachers, although this, too, is unclear, as information about this population was limited. The sample is fairly representative of the population of high school special educators in public schools throughout Massachusetts, however, as both were predominately female and White, with very limited percentages (<9%) of people of color in either group. The small size of the interview sample also contributes to limitations in the generalizability of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Like the quantitative sample, the qualitative sample also lacked diversity with respect to certain demographic characteristics. For example, 97% of survey respondents

were White. All six interview participants were White as well. The study could have benefitted from increased racial diversity and the additional perspectives it would bring. The sample was also relatively limited in terms of work environments: less than 1% of respondents were employed in juvenile facilities and less than 2% were employed in hospitals. The views of teachers in these settings would have been valuable as well.

Both survey and interview data were self-reported, further increasing the potential for bias. However, the open-ended nature of the interview protocol increases the significance of this issue, as interviews provide “‘indirect’ information filtered through the views of interviewees” (Creswell, 2003, p.186). Finally, one interview participant’s relationship to his graduate school, where he studied special education in the past and where he is presently employed, could have introduced bias into his responses to questions about university coursework. Finally, the Likert scale employed in the survey could increase the possibility of acquiescence bias (Johns, 2010).

Recommendations for Research, Policy, and Practice

This research has significant implications for teacher education and licensure. Currently, there are no universities in Massachusetts that offer special education programs designed specifically for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Findings from this study suggest that the development of a degree or concentration in this disability category, which is inclusive of specific features, has the potential to significantly improve teacher quality. These elements include instruction from professors with experience in the field, extended practicum time serving EBD students, and coverage of multiple content areas. An increased emphasis on practical skills related to SEL and on topics relevant to the

population served could be valuable as well. Higher education programs that address the unique needs of EBD teachers could foster self-efficacy in the work, reduce burnout, and resolve critical shortages in this area (Brownell, Smith, & Miller, 1994; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Pullis, 1992; cited by Prather-Jones, 2010; Hill, 2011; cited by Boe, 2013) due to inadequate preparation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

In addition to reevaluating course requirements in preparation programs for EBD teachers to ensure coverage of content across multiple disciplines, the criteria for special education licensure in moderate and/or severe disabilities should be redesigned to include the demonstration of such knowledge. Given the subjective nature of teacher quality standards in the HOUSSSE provision (Drame & Pugach, 2010), a truly uniform assessment would be more appropriate. The Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL) in General Curriculum for elementary education, which is designed for candidates interested in teaching grades 1-5, could be adapted to reflect content standards for secondary special educators. This exam consists of two parts: the mathematics subtest and the multi-subject subtest, which assesses competency in language arts, history, social science, and science and technology/engineering (MA DESE, n.d.-c). Findings from this study suggest that EBD teachers may benefit from preparation as content generalists rather than subject matter experts. An objective measure of assessment as such would establish a baseline standard for proficiency across disciplines, though further research in this area is warranted.

Additional research that addresses administrator support is also needed. Although findings from this study suggest that support from school administration positively impacts teachers' self-efficacy for special education instruction, an in-depth exploration

of teachers' perceptions of such support may be beneficial in yielding information about the specific leadership styles, attitudes, and behaviors of school administrators that are effective in encouraging and motivating EBD teachers and improving retention rates in the field. Mentoring opportunities for EBD teachers who are new to a school or program and/or novices in the field could also contribute to these outcomes, particularly if provided by others with experience serving students with emotional challenges.

Quantitative results revealed that EBD teachers in public settings possess lower self-efficacy levels than those in private schools, which interview participants explained through differences in public and private school models. These teachers identified numerous opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, professional development sessions focused on mental health issues, and school staff who were experienced with EBD students, among other features, as factors in private settings that foster teachers' self-efficacy.

The implementation of similar practices in public schools may counteract feelings of isolation, discouragement, and disrespect described by some participants. For example, public schools with behavior programs staffed by multiple teachers could implement regular debriefing sessions to provide support, combat stress, and ease any existing sense of alienation. For smaller programs, job-alike meetings in which EBD teachers from local schools collaborate and share resources could prove beneficial. Within their schools, EBD teachers should be encouraged to attend meetings in various departments. This would enable them to collaborate with building-based general educators and mental health professionals and provide exposure to academic and clinical strategies they may not receive through the special education department alone. Such a

practice could also foster a shared responsibility for students with behavioral challenges.

These findings have meaning for administrators and other school employees as well. Schoolwide training that raises awareness of specific emotional and behavioral disabilities and how they are manifested in the classroom may inspire respect for special educators and increased investment in supporting their work. Further, this research suggests that providing EBD teachers with opportunities for training related to the development of policies for alternative education and allowing them a voice in creating such guidelines within their own programs could yield meaningful change. Such a practice would not only afford teachers greater flexibility in meeting students' needs, but would also recognize their expertise as professionals.

The contributions of participants in this study highlighted the unique needs of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The insights they shared have practical implications for special education legislation, university preparation programs, and secondary school communities, and warrant additional research in the field.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

As part of my doctoral degree requirements at UMass Boston, I am conducting research on the preparation and self-efficacy of secondary special educators who serve emotionally and behaviorally challenged students. As a special education teacher who has worked in the field, the topic is one that has interested me for the past few years.

I plan to survey middle and high school special education teachers who work in substantially separate settings in MA that serve students who have emotional and behavioral disabilities. You have been identified as a school/district leader or a teacher in such a setting. I was hoping you would be willing to participate, either by sharing it with teachers in your school/district who meet these criteria and/or by taking the survey (if you are a teacher of this population). The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes and the included consent form provides additional information about it. Participants will not be asked to identify schools or districts in which they have worked, and all survey data will remain confidential. This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at UMass Boston.

The survey can be accessed via the link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/teachEBD>

Feel free to call me at [\(917\) 509-6654](tel:9175096654) or email me at chiggins717@gmail.com with any questions.

Thanks very much,
Claire Higgins

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393
Claire Higgins, Doctoral Candidate
chiggins717@gmail.com
(917) 509-6654
Dr. Wenfan Yan, Faculty Advisor
wenfan.yan@umb.edu
(617) 287-4873

Consent Forms for Adults: University of Massachusetts Boston

Principal Investigator: Claire Higgins

Introduction and Contact Information:

You are being asked to take part in research on the preparation and self-efficacy of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The principal researcher is Claire Higgins, doctoral candidate in the Department of Leadership in Education at UMass Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions at a later time, you may contact Claire Higgins at (917) 509-6654.

Description of the Project:

This research aims to explore the issues of teacher preparation and self-efficacy as they relate to secondary special educators who serve emotionally and behaviorally challenged students. This study will take place between July 2015 and July 2016. All participants in this study will be asked basic demographic information to broaden the diversity of the participant pool. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 1 online survey that will take approximately 30 minutes and will be administered by Claire Higgins. You may also be asked to participate in 1 focus group that will take approximately 60-90 minutes and will also be facilitated by Claire Higgins.

Risks or Discomforts:

This research poses minimal risk for participants. The primary risk associated with this study is the emergence of negative or distressful feelings during the survey and/or focus group. Another risk involves the loss of confidentiality from participation in the focus group. This applies to focus group participants only. Though all focus group participants

will be asked to refrain from mentioning identifying information revealed through the discussion to others, the compliance of each cannot be guaranteed. You may speak with Claire Higgins to discuss any issues related to study participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

The information you share will be **confidential**. Survey data is protected by SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encryption and Transport Layer Security (TLS) technology to ensure that user information is secure. All information about you will be disguised in a way that will prevent anyone from identifying you. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. Names of schools and/or districts will also be changed. The information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked cabinet in Boston, MA and only the principal investigator and her advisor, Dr. Wenfan Yan, will have access to the information.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. There are no monetary incentives. If you decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should contact Claire Higgins or her advisor Dr. Wenfan Yan at UMass Boston. Contact information is provided at the top of this form.

Rights:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Claire Higgins at the contact information provided at the top of this form. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the UMass Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, UMass Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures:

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

Signature of Participant

Date

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

APPENDIX C

SURVEY OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES (EBD)

Survey of Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (EBD)

You have been invited to complete this survey because you have been identified as a teacher of students with EBD. The terms *emotional and/or behavioral disability (EBD)* and *emotional impairment* are used interchangeably and are defined as:

One or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011a)

Please indicate your responses to the questions below by selecting (or writing in) a single choice unless otherwise specified.

Where do you work?

Substantially separate program/classroom within a public school

Educational collaborative

Therapeutic day program

Residential program

Juvenile facility

Hospital

I have taught in a substantially separate setting, but I no longer do.

I have never taught in a substantially separate setting.

I currently teach in another type of substantially separate setting (please specify):

If you previously taught in a substantially separate setting, but no longer do, what type of substantially separate setting did you last teach in?

Substantially separate program/classroom within a public school

Educational collaborative

Therapeutic day program

Residential program
Juvenile facility
Hospital
Other (please specify): _____

As you continue the survey, please answer the questions based on your experiences in this setting.

What is your gender?

Female
Male
Male to female transgender
Female to male transgender
Other (please specify): _____

What is your race and/or ethnicity? Select all that apply.

Hispanic or Latino
American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian
Black or African American
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
White

What is your age?

Under 30
30-39
40-49
50-59
60 or older

What grades do you teach? Select all that apply.

6
7
8
9
10
11
12

What subjects do you teach? Select all that apply.

Art
English (including Reading)
Foreign Language
Health
History (including Social Studies)

Math (Algebra, Geometry, etc.)
 Physical Education/Fitness
 Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc.)
 Other: _____

Do you possess teaching licenses in any of the following subjects? Select all that apply.

Art
 English (including Reading)
 Foreign Language
 Health
 History (including Social Studies)
 Math (Algebra, Geometry, etc.)
 Physical Education/Fitness
 Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc.)
 Other: _____

Do you possess degrees in or related to any of the following subjects/fields? Select all that apply.

	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate/other post-graduate
Art			
English (including Reading)			
Foreign Language			
Health			
History (including Social Studies)			
Math (Algebra, Geometry, etc.)			
Physical Education/Fitness			
Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc.)			
Other:			

Do you possess a teaching license in special education?

Yes
 No

Do you possess a degree in special education?

Yes
 No

Did you complete a student teaching assignment/practicum with students who have emotional and/or behavioral disabilities?

Yes
 No

Not including student teaching, how long have you been teaching students who have emotional and/or behavioral disabilities?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

How many courses or professional development sessions have you participated in that addressed social-emotional learning (SEL) as the primary focus? SEL refers to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making.

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5 or more

How many courses or professional development sessions have you participated in that have had cultural competence as the primary focus? Cultural competence refers to "an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families" (National Education Association, 2002-2015, Why Cultural Competence? section, para. 3).

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5 or more

For the items that follow, please indicate how you feel about each statement below by marking SA if you strongly agree, A if you agree, D if you disagree, and SD if you strongly disagree.

I feel supported by school administration regarding work with students who have emotional and/or behavioral disabilities.

SA A D SD

I have a solid understanding of each content area I teach.

SA A D SD

I am able to develop student-centered curriculum based on individual interests, abilities, and needs.	SA	A	D	SD
I can respond to difficult academic questions from my students with ease.	SA	A	D	SD
I frequently have to review skills related to my content area (i.e., correct use of commas in an English class) before I teach them to students.	SA	A	D	SD
I am skilled at adjusting my lessons to the proper level for individual students.	SA	A	D	SD
It is hard for me to provide alternative explanations or examples when students are confused.	SA	A	D	SD
Sometimes during lessons, I accidentally give students the wrong information.	SA	A	D	SD
I know how to modify materials for students with diverse abilities.	SA	A	D	SD
I understand how students with various types of emotional and/or behavioral disabilities learn.	SA	A	D	SD
I know how to help students believe they can do well in school.	SA	A	D	SD
I am able to motivate students who show low interest in school work.	SA	A	D	SD
I have strong relationships with my students.	SA	A	D	SD

I empathize with students' feelings and experiences.	SA A D SD
I know techniques to relieve stress (verbal calming strategies, scheduled breaks, etc.) in the classroom.	SA A D SD
I understand the causes of problematic behavior (school refusal, aggression, etc.) among students.	SA A D SD
I am able to tolerate antisocial behavior.	SA A D SD
I know a variety of strategies to minimize disruptive behavior (such as verbal outbursts, refusal to follow directions, etc.) in the classroom.	SA A D SD
I regularly encourage students to reflect on their actions and decisions.	SA A D SD
I am able to reach students of cultural backgrounds that are different from my own.	SA A D SD
Additional training in instructional strategies for special education students would help me.	SA A D SD
Additional training in my content area(s) would help me.	SA A D SD
Additional training in responding to students' social and emotional needs would help me.	SA A D SD
<p>Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to discuss teacher preparation and skills further?</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>If so, are you available to meet in the Greater Boston area in the next month?</p> <p>Yes No</p>	

If you answered "yes" to questions 33 and 34, please provide your name, phone number, and email address below:

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Do you know others who might be willing to participate in this study? (These should be secondary level classroom teachers or former teachers who work/have worked in substantially separate environments in Massachusetts that serve students emotional and/or behavioral disorders.) If so, please provide their email addresses and/or other information below.

1) Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

2) Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

As a follow-up to a survey I conducted as part of my dissertation research at UMass Boston, I would like to invite you to participate in a phone interview to discuss the preparation, self-efficacy, and professional experiences of teachers who work in or have worked in substantially separate settings for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). On that survey, you indicated that you may be willing to participate in a related focus group. Due to logistical difficulties, I have changed my research methods slightly to include a phone interview instead, for which my university's research office just granted me approval.

Interviews will take about 25-35 minutes and can be scheduled at your convenience. The session will be audio-taped, and all participants will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card. Please let me know if you are willing to participate, along with some dates and times that would work for you and the best number to reach you at.

Thank you very much,
Claire Higgins
[917.509.6654](tel:917.509.6654)

APPENDIX E

AUDIOTAPING AND TRANSCRIPTION CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPING AND TRANSCRIPTION

For the Study:

*The Preparation and Self-Efficacy of Teachers of
Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*

Principal Investigator:

Claire Higgins

University of Massachusetts Boston

This study involves the audiotaping of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. Only the research team will be able to listen to the tapes.

The tapes will be transcribed by the research team and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

By signing this form you are consenting to:

- ☐ having your interview taped;
- ☐ having the tape transcribed;
- ☐ use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

This consent for taping is effective until July 27, 2017. On or before that date, the tape will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES (EBD)

Interview Protocol

1) I am curious about how you got involved in working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Can you tell me about your teaching experience, if any, before you began teaching students with emotional and behavioral disabilities?

2) Help me to understand what credentials you had when you first began teaching EBD students.

Did you earn any as you continued in the field? Why?

What elements of these educational/training programs did you find most useful? Why?

Which did you find to be useless?

3) I have been looking at the concept of self-efficacy (or feelings of success or competency) in teachers of students with EBD, and my study has revealed some findings that have surprised me. What we might expect to make teachers feel effective or successful (i.e., teaching licenses and related degrees) is not necessarily the case. I'd like to understand what other factors play a role in building self-efficacy in teachers of EBD students. What factors do you feel have been important in your effectiveness as a teacher? In helping you to recognize your own effectiveness (or to feel successful or effective)?

4) Have you felt more effective, less effective, or the same since you started teaching EBD students?

5) What do you see as the most challenging aspect of your role?

6) In spite of what appears to be a limited impact on teachers' self-efficacy, 78% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that additional training in their content area

would help them; 85% felt that way about training in special education; and 90% felt that way about training in SEL. What type of professional development do you believe would be most beneficial in making you feel more effective?

7) Please tell me about the outlets you have, if any, to meet and discuss your work with other EBD teachers.

Do you think this has been /would be beneficial?

8) Can you give me some examples of how your administration has supported you?

Or how they have not?

9) My survey findings suggest that working in a sub-separate program in a public school (rather than a private placement) negatively impacts the self-efficacy of EBD teachers as it relates to teaching content. Can you help me to understand why this may be?

10) How long do you plan to stay in this field? What factors have played a role in your decision to stay or go?

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