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Integrated Care: Transforming Beginning Teachers and Students with EBD

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Abstract

This research examined the experiences and self-efficacy of beginning teachers who work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in the general education classroom. Supported by the work of Bandura (1977, 1997) on teacher self-efficacy and Noddings (2013) on the ethic of care, this qualitative case study implemented semi-structured interviews to gather data on beginning teachers' confidence and struggles in meeting the needs of students with EBD. The findings revealed beginning teachers of students with EBD are caregivers in need of specific care to meet both their own needs and those of their students. Implications for educator preparation providers and school districts include transforming pre-service and beginning teachers' capacity to care through knowledge and experience with inclusion, relationship building practices, and strengthening their dispositions of self-regulation, reflection, and self-care.

Keywords

Integrated Care: Transforming Beginning Teachers and Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

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Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) experience numerous challenges in their education due to the complexity of their disabilities. Their school experience is prone to negative attitudes from teachers and classmates, strained friendships, and bleak post-school outcomes (Kelly et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2019; Gable et al., 2012; Landrum, 2011). Biological factors, family issues, school environments, misconceptions, and cultural influences impact students with EBD in the classroom (Kauffman, 2009; Landrum, 2011). Kauffman (2009) described students with EBD as having the highest rate of unemployment and the most challenging transition from high school to work than any other students with special needs. Transformative care for all populations of students is necessary to counter unjust systems that hold back populations of students.

Inclusion model classrooms, a growing practice in the U.S. and internationally, allow students with disabilities to be educated in the general education classroom with their peers (Sharma et al., 2011; Vaughn et al., 2018). However, students with EBD are more often placed in the most restrictive environment with only 49% included in the general education classroom for 80% of their day (Lanterman et al., 2021; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2021). Lanterman et al. (2021) found that teachers and administrators were open to the idea of inclusion but had concerns over the fidelity of including students with disabilities, particularly severe disabilities like EBD.

Successful inclusion requires teachers who are trained in inclusive practices, who have a solid understanding of the needs of their students, and the dispositions necessary to handle challenging behaviors (Leggio & Terras, 2019; Vaughn et al.,

2018). Including care in teacher education can transform the self-efficacy of beginning teachers as they learn how to care for their students and themselves. Self-reflection for beginning teachers allows them to uncover areas of growth in their instructional practices (Koenen et al., 2017). Teachers who have a full grasp of their role as caregivers, and know evidence-based strategies to do this, can make a positive impact on our most vulnerable student populations.

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This study aimed to understand the gaps between the confidence and struggles general education beginning teachers experienced when caring for the needs of students with EBD. Unique to this study is the exploration of how teacher self-efficacy coupled with the ethic of care impacted beginning teachers' ability to meet the needs of students with EBD. Two research questions guided the study. Research Question 1 (RQ1): In what ways do general education beginning teachers feel confident and prepared to meet the needs of students with EBD? Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways do general education beginning teachers struggle with meeting the needs of students with EBD? The results speak to

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the need for the integration of care for both beginning teachers and their students.

Christian educators, whose beliefs impact their treatment of students, should be encouraged by the findings of this study. As a teacher of future educators, my Christian faith compels me to act in ways that show care towards my students. That care is essential to be practiced on myself as well. When care is out of balance, the classroom can be an environment that does not meet the needs of the teacher or her students. This research was conducted to understand the story of beginning teachers and their students with EBD and to discover practices that transform both.

Background Literature

General education teachers often feel unprepared to meet the needs of students with EBD (Vaughn et al., 2018). If teachers are coming out of their educator preparation programs (EPPs) with limited experience in inclusive practices, their beginning years in the classroom can be difficult, leading some to leave the profession (Cancio et al., 2014). Mitchell et al. (2019) challenged teacher educators to understand the current needs of classroom teachers and to design coursework and field placements that build their self-efficacy with skills and dispositions to teach all students, including those with EBD. The literature reviewed for this study explores the theories of self-efficacy and care, the needs of both students with EBD and their teachers, and the strategies to meet those needs.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied to this study brings together the influence of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1997) and care theory (Noddings, 2013) to understand how beginning teachers are impacted in meeting the needs of their students with EBD. This review of the literature revealed that the teacher as caregiver is a weighty role and building teacher self-efficacy to handle all that is involved in that role needs to be a part of educator preparation.

Ethic of Care

Care theory, as explained by Noddings (2013), is a natural inclination – a beneficial relationship for both the one caring and the one cared for. In the classroom, the teacher cares for her students in the same natural way a parent cares for an infant (Noddings, 2013). According to Noddings, a care ethic compels a teacher to practice their craft, and to not do so would go against their innate ethic. How a teacher responds to students in the classroom emphasizes care; as Noddings (2013) explained, "When a teacher asks a question in class and a student responds she receives not just the 'response' but the student" (p. 176). By placing the student above the correct answer, the teacher shows care for the person above the subject matter.

Educators must recognize their own vulnerability and the complexity of care in teaching to fully embrace an ethical approach that can help them navigate challenges (Collins & Ting, 2014). Teachers can experience burnout when their effort to care for students is not received (Noddings, 2013). For the teacher of students with EBD, building a caring reciprocal relationship can make a difference in the longevity of the teacher's efforts and the student's success.

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Theory of Self-Efficacy

When a teacher is faced with challenges, their belief in their ability to cope with those challenges affects their persistence to push through to a solution (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) explained, "The expectations of personal mastery affect both initiation and persistence of coping behavior" (p. 193). Bandura found that efficacy influenced not only what people were willing to try, but also how much effort they put towards something. The length of time someone persists in a challenging situation is correlated to the strength of their perceived efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Establishing self-efficacy in the preservice and beginning teacher years is important because once

beliefs are established change can be difficult (Hoy, 2000). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) explained:

> Teachers who do not expect to be successful with certain students are likely to put forth less effort in preparation and delivery of instruction and to give up easily at the first sign of difficulty, even if they actually know of strategies that could assist these students if applied. (p. 3)

These authors believed early proficiency experiences are most impactful in building teacher self-efficacy which subsequently develops their persistence to care for students with EBD.

In their study of teacher self-efficacy in teaching students with special needs, Shani and Hebel (2016) found teachers were frustrated, fearful, angry, and lacked confidence in their ability to teach all their students. "They reported a lack of required knowledge and a sense of insecurity regarding their ability to cope with inclusion education" (Shani & Hebel, 2016, p. 3). The authors suggested a high sense of self-efficacy is necessary for teachers to succeed in the demands of teaching diverse learners.

Characteristics and Needs of Students with EBD

Students with EBD make up over 5% of the U.S. student population between ages 3-21 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Behaviors exhibited are either externalized affecting others in the classroom, internalized often only affecting the students, or a combination of both types (Vaughn et al., 2018). Externalized behaviors can be some of the most challenging as they can escalate to violence if the teacher is uninformed about how to handle them. Physical altercations, verbal outbursts, and destruction of property can all become frightening to other students and teachers. Internalized behaviors such as shyness, withdrawal, fear, phobias, and anxiety may only affect the student and their family and often go undiagnosed because of the difficulty in recognizing internalized symptoms. Generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder,

and social phobia are five examples of anxiety disorder that may have internalized characteristics (Vaughn et al., 2018).

Students with EBD often do not respond to behavior management techniques that typically work for general education students, and in some cases, those techniques exacerbate the situation (McKenna et al., 2021). Students with EBD may respond well to a classroom that is focused on teaching children how to change behaviors, rather than an environment that seeks to exert control over externalized behaviors (Marlow et al., 2016). These authors emphasized relationships in working with students with EBD, explaining the important role a teacher has in modeling appropriate behaviors and giving direct instruction on how to self-correct negative behaviors. Because of the complexity of EBD, treatment varies greatly, but establishing good relationships is an important component (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019).

Teacher Training for Inclusion

Early identification can lessen symptoms or even prevent EBD from occurring (Mitchell et al., 2019). Recognizing characteristics and building general education teachers' training for inclusive practices will encourage their self-efficacy and ability to teach students with EBD and will increase the opportunity for students with EBD to receive the emotional and academic support they need to succeed (Allday et al., 2013; Leggio & Terras, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019). Peebles and Mendaglio's (2014) study showed teachers' self-efficacy increased when they had both an inclusion course and relevant field experiences. Macartney (2012) described how the intersection of a *pedagogy of listening* and inclusive practices can encourage belonging in the classroom and be transformative in student success and teacher self-efficacy.

Recent research on teacher self-efficacy found connections to personality traits such as openness (Barni et al., 2019). Kelly et al. (2021) explained how deficit thinking was a hurdle for some teachers as they worked with the families of students with EBD. Whether a person is open to change or willing to put other people's needs ahead of their own is the subject of several studies

showing how self-efficacy is not just influenced by experience but can be dependent on internal personality characteristics. Costa and Kallick (2014) described certain dispositions such as grit, determination, empathy, flexible thinking, and persistence as qualities necessary for relational work. Gidlund (2018) found teachers who were not open to working with students with EBD were an obstacle to success in the classroom. Hughes (2018) found that when dispositions were taught in EPPs, beginning teachers were better equipped to notice their developing dispositions and how that impacted successful teaching. Wiesman (2023) agreed that dispositions necessary for the teaching profession were equally important to teach as pedagogical skills or content knowledge.

Hylen (2022) explained, "If teachers are going to help students grow in emotional intelligence, the first thing they will need to do is recognize that student display of emotion is an opportunity for building trust" (p. 63). Teachers who either naturally see a problem as an opportunity or who develop that mindset can build a relationship with their students by encouraging trust through their outreach of care. Prioritizing relationships is a significant way to positively impact student learning, particularly for those with EBD (Archambault et al. 2017; Kwon et al., 2017).

Savolainen et al. (2020) completed a longitudinal study of teacher self-efficacy towards inclusion and found higher self-efficacy led to a more positive attitude toward inclusion. Providing proficiency experiences is one way to prepare beginning teachers to teach diverse learners and boost their confidence and willingness to teach students with EBD as they become lead teachers. Infusing teacher curriculum with practical experiences in social-emotional learning (SEL) benefits both students and teachers (Waajid et al., 2013).

Teacher Self-Care

Jennings (2019), in her work on trauma-informed teaching, explained the importance of teacher self-care in the profession. To prevent burnout, teacher educators need to instill the concept of self-care into their programs, and school districts need to help provide sustainable working environments (Freytag & Shotsberger, 2022).

Beginning teachers must learn how to advocate for their own needs if they are going to meet their students' many needs.

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Wilfong and Donlan's (2021) research suggested *mattering* as something that impacts self-efficacy, and teachers' reflection on this helps them to evaluate their strengths and needs. Wilfong and Donlan described mattering as feeling valued by others. "Teachers can gauge their own sense of mattering to identify what is missing in their own careers and to fill those gaps" (Wilfong & Donlan, 2021, p. 52). The authors found that teachers who feel valued have a higher self-efficacy.

The demands on the teacher in building a trusting classroom environment where students feel cared for and even care for each other are great. Collins and Ting (2014) stated, "The challenge of caring within the complexity of real social situations is demanding and can be overwhelming" (p. 16). Beginning teachers, without a background of what this looks like, can feel even more disillusioned and depleted without proper self-care. Teachers need to have patience with their limitations and recognize their own needs as well as their students (Collins & Ting, 2014).

The literature reviewed showed that a gap exists between teacher training and the ability to meet the specific needs of students with EBD. The next section describes the methods used in this qualitative case study to examine beginning teachers' efficacy and their struggle to meet the needs of their students with EBD, as well as the implications that the findings can have on teacher education and school districts.

Methodology

Designed as a qualitative case study, this research focused on understanding the experiences and beliefs of beginning teachers in the first three

years of the profession who work with students with EBD in the general education classroom. Yin (2018) suggested that case study design encourages the use of theory to guide the process. This approach fits this study's use of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy and Noddings' (2013) care theory to frame the process and discussion of results. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained how integrating theory in qualitative studies can impact understanding phenomena, and in this case study provided a new understanding of the problem facing beginning teachers and how they meet the needs of students with EBD.

General education beginning teachers from Western North Carolina were chosen as the population for this study. Cases were selected based on characteristics determined helpful for the research question (Cohen et al., 2018). This allowed access to people who have experience or knowledge of the issues related to this study. For this study, 10 beginning teachers who met the inclusive criteria were chosen. The number of participants was determined by fitness for purpose and when no new data presented itself, the researcher determined the data were saturated enough to answer the research questions (Cohen et al., 2018).

Participants

Ten participants made up the case of the general education beginning teacher who has some experience with students with EBD. Participants had a variety of undergraduate preparation. Among them were degrees in elementary education and psychology and certifications in birth to kindergarten and exceptionalities. Several had graduate degrees in teaching reading and science. There were first-, second-, and third-year teachers, ages ranging from 22-57 who taught in rural, urban, and suburban settings (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Grade	School Type	Gender/ Age	Year	Education
Sara	2nd	Private K-12	Fem/ 20-25	3rd	BA & & MA (Early Child)
Barb	Pre-K	Rural Elementary	Fem/over 50	1st	BA, state university (Birth-Kindergarten)
Hannah	2nd	Rural Elementary	Fem/ 20-25	1st	BA, state EPP
Sienna	1st	Rural Elementary	Fem/ 20-25	3rd	BA, private EPP
Melanie	6th	Rural Middle	Fem/ 20-25	3rd	BS, state EPP (Psychology Major)
Jennifer	K	Rural Elementary	Fem/ 20-25	2nd	BA, state EPP
Penelope	9-11	Rural High	Fem/ 30-40	1st	BS, MS Nursing, (Lateral Entry)
Karen	7th	Rural Middle	Fem/ 20-25	1st	BS, state EPP (Psychology Major)
Brenda	1st	Rural Elementary	Fem/over 50	3rd	BA, on-line EPP
Briana	K	Rural Elementary	Fem/ 20-25	1st	BS, state EPP (Exceptional Child)

Note. Names have been changed and content areas removed to protect participants' privacy.

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) were conducted over Zoom with 10 beginning teachers within their first three years of lead teaching. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were used to inductively search the participants' responses for patterns related to the two research questions. The SSI lasted between 30-60 minutes per interview. Examples of interview questions were related to their experience with students with EBD, their training, their confidence in meeting students' needs, and their support (see Appendix).

Analytic memos were taken during each interview to establish validity-capturing keywords while also recording (Saldana, 2021). Member checking was used to validate answers to interview questions, checking for clarity of response before concluding the interview and later by sending a draft of the results to each participant for confirmation that their words were captured accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Peer coding

was an additional method used to provide reliability.

Data Analysis

During phase one, codes were created to assign meaning to pieces of data (Saldana, 2021). In vivo codes, developed from the participants' words, were used to create sub-categories written on the right margin of transcripts (Saldana, 2021). Analytic coding began during the second coding phase to create explanatory meaning to codes that were grouped together (Cohen et al., 2018). A third stage of codes was created through selective categories. The researcher did this by integrating the categories and codes to form eight major categories selected as overarching terms. These were integrated into three themes to explain how

teacher confidence is impacted both by their experiences and their struggles with students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Figure 1 shows a sample of The Code Book created to ensure a rigorous and consistent method of data analysis.

Data Integration

A narrative approach was used to integrate the findings from the analysis to tell the case of the beginning teachers' experience, knowledge, and beliefs about teaching students with EBD. The data were analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and care theory (Noddings, 2013). The iterative process of coding allowed the researcher to uncover deeper meaning from categories and look for themes that emerged from the data, moving back and forth through the coding process. The current research focuses on the results and discussion of three themes: Teacher confidence in meeting student need is impacted by their role as caregiver, teacher confidence in meeting student need is tied to student behavior; and teacher confidence in meeting student need is impacted by collaboration opportunities. A full discussion of all themes can be found in Flagler (2022).

Code Book Sample

Categories	Subcategories	Code descriptions and data samples	IN VIVO CODES
Teacher as Caregiver	-Empathy determines response to care -Teacher sense of responsibility -Teacher attitude -Student response to care -Caregiver needs -Teacher persistence to meet needs -Teacher self-care	Teacher responds to student need because of their role as a caregiver. Teacher is motivated to action, with persistence, and problem solves because of their desire to care. Teacher is drawn to support student need. Teacher views student as in need of their care, not as an obstacle. Caregiver needs matter too. Teacher sacrifice needs.	-SAY AFFIRMATIONS YOU ARE TEACHER, NURSE, MOM, FRIEND, GUIDANCE COUNSELOR. -YOU ARE EVERYTHING. -YOU HAVE TO LISTEN. -NOT GETTING HELP AT HOME. -TEACH THEM HOW TO BE PEOPLE. -YOU WANT TO HELP. -SO HE FEELS SEEN. -LOVE HIM DEARLY. -YOU FEEL LIKE A LIMP DISHRAG. -YOU CRY. -ADVOCATING FOR MYSELF. -WE USE BREAK TIMES

Results

In response to RQ1, there were several ways the beginning teachers felt confident and prepared to teach students with EBD. They expressed a strong confidence to teach their students the content of their discipline. Some of the beginning teachers shared how their confidence felt most strong when student behavior was under control and the student was responding to interventions. Most of the beginning teachers felt their self-efficacy in meeting the needs of their students with EBD increased when they took the time to build a relationship with the student and when that student responded positively to the effort.

With regards to RQ2, there were various ways the beginning teachers struggled to meet the needs of students with EBD, particularly when the students' behaviors derailed instructional time. Some of the beginning teachers felt frustrated by their lack of progress in helping their students with EBD improve in their learning goals. Many felt the fluctuation of behavioral progress impeded learning. Most felt their self-efficacy dip when student behaviors continued to interrupt whole class experiences. Figure 2 below is a visual of how the subcategories and categories developed into a major theme.

Major Theme

| Theme | Categories | Sub-Categories |
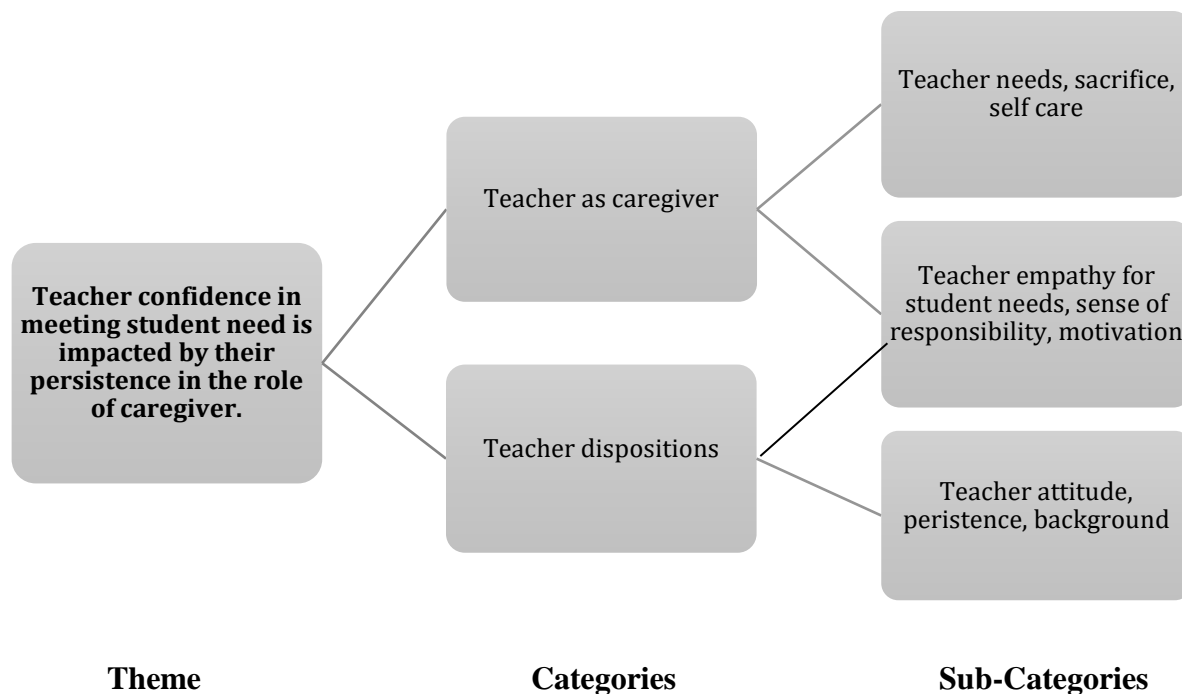
Note. Other major themes are explained in Flagler (2022) – see References.

RQ1: Confident and Prepared Dispositions for Care

Teacher dispositions are qualities a teacher possesses that help them navigate the challenges of the profession. Dispositions can be dependent on beliefs or personal experiences. Some may be innate character traits, while others can be nurtured intentionally. Examples of teacher dispositions are empathy, care, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and a belief that all students can learn.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share feelings with someone else. Some of the beginning teachers expressed their empathy for their students' struggles showing understanding and recognition of the struggles. As an empathetic teacher, Barb responded to her student's outbursts or emotional turmoil from a place of genuine concern as one who cares for the well-being of the child in front of them. Barb stated, "She needs to know she's safe. And to make her feel safe at that point, then you do it [whatever it takes to make the child feel safe]." Barb's empathy for her student's challenging behavioral outbursts drove her decisions. Barb understood what her student needed most in those challenging moments.

Empathy that drives decision-making could be seen when Briana explained how she wanted to implement a morning meeting. She stated:

> To get them all in one place. To get us together. To have family time before we start instruction, I think that would help behavior. And just to get their day started emotionally—to get in the zone, you know, I think coming in—because a lot of my students have hard home lives.

This teacher's empathy drove her response to the children and determined her course of action.

Melanie explained how her empathy for her struggling students stemmed from her own challenges when she was a child. She stated, "I remember how frustrating it is to be a kid at school with ADHD." Motivated by her own experiences, she understood her students need to "tap, wiggle, and jiggle," so she planned for it with flexible seating.

Teacher Attitude

The beginning teachers' attitudes directly impacted how they responded to their role as caregivers in the classroom. Sienna explained that she "thrives on a challenge." When asked what it feels like to teach students with EBD, she stated, "It's like a puzzle, a challenge to solve." Her focus was not on the difficulty of the situation, but on how she could help solve the problem. She explained, "What can I do to make it a positive experience?" Having a positive outlook was shared by several of the beginning teachers interviewed. Their perception of the problems as challenges to be solved helped them cope with the tiresome work involved.

Melanie embraced her students' challenging needs by acknowledging their different needs. Her attitude of acceptance was how she met all students in her class. She explained:

> Honestly, when I see accommodations work for my diagnosed kids, I use them for all of my kids 'cause most of the time it's just something that's going to help with the 12-year-old. A lot of 12-year-olds struggle, it's not really their fault.

Her openness to their differences and her accepting attitude coupled with her empathy enabled her to create learning experiences where everyone in her class could thrive.

Self-Reflection

The beginning teachers who regularly reflected on what was working or not working had more success in finding solutions to problems. Karen explained,

> I had to change my entire philosophy of teaching strategies because it just doesn't work for them. . . I was too optimistic about what the age group was capable of. I would give them too much autonomy. It did not work in my favor at all.

Karen's realization that what she was doing was not working for her students prompted her to change strategies – to adjust to her students' needs. Reflecting, adjusting expectations, and being flexible helped transform the classroom into a functioning environment for learning.

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Teacher Persistence

The beginning teachers who were problem solvers discussed more success in meeting the needs of challenging students. Melanie described herself as "stubborn" and attributed that to her persistence in not giving up on a student even when everyone else had.

Another beginning teacher explained numerous strategies that did not work. "I've tried to do a calm down corner, but instead of having my calm down box [I] just have a rocking chair. He was flipping it over – it was a disaster." Briana's failure was not the end of her pursuit of a solution. She reflected on the problem, exhibited humility, and approached the challenge with perseverance. Her persistence to find a solution to help her student propelled her efforts. Her ability to keep trying strategies was in part due to her persistence as a problem solver and positively impacted her belief that she could figure out the next problem.

Responsibility Towards Care

A sense of responsibility was related to both the beginning teachers' dispositions and their role as caregivers. Jennifer shared:

> What else can I do to make them want to be here, because like I know everyone says this, you're not just his teacher, you're a teacher, you're a nurse, you're a mom, you're a friend, you're a guidance counselor, you are everything in here because you have to think about what's all going on at home and then what's going on in here.

Needs beginning teachers felt responsible for varied depending on their experiences, background, and self-efficacy.

Melanie's sense of responsibility to her students contributed to her disposition of persistence and

was a motivation for her to do her best. She explained, "I'm always trying to do too much, I'd rather do too much and exhaust myself than not do enough and actually mess up and have to carry that." She attributed her responsibility for her students as keeping her working diligently to find solutions for them.

Motivated by Students' Response to Care

One participant explained how a moment of trust expressed by a student motivated her response. Penelope explained:

> He had lost his caregiver, who was not a parent. It was a grandparent, so he was already being raised by a grandparent, and lost that grandparent that summer, and his first day, his words to me were, "if I'm quiet, you need to check on me because I'm not ok."

The trust expressed by this student in need triggered this teacher's empathy for the student's needs. By responding to her care, this student was inviting his teacher into his care cycle.

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Karen explained how it was easier for her to respond to a student in emotional need when they reached out to her. She stated:

> I feel way more confident with emotional challenges than I do with behavioral challenges. Obviously, sometimes those go hand-in-hand, but if a kid is reaching out for emotional support, I'm a lot more confident with that than someone who is acting out because of their emotional state.

Karen articulated how the student's role in the care cycle matters. Her students who invited help drew empathy from their teacher as a caregiver. The teacher was motivated to provide for the student's needs in those situations.

RQ2: Teacher Struggles Self-Confidence Fluctuates

Feeling confident and successful with student behavior, student learning outcomes, and parental interactions were three areas beginning teachers found most challenging and most likely to experience fluctuation. Briana experienced a drop in confidence during her first year. She explained, "I had a lot of confidence coming in, but due to people talking really bad about me, about my excitement, it bumped me down." Briana's confidence was impacted by the negative school culture she experienced.

Jennifer described the fluctuation in her confidence on a scale from one to ten. She explained, "I think when I started, I was about a three as a student teacher … now, I feel like I can't even pick a number. I'm like eight one day, two one day, five one day, three one day." Both Jennifer and Briana felt unsure about how to do their job and insecure about whether they were making good choices. Several beginning teachers expressed doubt when talking about applying strategies. Several described a method of "trial and error" in choosing what to do to help their students' behavior.

Teacher's Needs Impact Confidence

As a caregiver, the beginning teachers often sacrificed time and energy in their role. Some beginning teachers expressed exhaustion, frustration, and burnout. Sara explained the exhaustion and exasperation she experienced with a student during her first year of teaching. She said, "I had a really tough kid. It was extremely draining and discouraging, and I would, every day, be like maybe this child will be absent today because all of my energy goes toward this child." Hannah explained, "I just feel pulled in so many different directions … It's hard." Brenda described her exhaustion stating, "I went home a lot of nights crying. It can be exhausting. You feel like a limp dishrag." Brenda described how trying to balance the numerous challenging behavioral needs along with their learning needs resulted in her own drop in confidence.

Gap Between Expectations and Reality

Whether it was 18 energetic five-year-olds or 25 hormonal 12-year-olds, the beginning teachers described classrooms that were a mix of personalities, experiences, interests, difficulties, laughter, and tears. Hannah explained being unsettled and insecure because of the reality of teaching a student with EBD. She explained, "Oh my goodness, I am just one person with these 17 kids and one who is trying to jump in the creek! What do I do?" Hannah's feeling of helplessness led to a feeling of guilt at not being ready for the challenging situation she experienced. She said, "I know I could do so much better but it's just so hard." Hannah also felt that nothing could have prepared her for that situation.

Feeling unprepared was a common experience for the beginning teachers interviewed. Sienna explained, "I did not know what I was walking into." She felt unprepared for the reality of leading a classroom. Even the beginning teachers who had seen good practices modeled through their student teaching experiences were surprised by how complicated a classroom was to manage on their own.

Discussion

The beginning teachers who felt successful in responding to students' needs were motivated because of their role as caregivers and persistence as problem solvers. When teachers did not have strategies to meet needs, their self-confidence in their ability to care was negatively impacted. When the students' needs outweighed the beginning teacher's ability to care for the needs, some teachers experienced frustration, anger, and despair. The discussion that follows provides opportunities for transforming the classroom experience for both beginning teachers and their students with EBD.

Transformation Through Preparation

Some of the beginning teachers responded to the disparity of need and ability to care by drawing on their dispositions of persistence. Confirming the work of Collins and Ting (2014) on the complexity

of care dynamics in a classroom, the present study found the beginning teachers who had strong self-efficacy had been prepared for the care work of the classroom and viewed their students' challenging behaviors as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. For example, Penelope's former work in health care contributed to how she viewed her students' need for care. Her previous training provided her with a stronger self-efficacy as a caregiver even though she lacked teaching expertise. This teacher expected to care for her students' emotional needs. Just as Macartney (2012) explained, "A pedagogy of listening argues that teachers must consciously work from an ethic of care and obligation to others" (p. 172). Penelope used her care techniques, not giving up on her students because of her obligation to them and her realistic expectation of their needs. Similarly, Sara identified her biggest influences in teaching students with EBD to be the Responsive Teaching Model used at her school, and her classroom management course in her undergraduate program. Several beginning teachers relied on their psychology training, and their exceptional child and/or classroom management coursework to understand the needs of their students with EBD.

Some of the beginning teachers responded to the disparity of need and ability to care by drawing on their dispositions of persistence.

In contrast, Sienna, Jennifer, and Hannah felt their preparation was insufficient to help them meet their students' extreme needs. Sienna explained, "I did not know what I was walking into." Hannah described a similar experience, stating,

> We had a special education class, but that was more of learning the rhetoric and other things that go into special education. I don't think anything other than experiencing myself could have prepared me for stepping in this classroom and then getting a pencil box thrown at me.

To transform beginning teachers into practitioners who are ready for the realities of the diverse emotional and behavioral needs of their students, the beginning teachers interviewed suggested more authentic practicum experiences.

Transformation Through Reflection

An interesting finding that impacted beginning teachers' resolve was whether they were self-reflective. Most of the teachers participating in this study showed some level of self-reflection. Some of their reflection was focused on what the student was doing – on the specific behaviors – as to whether they were an obstacle to learning or an opportunity for help. Other beginning teachers reflected on their own responses to the students' behaviors. Just as Koenen et al. (2019) suggested, in-depth reflection is a way for teachers to attune to their positive and negative emotions about their students and their interactions with them. When participants in this study reflected on their response to students – how they cared for them – they were able to persist longer, create new learning experiences that were beneficial to their students, and build their own self-efficacy.

Several beginning teachers who expressed anger at the situation were able to dig into the source of the anger through reflection. Their anger at the student with EBD or the situation (behavioral issues, lack of support, or self-doubt) caused them to problem-solve – to figure out why they were feeling angry and what they could do about it. Each of the beginning teachers who felt angry did something about it. They moved from anger to guilt in feeling the anger, to blame, to looking for solutions. Noddings (2013) described the connection between joy and anguish as two parts of reflection, stating, "Both joy and anguish may be considered as aspects of reflective modes of consciousness" (p. 133). This study found that the beginning teachers experiencing anguish over their situation used their reflective process to resolve the issue – wanting to replace anguish with joy. Reflective teachers who recognize that the caregiver's needs matter developed strategies for self-care, which increased their joy. Most of the beginning teachers found collaboration to be a necessary and enjoyable part of their survival in

the first years. Nine out of ten participated in mentoring groups that offered a time of reflection that built camaraderie and trust and eliminated isolation for the beginning teachers. Melanie described her beginning teacher group as a "therapy session." Their early mentoring groups were a place to laugh, trade strategies, and encourage each other to reflect on shared experiences.

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Transformation Through Perspective

How the beginning teachers viewed a challenge had a direct impact on how they dealt with it. Teachers who viewed challenges as obstacles in their way, may not have pursued the obstacle the way teachers who saw the challenge as an opportunity to help. Several of the beginning teachers expressed their strong motivation to meet challenges. Barni et al. (2019) explained that teachers who sincerely care for others and themselves have higher self-efficacy. The beginning teachers in this study who sincerely pursued the student with EBD, not as an obstacle to learning, persisted in creating a caring relationship that was received by the student. Their perspective in seeing the whole child, not the challenging behaviors alone, impacted how they felt about their situation and how they persevered to solve problems.

Implications for Educators

This study found beginning teachers were open to having students with EBD in their classrooms but struggled to feel successful with them – revealing there is still a need for better preparation for preservice and beginning teachers in the complex work of inclusion.

Most of the beginning teachers expressed a need for more training to handle extreme behaviors. They wanted instruction in SEL and a realistic

preparation for the complexity of inclusion. The beginning teachers in this study who had preparation in care work through previous professions or instruction in SEL through coursework had more strategies to rely on when navigating intense emotional and behavioral challenges. Teaching beginning teachers to develop relationships with students, to use evidence-based strategies for inclusion, and to increase self-care can increase their belief that they are prepared for this challenging profession.

Many of the beginning teachers in this study said they wished they knew more about how to help their students with EBD. Previous studies (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014) suggested providing future teachers with more training on the characteristics of students with EBD, along with strategies that work for them, to build their self-efficacy in teaching them. Several beginning teachers interviewed suggested EPPs provide practice through case studies in their coursework to help them understand the characteristics of students with EBD and how to care for them. Specifically, EPPs can focus curricular attention on three areas – relationships, dispositions, and teacher self-care.

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Teaching Relationship Building

In this study, the beginning teachers who felt successful with students often developed deep relationships with them. Numerous studies have shown that beginning teachers who know how to develop relationships with their students have more success with students with EBD (Archambault et al, 2017; Garwood & Van Loan, 2019; Kwon et al., 2017; Leggio & Terras, 2019). Some teachers in this study understood how advocacy develops trust in the educator and impacts a student's feeling of belonging in the classroom. Wiesman (2023) explained, "Teachers have an obligation to advocate for every student, regardless of background, personal

characteristics, gender, race, ethnicity, class, or capabilities" (para. 10). EPPs need to expand beginning teachers' understanding of advocacy as an outpouring of care, improving the likelihood that educators will search for ways to meet their student's needs. This sense of belonging can be transformative in student behavior and engagement in learning.

Teaching Dispositions

This study found that dispositions that enable a teacher to care for their students and themselves are necessary for strong self-efficacy. Those unprepared for the care work teaching requires had unrealistic expectations of their role in the classroom. As shown by previous research (Cancio et al., 2014), strong self-efficacy impacts a teacher's longevity in the profession. EPPs who include disposition development throughout their program, offer beginning teachers a foundation to draw on that includes grit, determination, openness, and resilience. As Hughes (2018) suggested, "In addition to traditional expectations for content and pedagogy, developing teachers must collect tools to build dispositional awareness" (p. 9). These characteristics improve a beginning teacher's ability to build self-efficacy early in their career and stay in the profession.

dispositions that enable a teacher to care for their students and themselves are necessary for strong self-efficacy

Teaching Self-Care

Teacher education has a responsibility to prepare its teachers for the realities of the contemporary inclusive classroom. Snipes (2017) found that many beginning teachers felt unprepared to deal with the demands of their profession. The present study discovered that beginning teachers who did not have a realistic picture of the demands of the profession struggled with self-efficacy.

EPPs that include self-care as a component of their programs provide opportunities for teachers to practice their own emotional regulation

techniques promoting teacher well-being (Jennings et al., 2017). Self-care techniques of mindfulness, emotional self-regulation, and boundary setting are ways teachers can improve their ability to meet the needs that surround them daily.

School systems have a responsibility to create sustainable professional environments. Wilfong and Donlan (2021) showed a positive connection between how valued teachers felt and teacher self-efficacy. The beginning teachers in this study who felt cared for were able to respond to the students in need with more care. Their self-efficacy was tied to the level of support they felt. Snipes (2017) explained teachers who had mentor relationships felt more accomplished in their teaching. Just as their students needed to be cared for, the beginning teachers needed a particular type of care that impacted their persistence in difficult circumstances, their belief that they would grow in their profession, and their willingness to strategize for their students with the most needs. When schools provide tools, time, and encouragement for teachers to care for themselves, their students benefit too.

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Recommendations for Future Research

A limitation of this study was the small sample of beginning teachers in Western North Carolina. Compiling a larger sample, continuing this study with a follow-up study of how experienced teachers meet the needs of students with EBD, or recreating this study for a different population of teachers—perhaps how different demographics such as gender, age, or cultural assets impact self-efficacy for care—are ways to expand the topic. Investigating ways EPPs include care as a component of their curricular design is another way to further the work of this study.

Conclusion

There is an opportunity for EPPs to bolster their curriculum to better prepare new teachers for their care work in the classroom. Christian educators, who are called to care for others and to serve those in their care, can be some of the most vulnerable when it comes to self-care. Giving all of oneself to those in their care can deplete confidence and negatively impact the teacher. Self-efficacy, built upon training and support, can be an effective precursor to successful beginning teaching. This study showed beginning teachers were caregivers who desired to meet their students' needs; however, they often felt frustrated when they did not know how to handle challenging behaviors. Ways to increase beginning teacher self-efficacy can start with developing teacher dispositions as caregivers, building in experiences working with diverse students to better understand their needs and how to develop relationships with them, and showing new teachers how self-care can be transformative for themselves and their students.

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Appendix

SSI Sample Procedure and Questions

Semi-structured interview is meant to be a conversation to follow up open-ended questions for

clarity (Adams, 2015). The following is an example SSI process with sample questions.

Interview Process

A. Introduction of researcher and purpose of interview.

B. "Thank you for your time and care in helping this research project. Would you

be willing to be recorded so I may go back and review your responses? Are you ok with me taking notes (analytic memos) during the interview?

C. "Please tell me about your teaching experience (years, grades, subjects)."

D. Continue with interview questions - listed below.

E. "Is there anything else you would like to add to help my research on how to

prepare teachers for inclusion of students with EBD?"

F. Look back over my notes and ask any clarifying questions. "Did I understand

you correctly that…" or "What did you mean when you said . . ."

G. Thank the interviewee and conclude the interview.

H. Clean and clarify notes right after the interview while ideas are fresh in

mind. Add documentation of time, date, codes to identify this interview. Set

time to transcribe the interview and analyze.

Interview Questions

1) Tell me about your experience working with students with emotional and

behavioral disorders? Were these students identified for special education

services? Did they have an IEP? About what percentage of the day were they

included in your class? Was your classroom an inclusion model?

2) Please explain your experience co-teaching with other professionals – special

education teachers, assistants, etc.? In what ways was it successful or not?

3) In thinking about your experience with students with EBD, what evidence-based

practices did you use in the classroom? Examples include….read the list. In

what ways were the strategies successful or not?

4) What training did you receive in using these practices? Where did you receive

training? In what ways did your educator preparation program prepare you to

teach students with diverse needs? EBD?

5) What kinds of behaviors did your student with EBD exhibit in the classroom?

Were they externalizing or internalizing?

6) In what ways did you care for your students with EBD?

7) In what ways did you feel confident in your ability to meet the needs of your

students with diverse learning needs or EBD? Did your educator preparation

program help your confidence or were there other factors?

8) Please elaborate on what it feels like to teach a student with EBD?

9) Knowing what you know now, what do you wish you learned in college to help

you?