Recommendations for Improved Transitional Outcomes in Students with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders

By

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Abstract

In the field of education, there is a disconnect between research and practice in the area of supporting students with emotional and behavioural disorders. Evidence-based practices exist, but practical barriers prevent consistent use. This paper aims to identify limitations and offer practical strategies to improve student transitional outcomes in an alternative school program. By reviewing the progression of research over the last 30 years, strategies that show promise for practical use are examined based on accessibility and reasons for non-use. Consideration is given to the realities of school structures and challenges which may prevent regular use of effective practices. Recommendations designed by a reframing of promising practices are offered, providing workable strategies that address known obstacles. By directly responding to situational needs in a unique school setting, this paper modifies known strategies to fit a real situation, effectively demonstrating how it is possible to narrow the gap between research and practice.

Keywords: *emotional/behavioural disorder, educational intervention, transitional support, school-wide positive behaviour support, functional behaviour assessment, self-determination*

Introduction

This inquiry will focus on identifying and exploring a means to overcome existing barriers which inhibit effective use of evidence-based practices relating to students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD). The goal of educational research is to gain knowledge for the practical purpose of generating enhanced understanding for improved practice resulting in better student outcomes. While simplistic and logical in theory, there is often a disassociation which prevents successful application of research outcomes into the lived reality of school practice (Allison, 2015; Levin, 2010; Renihan & Renihan, 2015). In their examination of academic disconnect, Renihan & Renihan describe challenges of knowledge transfer that exist between the scholar with general insights and the practitioner with situational insights (2015). In respect to school leaders who must weigh merit against feasibility while considering theoretical understandings, Allison (2015) argues a need to better understand the nuance of situations research seeks to influence. Levin notes "there are many areas of education in which practices known to have good results are still not widely used, whereas ineffective practices remain in use despite the general availability of contrary knowledge" (2010, p. 305). Levin suggests that more attention should be given towards identifying and removing barriers which prevent use of evidence-based findings in meaningful ways that support students (2010).

Due to a myriad of complexities, students diagnosed with EBD are less likely to experience successful post-school outcomes and independence and more likely to engage in substance abuse, not graduate, and experience unemployment in adulthood (Kelly & Shogren, 2014; Lambros, Culver, Angulo, & Hosmer, 2007; Zirkus & Morgan, 2020). Trends documented from the early 1980's and followed over the next twenty years show an increase in diagnosed mental disorders in children (Maughan, Lervolino, & Collishaw, 2005), yet prevalence is

suspected to be much higher as clinical criteria for diagnosis may exclude students based on single point evaluations (Forness, Kim, & Walker, 2012). “There is considerable pressure for schools to address both the mental health and educational needs of youth with EBD” (Lambros et al., 2007, p. 60) and yet schools continue to lack the necessary infrastructure to foster effective collaboration with mental health practitioners (Lambros et al., 2007). Although research in this field has identified effective practices and structural frameworks for establishing interventions, barriers relating to the practical implication of collecting and analyzing data persist. The functional design of schools whose primary focus is academic accomplishments ultimately limits their own capacity for generating responsive interventions based on individual student needs. As a result of this inquiry, I will recommend strategies that promote positive transitional outcomes for students with EBD with consideration of known obstacles and limiting factors which generally exist within school structures.

Identifying the Problem

Motivation to address challenges related to the application of evidence-based practices which support students with EBD stems from personal interest. As a scholar and practitioner working in an alternative educational program, I have questioned the existence of practice limitations and wondered how we might overcome the barriers that hinder success for the students we serve. Although part of a larger school with sites located across multiple government facilities, my program of focus connects to the public school division and serves K-12 students with complex behaviours. I am part of a dedicated and highly trained staff team working collectively towards creating a trauma informed, safe and caring environment capable of supporting an extensive range of student needs. Students whose schooling requirements exceed the capacity of a community school are directed to this program by the division’s superintendent

and while there is no set timeline or transitional expectation, the understanding is that each student will eventually leave this program for something else. For some, a return to community school may be possible, others will graduate or possibly remain until they reach maturation age and no longer fit the criteria to receive public education.

While programs designed to support students with EBD seek to foster positive behaviour and prosocial development, one of the greatest challenges is the lived reality of balancing academic pressures while responding to frequent behavioural crises. The day to day needs of supporting students with extreme behaviour and emotional struggles leaves little time for data collection and analysis for targeting individual growth. Through this inquiry, I will seek to connect research and practice in a way that facilitates timely data collection and analysis to influence the design of workable interventions. This will be a critical component of my recommended strategies as I endeavor to effectively promote positive transitional outcomes for students with EBD.

Practice-Based Conceptual Framework

Research that focuses on EBD support includes many examples of mechanisms which promote targeted intervention across various contexts. These processes demonstrate the use of different assessment and reformation efforts all while emphasizing the significance of gathering data to generate practices informed by evidence. This study will examine insights found across diverse situational contexts while considering parallels and contrasts for my intended environment. By targeting research that highlights or empirically implies opportunities for growth and transitional success for students with EBD, I will conceptualize a framework based on aspects of various practices with promising application. Challenges relating to collecting

evidence and generating responsive strategies will be examined to ensure a framework that is feasible.

Practices described in the research have remained, in many ways, simply theoretical as they are rarely applied consistently in practice. Because of this non-use, many strategies continue to show limited evidence to support its success. Ironically, successful application with positive evidence is attached to high levels of external support in the form of research teams or supplemental funding which perpetuates the research-to-practice gap. As the "tried and true" methods are readily accessible, they are still heavily used. What I have worked to generate in this document takes otherwise inaccessible ideas and tailors them to fit a real situation in a way that is more likely to be sustainable.

Literature review

I began my search of the literature using keywords such as "educational support," "emotional/behavioural disorders," "behavioural education," and "transition support." This produced results relating to the effectiveness of school-wide positive behaviour supports (SWPBS) for foundational school improvement. Through examination of this research and continued searches connecting "school-wide positive behaviour supports" and "emotional/behavioural disorders," I became aware of a strategy known as "functional behaviour assessment", a tool used to identify the contributing factors of individual behaviours, and added that term to my search. Connections to "self-determination," a strategy to invite student contributions for goal setting, became prominent in research occurring over this past decade in response to older theories suggesting its potential. I later searched for ways to connect self-determination as a strategy to support transitional outcomes for students with EBD. I followed the progression of various researchers including Timothy Lewis and George Sugai and Terrance

Scott whose contributions to this field began in the 1990's and have continued since that time. I learned that much of the more practical research relating to practices for students with EBD was prompted by a critical review released in 1991. In order to better understand the motivation which prompted further research leading to findings that serve my own contextual needs, my literature review starts at this point.

A group of specialists, collectively known as the Peacock Hill Working Group (PHWG), drew attention to substandard practices and inadequacies related to the field of special education directly pertaining to students with emotional and behavioural challenges (PHWG, 1991). This focus stemmed from pressures of school reform pushing towards the elimination of externalized special needs education in favour of fully inclusive school structures. While the belief was that students with special needs would benefit from being placed in regular educational settings, this movement did not consider the structural support necessary for these students to be successful (Lewis, Chard, & Scott, 1994). In their published summary of group findings, the PHWG (1991) notes that while good practices exist, they tend to be grossly underutilized in education systems.

The PHWG report was revisited in 2019 by Lloyd, Bruhn, Sutherland, and Bradshaw in their review of overall progress in the field of supporting students with EBD. Unfortunately, despite an increase in overall research in this field and promising evidence for effectiveness, the issue of non-use for evidence-based practices is once again highlighted (Lloyd et al., 2019). This theme continues across documented areas of research in special education strategies as recommended practices are often not adopted in school settings (Lewis, Wehby, & Scott, 2019) despite research being directly "guided by the need to provide students access to quality educational opportunities, and in turn, promote positive post school outcomes" (Lloyd et al., 2019, p. 87). Pockets of contextual research exist, however effective and consistent application

of strategies to support outcomes where students with EBD are able to graduate and successfully move forward in this world do not. While I will follow the emergence of thought relating to SWPBS, FBA and self-determination as they connect to my own contextual space, it is important to recognize the diversity of needs across this field and not dismiss the value in merging other practices that may address individual circumstances.

School Wide Positive Behaviour Supports

In their examination of implications for students with EBD in settings where SWPBS are used, Lewis, McIntosh, Simonsen, Mitchell, and Hatton (2017) provide a rationale for implementing tiered interventions to promote positive outcomes for at-risk youth. By creating a framework of whole-school support, systems are in place to further success for both students with challenging behaviour and the teachers who are tasked with supporting them (Lewis et al., 2017). SWPBS have been recognized for their overall effectiveness of shifting from a culture of reactive and exclusionary discipline to the inclusion of proactive, prosocial strategies ultimately benefiting all students (Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; Maag, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2008). SWPBS "models include the design of individual student behaviour support plans but have, as a primary goal, the implementation of prevention practices that target the entire school population" (Luiselli et al., 2005, p. 184). Although SWPBS serve to diminish exclusionary practices, they do not consider the motivation behind adverse behaviour as it is expressed by individual students (Maag, 2012). Data that isolate the direct impact of SWPBS on students who are diagnosed with EBD and who are most in need of intervention is lacking (Curtis et al., 2010; Luiselli et al., 2005). Researchers urge for the continued study of targeted interventions for behavioural growth in children with EBD (Lewis et al., 2017; Simonson, Britton, & Young, 2010; State, Simonson, Hirn, & Wills,

2019) while acknowledging the persistent struggle to effectively implement evidence-based individual strategies amidst school-wide systems of support.

SWPBS studies have also looked to consider instructional needs as behavioural challenges hinder academic growth. Sugai and Horner state this reality as “schools need to attend simultaneously to developing the school-wide systems of constructive social behaviour and the curricular and instructional practices that will promote successful academic achievement for *all* students" (2008, p. 67). Studies connecting scholastic success to school-wide support have noted how academic and behavioral skills are interrelated (Forness, 2005; Lane & Menzies, 2010; Lewis et al., 2017; Luiselli et al., 2005). The impacts of supporting school-wide behavioural growth have included improved academic performance as teachers contribute more energy into learning structures, rather than behavioural response (Luiselli et al., 2005). Without addressing challenges associated with behaviour, interventions for students with learning disabilities have a disproportionate level of effectiveness as students with EBD tend not to improve over time (Forness, 2005; Lane & Menzies, 2010; Lewis et al., 2017).

Functional Behaviour Analysis

An evaluation of factors which contribute to behavioural motivation is known as a functional behaviour assessment (FBA). Riffel (2007) offers insight by describing FBA as “a process for gathering information to understand the function (purpose) of behavior in order to write an effective intervention plan” (p. 5). “FBA provides information about the environmental antecedents and consequences that can be manipulated to prevent problem behaviour and to promote socially appropriate behaviours” (McLaren & Nelson, 2009, p. 4). The purpose of targeted interventions includes proactive establishment of replacement behaviours which directly address student motivation for the undesired behaviour (Alberta Education, 2008; Crone &

Horner, 2003; Riffel, 2007; Scott & Kamps, 2007). The fullest expression of FBA involves an extensive collection of interviews, checklists and observations among other data collected to hypothesize the purpose of behaviour, the conditions preceding behaviour and the targeted intervention needed to alter the expression of behaviour (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015; Crone & Horner, 2003, Scott & Kamps, 2007)

Despite research which promotes FBA as an effective practice to support students with EBD (Anderson et al., 2015; McLaren & Nelson, 2009), the impracticality of use and the success rate of intervention transference hinder the likelihood of consistent use. In their examination of the FBA process, Scott, McIntyre, Liaupsin, Nelson, Conroy, and Payne (2005) noted the complexities and questioned the rationale of using an FBA to influence behaviour response planning as the level of training required for effective implementation exceeds the logistical capacity of most schools. McLaren and Nelson (2009) and Scott, Bucalos, Liaupsin, Nelson, Jolivette, and DeShea (2004) also highlight constraints resulting from intense labour involvement as a full FBA requires ongoing analysis of trends and formulating separate theories for each individual student based on collected data. Expectations for staff impede the application of FBA resulting in very few educators effectively including in-depth behaviour assessments as part of their daily routine (Mclaren & Nelson, 2009; Scott et al., 2004).

Researchers Sasso (2004) and Stichter and Conroy (2004) challenge the validity of FBA measurements as the suggested response includes environmental control which does not prepare students for complex variables which are likely to exist in other social circumstances. Although the disconnect of practically using FBA has been realized, the need for accessible tools that are usable by classroom teachers to generate data which informs the establishment of effective targeted interventions still exists (McLaren & Nelson, 2009; Scott & Kamps, 2004). Lewis,

Scott, Wehby, and Wills (2014) expand on the need for insights relating to the function of a behaviour in an environment and stress the significance of incorporating observation strategies. While simplified FBA frameworks do exist (Alberta Education, 2008, Crone & Horner, 2003, Riffel, 2007), their ability to provide the necessary insights needed for a student to successfully transition into other environments is questionable. Lewis et al. (2014) suggest that while contextual variables contributing to behavioural motivation should be examined, perhaps the ensuing intervention strategies should reflect combined methods.

Self-Determination

An emerging practice that has shown promise for improving post-school outcomes in students with EBD involves building capacity in the area of self-determination. Carter, Trainor, Owens, Sweden, and Sun promote the idea of developing skills related to self-determination in students with disabilities noting that "students who are equipped to play a more active role in their own transition may be more likely to accomplish personally meaningful outcomes during high school and throughout adulthood" (2010, p. 67). Improved outcomes for students with disabilities are strongly associated with the ability to advocate for their needs, articulate preferences and evaluate personal goals (Pierson, Carter, Lane, & Glaeser, 2008). Students with complex needs placed in restrictive settings may have fewer opportunities to practice and acquire self-determination skills resulting in how "relatively little is known about the self-determination capacities and opportunities of transition-age youth with EBD" (Carter et al., 2010, p.68).

In their systematic review of existing behaviour interventions, Bruhn, McDaniel, Fernando, and Troughton (2016) examine research that directly relates goal setting with improved self-regulatory skills. While many of the reviewed studies focused on goals connected to general life and academic skills, Bruhn et al. (2016) identified multiple studies where positive

behavioural outcomes were observed. One study described how enhanced capacity for self-determination holds the "potential to interrupt a trajectory of negative outcomes experienced by many children and youth with EBD" (Carter, Lane, Crnobori, Bruhn, & Oakes, 2011, p. 101). Carter et al. (2011) note that alternative educational settings place less emphasis on self-determination skills due to the specialized environment, but emphasize how these skills are, in fact, more crucial as the disparity between school and the outside world is greater. An older study reviewed by Bruhn et al. (2016), focused on adults providing different levels of goal setting support for students with histories of various misconduct behaviours (Maher, 1981). Goals relating to the problem behaviour were established either in collaboration with a counsellor, or by the counsellor alone who shared goals with the student only after they were decided (Maher, 1981). Limitations involving small sample size were acknowledged, however results suggested that "pupils who were involved directly in goal setting may have had higher degrees of goal attainment than those not so involved, since involvement in goal setting may allow them to determine the nature and scope of the counseling intervention" (Maher, 1981, p. 474). To better understand the effects of having students involved in setting goals, Maher conducted a later study which included a larger sample size and four levels of student/counsellor goal setting involvement (Barbrack & Maher, 1984). There again, findings suggested improved outcomes for students with problem behaviours where students are involved in the goal setting process.

The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) links self-determination and goal setting to academic achievement and transitional success. Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, and Little (2012) have offered empirical evidence showing positive results when introducing this model to students receiving special education services. Although

recognized as best practice in the field of special education, the structure of current educational systems hinder practice as expectations for implementation fall on teachers to be emphasizing skill development (Shogren et al., 2012). Kelly and Shogren (2014) later expanded this research to explore the efficacy of SDLMI for students with EBD, drawing a correlation between poor academic and post-school outcomes and highschool programming that lacks preparation for adult life. With enhanced self-advocacy capacity, students with EBD are more likely to improve on-task behaviour and promote self-selected goal attainment, subsequently increasing the likelihood of maintaining behavioural changes once interventions are withdrawn (Kelly & Shogren, 2014). Although the small sample size and limited complexity factors associated with this study prevent definitive conclusions from being drawn, initial findings were encouraging. Kelly and Shogren (2014) encourage further studies involving larger sample sizes, multiple complexity factors and varying ages and environments in order to better understand the extent to which SDLMI can support students with EBD.

Mansurnejad, Malekpour, Ghamarani, and Yarmmohamadiyan (2019) looked to examine the effects of learning self-determination skills on the externalizing behaviours of students with EBD. Using a pre-established curriculum relating to self-determination, all students were taught how to set goals relating to their personal values and behaviour needs noting that "when choosing which self-determination intervention to use, it is important to consider the needs and interests of individual student, including whether the student has the necessary skills to engage in the task or behavior" (Mansurnejad et al., 2019, p. 200). In order to develop self-determination, students must have the ability to choose, building the necessary skills as needed (Mansurnejad et al., 2019). Students with EBD are noted to have a limited understanding of basic self-determination skills as these require other internalized, self-regulatory factors that are often

deficient (Zirkus & Morgan, 2020). “Students develop self-determined behavior over time as they acquire key skills and attitudes associated with self-determination, including choice-making skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, goal-attainment skills, self-management skills (i.e., self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement skills), self-advocacy and leadership skills, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-knowledge” (Kelly & Shogren, 2014, p. 28).

In recognizing that building capacity for self-determination has the potential to positively impact post-school outcomes for students with EBD, Zirkus and Morgan (2020) offer insight about how to incorporate skill development instruction. Using person-centered planning (PCP), this approach focuses on helping students identify their future goals and then working to build instruction and experiences that support getting them there. “Finding methods to integrate PCP into transition planning for students with EBD has the potential to teach critical skills related to goal-setting and autonomy necessary for students to become more self-determined”(Zirkus & Morgan, 2020, p. 239). Strategies and practical tools are included within their publication as Zirkus and Morgan (2020) recognize the implementation challenges related to the necessity of intentionally including self-determination instruction.

Limitations for Evidence-Based Practice

While the studies previously referenced offer merit towards aspects of SWPBS, FBA and SDMIL, there is still much to be understood about the feasibility of integrating these practices into a school system. In their review of the research-to-practice gap, State et al., (2019) present a framework to support teacher ability to collect and implement evidence. The supposition reflected in this study connects deficits regarding teacher qualifications and training to the ongoing absence of utilizing evidence-based practices known to result in better outcomes for

students with EBD. Enhancements in pre-service and professional development training are recommended and while time constraints for ongoing training enhancements are recognized (State et al., 2019), acknowledgement of the time required for effective evidence collection and establishing new practices is not. In contrast, Zaheer, Maggin, McDaniel, McIntosh, Rodriguez, and Fogt (2019) address the same challenges, but through the lens of creating a support based system where teacher contributions are part of a larger framework. Improved capacity for teachers of students with EBD to effectively incorporate evidence for the actualization of responsive intervention practices stems from school teams and supportive contexts (Zaheer et al., 2019).

To ensure sustainability of practices which involve collection and effective use of data, Forness (2005) describes the importance of systems, supportive partnerships and establishing a data system that is realistic in order to successfully institutionalize a new practice. This is further emphasized by McLaren and Nelson who, despite having a positive study outcome, note "the data collection system employed in this study would be too time-consuming for classroom teachers" (2009, p. 16). Forness refers to teachers as "the gatekeepers who determine whether an evidence-based practice is ultimately adopted and effectively incorporated" (2005, p. 315). Zaheer et al., conclude their implementation review by stating "without adequate supports, educators often turn to ineffective punitive and exclusionary practices" (2019, p. 125). Recommendations for effectiveness include creating strong systems into school contexts (Forness, 2005; Mclaren & Nelson, 2009; Mitchell, Kern, & Conroy, 2019; State et al., 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019), and generating resources that are feasibly aligned with the lived realities of school implementation (Lloyd et al., 2019; Mclaren & Nelson, 2009; Scott et al., 2004).

Current Status

Currently in my school program, data collection begins upon intake, when information relating to the formalities of student placement is gathered. Teachers generate an individual program plan (IPP) relating to academic and basic social deficits while identifying goals and strategies to be implemented and reviewed at set timed intervals. With respect to academics, most students are not functioning at grade level, regularly scoring below the acceptable standard on provincial and evaluatory assessments. As behavioural influence is, at times, overbearing, it is frequently unclear whether academic dissonance is reflective of cognitive deficits or foundational gaps as the initial presentation may be similar. An individual behaviour support plan (IBSP) is also developed in order to identify antecedents, supports and crisis response to expressions of maladaptive behaviours. Both the IPP and IBSP involve populating pre-established templates using information from caregivers, previous school documents, third party assessments (psychometric) and staff insight gained from direct student interaction. A clinical psychologist, whose expertise is at times underutilized by staff, connects with students on a casual, mostly unstructured basis. Over the last two years, we have incorporated a system of SWPBS based on the seven habits philosophy introduced by Stephan Covey with his *Leader in Me* school program (2008). Positive behaviours are acknowledged as students are encouraged to be leaders by demonstrating the skills and habits inspired by this program.

At present, conversations related to transitional readiness are not part of students' regular instructional agenda until prompted by staff. Transitional readiness is largely based on anecdotal evidence as staff observe fewer behavioural incidents relating to a particular student. When this occurs, a designated transitional support person prompts conversations with the intake school and the student's family to facilitate a move. Families frequently react with hesitancy and fear as their child's success is being met with encouragement to leave their supportive space. Previous

school interactions were often negative and not remembered with fondness which incites feelings of rejection when students are urged to leave what, for some, has been their first successful school experience. An informal tracking system known as "daily contacts" (appendix A) is used to map levels of student well-being over the course of a day. While intended to enhance communication amongst staff and identify patterns of student behaviour relating to visible trends, inconsistent buy-in has limited the effectiveness of its use.

Recommendations

The reviewed literature has offered many practical considerations which inspired the following recommendations for my own context. By examining limitations which prevent consistent integration of practices known to effectively serve students with EBD, I considered what could realistically be achieved. I concluded that whole school endorsement of a unified vision relies on a system of support, ongoing measurement practices, and student-centered goal setting dependent on strategic planning and functional resources. Despite current shortcomings in use, a foundation has already been set by engaging *The Leader in Me* as part of a SWPBS, collecting observational data with our Daily Contacts tracking system, and offering therapeutic expertise by having a full-time clinical psychologist on staff. Shifting processes related to intake and monitoring, infused social skill instruction, and supportive staff systems will enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. Furthermore, by restructuring priorities that place student growth at the apex of what we do, these enhancements will endeavour to improve staff capacity as they continue to support students with EBD.

One tenet of *The Leader in Me* program states to begin with the end in mind (Covey, 2008). Transition planning needs to drive goals and subsequently influence responsive interventions which directly address maladaptive behaviours. By including transitional

conversations and long-term goal setting as part of the intake process, we would effectively promote progressive movement as a positive affirmation, reflective of student growth. For students expected to remain at our school setting through to maturation, ongoing dialogue may reduce student and caregiver anxiety as early consideration is given for anticipated next steps. An addendum to the intake package will be filled out by caregivers and reviewed with administrative staff as part of their introductory meeting. This addition (Appendix B) will explain the function served by this school program as a transitional preparation site for all students by outlining different avenues for transition. Caregivers may identify the process most applicable to their child while recognizing the non-permanence of this program. By inviting families to express concerns, hopes, and goals for their child, anxiety that often comes from caregivers who anticipate the prospects of poor post-school outcomes may be alleviated.

In terms of ongoing support, using a student growth plan (Appendix C) will formalize the inclusion of student input for ongoing strategy development of interventions directed towards behavioural growth and goal attainment. After an initial student consultation with our clinical psychologist, appropriate goals and strategies will be established based on student input. Further sessions targeting coaching and skill development will become a structured part of each student's weekly schedule. Scheduling periodic reviews which include the classroom team and clinical psychologist will ensure alignment between classroom instruction and therapy sessions. All legislation around therapy session confidentiality will be strictly adhered to, only information directly relating to strategies which support the student's growth plan will be reviewed.

Another creed found in *The Leader in Me* encourages putting first things first (Covey, 2008). By setting the stage for transition directly upon intake and expanding the clinical psychologist's role in generating student input for goal setting, classroom experiences should

affirm this process. Students with EBD tend to be less academically engaged (Kelly & Shogren, 2014) and academic support for learning disabilities is generally less effective (Lane & Menzies, 2010), yet teachers feel pressure to push academic performance. My suggestion is for teachers to infuse classroom instruction with life skills, self-determination and strength-based instruction which has the potential to enhance transitional success for students with EBD (Sitlington & Neubert, 2004). By prioritizing an investment in the effectiveness of prosocial strategies, we encourage "the ability of youth to make sound choices, work toward self-selected goals, solve unexpected problems, recognize and communicate their strengths, advocate for needed services and supports, and self-assess their progress can directly influence their engagement and success in school, as well as the outcomes that they later achieve" (Pierson et al., 2008, pp. 115-116). While self-determination skills are oftentimes assumed to exist, intentional inclusion and explicit instruction is regularly needed for youth with EBD (Bruhn et al., 2016; Pierson et al., 2008). Meeting students where they are at both socially and academically increases the likelihood of successful outcomes resulting from continuous and unified effort.

In order to facilitate positive transitional outcomes, other structural considerations need to be addressed as overall effectiveness is impacted by the integrity of implementation. Inclusion of a SWPBS creates a framework of behavioural support which enhances effectiveness of more targeted interventions (Lewis et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2019) and understanding the function of a behaviour provides insight towards how to address underlying motivational factors (Lewis et al., 2014). While the complexity of a community environment includes unpredictable variables, observational insights will support the overall behavioural growth (Anderson et al., 2015) necessary for a successful transition. Successful adoption of targeted-strategies responsive to individual student needs, relies heavily on structures promoting team-based coordination (Sugai

& Horner, 2008; Zaheer et al., 2019). While literature describes staffing a behavioural support team to ensure effective implementation (Crone & Horner, 2007; Lewis et al., 2010), fiscal constraints make this highly unlikely in most contexts (State et al., 2019). Consistent use of evidence-based practices becomes onerous when the effort falls primarily on teachers who are already striving to provide quality teaching, collect timely data, and develop responsive interventions that infuse life skills. Allocation for a dedicated individual tasked with coordinating efforts that facilitate monitoring and providing behavioural growth should be considered given the designation of this specialized educational program. This supportive role may effectively mitigate the historic challenge of inconsistent buy-in by reducing pressures related to infusion of life-skill instruction, continuous tracking and data analysis, and ongoing design of responsive interventions.

Implications for This Field

The field of special education as it pertains to students with emotional and behavioural disorders has made limited forward progression despite the existence of evidence-based practices. One of the greatest barriers identified through my examination of relevant research, is the lack of practical strategies able to effectively fit the reality of a school context. Presumptions regarding time and training of educational professionals often render quality resources impractical as continuing to add tasks to the ever-growing list of teacher expectations is not sustainable. “Whereas teacher training often seeks to make teachers better consumers of research, training researchers to better translate their findings into usable, easily accessible information should be a priority for the field” (Lloyd et al., 2019, p.92).

With respect to reviewed practices offering the potential of positive post-school outcomes for students with EBD, I have offered strategies which overcome known operational barriers.

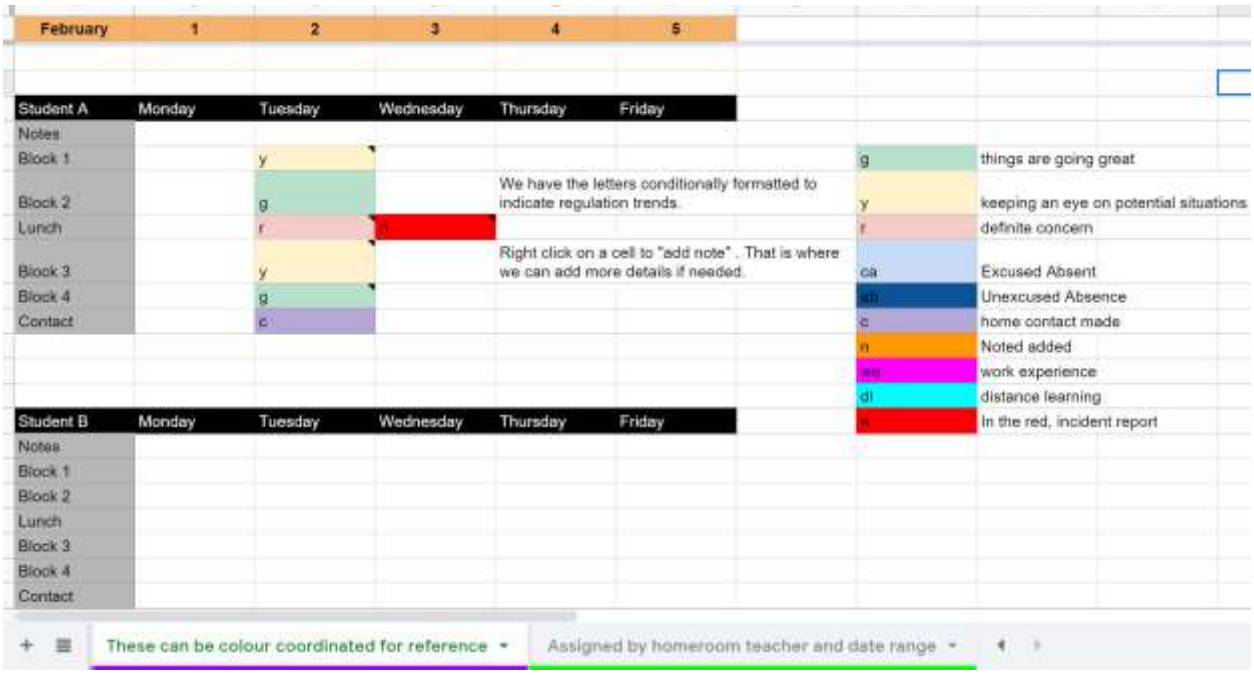
Considerations relating to data collection, process adoption and usability are paramount as using research to inform practice is futile without accessibility. “In many areas from reading instruction to special education to leadership, research has led to changed ideas and so practices, to the benefit of public education” (Levin, 2010, p. 305). Shifting priorities and the function of resource design holds potential for enhanced effectiveness of collecting and using data which in turn, directly promotes interventions that are responsive to student goals. Data which validates the effectiveness of my recommendations will prompt further consideration for specialized resource development in my own context and others in this field. The intentional design of functional strategies that directly align with structures already in place, is likely to improve post-school outcomes for students with EBD.

Conclusion

While research relating to students with EBD has continued since the PHWG published their review thirty years ago, evidence-informed practices continue to be overlooked in favour of more accessible strategies despite available research which shows them to be less effective (Zaheer, 2019). The current state of post-school outcomes for students with EBD is discouraging (Kelly & Shogren, 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Zirkus & Morgan, 2020) however, the research-to-practice gap may be overcome by designing structures to improve feasibility within the realities of individual school settings. My objective to review the research and build strategies realistic for use in a school has been met. The recommendations herein are simple and yet counterintuitive as systems are generally built for efficiency which, in educational structures, is equated with favourable academic performance. For students with EBD, the improvement of positive post-school and transitional outcomes depends on a willingness to redesign structural thinking and the placement of our effort. I have tailored effective strategies by removing barriers

that are often associated with preventing consistent use. Resources included in the appendices of this document offer strategies for improved evidence collection using the daily contacts tool and the student growth plan. These structural enhancements facilitate ongoing skill development and monitoring while promoting the design of responsive interventions targeted for individual student needs. The inclusion of ongoing support to uphold strategy implementation has the potential for reducing the research-to-practice gap and improving the likelihood for all students to experience positive outcomes.

Appendix A: Sample Daily Contacts:



Sample notes for indicated cells are as follows:

Tuesday Block 1	**Student is tired, had a nap and snack to prepare for block 2.**		
Tuesday Lunch	**Student was given bologna instead of salami. Threw their lunch, swore at staff, exited room, slamming door.**	**Wednesday Lunch**	**Student threw their water bottle at a peer. Required incident report.**
Tuesday Block 3	**Decided bologna is alright. Able to process feelings with staff.**		
Tuesday Block 4	**Returned to class in a better mood.**		

Appendix B: Transitional Outcomes

To be completed upon intake

Enrolment in this program stems from either an expulsion directive, or a need-based accommodation. Despite the reason for placement, this program's intent is to foster growth that supports student progression and eventual transition. Movement might occur in three ways:

1) Return to community school; criteria for transfer has been met. Transition support will assist by meeting with student, caregivers and receiving school to create a transfer plan. The transfer plan structure will be formulated in response to individual circumstances.

2) Graduation; credit requirements are filled and student matriculates.

3) Maturation age is reached; students who turn 20 years of age after the start of a new school calendar year may remain in this program for the remainder of the school year.

Consider how your child came to be part of our program. What are some of the goals you would like to see your child achieve in their time with us?

_____

_____

What are some of the concerns you may have about how your child will engage in our program?

_____

_____

What would you consider to be a successful short-term gain for your child? (Current year)

_____

_____

What would you consider to be a successful long-term gain for your child? (Future outcomes)

_____

_____

Appendix C: Student Growth Plan

Student name: _____ Grade: _____

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Team Review
Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Psychologist initials:	Psychologist initials:	Psychologist initials:	Psychologist initials:	Psychologist and classroom team initials:

What are your strengths (things you like about yourself or feel you do well):

What are your challenges (things you find hard or want to do better):

What is in your way (what is preventing you from doing things better):

How can we help (What do you imagine help might look like)?

The document will be replicated and filled out by the student and clinical psychologist at the start of each four session series over the course of a year. The student's classroom team will meet with the psychologist to review key understandings once per series.

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