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# Obstacles to Inclusion: One Early Childhood Inclusive Teacher's Perspective

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## Abstract

In spite of the attention given to the topic of including children and youth diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders in general education classrooms; there has been an absence of empirically sound research to guide policy and practice. With the passage of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) there has been an increase of students with cognitive, social and emotional disorders included in general education classrooms. Significant debate continues to surround the issue of students with emotional and behavior disorders and other disabilities for placement in general education settings. This chapter will explore the experience of one such environment in which several students with emotional disturbances are included in a first grade classroom. The frustrated teacher expressed a perceived lack of knowledge in handling behaviors and persistent feelings of helplessness. She struggled with how to handle the behaviors of the students with emotional disturbances and questioned if their inclusion in the general education classroom was best for all. Although the outbursts and negative behaviors did not cease; it was observed with consistent approaches to addressing behavior, the teacher was successful at cultivating empathy among students and examples of positive behaviors and care were shown in student interactions.

**Keywords:** inclusion, emotional disturbances, special education, general education, empathy

## 1. Introduction

The murmuring voices in the classroom suddenly came to a halt with the outburst of a student as he shouted "I won't do it! Pick someone else! I'm going to kill you! I want to cut out your eyes out and kill you! You need to die!" [1, 2]. Upon hearing these phrases, one might have a variety of reactions, including shock as these phrases were uttered to a teacher. It may also surprise a casual observer to note that these phrases were coming from a first grade boy, with no medical or mental health diagnosis, in a general education classroom. Although the words used by the young student are disturbing; it is not an uncommon occurrence in public schools today for classrooms to have students that are considered "deviant, disruptive, and nonconforming" [3]. In fact, disrespectful and deviant behavior is anything but a recent issue in the history of education but is considered by many teachers to be on the rise in classrooms today. In the past few decades there has been an increased

interest in the idea of inclusive education [4]. In spite of the extraordinary attention given to this topic, there has been a general absence of empirically sound research to guide policy and practice including children and youth diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders [1].

The ways in which educators have dealt with nonconforming students has changed over time. Students with emotional and behavioral challenges have been more apt to receive their education in specialized and non-integrated settings. The most significant alterations of the placement and education of students considered to have “deviant” or disruptive behaviors changed most significantly in the United States with the passage of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (Public Law 101-476; Public Law 105-17) passed in 1975 (as PL 94-142) amended 1997 and again in 2004. With this act, there has been increased attention to inclusive schooling, ruling every child is eligible to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) and to learn in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. Therefore, students with disruptive behaviors previously placed in alternative learning arrangements are now often mainstreamed or included into general education environments. This is considered the inclusion model of teaching, particularly if the disruptive child has special educational needs. The word inclusion has different meanings for various communities, but for the purposes of this chapter inclusion will encompass students educated in a heterogeneous, age-appropriate, child-focused school environment to prepare all students for full participation in a diverse and integrated society. A general education classroom is considered the program of education that children who are typically developing should receive, based on state standards.

True integration of students with emotional disabilities into general education classrooms is contingent upon attitudinal and social support [5]. Educators have known for decades that successful inclusion of students with disabilities, especially those with behavioral and emotional challenges, requires understanding and support from those with whom they share a classroom [1]. Teachers who engage in teaching inclusively are often resistant not because of the students with disabilities, but more about the valid concern of their preparedness to meet the demands of teaching multiple abilities in the same classroom [6]. The dominant factors inhibiting teachers to teach inclusively include attitudinal barriers and possessing the skills or knowledge to implement inclusive practices [7].

There are diverging philosophies guiding the educational expectations for students whose educational classification or stereotype is linked to their special education labels, particularly students considered with behavior disorders. This piece is an attempt to capture a snapshot of students with troubling behaviors in one inclusive classroom. Several months of observations revealed the frustrations of the inclusive teacher and the challenges presented to her in the attempt to educate several troubled students. The observer concluded that by creating a caring and empathetic classroom, the inclusive classroom may not eliminate the behaviors, however; inclusion can create positive learning experiences and promote student success despite the challenges.

## **2. History of educating troubled students**

As stated, in American schools today, IDEA mandates that all students with disabilities have the legal right to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and cannot be removed from a general education classroom simply because the school is not prepared to meet a student’s needs [2]. Therefore, training for the education grade level team can be written into an Individual Education Plan (IEP) under support for school personnel [2]. Schools are required to provide a level of

training under IDEA such as training in inclusive schooling, differentiation, modifying and adapting instruction, and collaboration. The law specifically guarantees that children with disabilities are entitled to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):

*To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Through the use of modifications, students can engage with content in different ways with different materials and supports than other students [2].*

Danforth and Smith in *Engaging Troubling Students*, reveal a great deal about the ways in which schools educate and have educated “troubled” students. The authors use the term “troubled” to describe students as behaving in ways that teachers and administrators find troubling. This behavior includes students who “resist, oppose school authority and norms in dramatic, loud and violent ways” [3]. Often the solution in the education of troubling students is to label them with an emotional disturbance and place them in a segregated classroom where their needs and issues can be specifically addressed. Before examining the snapshot of troubling students in a typical classroom, it is important to review a brief history of American education conceptualizing the problem behaviors of children in general education classrooms.

The construction of the disability category “emotional disturbance” (ED) became more widely known after World War II, and thus ED programs became a “central, consistent element within the framing of behavioral difficulties in American schools” [3]. Children identified with behavioral disorders are included in this category of disability [8]. IDEA provides a definition of emotional disturbance as a condition exhibiting characteristics that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. According to Danforth and Smith, a study in 1980 revealed a “478% increase in the number of students labeled ED in American public schools in less than 5 years” [3]. The reason for this significant jump in the number of labeled students is due to a combination of factors such as “an acceptance of this excluded group into the public schools and the new diagnosis of ED” that were once considered nondisabled prior to the implementation of IDEA.

IDEA further puts forth that every child is eligible to receive FAPE and to learn in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. Even though IDEA does not specifically state students with disabilities be placed in an inclusive classroom, it does support the goal to create an educational system which provides equal access and opportunities for all students. Research shows there is a wealth of knowledge in the more than two decades of implementation that supports the inclusion of children with disabilities in education settings, including those with emotional disturbances [8, 9]. According to Baglieri and Shapiro, “students seen as exhibiting emotionally disturbed behaviors need to be included in the mainstream of education for three reasons: (1) to give them a chance to interact with youngsters who are not handicapped, (2) to provide constructive role models for behavior, and (3) to keep up academically” [8].

Often, the prevalent obstacle to including students with emotional disturbances in the inclusive classroom involves the negative teacher attitudes toward including students with significant behavior challenges. Studies regarding teacher attitudes “represent one of the largest bodies of research investigating the critical area of inclusion” [5, 10]. Teachers are often “confused, overwhelmed, and ill prepared to work effectively in inclusive classrooms and schools” due to inexperience and poor professional preparation in working with students with disabilities [3]. A review of

the literature on teachers' attitudes toward working with students with ED reveals that general education teachers frequently report a resistance to full inclusion, often not a result of rejecting students, rather from feelings of a lack of competency [10]. Several studies have determined that more positive attitudes are reported following training and the most positive attitudes toward inclusion can be found in teachers who received more education for working with students with disabilities [11]. There is a correlation between teacher attitudes and their knowledge of disabilities. Negative attitudes might exist toward students with disabilities and inclusion because the teachers do not perceive that they have enough knowledge about this subject area [5, 11].

### **3. Case study of an inclusive classroom**

One method to gain information on the value of an inclusive classroom for the emotionally disturbed or "troubling student" is the opportunity to observe it in action within an inclusive environment. A strength of utilizing a case study method involves the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process [12]. Through this field research method, my questions could be addressed through documents and artifacts, participant observation, impromptu conversations and interviews of the teacher in the inclusive classroom. After securing access to the elementary school, the principal recommended a primary classroom that included several students labeled as Emotionally Disturbed (ED) based on their special educational designation. The principal shared the teacher had expressed frustrations with the class on numerous occasions and the teacher welcomed the opportunity to have an outside perspective.

An inclusion model for educating students with special needs was adopted in a Midwest, PreK-5 elementary school. The previous special education arrangement in this particular building was a case by case placement that included a segregated multiple handicapped resource classroom. Students were mainstreamed, only included during specific time periods based on their individual skills, and it was determined by the special education teacher when the student was "developmentally ready" to attend their designated class or not. The inclusion model that was adopted involved the elimination of the traditional multiple handicapped, self-contained classroom and integrating all students with disabilities, intellectual and emotional, into their same age peer classrooms. As the new model for inclusion was accepted at this elementary, there were lingering fears and doubts from parents and teachers that it would be successful.

#### **3.1 Case study approach**

This project can be best described as an observational case study because: (1) the major data-gathering technique used was participant observation, supplemented with more in depth interviews; (2) the focus of the study was on a particular group; and (3) the focus of the study included the interactions of the students and the teacher-student relationships. In particular, I focused primarily on the group of people, the teacher and the students, who were typically present in the room each day [13]. Bogdan and Biklen believe that, "a good physical setting to study is one that the same people use in a recurring way" [13].

#### **3.2 The first grade classroom**

Over a span of 3 months in the spring, observations were made in the case study classroom. The first grade classroom at this inclusive elementary was the locale for

the observations and interviews, which comprised of 26 students and one classroom teacher. The female teacher, Mrs. Bradwell<sup>1</sup>, had 22 years of teaching experience. Over the course of the observations, several informal conversations and interviews were conducted. Mrs. Bradwell had no specific formal training or education in teaching students with disabilities or behavior challenges. The children she indicated as “troubling” included the following (see **Table 1**).

### 3.3 Observations

The initial first few weeks of data-gathering were primarily centered on observations. Rapport was established with the students and the classroom teacher and I was viewed as a support staff or learning teacher in the classroom. The students recognized my note taking and they are used to many preservice teachers coming in the environment based on a local university partnership. Observations notes were written either as they were happening or immediately following the interaction. Attempts were made to record direct quotes by participants and in the event that I did not capture the entirety of the direct quote, I summarized what I had heard. Detailed notes and records were kept throughout the 3 months, and for a period of 10 days the behaviors of the “troubling students” indicated by the teacher were recorded in detail to be analyzed.

### 3.4 Interviews

Throughout the 3 months of collecting data utilizing the observational methods, informal conversations with the teacher took place to engage on a deeper, more personal level. Notes were taken during these informal conversations and on two occasions we engaged in a formal interview process of audio recording my questions and the teacher responses. There was not a structured guide of interview questions for the interviews as I tried to maintain the fidelity of research methods by allowing the teacher to direct the content of the interview and side conversations. Detailed, descriptive questions are “inconsistent with the emergent nature of qualitative research in general and grounded theory methods in particular” [12]. The primary question asked to guide the inquiry focused on her feelings about the inclusive environment.

I encouraged the teacher to elaborate on topics and issues that she initiated and I followed up with more in-depth questions as I sought to more fully understand her

Joey	Billy
IEP for oppositional defiant disorder and other health impairment Brain damage, extreme violent outbursts, unpredictable	No IEP Defiant, hyperactive, refusal to participate and physically hurtful to others
Beth	Sam
IEP for emotional disturbances Defiant, irritable and depressed, resistant, combative, argumentative, home life reported as disrupted	IEP for learning disabilities Hyperactive, inability to focus, depressive, sensitive

**Table 1.**  
*Student descriptions.*

<sup>1</sup>Teacher and student names are pseudonyms.

perspectives. The interviews and impromptu conversations allowed the teacher to share her experiences, observations, understandings, and stories in a private and safe environment. The in-depth interviews took place in her classroom at the end of the school day and allowed her the space and time to reflect upon her understandings and experiences. The loosely-structured interview protocol was reviewed and approved by the IRB. Following each interview, I transcribed the responses word for word.

### 3.5 Data analysis

When I began the analysis, I asked the following questions of the data: What is the main issue or problem? What idea keeps coming up? [14]. To answer my own questions, I wrote sentences or phrases that captured the overall story being told by the teacher. I used grounded theory methodology to analyze the case study, theories emerged from the data rather than being hypothesized prior to data [12]. Data collection, coding, and analysis were occurring simultaneously. The study's purpose was to develop practical theories in the area of the obstacles to an inclusive environment for children with emotional disturbances.

### 3.6 The findings

Mrs. Bradwell shared in her 22 years of teaching; the education of students with disabilities had changed in the last 15 years. She explained students with intellectual and emotional disabilities previously “were in house, it was in an MH room, not inclusion” [15]. She exclaimed she was “not prepared for things like autism, oppositional defiant disorder or roller coaster emotions, and my education at (university) did not prepare me for any of that. Before, when kids like that were included, it was only gym, special events, etc. but never in the classroom.”

After the first few weeks of the school year, and the experience of the extreme behaviors of Joey, Mrs. Bradwell indicated she was provided a teacher support person 3 days a week to help manage and maintain the classroom. She was very frustrated as it seemed other teachers with more training in the areas of special education would have the inclusive classrooms of students with cognitive or learning disabilities. “I seem to get the kids that are more the emotional disturbed, like the ones from abusive homes, mother on drugs when she was pregnant, things like that.” Mrs. Bradwell felt educating students with emotional disturbances was a challenge to her and the other typically developing students.

*It is always a battle to get these kids to learn. I do not see inclusion as a great thing if they cannot control themselves and are not able to behave themselves so as to not cause disturbances in the classroom. Our feeling in this building is we do not want to send these emotionally disturbed kids to an ED classroom, because there they do not focus on academics. The problem is you have 25 other kids who pay the price.*

Regarding the view that students might possibly benefit from a separate educational setting, according to Danforth and Smith, segregated programs in the past have served as “dumping grounds” for students who failed to “fit the middle-class ideals of attitude, appearance, and behavioral style” [3]. Regardless, Mrs. Bradwell felt entirely inadequate for the demands of the students with emotional disturbances. Observations and interviews revealed the teacher used positive and loving statements regarding her students, but also overwhelmed with the dynamics of her classroom. In multiple conversations, she shared of the challenges with the students that caused her most concern (see **Table 1**). She stated: “you cannot control what

comes out of their mouth, like I want to kill you, blow you up, and poke your eyes out, things of that sort. We get no training and I don't know what to do" [15]. She further revealed the teacher support provided 3 days a week was helpful, and she felt more competent at meeting the needs of the students with emotional disturbances only with aide support.

Mrs. Bradwell's insecurity at meeting the needs of students with emotional disturbances is not surprising as findings suggest "that although most of these students spend some time in general education classrooms, they are included in such classes less often than students with other disabilities and are likely to have teachers who feel unprepared to work with them" [16]. Because "society, schools and teachers set standards for acceptable behavior and expectations for children and adults" the challenges faced in educating students with emotional disturbances or behavior disorders are great, particularly when those behaviors are characterized by "impulsive, antisocial, hostile or aggressive actions directed toward others" [8].

#### 4. The "troubling" students

When Mrs. Bradwell began the school year, she was immediately faced with outbursts from two different students and antisocial and hostile behaviors from two other students, described in **Table 1**. The needs of these four particular students in addition to the other 22 felt insurmountable to her. She immediately began a referral process for two of the students based on the combination of their academic and social needs. The significance in the referrals for Mrs. Bradwell was not only to obtain the necessary support services to the students, but the needed help she hoped to gain in the classroom. One of the students received an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and the other student received an IEP for behavioral interventions which included a diagnosis of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), "a psychiatric disorder marked by aggressiveness and a tendency to purposefully bother and irritate others" [8]. The challenge in seeking and obtaining these diagnoses includes a differentiation between children, who demonstrate rational, purposeful, and communicative challenging behaviors and those with aggressive behaviors without a contextual/cultural rationale. However, the most common complaints of teachers about students considered troubling are "they are frequently off-task, not doing their assignments, and not sufficiently engaged in academic work and they do not get along well with their peers, interacting in negative or disrespectful ways" [3].

In the observations of the first grade classroom, the four students listed in **Table 1** exhibited many of these behaviors. Within the first hour of arriving, it was clear Joey and Billy were off task, would not begin their morning seat work even with various prompts, praise, or the possibilities of consequences. Mrs. Bradwell would continue to navigate throughout her morning routine and engage students, only to face resistance from students shortly into the lesson. This pattern of off-task, resistance, responding negatively or overtly to the teacher's requests was observed each day. During class story times, the students would be engaged at times, and on other occasions the personal space of other students was invaded by the troubling students; talking out and disengaged behaviors were repeatedly observed. **Table 2** indicates examples of the troubling behaviors for the four particular students during 10 days of observations.

There is difficulty in observing and appropriating what is considered an aspect of a behavior disorder or "troubling student" and that is a frustration many teachers and specialists discover, particularly in the diagnostic process. "What is disturbing to one person may be viewed as independent, humorous, appropriate or creative by another" [8]. While observing the four students considered "troubling," it was

<p><b>Joey (IEP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two significant outbursts that involved threats of death</li> <li>• Refusal to complete morning work, all 10 days</li> <li>• Three acts of physically hitting another student</li> <li>• Four examples of running around the room and laughing at behavior</li> </ul>
<p><b>Beth (IEP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 10 days, head on desk refusal to work</li> <li>• Each day, several times a day argued with the teacher</li> <li>• Each day actively defied or refused to comply with the teacher's request</li> <li>• Blamed others for her misbehaviors</li> <li>• Angry and resentful</li> </ul>
<p><b>Billy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three instances of refusing to complete work</li> <li>• Six examples of inappropriate behaviors at the story time area</li> <li>• Two recesses missed due to disrespect and incomplete work</li> <li>• Four instances of hostile defiance to authority</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sam (IEP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although revealed as a student of a troubling nature, Sam presented only on two occasions distraction and sensitivity</li> </ul>

**Table 2.**  
*Student observations.*

ironic some of the other members of the classroom were also engaged in behaviors that were deemed inappropriate, defying the teacher's requests or off task, yet they were not the focus of my observations. However, during the observations there was a consensus between myself and Mrs. Bradwell that the instances indicating which students were troubling were consistently regarding Joey, Billy and Beth. Although it is noteworthy there were several instances of resistant behavior among otherwise typically developing students in the classroom.

## 5. Teacher-student relationships

According to Danforth and Smith, "the most profound thing a teacher can do is create a relationship with a student that communicates deep acceptance and love to that student. That relationship is the cornerstone of good teaching" [3]. While there were many instances of nonconforming behaviors as indicated in **Table 1**, there were likewise a significant amount of positive and encouraging interactions of Mrs. Bradwell. Only on two occasions did she raise her voice, otherwise she would reassure, restate her expectations, and made the behavior expectations consistent and clear to her students. She did not use a reward system initially, but created a ticket system in the last few days of the observations due to the intensified end of school year student behavior issues and enthusiasm. The punishment system she typically used for her students was to take away a few minutes of their recess. Otherwise, Mrs. Bradwell did not use a prescribed management system in her classroom. Instead, she consistently used positive phrasing with all of her students in her lessons, in her daily transitions and student interactions. Some examples include: *Be kind; Make a good choice; I am looking for second grade behavior; In life sometimes we are asked to wait, so I am asking you all to be patient with others; etc.*

Although Mrs. Bradwell had clearly established some very positive student-teacher relationships, she felt discouraged by the relations with her troubling students. For example, with Joey and Billy, regardless of the trust, positive rapport and evidence of improvement in their overall behaviors; Mrs. Bradwell still felt defeated when they would act out. She seemed to feel the most sense of failure in her ability to connect with Beth. Joey had made significant gains in his ability to self-regulate his outbursts according to Mrs. Bradwell as compared to the beginning of the school year. However, the consistent anger and arguments from Beth were occurring continuously, causing Mrs. Bradwell frustration and feelings of helplessness in meeting Beth's needs. She felt she had exhausted all resources in connecting with Beth to help her socially and academically. Potentially a larger social issue was influencing the lack of progress, but one that was out of Mrs. Bradwell's control. Essentially, Mrs. Bradwell felt she had done all she could to establish a caring relationship with Beth and she felt it had failed.

Danforth and Smith reveal eight basic concepts that make up caring relationships such as time, being there, talking, sensitivity, etc. When discussing these ideas with Mrs. Bradwell, the frustration was even more apparent because a "caring relationship involves two people who must both participate" [3]. Her other expression of the hindrances with this particular student was her responsibility to meet all of her students' academic needs. The work of Nel Noddings describes caring as a relation, a connection or encounter between two human beings [17]. She emphasizes what constitutes a caring community in part, from cultivation of empathy, social concern and responsibility among children and more importantly how it does not conflict with goals of academic development.

Although, like Mrs. Bradwell, teachers who exhaustingly show care all day but do not feel like their students are really receiving that care know the frustration of a one-sided relationship. For teachers of resistant, depressed or troubling students, this can naturally be a problem. Often, Mrs. Bradwell was petitioning me "What is the solution? Do you have answers to share with me?" I would often share the challenge exists that relations do not merely consist of a list of approved behaviors that teachers should memorize and adopt. "Knowing how to be caring with one student is not necessarily ample preparation for creating such a relationship with another student" [3].

## **6. Inclusion is hard**

Throughout the conversations and interview with Mrs. Bradwell, the sentiments she regularly revealed were feelings of failure and the overwhelming sense of an inability to connect with the troubled students. Often this feeling was translated into the idea that she "did not see inclusion as a great thing" [15]. It was important to consider that the limiting factors in the timing of the observations was that they were taking place at the end of the school year and students felt like they were done for the year and lost their motivation. Behavioral issues for a majority of students became a big problem and teachers had an incredible amount of paperwork to do at the end of the school year. Students often take advantage of the fact that their teachers are tired and preoccupied with all the forms and data they have to turn in. Nevertheless, in the conversations and observations, it would appear many of the successes and stories of promise were difficult for Mrs. Bradwell to discern, but were revealed in what she shared.

Joey had several outbursts in the time I was there to observe, but Mrs. Bradwell shared the context of how volatile they had been in the beginning of the year. Joey was clearly able to calm down with Mrs. Bradwell, an indicator of a trusting

relationship. Even though Mrs. Bradwell recognized a caring relationship was seemingly established that involved nurturing, supportive elements; she felt that the cost for that developed relationship was the suffering of the typical students in the classroom. The students had to witness the behaviors of the nonconforming students.

*I think if the parents truly knew how much disruption to the classroom on an average day, they would be outraged. I really do. My daughter, was in kindergarten with the little guy that I have now, and she would come home and share with my husband, who is also in education, what he would say, and the threats and the hitting, and my husband would say, enough is enough, I need to go in there and say something, as this is not safe! I would tell him, hold on, if it truly were not safe to have him in there, they would not have him in there. But at the same time, oh the distractions...now that we have done full inclusion.*

The persistent challenge for Mrs. Bradwell was recognizing the success of inclusion for all of her students outside of the troubling students. If the only way to measure success is academically, she concluded that her students did each make adequate yearly progress; but she wondered how much more progress might they have made if the troubling students were not present in the classroom. Mrs. Bradwell stated if the measurement was her level of stress in teaching an inclusive classroom, she could truly attest to the exhaustion, scattered emotions and an overwhelming sense of failure. However, the observations seemed to display a level of success that is difficult to quantify. According to Danforth and Smith, in examining ways therapists connect with people of emotional disturbances, researchers found a common element of approaches that worked best in therapy: “a respectful, valuing, and empathetic bond between therapist and client. An intentional and consistent focus by therapist and client on discussing and developing the relationship they share” [3].

The authors believe that “a similar bond- a pedagogical alliance- between teacher and student is similarly powerful when teaching students who struggle with social and emotional difficulties” [3]. They explain that no educational research base on this exists. On the other hand, most professionals would acknowledge that students need a wide variety of academic and behavioral programs, services, and supports to succeed, and considerable professional literature has described these interventions for students with high-incidence disabilities, including ED teachers with a strong repertoire of behavior-management skills to decrease inappropriate behaviors and increase prosocial behaviors. Thus, any conclusions on how creating a caring classroom can ultimately promote student engagement and participation within the inclusive classroom must come from the personal stories and narratives within the teacher reflections.

Even though Mrs. Bradwell was finding it challenging to enjoy the relationships with the students considered troubled and troubling, each of the conversations with her revealed her determination to learn how to better love her students. She expressed that her teaching has changed to “promote tolerance. I mean a lot of these kids have been with the kids since Kindergarten. They model what is shown to them by the teacher when it comes right down to it” [15]. She explained that she was often sharing with all of her students the necessity for patience and understanding. Mrs. Bradwell stated she would often explain that we all have differences in appearance, ways of communicating and how everyone relates to people, objects, and events differently from one another and some respond unusually or dramatically to things. Baglieri and Shapiro state when necessary, “these ways of responding should be addressed candidly in order to cultivate understanding and acceptance of difference” [8]. Building a sense of community among class members and relationships are vital to the helping task and imperative for moral development.

An example of how these conversations and explanations had made an impact was revealed 1 day in the behavior of a typical developing student, Chuck. He was the pleaser, always mindful of the other students in the classroom; Chuck had no behavior issues and was consistent with on task behaviors. Mrs. Bradwell shared at the start of the year during Joey's outbursts, Chuck would cover his ears and was clearly disturbed by what he was seeing and hearing. Mrs. Bradwell was very concerned of how these interactions and experiences were affecting Chuck academically and emotionally. Chuck continued to succeed academically and his reactions to the behavior outbursts of the other students over time diminished. On one such occasion while trying to help Joey, a mantra of threats ensued and Chuck was the first student by the visitor's to share what was happening, how everything would be alright and a first grade version of why Joey was behaving the way he was behaving. The empathy was evident and it would seem a social distance between Chuck and Joey had significantly diminished from the examples Mrs. Bradwell had shared in her interview.

As Mrs. Bradwell struggled to manage the students' overt behaviors, she did not utilize a classroom management plan or tool that may have aided in her success. Behavior-Management Strategies with clear rules and related consequences have been shown to assist teachers in their teaching. However, many general education teachers are reluctant to implement behavior-management systems suggested in the literature as being effective with students with emotional disturbances because "these systems appear to be too time intensive and dependent on consistent implementation [18]. Additionally, some behavior strategies are not considered necessary for the rest of the student population. For instance, a token economy system that relies on external rewards has been shown to be successful for students with emotional and behavioral challenges, for instance, students earn tokens for appropriate behaviors.

When a classroom management tool or behavior modification idea was shared with Mrs. Bradwell, she was resistant to adding an additional task in her day. She also explained that not all students need a reward for positive behaviors they are consistently displaying. As previously stated, there is a correlation between teacher attitudes and their knowledge of disabilities. This is particularly true of individuals with emotional disturbances. Students with frequent outbursts are too often viewed from the perspective of their deviant behavior and not as a result of their disability. Therefore, implementing a different behavior tool to assist the student is hindered by the assumption that the student should behave as the other students do. In contrast, students with physical limitations or visual impairments would not be denied the necessary assistance they require to access the inclusion classroom. A review of the literature suggests the need for effective instructional, behavioral, and self-management strategies for troubling students [18]. Fortunately, most instructional practices that are effective for students with emotional disturbances have a positive impact when used alongside their non-disabled peers.

## **7. Conclusion**

Although the observations were just a single case study of troubling students in one inclusive classroom, the observations revealed first and foremost the frustrations of the inclusive teacher and the challenges presented to teachers by troubling students. Negotiating those challenges and the benefits of inclusion for Mrs. Bradwell was extremely difficult. Based on the observations and what Mrs. Bradwell shared of her classroom dynamics at the start of the year, there appeared to be a different outcome compared to the impressions of the observe, one that confirms the

conclusions of Danforth and Smith [3, 19]. The observations revealed how creating a caring classroom can ultimately promote student engagement and participation within the inclusive classroom and that these interactions and relationships can have a profound impact on the emotional well-being and learning of all students, but especially the students with troubling behaviors.

The teacher interview and conversations demonstrated although nothing fully prepares a teacher to teach inclusively troubling students, an important aspect in her teaching was to recognize that each student is different and have varying educational needs. This of course applies universally to all students, troubling or not. The classroom teacher worked tirelessly to develop positive relationships with all of her students. Ultimately, it takes time, patience and persistence to meet the individual needs of each and every student in the classroom, regardless of their emotional, behavioral and educational needs. Then again, is not that true of good teaching regardless?

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