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Survey608

Literature Review

**Pre-Service Art Educator Preparation for Work with  
Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed (E/BD) Students**

The literature review is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the research about the emotionally and behaviorally disturbed (E/BD) diagnoses, as well as the controversy and possible problems behind the diagnoses. The second section focuses on the current research in the field of pre-service preparation for art educators and a variety of pilot programs for art teachers working with special needs students.

The Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed (E/BD)

A number of scholars have written about the psychological diagnosis, Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed (E/BD), and the controversy behind the label. This section discusses the E/BD diagnosis from the perspectives of art educators, disability researchers, and psychologists. E/BD is a highly ambiguous disorder and often depends on the subjective observation of the child by the person doing the diagnosis. According to Alice Wexler, an art educator who has written many books and articles on the subject of disabilities and the arts, E/BD also tends to depend on the context and home environment of the child, rather than the child’s biology (Wexler, 2011, p. 107).

What makes this disorder different from other psychological disorders is that these behaviors are often socially learned. For example, so-called E/BD children often act out in response to their chaotic or inconsistent environment. According to Wexler, “These behaviors are socially learned by children in response to isolation, abuse, and neglect” (p. 111).   
 Furthermore Wexler (2011) argues that the origins of E/BD begin early in a child’s life when he or she is first forming relationships with their mothers. Children who are neglected, abused or do not receive sufficient care from their mothers or caregivers are often labeled with E/BD later in life. Wexler argues that without the continuous physical and emotional support of a caretaker, children will not learn to develop their emotional identities. This lack of a sense of self hinders the child from ever learning how to “organize, sequence, rationalize, plan and interpret our own and other’s behaviors” (p. 114). Wexler goes on to argue that if children do not develop these abilities early in life, they will not feel safe out in the world and will continue to live rigid and reclusive lives, protecting themselves from what they perceive as a constantly threatening and unsafe environment. Because of this feeling of insecurity from impending threats, children with E/BD live their lives in a constant state of anxiety and fear, often reacting in a “fight or flight” response (p. 115). As children grow, it is harder for them to trust and form relationships with adults making it difficult for teachers to connect with them. This inability to form relationships with adults ultimately influences the teacher’s ability to effectively educate a child with E/BD.

While researching a variety of schools and their special needs populations in Australia, Sabine Wingenfeld (2002), a psychologist and associate professor at Australian Catholic University, found that between 14 and 20% of adolescents had some type of mental health problem. This percentage suggests that in an average-sized classroom, about three to five children have at least one developmental or mental health problem. As noted, assessing and diagnosing a student with E/BD can be difficult and confusing because multiple perspectives are involved including the assessment of the child by the parent, by the teacher and by the student, him or herself. Wingenfeld asserts that since there are so many factors involved, not only in assessment perspectives but in the differences in a child’s personal environment, there is not one simple or single cause for this disorder. Though Wingenfeld argues for better assessment of children who may have a disorder or multiple disorders, there seems to be agreement between Wingenfeld and Wexler that multiple factors need to be taken into consideration, including the child’s environment and family life.

More than fifteen years before Wingenfeld’s study, Mary Wagner (1995) a director of education and human services research, analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education (NLTS). Wagner found that in order to qualify for a special education designation from the federal government, a child with E/BD must exhibit his or her disorder for a long period of time, their behavior must be considered “severe” by those assessing the child, and the disorder must adversely affect the child’s school performance (Wagner, 1995, p. 94). Even though about 14-20% of children are found to have E/BD, less than 1% of those students fall under the federal requirements for students considered to be eligible for special education (Wagner, p. 94). Wagner points out that, “One-fourth of high school students with E/BD were African American, even though African-American students constituted only 14% of the general population of students of similar age” (p. 95). Wagner notes the discrepancies in these figures and argues that some researchers in her field believe that the overrepresentation of African Americans is a result of the lack of tolerance in schools for “behaviors more characteristic of the African-American culture than mainstream white society” (p. 95). Yet she does note that similar relationships were found among African Americans with other disabilities including deafness and visual impairments, which suggests that poverty more than school policy plays a role (pp. 95-96).

Wexler also argues that the symptoms of black children labeled as E/BD are often just their reaction to feeling disenfranchised and unaccepted in society and in school (pp. 108-109). Though Wagner’s analysis of the data was done more than fifteen years ago, the amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1997, a federal law requiring more services for students and children with disabilities, and the recent inclusion laws taking effect throughout the country only seem to increase the likelihood of a continuation of these disturbing demographics in the present.

According to Wexler, the label of E/BD is highly controversial and is “inextricably intertwined with maintaining the system that causes the disability, and comes with a host of racist, sexist and classist constructions” (2011, p. 108). Wexler argues that a disproportionate number of black males, as well as students who are poor, tend to be labeled as E/BD (Wexler, p. 108). Wexler believes that because of the ambiguity and the tendency towards subjectivity during the assessment process, many children are over-labeled or mislabeled with E/BD (2011, p. 109). Wexler and her colleagues wonder if more positive relationships between teachers and their students would decrease the number of students labeled with E/BD. In terms of the possible racial implications, Wexler and her fellow researchers found that there is a disproportionate number of white females teaching a disproportionate number of black males labeled with E/BD and argues that this cultural mismatch causes more emotional stress and unwanted behavior from the black male student (Wexler, p.108-109).

Similarly, John Derby (2011), another art educator, argues that there is a possible stigmatization attached to diagnosing students with E/BD and labeling students as special needs in general (p. 95). In his research on disability studies, Derby states that using the term “special needs” to label a child who has physical or mental disabilities already establishes that the child is “abnormal” in the mind of the teacher (p. 103). Derby argues that using such disability metaphors as “special needs” negatively affects the way ableists presume a disabled person lives and operates his or her life (p. 103). Derby argues that “Disability metaphors almost always speak to the woeful state of disabled people– what they cannot do, the joys they can never know, their profound ignorance–of they are used for shock value” (pp. 103-104).

When specifically discussing E/BD, Derby goes further to say that the term emotionally and behaviorally disturbed is stigmatizing in and of itself. He claims that using the word “emotional” is ambiguous and only accounts for a very small portion of the disability that causes “disturbances” (p. 103). Furthermore, he claims that even the word “disturbance” is wrong because it “criminalizes students, emphasizing ‘behavioral problems’ and modification instead of addressing the causes and effects of the underlying illness” (p. 103). Derby asserts that this type of labeling ends up as an argument for isolating the child rather than helping to find out how that student learns (p. 103).

Both Derby and Wexler argue that the idea of disability is a social construction, dominated by those who consider themselves normal (Wexler, 2011; Derby, 2011). Both researchers assert that art educators need to better understand students who are considered disabled or who have special needs. Art educators need to push for a change in curriculum that will help de-stigmatize this population through lessons on social justice and advocacy in the classroom (Derby, p. 95). Derby equates racial metaphors and stereotyping with disability metaphors and stereotyping and argues that both need to be addressed through a social justice approach (p. 104).

Although Derby and Wexler agree on the social constructs and negative connotations that come with labeling those who are not “normal,” they have different views on the uses of art education in disability. Wexler argues that art education can and should be used as a bridge to connect the “normal” with the “abnormal” (Wexler, 2011, p. 8). As Wexler argues in her book, *Art and Disability*, “All the arts are helpful in creating a bridge between us and the other” (p. 8). She also discusses how art and materials can be used for diverse learners, such as those with ADHD, Autism and E/BD as way to cope with their particular needs or disabilities. On the other hand, Derby calls for educators to use their arts curriculum to advocate for social equality and the end of stigmatization. In his article on disability studies and art education, Derby argues that “art educators should merge social justice and disability research traditions by participating in the interdisciplinary scholarship of disability studies” (2011, p. 95).

Recognizing the possibility of misdiagnosis and stigmatization, and the moral and ethical questions surrounding E/BD, there are still some basic characteristics educators and psychologists have found consistent in the diagnostic profile. The typical behaviors found in a student labeled with E/BD are aggression, a tendency towards violence, disrespect and disruption as well as being withdrawn in the classroom (Wexler, 2011). Wexler notes that these students are often placed in self-contained classrooms because their disruptive and aggressive tendencies can be too much for a teacher with many students to manage effectively. Such students also have a high dropout rate and are often two years behind their peers in academic performance. According to Wagner (1995) students with E/BD have a higher number of absences from school than those who are considered normally functioning or have other special needs. For example, Wagner notes that in 1995, high school students with E/BD missed an average of 19 days of school. This number represented the highest rate of absentees in any group of students with disabilities, and about three-fourths of these students failed one or more of their classes (Wagner, 1995). Wagner asserts that there is also a significant correlation between students labeled as E/BD and poverty and family stressors. In 1987, more than one third of students labeled as E/BD lived in households that fell below the poverty line.

Wagner argues that the outcomes for these students do not get better as they get older. Only about 25% of students with E/BD in 1995 enrolled in higher education three to five years after leaving high school versus the 66% of students in the general population who enrolled in higher education (Wagner, 1995). Only about half of students with E/BD were employed after leaving high school three to five years later compared to 69% of students in the general population (Wagner, p. 100). Wagner cites a higher rate of parenthood in young females with E/BD compared to their nondisabled peers and a 25% arrest rate after one year of leaving high school versus only 8% of the general population. Wagner also found that students with E/BD were twice as likely as students with other disabilities to be found “in a correctional facility, halfway house, drug treatment center, or ‘on the street’ (10% versus 4%, respectively)” (Wagner, p. 103).

Wexler argues that since students with E/BD have a difficult time trusting and connecting to adults, their teachers need to make “emotional interactions that are developmentally appropriate,” making up for those missing connections with caregivers (Wexler, 2011, p. 116). According to Wexler, students with E/BD do not react well to adults demanding compliance and such demands increase the chance of some form of resistance. Wexler asserts that students with E/BD also do not react well to adults who try to “speak their language” (Wexler, pp. 122-123). Wexler argues that instead of a punishment and reward system, teachers should focus on building strong identities, a sense of morality and a positive outlook in these students.

Wexler (2011) argues that the art room is an ideal setting for creating positive interactions between students with E/BD, their teachers and their peers. It is often seen as an open and safe environment and a setting where teachers can help students develop a sense of self (p. 15). She sees the art room as the place for students with E/BD and other disabilities to confront themselves and make sense of the world they feel so disconnected from (p. 15). Yet, as mentioned previously, teachers must also have a basic understanding of their special needs students and the behaviors that come with their needs in order to effectively educate the student.

Addressing the Adequacy of Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for Special Needs Students

Karen Keifer-Boyd and Leah Kraft, both art educators, found that many new art teachers walk into their art rooms on the first day of school to find out that they will be working with many students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), a passage in the 2004 amendment of IDEA that requires specific education goals for a child a disability or with special needs (2003). Unfortunately, new art teachers lack the experience they need to work with this population. Boyd and Kraft (2003) found that some educators are uncomfortable with and are even opposed to inclusion in the classroom (p. 48). They assert that “such discomfort may result from lack of opportunities in pre-service preparation for teachers to gain confidence and practice strategies for teaching art to differently-abled learners …” (p.48). In fact, when Kraft researched schools for her case study, she only found two art classes out of 23 that included one student in each classroom that had severe disabilities (2003). Under the amendment to IDEA in 1997, public schools are strongly urged to practice inclusion in their classrooms.

As a result of their findings, Keifer-Boyd and Kraft created the Human Empowerment through the ARTS (HEARTS) program in 2001, where ten pre-service graduate students worked one-on-one with students with mental retardation as well as “typical” learners for five days within the second and third week of the course. These graduate students created and taught art lessons and differentiated their lessons based on student ability. They worked closely with special education teachers in a safe and controlled environment. The program resulted in an increase in the comfort level of the graduate students when working with students with special needs, an increased understanding in how to differentiate lessons for individual learners, and an even less apparent separation between “typical” and “non-typical” learners (p. 52). In addition, the student teachers who participated in this program felt more confident about working with this population in the future.

Four years after Keifer-Boyd and Kraft’s program, Carole Henry and Mary Lazzari (2007), two art educators, conducted research about the current preparation requirements for pre-service art teachers across the country in order to identify what aspects of the required courses were successful and what needed reform (p. 47). Henry and Lazzari noted that, “Teachers are now expected to have content knowledge that is both broad and deep and be able to teach that knowledge to student populations that are increasingly diverse” (2007, p. 48). Henry and Lazzari profiled one program at the University of Georgia called the Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Program (GSTEP) that focuses on the improvement of teacher preparation. It is a six-year program that provides full pre-service preparation for teaching, ranging from recruitment to classroom experience and mentoring programs. During the planning process of GSTEP, teams from different backgrounds including teacher education and preK-12 schools worked together to put together the program that met National Board, INTASC and content area standards (p. 48).

The creators of GSTEP argue that preparation starts at the beginning of a student’s college experience and extends into the first few years of teaching. The GSTEP Fine Arts Curriculum Team worked with pre-service art educators specifically, preparing them to teach in an ever-increasing inclusive classroom setting (2007). Along with the required hours of student teaching and art education theory and pedagogy, students took courses within the elementary school setting with their adjunct professor, who also taught at the elementary school. This course allowed pre-service teachers to interact with students, get an understanding of school culture and speak to students’ parents (p. 49). The program also increased fieldwork requirements in all of the courses, allowing pre-service teachers to observe more experienced teachers and learn how to work with “diverse learners” (p. 49).

Another recent study, which was inspired by Keifer-Boyd and Kraft’s research, also looked at the current preparation requirements for future art educators and their work with special needs students. Christina Bain and Cindy Hasio (2011) found that eight years after Keifer-Boyd and Kraft’s study, novice teachers still reported feeling unprepared and inexperienced in managing their own classroom during their first year of professional teaching (p. 34). Bain and Hasio argued,

Pre-service students with few opportunities to practice differentiated instruction are likely to struggle when planning instruction for children with special needs, as they have little or no practical knowledge regarding each child’s unique capabilities. (p. 34)

In addition, student confidentiality practices and an increase in class size also prevented art teachers from finding out which students had an IEP.

As a result of these findings, Bain and Hasio created a two-week intensive program in May 2007 for novice students from the University of North Texas that would include working with students with special needs and preparing lessons and implementing them in several secondary schools in the area. The students were able to get assistance from paraprofessionals, occupational therapists and special educators in the preparation of their lessons. They were asked to plan lessons for groups of students ranging from five to 12 students and devise multiple ways of implementing the lessons. After two weeks, novice teachers said that they felt more comfortable and prepared for working with this population even more than when they had done classroom observations. Many also said that they learned a lot through collaboration and working with other classmates and through their personal reflections.

After completion of the course, Bain and Hasio noticed pre-service teachers exhibited increased confidence and skills as well as positive attitudes toward working with students with disabilities. One student who took the course reflected that she is now aware of the needs of each student and is no longer afraid to work with them and adjust lessons to their needs (2011). The programs mentioned above appear to be somewhat isolated instances in the preparation of future art educators and therefore there is a need for similar adjustments to many current teacher preparation programs.

All three studies, completed within the past nine years, seem to show very similar results. Through HEARTS, G-STEP and Bain and Hasio's summer program, student art teachers who were able to work directly with students with special needs in seclusion or inclusion environments claimed to feel more confident when working with this population. An additional program that focused specifically on writing and differentiating lessons and for implementing these lessons for special needs students resulted in pre-service teachers feeling more comfortable teaching, more knowledgeable and understanding of how to teach these students, and more positive about working with the special needs population in the future.

The research sample in several of these studies was relatively small and a lot of the findings seemed to be somewhat generalized. For instance, in the HEARTS program, only ten pre-service graduate students participated in the pilot that lasted about three weeks (Kiefer-Boyd, 2003, p. 46). This small sample and relatively short length of the program did not allow for in-depth research and collection of results that is necessary for an deeper understanding of the positive or negative outcomes of the program.

Similarly, Bain and Hasio’s pre-service program with special needs also had a small research sample and a short time-span. Pre-service students from UNT only worked with local special needs students for a period of two weeks during the summer of 2007 (Bain & Hasio, 2011). Two weeks seems to be an inadequate period of time for pre-service students to gain enough experience in teaching a class of students with special needs, particularly students with E/BD. The G-STEP program seems to be the most in-depth program, as it requires pre-service students to take a variety of fieldwork courses and spend more hours observing and working one-on-one with the special needs population.

Though these programs seem to give only a mere glimpse of the possible outcomes that could result from pre-service art teachers having more experience with special needs populations, it is important to note that a majority of the results of these programs were positive. This research in pre-service work with special needs students is a notable first step in understanding what pre-service teachers need in order to work with students with disabilities.

Although there has been a noticeable increase in coursework for pre-service art educators on special needs populations, it appears that further reforms in teacher preparation are necessary. Elizabeth Kowalchuk (2000), an associate professor of visual art education at The University of Kansas conducted a study of thirty-seven student teachers studying at a college in the Northeast. She found that, although student teachers learned a lot in their pre-service years, they still felt they needed more guidance in a few areas of art education, specifically when working with the special needs population. These thirty-seven student teachers participated in a reflective teaching seminar and kept journals of their experiences in the eight-week student teaching course (Kowalchuk, p. 18). Kowalchuk found that four of the topics most written about and discussed during the course were student learning and characteristics, classroom management, instructional strategies and art lesson content (Kowalchuk, p. 19). In 2007, Carole Henry and Mary Lazzari also agreed that there needed to be more research and reform in teacher preparation. They argued that, “It is crucial that the research base continue to be expanded and receive greater focus if serious reform in art teacher preparation is to occur” (p. 50).

Derby and Wexler argue that art education is crucial in helping the special needs population, particularly those with emotional and behavioral disturbances and that teachers need to understand these students before they begin to work with them. (Wexler, 2011; Derby, 2011). Citing Daniel Goleman’s (1995) book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Wexler argues that teachers face a challenge as they figure out what approaches work best for students with special needs. Yet, once teachers understand the fundamental issues and behaviors of these students, they can then use art as a way of better connecting with these students (p. 12).

What is most essential about Wexler’s argument is that it is important that educators recognize the need first before they can effectively and efficiently help these particular students. This deep understanding of the students with special needs in terms of their behaviors, experiences and needs is crucial for successful outcomes when teaching students who learn or behave in different ways. Without this understanding, teachers will not have strategies for getting through to these students. As Wexler states, helping sooth a child who is upset with words and dialogue are useless to the child who has E/BD or any other disability that affects behaviors such as ADHD and Autism. Art teachers need to first understand what is going on in the minds of these particular children and then learn about the appropriate tools for working with them. These tools will only be acquired with more one-on-one experience with E/BD students through pre-service observations, teaching and other measures, and possibly through the addition of psychology courses.

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