

ASSESSING THE LIMITATIONS OF INTERVENTIONS-FOCUSED CASE STUDIES IN
INFLUENCING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH EBD

by

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

When I began the process of researching the aspects of Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and the impacts of trauma on executive functioning, I did so because I had been teaching students diagnosed with EBD and who were struggling in school, despite interventions of various length, strength, and intention. I was driven by a curiosity about this particular dilemma, but also by a sincere desire to help my students to find success in school more consistently. My students were frequently plagued by a negative self-concept that only seemed to grow more dour with each new academic or social venture that did not live up to the expectations placed on them by their teachers, their parents, or themselves; what successes these students experienced were always fleeting. There came to be a very negative feedback loop within their school experiences. I was not sure how to help them, and so I figured that my Master's capstone work should be directed toward figuring out how to do so.

My research took me in all manner of interesting directions, but I was most intrigued by the case studies that were conducted for students diagnosed with (or at risk of diagnosis for) EBD because these were a tangible extension of the practices that I was witnessing in my own school. More often than not, these approaches to research in this disability category provided Tier 3 interventions to help explicitly instruct students with EBD in pro-social skills, responses, and expressive communication. Students, by and large, were able to internalize these skills and successfully complete these interventions. And yet, despite any documented successes, there were even more articles written about the appalling academic and social outcomes that persisted for students diagnosed with EBD in the United States education system even to this day. There was a disconnect, I surmised, between the active research studies that were designed to improve outcomes for students with EBD and the actual, practical application of the skills that students

were taught in their interventions. To that end, after a few different drafts and false starts, the subject of my research became this question: *What are the limitations of intervention-focused case studies in the practical increase of positive outcomes for students at risk for or diagnosed with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders at the secondary level? What are best practices in the classroom for students with EBD that compensate for these study limitations?*

The literature review for my thesis became an investigation into the nature and criteria of EBD, as well as an exploration of the impacts of trauma on executive functioning. Students with EBD are characterized by executive functioning challenges; I wanted to understand how those behavioral and self-regulation difficulties can and do manifest outside of a disability diagnosis in order to contextualize the behaviors and tendencies that are commonly witnessed in students who are diagnosed with EBD. This research also helped me to understand why the interventions that are created for students with EBD are structured in the way they are. This subset of students *needs* explicit instruction in social skills domains, I found, and benefitted, at least in the vacuum of a special education classroom, from such instruction. It appeared that the students' abilities to generalize the explicitly taught behaviors to their general education classes (and other spaces of socialization) were the problem.

After sharing my findings in conversations with my colleagues at the high school I was teaching in, I received copious positive feedback about my research subject, but also requests: requests for observations of a particular student; requests for teaching suggestions and strategies for helping a particular student with their behavioral regulation; requests for help, full stop. I realized that my colleagues, who were already working so much and so hard to create engaging content for their students, had no resources for helping their behaviorally challenged students

besides some basic approaches to relationship building. And if they did not build that relationship, well, they were not sure exactly how to proceed.

In short, my colleagues needed ready-made strategies to at least try with their behaviorally challenged students. They were not asking for a book or a manual, but some ideas backed up by research that they could apply right away to their classrooms.

I determined that the most appropriate and effective application of my research was to build a website for teachers of all levels that offers researched ideas and strategies for reaching behaviorally challenged students. I resolved to include quick-solution ideas as well as longer-form content that delivers the research and theory that the quick strategies are attempting to put into practice. I also surmised that my colleagues were likely not the only teachers out in the country who wanted to have productive conversations about helping their behaviorally challenged students. To that end, I wanted to create a community around the content of my website, where teachers of all levels could discuss ideas they have tried, improved, or debunked in practice in their classrooms. In an effort to help improve the outcomes of students with EBD (typically very behaviorally challenged and low-achieving), and to support teachers as they instruct populations of students increasingly impacted by trauma, I determined to create a teacher resource website that serves as both a hub for reviewing, discussing, and implementing strategies as well as a respected and ethical source for research into the many things that currently impact United States student populations.

THE WEBSITE: EDUCATING THE HEART

<https://swatkins089.wixsite.com/website>

The website that I created, *Educating the Heart*, is designed to be a hub of applicable information about Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices and research into trauma-informed

classrooms in general and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) specifically. A major function of the website is to draw in the many diverse sources of SEL instruction and package them in easy-to-read posts and pages. There are also opportunities for community and collaboration. The website is composed of a Home Page, a Resource Page, a Research Page, and a Blog Page. Each of the following sections will discuss one of these pages in further detail, including screenshots of the source material from the website.

Home Page

This is the central navigation page of the website. Besides the importance of central navigation, this page provides the rationale for the website itself. This page is designed to be the landing place for any teacher who is searching for resources to provide for their students, and so it provides a brief and easily accessible overview of what the site offers to the teacher. The Home Page also provides a very brief description of Social and Emotional Learning, and promotes most recently published blog posts that provide teachers with more specific information and research about the topics I covered in my thesis research.



Educating the Heart: Home Page and Banner

Easy to access banner along the top of the page offers direction to the user. Embedded social media links make it easy for the user to connect the site to their social media profiles, or to connect with the website designer. There is also evidence of the Member Chat function, which allows users to engage in dialogue about the content of the site, either privately or publicly.

Resource Page

This is the main attraction of the site at this time. The resource page offers a compiled source of strategies for implementing SEL instruction to one student, small groups, or even a whole classroom. The most prominent function of the Resource Page is to introduce and inform

teachers about the Core Competencies of SEL (with links to strategies that can be used for various groupings of students. However, there is also a significant portion of this page dedicated to providing quick solutions to teachers who need ideas and help with a particular student as soon as possible. The Immediate Impact section has brief summaries and a number of listed ideas that teachers can implement in their next day’s lesson, if they desire. The final function of the Resource Page is the “Surveys and Assessments” section, where teachers can access self-assessments to understand their own SEL competencies, as well as individual student surveys that help to identify needs for intervention for a particular student and assess how successful those interventions have been.

Resource Page: Scrolling Competencies

A pleasing, scrolling interface allows the user to dive more deeply in the SEL competency that they want to explore and implement in their classroom. There is a brief description and appropriate graphic to guide the user.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The following strategies and approaches are suggested for implementing SEL Social Awareness skills and practices within your classroom. These approaches are recommended by CASEL (“Support Core Competencies”, 2017, pp. 10-14) and sorted by the group size you intend to work with. Many of these strategies can be adjusted to the specific age group that you teach.

One-on-One Approaches

- Process an entrenched difference in opinion with a student by asking them how they are feeling after a disagreement and having them explain with words, visuals, etc.
- Discuss the idea of “respect” and arrive at a consensus understanding and agreement of the word.
 - What respect means.
 - How respect feels.
 - What respect looks like in practice and how we show respect to others.
 - Where we see respect the most / least.
- Discuss with the student why the classroom and school have rules and expectations, exploring the appropriateness and fairness of those rules.

Small Group Approaches

- Discuss situational awareness and expectations.

THE FIVE CORE COMPETENCIES OF SEL

The CASEL Framework (2020)

This section includes an overview of the 5 Core Competencies of Social-Emotional Learning and how the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines each competency. There is a link connected to each Competency that will connect you with a page that displays high-leverage strategies for working with students on that Competency in individual, small group, and whole-class settings.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social Awareness is the ability to understand the perspectives of, and empathize with, others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports (CASEL, 2020).

For strategies to help students to develop their social awareness, click the link below!

[Social Awareness Strategies](#)



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Resource Page: Strategies Links

By clicking the button to see “Social Awareness Strategies,” the user is taken to an entirely different page that hosts researched and advised strategies for implementing the SEL competency of their choice. All strategies are broken out into three groupings: One-on-One, Small Group, and Whole Class.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Feeling overwhelmed by all the various strategies and approaches for creating SEL-focused instruction? Read on for a guided approach to easily rolling out SEL practices in your classroom TOMORROW!

Resource Page: Immediate Impact Section

Below the Core Competencies navigational tool, there is the immediate support section that users can access to find advice on how to start implementing basic SEL practices in their classroom immediately.

START SMALL

Don't try to do too much right away. You could start by normalizing the use of brain breaks or guided breathing exercises in your class, to help with transitioning into class or between activities. You could even work with individual students on communication and break plans. Make sure that whatever your first step is, it is relevant to your current classroom culture and climate. And be sure to include plenty of opportunities for your students to practice the skill or strategy that you are using. Are you focusing on helping a student to develop their self-advocacy around the need for a break? Work out exact language for that purpose and then measure how frequently your student uses that support. Check in with them, discuss their progress, and then add/adjust your approach from there. Only add new strategies and approaches after students have become proficient in that task you introduced to them.

EMBRACE COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Intentionally planning activities that allow students to collaborate is a powerful culture-builder for your classroom. You could start small with think-pair-share exercises and eventually scaffold up to group work submissions. It will be very important to explicitly provide students with the means for cooperation:

SURVEYS AND ASSESSMENTS

STUDENT SEL CHECK-IN SURVEY

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) created a downloadable and simple student survey that you can provide to your students as a pulse check on your classroom culture. The survey features a highly accessible "Agree-Disagree" format with space at the end for students to include comments.

Follow the link below to access this free, downloadable content!

[CASEL Student Survey](#)

TEACHER SEL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Nicholas Yoder (2014), of the American Institutes for Research' Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, created a self-assessment tool for classroom teachers to understand and improve their own social and emotional competencies, because "teachers' social and emotional competencies directly affect how they interact with students on both social and instructional levels."

Follow the link below to access a .pdf of this tool!

[Teacher Survey](#)

Resource Page: Surveys and Assessments

This section of the Resource Page allows users to access assessment resources that will help with a variety of ongoing evaluations of their classroom and student responses to implementing SEL strategies, as well as self-assessments.

Research Page

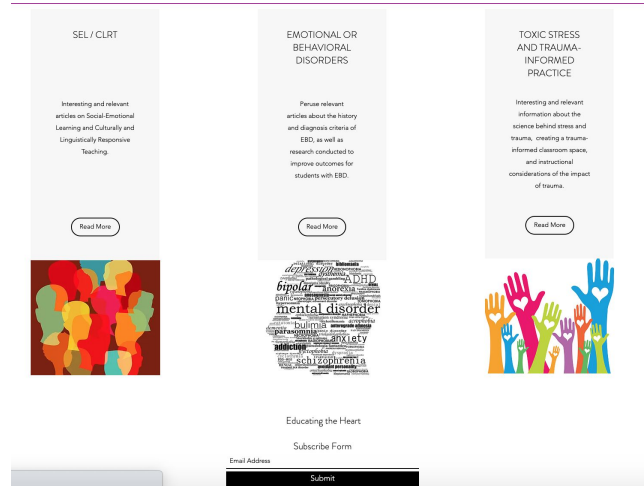
This page is host to the research that I have engaged in during my capstone journey. The hope is that this page will develop over time to become a library of references for teachers looking for information about improving their practice for students with behavioral challenges.

Furthermore, this page will also function as a growing reference page for any and all articles, journals, and studies that I use to write blog posts and host forum discussions.

Research Page: General Navigation

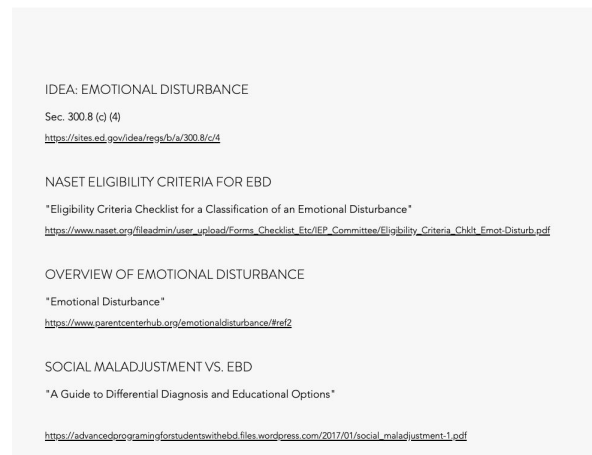
On the Research Page, users can access the links embedded in the buttons in the three categories of research to explore some of the work that I have read and used in my capstone work. This will be updated with my continued research and scholarship pursuits.

The “Subscribe Form” is also displayed here, as it is at the bottom of every page, to entice users to become members of the site community.



EBD

Peruse relevant articles about the history and diagnosis criteria of EBD, as well as research conducted to improve outcomes for students with EBD.



Research Page: Link Exploration

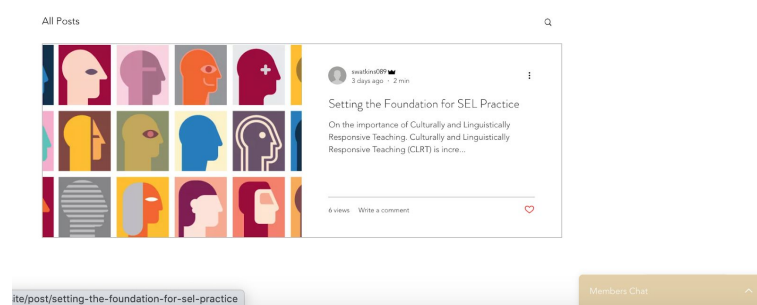
This is the page a user will find after clicking the button under the EBD research category. A broad categorical designation is the largest font, the actual title of the document is listed in the subtitle, and then a link to the document is included in the description. In this way, the site provides access to numerous free and useful research resources to the site community.

The Blog: Focused on Community and Dialogue

The final prominent function of the website is the blog and member interaction section.

As I mentioned previously, I created this website in part to build a community for teachers to

collaborate on behalf of the students that they have difficulty reaching due to behavioral challenges. The Blog Page is, at this time, designed to provide supplementary information to aid in the implementation of SEL practices in a teacher's classroom. In the future, the Blog Page will host my writing on new research that I have investigated, as well as introduce new ideas that teachers can use (before they are added to the Resource Page). Community members are able to leave comments providing feedback and response to these posts in a way that will engage anyone who reads the post in a community dialogue. There is also a Members Chat function that is connected to each page of the website that can host discussions about blog posts, research, the strategies listed earlier, or any other topic that community members wish to discuss.



Blog Page

This easy-to-navigate page has a simple layout for blog posts that allows users to search by title, keyword, and author. The Member Chat feature is also displayed in this image, though it is available on every page of the site.

CONCLUSION

The *Educating the Heart* website is not meant to be a ground-breaking educational study; rather, it is designed to function as a grassroots collaborative between educators who want to do and be better to some of our most vulnerable students. It is also created in response to the desire that so many of my colleagues have expressed as they scour websites, teacher blogs, and other resources looking for ways to better support those students who tend to resist accepting such support. It is my hope for the website that it can make some positive impact, no matter how small, in the outcomes for students diagnosed with EBD, and any other student who struggles with behavioral regulation.

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