

## Students and Teachers and EBD: An Informative Essay on Emotional and Behavioral Disturbance

The term *emotional and behavioral disturbance* represents an umbrella category under which are placed a number of conditions that do not lend themselves to simple definitions and demarcation; EBD, as a condition, is thus difficult to define. In 1961, Psychologist Eli Bower defined the condition. His definition, which ignored etiology, contained five characteristics, of which one or more had to be demonstrated to a marked extent and over a period of time in order for some to be classified as having EBD. Bower's definition became widely accepted, although there were and still are groups who were not satisfied with it, the characteristics and conditions were accepted by the U.S. Department of Education and included in IDEA. The definitions in IDEA—the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act passed in 1990—specified that serious emotional disturbance is indicated by problematic behavior in one or more of five characteristic areas:

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
- (D) A general or pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems

Federal regulations departed from Bower's definition by adding a further criterion—"that an observed behavior problem must adversely affect educational performance"—and specified that

schizophrenia was included but social maladjustment was not included unless the individual also had an emotional disturbance (Newcomer, 2011, p.15-20).

The history of a particular condition called EBD is equally as challenging to follow as one encounters similar issues as with the defining of the condition. EBD is also very difficult to isolate as a condition as there is a high rate of co-morbidity with other disabilities. The term itself, *emotional disturbance*, appeared in the late 1900's, and during the same period the label *behaviorally disordered* became popular as well. But as a condition there are massive amounts of evidence throughout history of people characterized by what would now be labeled as EBD. In ancient Greece it's likely that people with severe EBD might have been seen as touched by the gods or as oracles. In the dark ages people with EBD might have been burnt at the stake, labeled witches, or possessed by demons. The steady march towards humanization regarding the treatment of the mad, or exceptional, or special, is also seen in the treatment of individuals with EBD. In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed, which mandated that education services be available for all children with disabilities; later amendments of this law included preschool children and mandated greater attention to successful outcomes for children and youth with EBDs. IDEA was passed in 1990; this law was important to people with EBD as it allowed them access to alternative educational opportunities, while mandating functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs) for them.

Most students with EBD have problems with their social behavior, often manifested as less mature or inappropriate social skills. Some students may be particularly aggressive with peers and adults and cause harm when playing or interacting with others. These students act out in class, do not appear to respond appropriately to discipline from teachers and may seem oblivious to class and school rules (Gage, 2013, p.130)

Students with EBD may exhibit social behavior similar to that of younger children and act socially immature. Some students may withdraw from others and appear socially isolated. Although withdrawn students may not call as much attention to themselves as EBD students with externalizing behavior, the degree of the disturbance may be much stronger and thus nonetheless requires interventions. These students may exhibit symptoms of depression. Social isolates do not interact with any peers or adults, and in the most severe cases may exhibit selective mutism. Individuals with selective mutism have the physical ability to talk but nevertheless do not speak in appropriate situations. All of these emotional or behavioral disorders share the characteristic of an inability to interact appropriately with others, including peers, teachers, siblings, and parents, which negatively affects school performance (Newcomer, 2011, p.10).

Research indicates that students with EBD may function two or more years below grade level in reading, math, writing, and spelling. These deficiencies may be the result of anxiety and stress on the brain's ability to learn. Research suggests that brains shut down in high anxiety and high stress situations. So, if a student, because of an EBD, is suffering from high anxiety in a classroom, they may be unable to concentrate, listen, participate and learn. Students with EBD also frequently exhibit deficiencies in metacognition and memory (Cozolino, 2006)

Accommodations for students with EBD are based on creating an environment with low levels of anxiety and stress for the student(s). This includes clearly stating class rules and consequences, establishing an open/accepting environment, permitting students to work alone, and having alternative activities available. Research indicates that only once anxiety and stress levels are low enough, will a student's brain be able to learn (Kupper, 2012)

The famous artist Vincent van Gogh is someone who suffered from EBD. Vincent van Gogh suffered tremendously throughout his life. He was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1853, died on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1890 at the age of 37 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound (Collins, 2004)

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