An Oral History of First-Generation Leaders in Education of Children With Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, Part 2: Important Events, Developments, and People

Robert H. Zabel, Marilyn S. Kaff, and Jim M. Teagarden

Abstract
As the second part of an oral history of education of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, 15 first-generation leaders were asked about the events, policies, and people that have had the most influence on their professional lives and to identify the most positive and most negative influences. Their videotaped responses to these questions were transcribed and analyzed and are reported here together with discussion of several themes that emerged. Among the most cited positive influences were passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (precursor to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 1975, development and application of behavioral approaches, contributions of talented people, and involvement in professional organizations and activities in the field. The most often identified negative influences were the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, zero-tolerance policies, inadequate federal definitions of serious emotional disturbance, isolation from other disciplines with potentially relevant knowledge and practices, and resistance to prevention and early intervention approaches.

Keywords
special education, emotional and behavior disorders, oral history

Many first-generation leaders in the field of emotional and behavioral disorders have retired or are near retirement. During their years in the profession, much has changed, and they have provided the leadership for some of those changes. As they leave the profession, some of the history of our field is in danger of leaving with them. To preserve their experiences, ideas, and observations, the authors conducted in-depth interviews to examine where we have been as a profession and to record their insights about where we might be going.

The central purpose of the Janus Project is to record and analyze an oral history of the professional lives of leaders in the field. The Janus Project (and the month of January) are named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and endings. Janus had two faces, which enabled him to look in opposite directions and see both past and future. We hope that this oral history project will preserve firsthand perspectives on past and present knowledge and practice as well as informed perspectives on future issues and challenges to the field. To do this, the researchers have interviewed established leaders in the field as well as midcareer professionals and practicing master teachers.

This article is the second in a series of three reports involving 15 first-generation leaders. In an earlier article we reported how they entered the field and the course of their careers (Kaff, Zabel, & Teagarden, 2011). In this article we describe and discuss participants’ views about important developments and events—positive and negative—during their careers. In a subsequent article we will include their predictions for the future of the field and advice to prospective professionals (Teagarden, Zabel, & Kaff, 2011).

Oral history is defined as the preservation of the recollections of those who have experienced important social occurrences of events. The aim is to preserve firsthand knowledge of those events in personal stories that focus on particular topics. According to Gardner (2003), oral history captures life information—bits and pieces of data that

1Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, USA

Corresponding Author:
Marilyn S. Kaff, Kansas State University, 1100 Mid-Campus Drive, 307 Bluemont, Manhattan, KS 66506 Email: mkaff@ksu.edu
would otherwise be lost to posterity. Oral history provides a sense of the participants’ personalities by providing insights into their thinking and motivations. In addition, good oral history may help illuminate present situations and oblige us to make sense of who we are (Janesick, 2007).

Oral history is dialogical in the sense that researchers and participants are coresearchers (Janesick, 2004, 2007). Stories evolve from the questions posed and the context to which they adhere. Oral history is about the excitement and engagement of the lived experience of the interviewees. Often an oral history consists of audio- or video-recorded interviews with individuals, which constitute the research data (Patton, 2002). It is the responsibility of the researchers to search for the common themes or stories that represent the views of the participants.

**Method**

**Participants**

In this phase of Janus Project, 15 first-generation leaders participated. They are individuals who have played active leadership roles and have had a strong professional identity in the field of education of children with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) for more than 30 years. They are Sheldon Braaten, Lyndal Bullock, Gwen Cartledge, Kay Cessna, Steven Forness, James Kauffman, Mary Margaret Kerr, Rick Neel, C. Michael Nelson, Reece Peterson, Richard Simpson, Carl Smith, Frank Wood, Mary Kay Zabel, and Robert Zabel.

Subsequent to collecting these oral histories, we interviewed two other first-generation leaders—Nicholas J. Long and Richard J. Whelan. Because we interviewed Long and Whelan individually and the interviews followed a somewhat different format, their oral histories are published separately (see Teagarden, Kaff, & Zabel, in press; Kaff, Teagarden, & Zabel, 2011). In addition, the Janus Project continues to collect oral histories from other first-generation and current leaders in the field.

Although the participants in this phase of the oral history are a sample of leaders in this field, we believe they qualify for the “leader” designation. They have served in leadership positions in professional organizations, have published widely, and have been editors and associate editors for journals that focus on EBD. For example, half of the participants have been president of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD), and many have served in other roles in CCBD and other Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) organizations, seven have been editors of either Behavioral Disorders or Beyond Behavior, and several have led other professional organizations and/or edited journals concerned with EBD. They are recognized scholars who have published their research and ideas in major professional journals, authored and edited books on EBD-related topics, founded and organized EBD conferences and symposia, and been frequent presenters at professional meetings. Most of the participants have held faculty positions at major universities, and all have served in public school, clinical, and/or administrative positions outside of academia. They have been mentors to persons who are considered leaders in their own right.

**Procedure**

Participants were contacted via email by the first author, who described the purposes, procedures, and topics to be addressed and invited them to participate in the project. Most interviews were conducted in conjunction with professional conferences where they were already participating. These were the 2006 and 2007 Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behavioral Disorders (MSLBD) meetings in Kansas City, Missouri, and the 2006 International Child and Adolescent E/BD Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. All interview sessions involved two or three participants together with a moderator posing the same questions to each individual. Sessions were videotaped and lasted approximately 1 hour. The videotapes were later transcribed to print format and edited by the research team, who then analyzed the oral histories to identify common themes as well as unique experiences and observations.

**Research Questions**

Participants were asked the following questions, which are the subject of this report:

1. What events, policies, and people have had the most influence on your professional life?
2. What has had the greatest positive impact on your career?
3. What has had the greatest negative impact?

The following is a summary of several themes, followed by examples of the participants’ observations, which emerged from the oral history records. Each participant’s words are preceded by his or her last name.

**Findings**

**Influential Events, Policies, Innovations, and People**

Participants identified a variety of influential events, policies, and innovations on their professional lives. The most cited influential event or policy was the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (later the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]). By 1975, all of the participants were
already involved in education of children with EBD, and this federal legislation and the court decisions that preceded it represented a milestone. Most participants viewed the legislation as significant because it established the right to an appropriate publication education for students with disabilities, including those with EBD. For example,

Cartledge: I think a big event was the right to education and what that said for special educators and most importantly what it said for children. . . . [T]his federal legislation . . . also changed the way I perform and operate and look at kids.

Neel: I think the greatest event that occurred in my professional life is the passing of 94-142. . . . [I]t promoted access and really was the fire for the whole thing . . . that’s the biggest change that I see in my professional career. . . . So there was lots and lots of money for research and technology, designs, and interaction between folks and most of the people you are interviewing all got together because of all of that . . . that’s indeed the landmark for me.

The impact of Public Law 94-142 was considered mostly positive, although several participants also noted negative impacts because of how aspects of the law have been interpreted and implemented.

Wood: The unfortunate thing is that policies, whether it’s legislation or judicial decisions, are very clumsy tools as far as shaping society is concerned, and in . . . educational policy, what we’ve gotten tied into is this category system, and rather than there being fewer categories, there just keeps being new categories . . . and at the same time, we have . . . this large group of kids who used to be called socially maladjusted, but now we’re saying, “well, they’re criminals” and maybe, you know, juvenile delinquent is kind of a euphemism, but basically we’re saying, “they’re criminals and they don’t deserve special services, instead you punish them until they’re good.” It’s tragic. . . .

The second most cited influence was the development of a science of behavior, referred to as behavior modification, the behavioral approach, behavioral interventions, or applied behavior analysis (ABA). Most participants viewed this as beneficial because it has offered interventions and programs that could be taught, readily implemented in schools, measured, and evaluated.

Neel: One of the innovations . . . is the whole idea of the empirical approach to teaching. [P]rior to the early 60s [this] was basically not a strategy we used in schools with kids with disabilities and . . . kids with behavior problems. Kids that I now work with all the time weren’t in schools and the whole idea once they got there was you . . . sort of sit around and mitigate them but not do anything with them. . . . The whole idea of using an empirically based behavioral approach to teaching . . . obviously changed the field dramatically. . . . [O]ut of Kansas, and you know, there used to be these little fiefdoms around the country, these rich places like this [University of Minnesota]. [T]he University of Washington was one of those too. . . . There were these isolated pockets . . . there wasn’t a national network that there is now. . . . [T]o those events . . . basically started making teaching a science which probably is as significant a change in kids’ lives as anything that occurred. . . . We have a long ways to go, but if you look at the history of education we’ve done a lot in 35 years . . . in terms of changing the lives of kids.

Nelson: Dick Whelan and Ogden Lindsley and others at Kansas, Montrose Wolfe, Don Baer, gave us a really deep and thorough appreciation of the science of human behavior and how that science can be translated into a technology that provides practitioners with a really firm set of guidelines in working with kids and addressing challenging behavior.

Kauffman: . . . [T]he structured approach that the Dick Whelan introduced me to, reading that first book by Haring and Phillips, and the rise of the behavioral approach to dealing with behavior in teaching was really important.

R. Zabel: [I]n the late . . . 1960s . . . Frank Hewett in California, with the Santa Monica Project, was developing the first special education classrooms. He called them engineered classrooms, which utilized what we call applied behavior analysis today, but it was behavior modification techniques, using token economies, level systems, a very high level of structure so that both antecedent and consequent types of conditions could be communicated to kids, to help them behave in ways that were more acceptable. . . .

[S]ome of the terminology continues to change. We talk about applied behavioral analysis now, rather than behavior modification. We don’t say engineered classroom anymore, we still may use therapeutic environment or therapeutic milieu; we have functional assessment now, but we used to have ecological analyses. . . . [W]e have some new names, and maybe there is some growing sophistication and more emphasis . . . on numbers, but I think those were some really important contributions.
Some participants emphasized the contributions to understanding children’s developmental processes and inner lives and some disappointment about what was lost when psychoeducational approaches were eclipsed by behavioral approaches.

R. Zabel: We read Redl and Wineman’s *Children Who Hate* and *Controls From Within*, and those two books . . . really opened my eyes to a lot of things. . . . [The basic interpretations of a lot of disturbed behavior as . . . defense mechanisms where kids are trying to protect their sense of self . . . out of fear, guilt, and so on, are really important. I think they’re also helpful . . . to teachers’ own mental health . . . these are patterns of behavior that children with emotional behavioral disorders engage in to protect themselves because of the life experiences they’ve had.

Wood: I think what we’ve seen in recent years has been the recognition that neither is complete in itself, and that elements of one can be combined with the other because they’re both useful tools.

Several participants referred to the influence of major sociocultural movements, such as the women’s, civil rights, and antiwar movements on their professional beliefs and behavior.

Kerr: I think the women’s movement made it okay to pursue a career, it was certainly not without nuance, second-guessing, and a lot of other issues that I think and hope young women don’t have to face now. That was a very powerful influence, though. It allowed women to enter what had pretty much been a fraternity. . . . That being said, it was a very kind fraternity, at least to me.

Peterson: [F]or me there is an element of protest in trying to improve our community and the world that has been a long-standing theme to all of this, and I think many of us in this field . . . but I am thinking specifically of protesting the war in Viet Nam at that time. . . . [I]t seems really important for our society to do things well for people, to improve a lot of our communities and our society. [W]hen I got in special ed, I . . . viewed it as a civil rights issue. In fact, a friend of mine once told me that “you’re really lucky because you get to help people’s civil rights every day of your life” and that’s always stuck with me, because that’s really what you’re trying to do here; you’re trying to ensure that kids get a fair shake in the system and that families do.

Every participant referred to the influence of specific people—their mentors, fellow graduate students, colleagues, and their own students—on their careers. They cited dozens of names, including people with whom they had worked directly or who had otherwise influenced their thinking and their work.

Bullock: I’ve . . . said many, many times, that probably the best part of my career has been associations with my colleagues.

Kaufman: I really value all that wisdom in people who came before . . . did things, wrote things, said things that were very important to me. That’s been true of not just my mentors, but colleagues, people who were in the doctoral program with me, and the students I’ve had. Some of them have had remarkable careers and have done a lot of really important stuff.

Several referred to what they believed is the unique character of people in this field, even when compared to other areas of special education. Several mentioned mutual understanding and support.

M. K. Zabel: As I’ve become involved with others or talk to friends . . . there is something different. . . . [A] lot of it is shared humiliation. . . . [W]hat we often do as teachers is so stressful and so overwhelming and pretty much hard for anybody to believe that you go back and do. In fact, one of the things you don’t want to examine too much is why you keep going back to that sort of abuse yourself, and then to be surrounded by people who get it is just a lovely thing, and I think that is why this becomes such a close group of people, such a positive group.

Several professional organizations, institutes, and projects, including CCBD, MSLBD, the Teacher Educator Council for Behavior Disorders, Tempe (Arizona State University) BD conferences, Advanced Training Institutes, and the National Mental Health and Special Education Coalition, were cited as significant influences.

Nelson: Frank Wood had the Advanced Training Institute in Behavior Disorders at the University of Minnesota and I was able to go up there for a few weeks on a postdoctoral experience. It was just phenomenal. . . .

Kerr: The small institutes that Frank hosted, the Tempe institutes, the Midwest Leadership Symposium, those are small places where networking happens and certainly for me those were very formative experiences. . . .

Braaten: . . . Frank obviously had a way of finding people and bringing out the best in people and giving people opportunities that were incredibly rich and rewarding and in such a gentle unselfish
kind of way. . . . [He] would bring in four or five people around the topic and if you were lucky enough to be of the 40 people that were invited to be in the room with them it was like “this was a great place to be.” My very first one of those experiences I was sitting there in the room with Hill Walker, Vance Hall, Jim Kaufman, four or five of the leading behavioral thinkers in the United States and I was one of 40 people that just got invited to sit there. . . . [Y]ou think “Well, man, this is kind of special.”

A few participants mentioned the influence of personal and family experiences as a significant influence on their professional careers.

Smith: So, to me, what’s so important and what sustains my . . . passion in this field is how personal it is. It’s more than just a job . . . we’re talking about . . . why this is important, this is what it means for somebody. . . . [I]n some cases, it is the issue of advocating based on what we’ve seen happen with the closest people in our life . . . it’s a tremendously personal business.

Simpson: I have a sister who has a severe emotional disturbance and grew up with a very severe psychiatric illness, and I watched my sister struggle. . . . My sister was pushed out the back, spent a lot of time in psychiatric hospitals, and had some horrible, horrible experiences, and I saw my parents struggle in so many ways with my sister. . . . It was a painful experience, and I think because of that I first of all had great anger towards the helping professions because I considered those people . . . buffoonish, to have little or nothing to offer because I saw them doing nothing for my family. And I think there was resistance in initially getting in the field, but then when I . . . got into the field. . . . I saw that there were opportunities for great advances on a micro and a macro level when we did the right things. I got very excited when I saw people doing things that made differences. . . .

Nelson: [I]t is people, people in the field, so many it’s impossible to name everyone and . . . coherently describe their contributions when this is a really diverse field with many divergent opinions, but with a common attitude that we cannot throw these kids away. . . .

Kauffman: It’s not really the policies, the laws, the events, the institutions, but the people. I’ve just been blessed by wonderful colleagues and students as well as mentors and friends at other places . . .

Forness: It’s terrible for me to say this, but now that I’m retired, I can say a lot of things. I went a lot of years to the MR division. It was nice, but it was. . . . I won’t say “slow,” but it was kind of. Then you went to the LD and it was serious as a heart attack. . . . I think in the field of behavioral disorders, everybody took their work seriously, but they never took themselves seriously. And it was the most supportive field and the most friendly field. . . . You’ll never regret going into this field and I never have. Every conference, every division meeting, has always been so supportive and it’s like family.

Kerr: Certainly it’s been the people . . . some qualities about those people that have singled them out. . . . One of them is that these were staunch advocates for the children who tend to be the least appealing and who seem to be the most without voice. Whether they were public interest attorneys or professors, there was this sense of perseverance at all costs to make things better for kids. That’s been a huge influence. I think the second characteristic . . . would be this sometimes extensively insane capacity to question. Nothing is ever assumed; there is always room for another question. We’d better try it one more way. As Mark Gold used to say “push it,” and this capacity of colleagues to . . . ask hard questions coupled with my fairly insatiable curiosity has been at times diagnosable, I’m quite sure. . . . [A]nd the third influence that has been very striking for me has been to work in doggedly interdisciplinary settings.

Simpson: [I]t’s probably the people, including students, that I’ve had the opportunity to be with, particularly in combination with some opportunities for situations where we get to try some things out that are new, particularly with kids, and also in the area of training.

Smith: [I]t’s hard to describe how much shared commitment there was to sharing knowledge. . . . [A]fter your initial hugs and everybody got their beer

Positive Influences

When asked to identify the greatest positive influences during their careers, people in the field were most often cited. Participants named dozens of influential people, including their mentors or even mentors of their mentors. They also named fellow graduate students, colleagues and collaborators, and their own students as great positive influences on their thinking, their work, and their enthusiasm.
or their glasses of wine, everybody would say, “Okay, what are you working on now?” After that was a series of “Oh, have you talked to... because now they’re working on that.” And it was always this weaving together to try to make it work. There was nothing... outside the purview, even the wildest idea... What if we did this? How could that work?

Several participants cited the impact of ABA as one of the “most positive” influences on their careers and the field, although several expressed some concerns about the limitations of behavioral approaches.

Nelson: [T]he science of behavior, applied behavior analysis, the influence of B. F. Skinner has been just phenomenal; perhaps underappreciated, but I think it has been very dramatic in terms of what we have seen in the research on effective practices.

Cartledge: I hate to say this, but I’m old enough to remember when you first got started with programs for children with emotional problems or EBD... Psychodynamic approaches were... at the forefront. People taught Bruno Bettelheim, for example. And that’s not to take anything away from him in terms of psychoanalysis... but in terms of classroom interventions, that didn’t have a lot to offer a typical teacher. It was hard to... analyze or figure out why a kid did such or such and attribute it to a relationship with a parent or events or try to figure out what kinds of materials were going to be emotionally charged for a child. Of course we care about a child’s emotional state... but using behavioral approaches is much more realistic in terms of trying to figure out how we structure the environment... to institute... academic as well as social opportunities.

Forness: Our field, at least in the main, has been very behaviorally oriented. And it’s been operant oriented rather than respondent oriented,... [O]ur field has missed a lot because we’ve been so focused on... operant behavior... and on the reinforcers. If you put good things in place, you can elicit good responses, rather than wait for the responses and reinforce them. I think our field has not embraced those kinds of respondent events. Frank Hewett always had his little learning triangle—conditions, consequences, and curriculum.

Bullock: We have ABA programs on our campus, and [for] the people... in that program, this is the only way you can do business and this is the only way you can deal with kids. We cross fires a lot because it’s a good technique and it’s positive, but that’s not the only thing we do with kids.

Other positive influences included collaborations with and influence of research groups, projects, and organizations. These included research projects led by Dick Shores, the Conceptual Project in Child Variance directed by William Rhodes, advances in early intervention, and professional involvements in organizations such as MSLBD and the Advanced Training Institutes directed by Frank Wood that offered collegial support, disseminated cutting-edge knowledge, and advanced the field.

Simpson: [S]ome of my most positive experiences have occurred in lab settings or experimental settings where we bring together a group of people... to do something completely different and new... [I]t’s really very exciting, you know, when you sort of see things come together and you do things in a different way, particularly if they work. I would also have to confess that there is an intrigue and an adrenaline rush that comes with success when you find keys, little bits and pieces to the puzzle, where you can start almost assembling away, dealing with situations.

Peterson: [T]he other thing that is really fascinating about the Midwest Symposium is that it has been so kind of amoebic. It just keeps changing, and morphing... and seems yet to be growing and be very healthy... I think that’s really positive, but probably that’s the most important as a kind of motivator and a very positive influence through time.

Simpson: [T]he Midwest Symposium... has also been a very exciting opportunity, a very positive opportunity... This has been one of the more positive experiences that I’ve had possibly because we’ve sort of forged this group of people who are not gaining anything personally. I don’t think any of us walk away with anything other than just the feeling that when we leave the profession, we’ve probably left something that I’m hoping is going to go on, and it’s going to actually improve, it’s going to have a positive impact, and then also we got to do some really fun stuff and walked away with... a better understanding of our field... 

M. K. Zabel: [T]he advances in what’s... called infant psychiatry, where we can begin to intervene in those mother-child situations, or caregiver-child situations, very, very early, and perhaps make a difference and see that some of those children don’t have to go through the years and years and turmoil... [T]hat’s a real positive step.
Cartledge: I’m encouraged by at least the lip service [to] the importance of early intervention. What I’d like to see are really high quality programs . . . that we should start at infancy, but certainly from preschool. . . . [I]f we can really be committed to early intervention, both in terms of academic as well as social behaviors . . . we can get a head start on . . . that whole business of zero tolerance.

Wood: [T]he Conceptual Project in Child Variance, and Bill Rhodes who . . . was already at the University of Michigan . . . when he started that project. . . . [T]hat was a very exciting program where he sort of looked at the whole atlas of different kinds of interventions and it was a way of educating the field.

The impact of federal legislation, namely Public Law 94-142 and IDEA, which mandated the right to education in the least restrictive environment, was another major positive influence.

Bullock: [T]he thing that helped us the most is 94-142, I think to shake us loose from the limbs and say, “hey you’ve got to provide services for kids.” At the same time, I look . . . at the most recent RFP that came out and high incidence kids are not on that list anymore, which kind of makes me wonder if we’ve come full circle now and if we’re reneging on a lot of our original priorities to kids.

Nelson: [T]hat was an amazing piece of legislation for us, but . . . I entered the field sometime before that and it was interesting to try to plow the ground to get programs established in public schools that addressed the needs of kids with pretty odious patterns of behavior. In fact, when I came to central Kentucky in 1969, there were no education programs for students with emotional behavior disorders. So, it was a challenge to find practicum situations in which to place my students. I ended up teaming with staff in the mental health community, the local comprehensive care center. We set up a camping program for kids with emotional behavior problems, many of whom had not been in school from day one, kicked off . . . the bus . . . and were permanently expelled from school. So, we take these rowdies . . . and . . . a group of practicum students . . . [in]to the woods, and we would teach them how to build fires and to use an axe. Kind of crazy when you think about it, but it was also a great experience. If you ever want to get some practical experience in . . . how to create structure in an environment, try it around a campfire in an open environment like that.

Neel: [T]he other really positive impact on the field is all the iterations of what I would call inclusion. And not for the reasons most people would identify. But I think the main reason is that they just opened up the whole world to differences, and people of color and people with disabilities can now interact with each other and see each other and relate to each other in ways in which we used to isolate them. The reason mental health hospital jails were way out in the countryside was because that’s how we’d isolate people. [T]here’s no longer a shocking event or an unusual event to see a person with disabilities or a person with mental or behavioral problems in the community. . . . That’s changed over the years since I started. I think that’s a really positive impact.

Some participants mentioned development of curriculum specifically for students with EBD.

Neel: Well, I think a positive impact is developing instructional technology in the broadest sense of the word. To develop curriculum . . . that works. And works in school settings.

Braaten: There were two, maybe three practitioners that had some curriculum that would work with some kids. Now, the amount of material is enormous. It’s a different problem of sorting through it and deciding what’s worth having because there’s so much.

Negative Influences

Unlike IDEA, the more recent No Child Left Behind legislation was generally viewed as having a negative influence on education of students with EBD.

Braaten: No Child Left Behind has basically wiped out all of . . . what I thought were wonderful, flexible programs because now everyone’s talking about reading and math tests and if you don’t pass those, nobody cares. The programs that we used to have . . . were . . . extraordinary. They’re all gone. . . . [T]he public policy decisions regarding high-stakes tests have had . . . an unspoken . . . consequence of a policy decision deliberately intending to write off somewhere between 20% and 25% . . . I mean, just write them off . . . So, now all we have is probably a return to . . . where we were a few years ago, where we’re setting up alternative school systems because these kids have got to go some place.

Nelson: No Child Left Behind is a very uninspired piece of legislation and one that is detrimental to
good outcomes for most children who are in any degree at risk, and most especially kids who have significant emotional and behavioral problems.

Kauffman: NCLB is probably one of the more negative things that has happened in the field of education generally and in special ed in particular because I think it does suggest that there are throw-away kids. All kids are going to meet certain standards. [T]his is not going to happen, never will, never has, and people don’t want to face that reality that kids are not all the same. They can’t all meet the same standard, and I think that tends to lead to evaluation of kids who can’t measure up. So if they can’t meet the standard, they count against you. Schools don’t like this; schools don’t want to deal with kids who cause them to crash and burn. You can’t blame them, really. So if the law says everybody’s going to have to do this, it’s not going to happen. People are going to be embittered by the experience of working with kids who are less capable, or kids whose behavior does not quite meet the expectations.

Simpson: [P]olicy makers who get into the business of trying to reform education and legislate education without having an understanding of what it is we do and with a very shortsighted mentality. Unfunded mandates, insufficient resources, using education as the whipping boy, not valuing our citizens who are having behavioral challenges enough to say there are some things that work, and if we invest in certain ways, if we do certain things, we can either avoid, prevent, or we can certainly do better than we’ve done. And it’s been troubling, and . . . I would be surprised if anybody in our field doesn’t say “no, that’s kind of the way it is” and move on. It’s the moving on . . . that at times I find to be difficult. . . . [I]t’s a little bit of a weight on the shoulders, and sort of like the job is tough enough as it is; you don’t need to put any more weights on my shoulders and our profession’s shoulders. We’ve got our challenges as it is.

Related to definition shortcomings are school policies of zero tolerance that punish and exclude children from services and ultimately push them into the criminal justice system.

Bullock: I think one of the other things I get really discouraged [about] . . . is . . . zero tolerance. I mean, we’re just throwing kids out the window without any kind of service and I get very discouraged about that. It seems like intelligent people keep buying into this concept and letting our kids go to the wind and not sure when that can stop, but it’s got to stop soon.

Cartledge: And that whole business of zero tolerance . . . causes me a great deal of angst. . . . I’m concerned now because we had another little bump of school violence events. That was the trigger for zero tolerance to begin with. . . . [P]eople decided that any little minor infraction would result in suspensions and expulsions.
the most vulnerable in our schools, the ones that we should be committed to helping to bring about a change, to help them develop a cognitive and academic behavioral center so critical for them—those are the ones we are excluding. . . . [H]ow do you say that you are a school program by definition trying to bring about change in behavior and yet what you’re doing is just excluding those that need us most and then taking credit for teaching those that are easy to teach. The other thing about that whole business with zero tolerance is that it was brought about by a rash of . . . violent incidences. . . . [W]hen we look at the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 and . . . in 2004, both of them, to some extent . . . were held up around disciplinary issues. When people look at kids with behavioral disorders, they’re most concerned about having those kids in the schools. But when we look at the kids who cause the violence in our schools, those youngsters didn’t come out of special ed.

Nelson: [S]chool policies that are absolutely brain dead like zero tolerance and the criminalization of child behavior by schools which . . . propels youth rather quickly and directly to the juvenile justice system, and we talk about a school to prison pipeline which it’s really not—that’s an oversimplistic rendering of it as Hill Walker points out—but in fact, we are seeing an increase in direct referrals by schools of youth to juvenile courts and arrests for behaviors that are in fact not criminal. . . . I think that’s a very direct outcome of the attitude that promoted No Child Left Behind and other practices that simply say that “if students are not here to learn and excel at that, then we are not really interested in serving them.”. . . [T]he societal costs of this educational blunder are just overwhelming.

R. Zabel: [M]any of our fellow citizens’ . . . common response to deviance is to punish and suppress, and I think we are at a point, and have been for some time, that people and people that we elect to make our laws . . . are more ready to put their resources into punishing kinds of consequences, rather than in preventative or restorative efforts. . . . [T]hat’s been difficult for us because . . . resources that could be used in ways that I think would be more beneficial are not available.

Neel: [M]aybe because I’m long in the tooth, I’ve seen the movements in standard-based education come and go over time. So, I think we’re in a period of time where . . . we go through cycles . . . because we’re still trying to solve a very complex problem with a fairly old fashion solution.

Several participants referred to a “silo” phenomenon, where the field of emotional and behavioral disorders has been isolated from other disciplines involved in children’s mental health.

Nelson: I prepared a paper on the epidemiology of behavior disorders and looked at a lot of research from the education field, and subsequent to that was writing a paper for a juvenile justice audience, and discovered a whole different literature that didn’t cross over to any degree. Not to any degree was there transference of information from one field to the other. So to the extent that we think in silos and work in silos, we will continue to miss the point that these are all the same kids . . . addressed in each of these separate fields. As long as we work in silos, we are never going to make an impact on the public that needs to understand that to address the needs of these kids, we’ve got to think more broadly and more proactively.

Kerr: [T]he siloing effect is hugely important. Most of the big city school districts that have faced court battles over special education are districts where there have been parallel education systems; one for those with disabilities and one for those without. Those parallel systems run very deep, both financially and in terms of policy and are lethal to children that only get one chance to go through school. We can’t correct it and come back and do their schooling over again. I think that’s been a hideous assault on children, this notion that there will be two different education systems, and what of course fuels those is people’s greed, people’s need for power, lack of accountability. . . . I think part of the legacy of our generation will be this failure to dismantle, regulatory silos, categorical funding. I’m not typically pessimistic, but I’m fairly pessimistic that we won’t solve that problem, and it saddens me a lot.

Bullock: I think one of the other things that we can’t get past is seriously disturbed kids. The schools can’t be . . . the answer. We teach collaboration. Look at all the federal RFPs—“partnering and collaboration”—and yet, as long as money follows agencies instead of following kids . . . we’re probably never going to get off dead center. I’ve seen a school or two . . . where they brought in all the different services right into the school. Made it one wing of the school. You’ve got probation officers, you’ve got child welfare workers and those all work there. It makes it all work then. It’s a community-based school and it’s a one-stop . . . full-service school and people know where to go. It’s a group of people that work
together on a consistent basis and they’re all there to make an impact on kids. We know that’s an effective model and yet we don’t see very much action in terms of making it happen. We are spending a lot of money, but again, I’m not sure it’s going in the right direction.

Forness: [In] the psychodynamic field, you had to think about psychoneurotic learning inhibitions and kind of look at the dynamics of the family and . . . why the child might not have been learning. . . . I think the problem with that, I mean the real advantage of that, we could just concentrate on what we could control between 9 and 3 and do it well. . . . I think over time, that habit has been functionally autonomous and no longer serves as well. I think we have to spend more time on looking at underlying psychiatric diagnoses and on looking at some of the issues of family dynamics. . . . We’re now doing it, I think, but it’s only been discovered in the last few years. . . .

Some participants viewed insufficient emphasis on prevention and early intervention as major negative influences.

Smith: [T]he frustrations associated with what we all know about the importance of early intervention . . . yet we seem to be frozen in being able to describe really what it means to identify kids at an early stage of need for services, and the craziness that goes into policies where you have somebody saying “absolutely committed to early intervention, and identification of those particular kids, and providing services, but I want to do it within a noncategorical system where I never identify a kid.”. . . [T]hat type of contradiction with a straight face, I’m baffled by it.

Cartledge: We know what we need to do in terms of early intervention. We know what kind of supports we need to provide for families in poverty. We know what we can do in terms of helping children to develop more adaptive behaviors. . . . I’m in the schools a lot and I see a lot of bodies in the schools, but what I don’t see is a lot of is people that are trained to do what it is we need to do. For example, just to give you an idea of things we’ve been doing recently, we’ve been focused on prevention/early intervention. We’ve been training paraprofessionals to provide this early intervention for children. And we know with poor urban children. . . . that they have significant deficiencies that we need to get on top of immediately and to provide that kind of intervention. Now if we can train our paraprofessionals, we already have those bodies there, what are they doing now? They’re copying paper, they’re monitoring kids, they’re taking kids to the lavatory, they’re standing out there on the playground, but they’re not providing that kind of additional support that could help teachers teach and help these youngsters, most importantly, to develop readiness skills to be successful in the classroom.

Several viewed professional qualifications of service providers, including some teachers, as inadequate for providing appropriate education for students with EBD.

Kauffman: All of us all of us have had this experience of working in the field with people who weren’t as competent as hoped, either our colleagues were not really committed to the same values that we hold or teachers in the field or administrators. We can all tell horror stories and education has never been everything it could be, or wish it would be. I guess no field—including psychiatry, medicine, engineering—it’s never everything you hoped for. Sometimes I think people are careless about thinking about education, education-related issues. That’s always been true, though.

Some participants viewed this perceived problem as a function of unrealistic expectations that teachers should be able to “do it all.”

Cessna: [W]e have some very, very involved mentally ill kids now. And I’m not sure we know much what to do with them, to tell you the truth. You know, PBS was really successful, but what is it we’re going to do with those . . . few kids in the top. . . . if you’re the only teacher and you have on your case load, 10 . . . LD kids, three mentally retarded kids and five EBD kids and maybe a couple in speech. . . . I mean, that’s a kind of reality where . . . they can’t pay as careful attention . . . so they don’t much attend to the behavior. They change the environment enough that the kid can function . . . but never really learns or gets their behavior changed much.

M. K. Zabel: [T]he notion that . . . one person should be able to do all of it. A third grade teacher, or high school biology, or a middle school teacher should be fine with the fact that they have kids who may have serious emotional disturbances. They may have kids with lowered IQs, they may have kids who are extremely gifted, and they may have kids who are not native speakers. They may have all sorts of kids in their classroom, and that’s just fine.
And they should just be able to do that. There’ll be a little support, and there’ll be a little help back there, but those are all your kids.

I think . . . that the teachers are going out there and really being overwhelmed by the problems, the needs of the kids, the risk factors that are existent both in the schools and also in the families and the communities.

We are inclusive, we want to be inclusive, we want everybody to have access, but that’s come to mean everybody’s going to do it the same way with one person doing it. . . . [T]eachers are trying to do that, but the inevitable thing . . . is that they start to get mad at those kids who they don’t understand and they never signed up for. . . . [Y]ou have this whole group of people . . . that did sign up for it, and they’re sort of relegated to the tutoring role . . . in the back of the room. . . . I’m not sure anyone could have foreseen that when the whole inclusion notion started, but . . . that is having serious negative effects on the field. I hear, as we all do, from teachers who’ve been in the field awhile, “this is not the job I wanted, and I’m going to find something else.” . . . I hear even from new students . . . who are passionate about doing something . . . and realize, “well, that thing I’m passionate about, that’s like 10% of what I get to do. I’m not sure I want to sign up for that.” I have no answer to that. I can’t fix it, but I think the notion that expertise is somehow not a good thing is definitely the wrong way to go.

Some participants saw difficulties translating ideals into practice as a major negative influence.

Smith: I think the realization of how ineffective our profession has been at times as far as truly being able to make widespread change. As I think about some of the advocacy agenda items that have been around a long time, certain areas like children’s mental health, and the access to services for kids who have very unique needs on any type. . . . [I]t gets discouraging . . . to realize that the things that may be emerging as an advocacy agenda in this year will not necessarily be much different than the advocacy agenda in 1980 or 1975. . . . [I]t’s pretty darn discouraging to realize how many people we interact with in our communities would not necessarily agree that these kids need services. They would consider these kids as being bad kids, or families who haven’t done their job. . . . [U]ntil we reach the day . . . where people say, “This is an issue that all of us have, our families, us, it’s not something for somebody else.” Until we reach that, we’re going to continue to be dealing with public policy that’s not going to match what any of our dreams are. I think that’s a discouraging thing to me at times.

Peterson: I’ve reflected back when I’ve been preparing teachers, that maybe the first 10 or so years of working to help teachers do a better job out in the schools, things were getting better. I felt that teachers’ skills were improving; they were always valuing and anxious to learn and apply good ideas. . . . [T]he overall climate in schools was improving, there was enthusiasm, there was energy. . . . [T]oward the end of the 80s, early 90s, we reached a peak. Unfortunately things have been declining, and I don’t attribute that to a change in the teachers, the young people that we’re trying to help get ready to teach, but more the overall climate about schooling soured. There began to be a lot of negative attention to schools, and in particular the idea that these kids are bad kids and ought to be punished instead of helped. . . . It’s kind of like you feel like you’re in a Katrina hurricane in slow motion where all of the building is just being ripped apart by . . . an overwhelming force that is beyond anyone’s control. . . . I’ve never had a sense that that’s something we should then give up on, back off from, it’s not that, but it’s not the feeling of success or moving forward that I think we have had for a period of time. . . . [T]hat is really the most discouraging part of our jobs right now . . . the lack of ability to really have any inherent large or long-term impact on the issues. Individual kids, individual teachers, we have wonderful examples of good outcomes, and very positive things have happened and help reinforce us, but in the bigger picture is really gloomy. . . .

Wood: [W]e said, “This is not right; they ought to learn, and we want to provide an education for all these students,” and we’ve tried to come up with models for doing it. . . . [O]ur policy makers passed mandates that said you have to provide an appropriate education; you can’t ignore these kids. That’s the ideal being put into practice, but of course, things like that are expensive and so they never were funded. If anything now, the funding is decreasing and I think we’re headed toward a real catastrophe . . . because the state provision of funding is decreasing, and that means that property taxes are going up, and at some point, I’m just afraid that the programs are going to be cut, subverted in some way. But they’ve never been fully and properly funded. In a way, it makes you angry; on the other hand, it’s a tragedy. It really is, because I think it comes from people being
good-hearted and wanting to do better. . . . I’d like to think that money was the only problem, but I don’t think it’s the only problem. I think it’s that you’re always going to fall short when you’re trying to realize a great ideal in practice.

Neel: [P]eople think they can legislate quality. You can’t legislate quality. You can pass rules . . . but you can’t legislate quality. Quality is something that comes from competency and compassionate commitment. It doesn’t come from rules. I mean how many IEPs have we all read that don’t affect anything? . . . To me . . . the frustration is a long history of repeating cycles. You’d think by now that we would figure out that you can generate a human service system, an educational system, that doesn’t have to retreat three decades and then come back again. You would think we’re past that.

Conclusions
The 15 first-generation leaders interviewed in this phase of the Janus Project described some similar experiences and expressed similar views about important influences on their careers in the field of emotional behavioral disorders. This is not surprising, given that their careers have spanned the same time period and they have played major roles in developing the field as researchers, editors, curriculum developers, administrators, leaders of our professional organizations, and mentors. In addition, they have influenced one another through their professional involvements and contributions. Although they do not agree about every influence and each offers unique perspectives on a wide range of events and issues, they do concur on the importance of a mutually supportive professional community.

Over the past 40 to 50 years, these people helped lay a foundation for current programming and practice in the education of students with EBD. They have mixed forecasts for the future direction, and even of the future survival, of this endeavor as a distinct field of special education. They expressed similar views about important influences on their careers in the field of emotional behavioral disorders, Part 3: The future looking back to move the field of emotional and behavior disorders forward: Nicholas Long. Intervention in School and Clinic, 46(3), 184-189.


About the Authors
Marilyn S. Kaff is an associate professor of special education at Kansas State University. Her current interests include assessment and interventions for students with autism, cross-cultural interventions for students with disabilities, and effective teacher preparation.

Jim M. Teagarden is an assistant professor of special education at Kansas State University. His current interests include assessment and effective interventions for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Robert H. Zabel is professor emeritus of special education at Kansas State University. His interests include students with emotional and behavioral disorders, juvenile offenders, behavior and classroom management, and teacher stress and burnout.