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Teachers' Experience with Problematic Behavior and Educational Support: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE WITH PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE WITH PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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This dissertation was conducted to discover how teachers of elementary and middle school-aged children experience the phenomenon of problematic behavior in their classrooms and the support they receive from the educational system in this regard. The literature review revealed that there is a dearth of research using a purely qualitative approach to exploring the experience of teachers in this area. The idea that teachers are rarely asked how they experience problematic behavior and support was evident in the findings of this study. I conducted this study using a phenomenological approach to interview six teachers from three states. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to find themes and codes to help elucidate the experience of the teachers that were interviewed. This study revealed that teachers find the relationships they build with students, parents, and administrators to be among the most important factors leading to how they experience a child's behavior. The behavior alone is a small part of the larger context of the child. It is the educational system and the context of the child that mitigate how teachers experience feelings of efficacy surrounding their careers. The relationships teachers experience with each other were shown to be the most helpful in providing information and support in two ways. First, teachers learned how best to manage a classroom from other experienced teachers.

Second, teachers relied heavily on each other for emotional support and understanding how to cope with the stress that comes with most aspects of problematic behavior. Feelings of efficacy and job satisfaction were experienced when a teacher was able to witness the success of their students in later stages of the student's education. Overall teachers felt a sense of marginalization and a lack of support and agency when interacting with the educational system. The idea of marginalization and lack of support and agency was discussed in regard to how it is reflected in the political atmosphere of the current times. This dissertation and further research using the expertise of teachers could help shape effective policy and program generation in the future.

Keywords: problematic behavior, teachers experience, educational system, phenomenological study

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Barbara Bauman. Barbara taught elementary grades for 40 years. I grew up watching her care for children in a way that had great influence on how I have come to understand the world. She was very excited to discuss my dissertation process with me. Sadly, she passed before I was able to complete this project and will not be here to experience the outcome of my efforts. I write this knowing that she would have been as proud of me as I am of her, regardless of the outcome.

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Table of Contents Page

List of Figures Page

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

During their developing years, most American children spend a significant portion of time with their teachers in a public-school classroom. As of autumn, 2017, approximately 50.7 million students were enrolled in public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Students spend an average of 6.64 hours of each school day in class (NCES, 2008).

Researchers generally agree that teachers play an important role in shaping the trajectory of a child's ability to function both in and out of the classroom and stand in a unique position to influence many facets of development in the children they teach (Ball & Anderson-Butcher, 2014; Baweja et al., 2016; Hafen, Ruzek, Gregory, Allen, & Mikami, 2015; Lindo et al., 2014). Some of these children bring to the classroom aberrant behavior rooted in issues beyond the teacher's control or knowledge. The context from which problematic behavior emerges and the way teachers interact with children exhibiting such behavior exerts a significant effect on various aspects of the children's future behavior, as well their overall wellbeing and chances of future success.

Definition of Problematic Behavior

For the purposes of this dissertation, *problematic behavior* (PB) was defined as any behavior that poses problematic implications for teachers or children in any capacity. Various definitions of PB are discussed and explored later in this document.

The Phenomenon of Problematic Behavior

Problematic behavior occurs in virtually every classroom, making it exceedingly common, yet the dynamics and circumstances surrounding such behavior in individual students are complex and nuanced (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). Teachers require a strong

knowledge base, sense of efficacy, and support from multiple sources in order to effectively assess and address PB (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Domitrovich, et al., 2016; Stormont, Reinke, Newcomer, Marchese, & Lewis, 2015; Tsouloupas, Carson, & Matthews, 2013). Research has consistently demonstrated that teachers lack relevant and sufficient training and support in many areas related to PB (Ekornes, 2015; Stiffler & Dever, 2015).

In addition to teachers' effect on PB, PB imposes a profound effect on teachers' overall wellbeing. Teachers have expressed that dealing with PB and a lack of resources and support comprise dominant factors leading to burnout, stress, and attrition (Ball & Anderson-Butcher, 2014; Becker, Keller, Goetz, Frenzel, & Taxer, 2015; Cancio et al., 2013; Domitrovich et al., 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Tsouloupas et al., 2013).

Gaps in Research

Most research dealing with teachers' experience has been conducted in relation to the implementation of a set of behavioral interventions rather than exploring teachers' subjective lived experience. Teachers' social emotional wellness and feelings of self-efficacy have been linked to job satisfaction and, importantly, to teachers' ability to effectively manage the behavioral climate of their classrooms as well as to elicit positive outcomes from the children they work with (Cancio et al., 2013; Domitrovich et al., 2016; Tsouloupas et al., 2013). There appears to be a dearth of research focusing on the wellbeing of mainstream elementary education school teachers in general. More research is needed to reveal connections between problematic student behavior, support or lack thereof from the school and community, and teacher burnout and stress as they impact the private and professional lives of teachers (Axup & Gersch, 2008; Cancio et al., 2013). In addition, research is needed to explore the connections forged in teacher-student relationships in order to discover how these relationships impact PB (Jennings &

Greenberg, 2009; Myers & Pianta, 2008) and teachers' sense of efficacy and overall wellbeing. Inquiries that allow room for teachers to discuss their relationship to children exhibiting PB could reveal useful information in this regard (Myers & Pianta, 2008).

A research-to-practice gap exists regarding evidence-based interventions for PB and their common usage. More research focused on teachers' perception and experience in this area could reveal yet undiscovered barriers to intervention implementation (Baweja, et al., 2016; Stormont, Reinke, & Herman, 2011). Additionally, research indicates that teachers remain largely unaware of the supports and programs that are available to them (Stormont et al., 2011).

Scant research examines the criteria or other factors influencing teacher reports of PB. Studies exploring how and why teachers perceive and react to certain behaviors in a particular manner could be important to discovering what works for teachers and influences their choices (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014; Stormont et al., 2015). In addition, more research is needed looking into the contextual variables associated with both how teachers interact with PB (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Meyers, & Sugai, 2008) and how they experience support from administration at the state and local levels (Cancio et al., 2013). Since laws and policies differ from state to state, localized research may yield results relevant and useful for the particular area from which subjects are drawn.

Also largely lacking is research regarding teachers' opinions or inquiry into how the educational system is working for them as well as how teachers inform the policies and laws that shape the classroom environment. In addition, the bulk of research regarding teachers and education is commonly conducted within middle class white schools. The findings of such research, which guide a good deal of policy and practice, may not be applicable to other populations, especially in regard to cultural conceptions of what constitutes acceptable behavior

and appropriate discipline (Bevaart et al., 2013; Hatton, 2013; Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014). Extant research into racial disparities in discipline practices calls attention to the need for further research examining the causes and implications of these factors.

Implications for Psychology

Schools have become the primary and most practical location for mental health assessment and treatment delivery (Dikel, 2014; Stiffler & Dever, 2015). Teachers are uniquely situated to observe PB across several environments and are likely to be consulted by parents with concerns about their children's mental health (Moldavsky, Groenewald, Owen, & Sayal, 2013; Stiffler & Dever, 2015). Despite this important vantage point and opportunity for insight, teachers lack the needed support, resources, and training to gauge their students' mental health needs. Many have expressed a desire to consult regularly with mental health professionals in regard to PB (Baweja et al., 2016) because psychologists and other mental health professionals can offer a great deal of support toward understanding and assessing PB, as well as offering social emotional support and coping skills for teachers themselves. Perspective from a clinical psychology vantage point is largely missing in the educational system in general and could potentially offer a valuable avenue of support. A phenomenological study into the experiences of teachers in regard to PB and surrounding support could help to bring contemporary relevant information to this burgeoning area of practice.

Purpose of This Dissertation

The purpose of this proposed study was to gain a deeper perspective into the lived experience of elementary school teachers in western Washington, California, and Oregon specifically pertinent to their experience with children exhibiting PB in the classroom and support or lack thereof from the educational system in this regard.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological research methodology seeks to explore and describe meaning as it relates to the lived experience of several individuals in relationship with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research methods require the researcher to address and hold back scientific and personal bias and assumptions, allowing for an open exploration of a participant's response. Most of the previously conducted research regarding teachers' experience and perceptions utilized quantitative and mixed methods, which may restrict the depth and breadth of responses. In addition, even though most researchers discuss the value and importance of teachers to children, and some researchers discuss the value of teachers to society, teachers are often measured as mere objects facilitating the ultimate goals of student, classroom, and school outcomes.

Researching teachers' experience with PB and systems of support using a phenomenological method allowed insight into their subjective experience and sought to bring the emerging meaning to light with a richness that may open up a more current, nuanced, and relevant understanding of problematic classroom behavior and teacher experience within the larger culture. In addition, having applied phenomenological research to the study of teachers' experience may open up a curiosity within teachers that may lead to more self-reflective and purposeful practice. This research can also benefit the educational system by providing a firsthand account of how teachers are currently experiencing PB and support. This account could serve to expand the dialogue relevant to the educational system and how it is working for, with, and through teachers.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Problematic Behavior Overview

This section in no way comprises a comprehensive discussion of the topic; the main purpose was to provide a window into the complexity of defining problematic classroom behavior in children as reflected in current literature on the topic. In addition, sources discussing some of the most significant contextual factors relating to problematic behavior (PB) are summarized in brief. Contextual factors relating to PB, however, are nuanced and complex beyond the capacity afforded within a brief frame.

Researchers largely agree that interacting with students who exhibit PB is one of the most challenging aspects of a teacher's multifaceted role (Cancio et al., 2013; Cunningham & Suldo, 2014; Domitrovich et al., 2016; Hafen et al., 2015; Hinchcliffe & Campbell, 2015). PB stems from many biological, psychological, and/or environmental factors (Anda et al., 2006; Briggs-Gowen et al., 2010; Magyar & Pandolfi, 2012; O'Neil, Guenette, & Kitchenham, 2010). The complex nature of PB renders accurate assessment of the prevalence with which it appears in the classroom setting extremely difficult (Alter et al., 2013). Additionally, as Alter et al. (2013) have pointed out, determining the prevalence of PB in the classroom is further complicated by the fact that that past research on the topic has gathered information using a range of inconsistent methods and definitions.

When one or more children exhibiting PB is present in a given classroom, the way the teacher manages and intervenes in these behaviors can sometimes have a profound effect not only on the learning and feelings of efficacy of the individual student but also on the learning and social/emotional environment of the classroom as a whole. In addition, several aspects of teachers' emotional wellness, feelings of efficacy, and overall job satisfaction are impacted by

their experiences with students exhibiting PB (Alter et al., 2013; Domitrovich et al., 2016; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Stormont, Reinke, Newcomer, Marchese, & Lewis, 2015).

PB can take many forms, loosely categorized as externalized versus internalized. Externalizing behavior is perhaps the most difficult for teachers to address because this type of behavior can include flagrant conflict and lead to classroom disruption. Classroom disruption, in turn, may lead to a compromised flow of learning and tense social environment that impacts the wellbeing of all the students in a given class, as well as the teacher (Alter et al., 2013; Stormont et al., 2015; Tsouloupas, Carson, & Matthews, 2014). Disruptive behaviors include, but are not limited to, speaking out of turn, fidgeting in seat, getting up from seat at inappropriate times, arguing with teachers and other students, refusing to participate in classroom activities, leaving the classroom at inappropriate times, yelling, engaging in physical altercations, and venting emotions in outbursts at unpredictable times (Alter et al., 2013; Anda, 2007; Hinshaw, 1992; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014).

Internalized behaviors are for the most part associated with depression and anxiety and can present as, but are not limited to, lack of participation in classroom activities and discussions, social isolation, withdrawal, and physical symptoms such as stomach ache and headache (Ball & Anderson-Butcher, 2014; Cunningham & Suldo, 2014; Dikel, 2014). These behaviors can be overlooked by teachers since children afflicted by internalizing behaviors tend to be adept at blending in. In most cases, children with internalized behaviors do not call attention to themselves and are passively cooperative or at least appear to be cooperative to avoid notice by teachers. As a result, their problems are often not assessed in the school environment (Cunningham & Suldo, 2014; Hinchliffe & Campbell, 2015). Not only are internalized behaviors difficult to assess, but teachers receive little to no training in the contextual conditions of this

type of behavior (Alter et al., 2013; Cunningham & Suldo, 2014). This lack of training leaves teachers without an important facet of perception by which to gauge their students' behavior.

Given that PBs considered in larger contexts are nuanced and complex, maintaining a curious outlook about these contexts is imperative when crafting an effective behavioral plan. In this section, several conditions are briefly explored to serve as examples underscoring the importance of understanding children who exhibit PB as individuals, rather than addressing them as if the dynamics of their inner experiences were as universal as their outward presentations (Bambara & Kern, 2005; Dikel, 2014). Simply put, even though behaviors may appear to be the same, what is going on inside and around each individual child is unique. Similarly, which behaviors are considered problematic may vary depending on the individual teacher.

In clinical psychology, the first step to creating an effective treatment plan for an individual consists of arriving at an accurate diagnosis. One of the most important aspects of diagnosis is careful consideration of the differentiation among conditions. In differential diagnosis, the psychologist asks herself, what am I seeing? If he or she is seeing disruptive behavior, he or she asks, what other information is needed to determine what is happening and how to best help this person? The presentation must be considered from multiple contextual angles, such that all the systems in a child's life are explored. It is understood that multiple conditions often present similarly and/or overlap. That all possibilities be explored through an examination of systems in a child's life is imperative in order to address behavior in a multicontextual way. If a child is misdiagnosed, the treatment plan may prove not only ineffective but also harmful, adding negatively to the context of the child's experience (Crosby, 2015).

Although teachers, being laypersons unversed in the mental health profession, cannot be expected to diagnose or treat any extraordinary condition, as stated previously, they do exert a significant influence in a child's life. They are often asked to manage and work with children who exhibit PB as a feature of the difficult conditions under which they, the children, have developed. As a result, teachers are uniquely positioned to serve as an informant and active participant in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of the children they work with (Dikel, 2014; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015).

Common Disorders and Conditions

Several disorders or conditions a child can experience may result in problematic and potentially overlapping behavioral presentations. The next subsections look briefly at several contextual frames of PB to demonstrate the complexity of inner experience in contrast to the common external presentations. By no means, however, are the conditions a child might be experiencing when exhibiting PB limited to the conditions discussed in the following.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobiological disorder considered to be the most prevalent reported by teachers (DuPaul & Stoner, 2014). The most recent data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) stated that, based on parent report, 11% of children ages 4–17 are diagnosed with ADHD, a number which has been consistently increasing over the past 12 years. In 2011, 17% of children diagnosed with ADHD had received neither medication nor any type of intervention for their condition. In addition, Barkley (2016) has reported that 90% of these children will suffer problems affecting their behavior, social interactions, and academic abilities. Barkley (2016) further indicated that 40% of children diagnosed with ADHD will not finish their education through high school, and

that fewer than 8% will achieve a college education (p. xi). These numbers clearly indicate that ADHD is a prevalent childhood condition with which virtually every teacher will interact.

The most common reference for diagnosing ADHD is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM-5 discusses ADHD in terms of the symptom domains of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsiveness. Inattention is characterized by lack of attention to details; problems with sustained attention to activities, directions, lectures, or conversation; a dislike of tasks requiring sustained attention; difficulty organizing and completing tasks; frequently losing tools required for a task; being easily distracted and/or forgetful of activities or portions of activities. Hyperactive and impulsivity symptoms are listed as excessive and inappropriate movement at inappropriate times when remaining still or in one's seat is expected; being unable to engage in quiet, relaxed activities; acting "as if driven by a motor" (p. 60); and excessive talking, talking out of turn, or interrupting. Despite this seemingly clear list of ADHD symptoms, the presentation of this disorder in each given individual varies extensively (DuPaul & Stoner, 2014). Symptoms can be limited to the domain of attention where, because these symptoms are more internal and less disruptive, they are noticed less frequently (Alter et al., 2013; Cunningham & Suldo, 2014). The DSM-5 also states that ADHD is frequently experienced in conjunction with other disorders such as anxiety, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and disruptive mood dysregulation disorder.

Several studies have noted that teachers have typically demonstrated a strong ability to recognize ADHD hyperactive and impulsive symptoms but have problems recognizing the internalized aspects of inattentive symptoms. Comparing the disparity with which teachers understand inattentive behaviors and disruptive externalizing behaviors in regard to ADHD

testifies to the need for more teacher training in this area. A working knowledge of how to recognize internalized types of PB could be integral to a teacher's ability to identify and effectively address the conditions associated with these types of disorders (Moldavsky, Groenewald, Owen & Sayal, 2013; Cunningham & Suldo, 2014).

Emotional Behavior Disorders

The definition of emotional behavior disorders varies from one author, organization, and discipline to the next. Magyar and Pandolfi (2012) defined emotional behavior disorders as "any behavior, syndrome, or disorder contained in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR; APA, 2000) that is related to functional impairment and/or personal distress for the student" (p. 975). This definition encompasses all disorders within the purview of psychology as they relate to the emotional health of school children. According to a report by Pastor, Reuben, and Duran (2012), an estimated 7.4% of children were identified as experiencing an emotional behavior disorder in a nationally representative sample of 61,233 children aged 4 to 17 years.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA Regulations: Part 300/A/300.8/c/4/i, 2004) describes emotional behavior disorder, referred to as emotional disturbance, in the following way:

> Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
>
> 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 and teachers.
C. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
D. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
E. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The quoted material provides inclusivity for children who exhibit emotional and behavioral disturbances but may not meet the specific criteria for a syndrome or disorder as specified in the DSM.

Magyar & Pandolfi (2012) discussed the complicated process of intervening with emotional behavior disorder and the commonly co-occurring contextual condition of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The authors also discussed overlapping PB associated with ASD, ADHD, obsessive compulsive disorder, and depression. Children experiencing ASD can have difficulty with the self-reflective nature of behavioral interventions commonly used to address behavior along with some of these other contextual conditions.

Learning Disorders

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013), children experiencing a specific learning disorder have significant difficulty learning the skills related to reading, writing, and mathematics that are necessary for academic proficiency. Between 5% and 15% of school-aged children experience a specific learning disorder. The APA describes some of the PB expressed by children experiencing a specific learning disability as an unwillingness to participate in learning or oppositional behavior, explaining that symptoms can shift over time

and lead to a range of observable behaviors and symptomology. The APA describes oppositional behaviors as anger, irritability, combativeness, defiance, and vindictiveness (p. 462).

McKenna. Flower, Kim, Ciullo, and Haring (2015) discussed the importance of considering the PB associated with learning disability. Their research reported that children who experience a learning disability are more likely to exhibit PB when compared other children of similar age. This is an important consideration when assessing the context of a child exhibiting PB because the behavior may serve to mask the true problem.

Early Adverse Experiences

Based on a report from the National Traumatic Stress Network, Brunzell, Waters, and Stokes (2015) pointed out that 40% of school-aged children have been exposed to early adverse experiences. Early adverse experiences include contextual conditions such as disruption in home life or living situation; exposure to violence, including domestic violence; neglect; physical and sexual abuse; drug and alcohol abuse; mental illness; parental discord; and death of someone close to them (Anda, 2007; Brunzell et al., 2015). According to Anda, one in four children has experienced at least one of these conditions and one in ten has been exposed to at least five. Prevalence of exposure to adverse experiences is high regardless of level of education or socioeconomic status. Studies have shown that early adverse experiences display a significant positive correlation with health problems, PB, and social interaction problems across the life span.

Children exposed to adverse experiences are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems. The developing brains of children who are exposed to ongoing stress may grow in ways adaptive to traumatic conditions. In this way, various mechanisms in the brain are poised to react to seemingly innocuous stimuli as if they posed a threat (Anda et al., 2006; O'Neil et al., 2010). In

the classroom, this phenomenon may result in behaviors such as inappropriate overactivity, hypervigilance, hostility, anger, fright, stomach aches and other physical complaints, emotional dysregulation, self-harm, and problems related to interacting with their peers and participating in social situations (Anda et al., 2006; Dikel, 2014; O'Neil et al., 2010). According to the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2015), "In 2013, 7,132 children were victims of abuse or neglect in Washington, a rate of 4.5 per 1,000 children, representing an 8.2% increase from 2012. Of these children, 89.0% were neglected, 21.0% were physically abused, and 7.0% were sexually abused."

Trauma and teacher diagnostic training. Behavioral presentation of children suffering from early adverse experiences can mimic that of several other conditions, meaning that children may exhibit externalizing behaviors typical of ADHD; cognitive problems such as difficulty with concentration and organization as well as hyperactivity can be key presentations of both ADHD and early trauma. When considered in conjunction with the lack of training for teachers in recognizing ADHD hyperactive type, this overlap or mimic raises additional questions regarding the training teachers need in order to differentiate trauma-based behavior from ADHD-based behavior.

Children who have lived through early adverse experiences tend to mistrust their environment and the people around them. They may respond more favorably if they are provided simple clear instructions in small increments in order to facilitate a sense of success that can perpetuate further success and safety. Because adverse experiences in early childhood can affect attachment, creating a safe secure bond through a predictable environment and relationship may be a teacher's best way to begin addressing behavior. Children exhibiting behavior based in traumatic experience may not cooperate with typical behavioral interventions because they have

developed within an environment of stress and fear, and may approach any situation from that framework (Anda et al., 2006; O'Neil et al., 2010).

Also important to consider is the impact teachers may experience when working with traumatized students. Secondary trauma is a stress reaction that can occur in individuals working closely with children who have experienced trauma (Caringi et al., 2015). Although a rich body of research has been carried out examining secondary trauma in social workers and therapists, little of this research has focused on teachers (Caringi et al., 2015). Caringi et al. recently conducted a study looking at how secondary trauma affects teachers. Their research revealed that teachers are significantly impacted by the adverse experiences of the children they work with, which in turn affects their feelings of job burnout and personal stress.

Several schools and districts around the U.S. are beginning to implement trauma-informed programs that include positive behavior supports in conjunction with teacher training in the nuances of mental health conditions and the assessment of children exhibiting both internalized and externalized PB. These trauma-informed programs focus on making changes within the multiple systems in a child's life, featuring a more interactive approach aimed at changing the system of education to allow for a more collaborative style of problem solving rather than a set of standards for teachers to achieve (Cole et al., 2013; Craig, 2008)

Psychodynamic Theory of Problematic Behaviors

In the research used to provide the framework for their study, Axup and Gersch (2008) discussed aspects of psychological theory to explain PB. First, through the lens of psychodynamic theory, the authors discussed transference, attachment, and projection to explain how problematic early childhood experiences lead to a reenactment of these experiences within the classroom. Next, through the lens of Adlerian theory, the authors offered the proposal that PB

may stem from mistaken goals and a need to experience belonging, which can result in challenging behavior that teachers have difficulty understanding. Axup and Gersch also pointed out that disciplinary policies such as zero tolerance and exclusion can prevent teachers from engaging in more prosocial alternatives to punitive discipline.

Behavior and Discipline: Cultural Conceptualizations

The information discussed in the following section pertains to this dissertation in that it provides a brief look at the structure of behavioral intervention that is embedded in the U.S. educational and cultural systems. These systems comprise the foundation of the many supports needed by teachers to do their jobs.

Appropriate behavior is a culturally defined construct, with social norms determining which behaviors are acceptable. Such social norms are determined relative to a particular cultural community or enclave, so conflict can result in the classroom when students' and teachers' expectations are shaped by differing cultural norms (Delpit, 2006; Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Weinstein et al. (2004) asserted that most U.S. teachers come from a white middle class background and, without culturally relevant training, are apt to frame appropriate behavior in terms of their own subculture. This lack of cultural understanding and training may be responsible for evidence showing that African American and Latino boys are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline and African American boys are disproportionately assessed with emotional behavior disorders (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005; McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014; Pane et al., 2014; Peguero, Popp, & Shekarkhar, 2015; Valdebenito et al., 2015; Williams, 2013).

Schools in the U.S. predominantly use punitive discipline as a means to control the school environment (Irby, 2013). Irby asserted that this policy and practice stands in direct

conflict with a preponderance of evidence showing that more positive approaches yield significantly better social, academic, and behavioral outcomes. Irby cited The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law 103–382. 108 Statute 3907, Title 14) as the catalyst for zero tolerance policies because it tied federal educational funds to the implementation of strict discipline policies.

Although these practices are thought, in most cases, to be used as a culmination of increasingly restrictive discipline and reserved for only the most extreme cases, researchers reported that these tactics have been found to be often used in response to minimal levels of aberrant behavior and in response to incidents during which, when context is taken into account, the children in question may not have been exhibiting undesired behavior at all (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Irby, 2013; Williams, 2013; Valdebenito et al., 2015).

Excluding children from the school environment as punishment has been linked to a myriad of significant short-term consequences such as social rejection, severe academic problems, a need to repeat grades, dropping out of school, and long-term consequences such as drug abuse, poverty, and incarceration (Peguero et al., 2015; Pane et al., 2014). Pane et al. (2014) discussed how the disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline for African American children reveals a facet of institutionalized racism because exclusionary discipline denies children the opportunity to participate in a full range of educational and social opportunities.

Relevant Washington State Administrative Codes and Revised Codes

Washington State Administrative Code 392-400-235 discusses the limits and conditions of discipline in schools within Washington State. This administrative code states that discipline procedures cannot be enforced in a way that prevents “a student from accomplishing specific

academic grade, subject, or graduation requirements." It also states that corporal punishment is prohibited, defined as "any act which willfully inflicts or willfully causes the infliction of physical pain on a student." A caveat clarifies that physical harm resulting from reasonable restraint such as that needed to prevent a student from harm to self, others, or school property does not fall under the definition of corporal punishment.

Revised Code of Washington 28A.600.015 addresses rules for bringing in due process, duration of, immediate necessity of, and discretionary use in regard to the exclusionary disciplines of suspension and expulsion. "School districts may not suspend the provision of educational services to a student as a disciplinary action. A student may be excluded from a particular classroom or instructional or activity area for the period of suspension or expulsion, but the school district must provide an opportunity for a student to receive educational services during a period of suspension or expulsion."

Included in this code is an addendum statement referencing the court case *McCleary v. State of Washington* and stating that more needs to be done to provide equal educational opportunity to students belonging to "certain demographic groups including English language learners." This note also lists several recommendations to achieve more balanced opportunities, including reducing the suspension time for "students of color" and a provision of more support to help these students return to their classroom environment. The note in the Revised Code of Washington 28A.600.015 also observes the following:

> Closing the opportunity gap requires highly skilled, culturally competent, and diverse educators who understand the communities and cultures that students come from; it requires careful monitoring of not only the academic performance but also the educational environment for all students, at a fine grain of detail to assure adequate

> accountability; and it requires a robust program of instruction, including appropriately trained educators, to help English language learners gain language proficiency as well as academic proficiency.

However, Revised Code of Washington 28A.600.420 states:

> A school district may suspend or expel a student for up to one year subject to subsections (1), (3), (4), and (5) of this section, if the student acts with malice as defined under RCW 9A.04.110 and displays an instrument that appears to be a firearm, on public elementary or secondary school premises, public school-provided transportation, or areas of facilities while being used exclusively by public schools.

Revised Code of Washington 9A.04.110 defines Malice as an act that:

> shall import an evil intent, wish, or design to vex, annoy, or injure another person. Malice may be inferred from an act done in willful disregard of the rights of another, or an act wrongfully done without just cause or excuse, or an act or omission of duty betraying a willful disregard of social duty.

Classroom Management

The way teachers interact with students exhibiting PB to provide a sense of order and flow throughout the day is termed *classroom management*. An important aspect of teacher competency, effective classroom management creates an environment in which optimum learning can occur (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Simonsen et al., 2008). Emmer and Stough (2001) and Simonsen et al. (2008) conducted reviews of the literature to explore classroom management using several seminal studies on the topic. Emmer and Stough described good classroom management as preserving order, maintaining a balance between attending to group activities and to the needs of individual students, and the use of behavioral and therapy techniques. In the

research used for the review, the techniques that resulted in the best results included observations of behavior and group dynamics at the outset of the school year; regular monitoring of behavior to observe minor behavior reactions before they become problematic; adaptiveness to the dynamics of the classroom, time of day, learning situation, and students; preventative rather than reactive responses; clear statements of expectations, class rules, and performance feedback beginning at the outset of the school year; use of individual interventions when group interventions are ineffective or inappropriate for the context of the child; and close adherence to classroom structure and employing predictable consequences for unacceptable behavior.

Personal Factors

Several personal factors influence effective classroom management, such as an individual's training and knowledge in this area, flexibility and ability to adapt to shifting contexts, ability to be self-reflective, and controlled emotional responses to PB (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Teachers' emotional responses to PB can be triggered by assumptions regarding the nature and intent of a behavior. Emmer and Stough (2001) also stated that guilt was a common reaction for teachers when children fail to meet their expectations. Feelings of guilt were fueled by a lack of support, ambiguity around how much impact teachers have on student wellbeing, increased teacher accountability for outcomes, and demands so intense they are not likely to be met (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Other classroom management variables discussed in this review included contextual variables such as socioeconomic status (SES) and the relationship between teacher and child.

Structure and Predictability

Simonsen et al. (2008) stressed the idea of structure and predictability as integral concepts in effective classroom management. One way in which these components can be

achieved is through a careful physical design of the classroom environment. More physical space around students, in conjunction with a more predictable routine, results in less distraction and disruptive behavior. Simonsen et al. also noted that overt acknowledgement of appropriate behavior is a technique that has been shown to promote desirable behavior.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The relationship between teacher and student is a focal topic in research regarding PB and classroom management (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Freiberg & Lamb, 2009; Hafen et al., 2015; Myers & Pianta, 2008; O'Brennan et al., 2014). The quality of student-teacher relationships comprises an integral part of classroom management that influences the degree to which students communicate with their teachers and connect to their education which, in turn, can have lasting effects on their social and emotional wellness and academic success (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009; Hafen et al., 2015; Myers & Pianta, 2008). Myers and Pianta pointed out that strong and positive student-teacher relationships can serve as a protective factor for children at risk of PB and may increase the success of a given intervention.

Preservice Training

Washington State elementary and secondary education program standards are vague as to how they address issues related to training teachers to understand and respond to PB. According to the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB, 2018), standard 5 explains that teachers are required to be trained in teaching to the diverse learning needs of the children they work with. Individual universities address this standard through several courses. The University of Washington (UW, 2018a: UW, 2018b), Western Washington University (WWU, 2018), and Washington State University (WSU, 2018) require teachers to attend several classes that address diverse learning needs. These classes focus on individual differences, motivation, learning

disabilities, cultural diversity, and social justice. Although it is not explicitly stated, it is reasonable to assume that the topic of PB is discussed within these concepts. Whereas WWU provides classes that address these issues directly and as they relate to classroom management, WSU addresses these issues through classroom management courses. UW addresses these issues through their Masters in Elementary Education Program in classroom management classes and more directly in their Secondary Education Program. None of the program information addressed issues related to the social emotional wellness of students or student mental health.

Teachers' Perceptions and Experience in Relation to Support Systems

An extensive search for research dedicated to exploring teachers' experience and perceptions with the U.S. educational system has revealed a dearth of inquiry related to how teachers understand and make meaning of the systems within which they work. Exploring the teacher's perspective is especially important when looking at how teachers' perceptions relate to their experience of support. Because the phenomenon of PB is too complex for an individual to address alone in the classroom, how teachers experience support from the school, educational, and cultural systems within which they work and live represents an important issue for study.

Teachers' understanding and experience of the support they receive in regard to variables associated with PB and their perceptions and experiences with the behavior itself are topics discussed in articles exploring such issues as teacher burnout and stress. It is to be noted that the research that informs recent studies is comprised of a conglomeration of studies done in various nations. Such a range of data sources can be problematic, given that the educational systems and cultural conceptualizations, values, and laws related to the educational system differ widely depending on the country in question.

Teacher Stress, Coping Methods, and Institutional Support

In a British study focused on PB and its impact on teachers' lives, Axup and Gersch (2008) administered an open-ended questionnaire to nine teachers of boys aged 12–13. The questionnaires were distributed through the use of a "key staff member and returned in sealed envelopes" (p. 146). The researchers sought to explore how PB affects teachers, their perceptions of PB, use of coping mechanisms, and the support they receive and feel they need more of from the school system.

Stressors. Axup and Gersch (2008) discussed literature suggesting PB, an overwhelming workload, and a perception that they are powerless to ameliorate foundational issues to be the main complications leading to teachers' experience of stress. These factors are further complicated when schools, districts, and communities fail to provide a supportive atmosphere in which each system (student, teacher, classroom, school, district, and community) holds equal value and responsibility for student outcomes.

The authors defined teachers' stress in terms of workload versus adaptability, biological and psychological responses, and experiences such as tension, aggravation, despair, and anger. These terms varied in intensity and incidence depending on the personal and professional context of an individual teacher.

Axup and Gersch (2008) discovered the most significant PBs among students to include "verbal, work avoidance, and out of seat" (p. 147) behaviors. The two most frequently named perceived motivators for such behavior were "power seeking and attention seeking" (p. 147). Teachers stated that their own feelings associated with these behaviors included "sorrow, anger, sadness, boredom, bewilderment, disgust, concern, patience, shock, irritability and pity" (p. 148) as well as, most commonly, frustration. The study revealed significant reports of individual

student disruptive behavior having a negative effect on the classroom as a whole, including the teachers' difficulty in focusing on classroom instruction following a disruption. However, teachers did not report a significant impact of behavior on their personal life.

Coping methods. Regarding teachers' reported techniques used to cope with PB, Axup and Gersch (2008) found use of "behavior management, praise, and understanding of behavior" to be the most frequent responses. Included in individual teachers' responses for coping were techniques related to professional practice, such as speaking with colleagues, journaling, and not allowing an incident to affect subsequent lessons. Teachers also referenced maintaining interests unrelated to school, physical activity, and conversations with friends and family as coping strategies they used regularly outside the classroom. Personal internal coping strategies were listed as patience, humor, and remaining calm.

Institutional support. In regard to support from educational institutions, Axup and Gersch (2008) found an overall negative consensus in teachers' perceptions of support. Many teachers reported no support available at all. Other respondents named imposing student exclusion and tiered penalties as their sole available supports. The researchers stated that "overall no existing support was perceived as systematically effective" (p. 149).

In regard to desired supports, teachers indicated that having a teaching assistant or mentor available throughout the school day, student counseling, and support for parents would be the most effective means of support, in addition to student removal (p. 149). Access to a variety of professionals for advice and training was also named frequently as a desired support.

This study was limited by the fact that teachers had no contact with a researcher. Answering open-ended questions in writing may have placed constraints on participants' likelihood of candor by limiting the space in which answers can be expressed, while lack of a

face-to-face connection to a concerned other may also have limited the depth in which participants felt comfortable sharing their experience.

Classroom Climate

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) developed a model to depict the interaction between teachers' emotional health, classroom climate, and positive student outcomes (Figure 1, p. 494). The model depicts "Teachers social emotional competence and wellbeing" contributing to and being influenced by "Healthy student-teacher relationships, Effective classroom management" and "Effective social emotional learning implementation", which then influence and are influenced by a "Healthy classroom climate" which, while connecting back to "Teachers social emotional competence and wellbeing," leads to and is strengthened by "Students social emotional and academic outcomes." These outcomes also contribute directly back to "Heathy student-teacher relationships" and "Effective social emotional learning implementation". All of these factors are supported by a foundation of "school/community contextual factors."

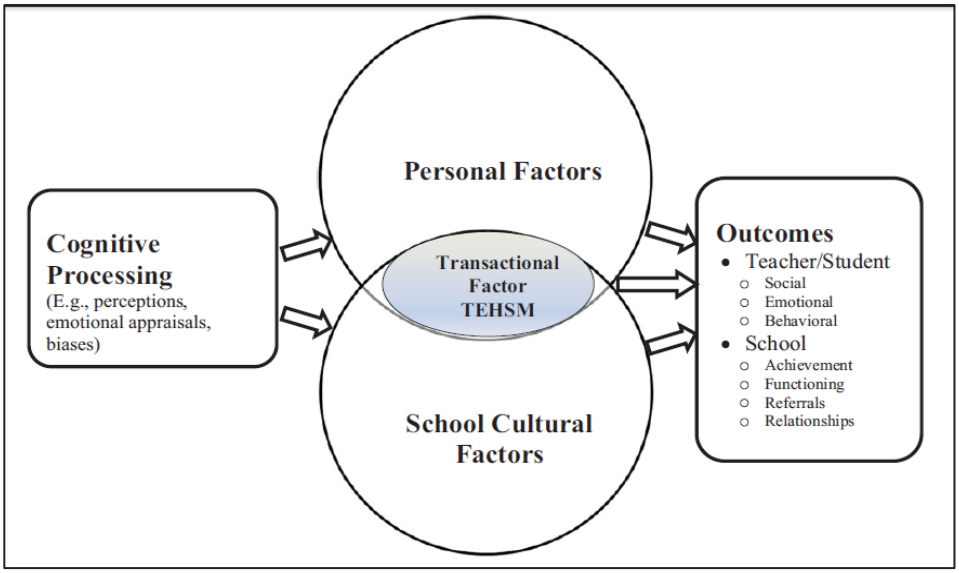
Jennings and Greenberg (2009) based their model in literature that discussed the factors involved in several of these variables. First, they asserted that positive outcomes have a foundation in strong school and community support as well as contextual factors. The model adds a given teacher's social emotional wellness to the system as integral to the development of an effective classroom climate. This climate is created through positive relationships with students, good classroom management, and the practice of social emotional education in class. Jennings and Greenberg noted that teachers need more support and training in the areas of recognizing the importance of attending to their own emotional wellbeing and techniques to reflect on and regulate their emotions. Finally, the model depicts the connections and feedback among these variables.

Perceived Self-Efficacy in Handling Student Misbehavior

Through the framework of Bandura's theoretical concept of self-efficacy, Tsouloupas et al. (2013) developed a specific conceptual model for researching teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy as they relate to PB, termed "Teachers Efficacy in Handling Student Misbehavior" (TEHSM). Using this model, the authors asserted that personal and environmental factors influence teachers' positive perceptions of their self-efficacy in regard to their ability to interact with children exhibiting PB. These factors are based in the perceptions, biases, and emotional appraisals of both the individual teacher and the system within which he or she works. The quality of a given teacher's perceptions of self-efficacy then influences the outcome for both teacher and student in regard to social emotional and behavioral health, and also influences outcomes for the school system.

Figure 2

Factors Affecting TEHSM



Tsouloupas et al. (2013) set out to measure which personal and environmental factors most influenced TEHSM. Personal factors researched included extroversion, conscientiousness,

neuroticism, and years of teaching experience, while emotional factors included student SES, principal support, collegial support, and job autonomy. Participants consisted of 344 teachers from three school districts in an undisclosed southeastern state. Of these teachers,178 worked in schools considered low SES, 97 taught at moderate SES schools, and 69 taught at high SES schools. In terms of gender, 295 were female while 51 were male, and in terms of race, 81% were Caucasian, 16% African American, and 3% other. All participants taught general education classes at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The researchers discovered a strong positive relationship between positive TEHSM and the school cultural factor of providing professional development opportunities such as training opportunities, seminars, and other educational activities. Teachers from more affluent schools had more positive TEHSM, and at the same time teachers from more affluent schools reported more professional development. The only personal factor to significantly influence TEHSM was extroversion. This evidence lends weight to the argument that significant disparity exists among schools based on the SES of the children in attendance (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

This study used a survey that limited the teachers' ability to express their full experience in regard to these factors. Participants may have endorsed an item that most fit their experience rather than having the ability to define factors most important to them. This study did have a large sample size, although the participants were mostly female (approximately 82%) and Caucasian (81%).

Student Support Systems

In a study surveying 318 teachers from four Ohio school districts, Ball and Anderson-Butcher (2014) used several surveys to measure teachers' stress levels in relation to student support systems. Ball and Anderson-Butcher suggested that teacher stress levels were

related to their perceptions of externalizing behaviors, the surrounding context, and the amount and level of support these children were provided through their schools. In their results, Ball and Anderson-Butcher found teachers reported moderately high levels of task stress, which was defined as stress related to performing a common task. Teachers reported high levels of school stress, which was defined as stress related to the school environment. Notably, teachers reporting more positive perceptions of the supports available to their students reported lower levels of stress in general. Also of note is Ball and Anderson-Butcher's finding that student internalizing behavior had zero effect on teacher stress. This finding is interesting when considering evidence that teachers lack a trained perception regarding internalizing behaviors in general, as discussed earlier in the Problematic Behavior Overview section of this literature review. Again, the authors point to a lack of research regarding teachers' perceptions and how they relate to levels of teacher stress.

One limitation of this study was the use of surveys, which may limit the scope of the perspective teachers were allowed to express. In addition, the sample size was small and homogeneous. The authors urged that further research studies use a more diverse sample and expand the geographical area of the inquiry to include more school districts.

Emotional Fatigue

O'Brennan et al. (2014) discussed research suggesting that teachers' experience of stress and emotional fatigue can adversely affect the quality of the relationships they build with their students and their overall job performance. This study focused on variables related to teachers' perceptions regarding classroom and school climate, reported PB, aspects of behavior, and teachers' use of classroom management strategies. O'Brennan et al. used data from a

longitudinal study of schoolwide prevention models that examined four school districts representing a range of socioeconomic demographics.

The researchers discovered a link between overall student performance and classrooms with children exhibiting PB. This discovery suggests children who attend such classrooms, even when not engaging in PB themselves, are at higher risk of poor academic and social outcomes. The researchers also discovered that teachers who viewed their school climate as supportive and collaborative reported less PB. The authors suggested that when schools exhibit prosocial and cooperative behavior as policy and practice, they provide students with positive modeling and create a climate in which they are more likely to exhibit the same types of behavior. The researchers also found a link between low SES and PB. They suggested that, in schools attended by children of low SES, underfunding and a lack of resources and supplies may constitute barriers to creating prosocial school climates in which both teachers and students are able to thrive.

One limitation of this study was, again, the use of surveys to define PBs and teachers' experience. Surveys limit teachers' input to predetermined categorical variables and may ignore important nuances and complexities of behavior and experience. Another limitation of this study was the area in which it was conducted. The information obtained by O'Brennan et al., (2013) is only relevant to the state of Maryland, and similar studies would need to be conducted in other U.S. areas before any findings could be generalized to the U.S. educational system at large. Although the area surveyed was limited, a diversity of SES and ethnicity among participant school districts did comprise a strength of this study.

Teachers' Anger and Enjoyment

Outside the U.S., a German study was conducted to determine the antecedents of teachers' most common emotions—anger and enjoyment. Becker et al. (2015) hypothesized that children's related experience of motivation and discipline level in the classroom would be positively related to teachers' experience of enjoyment and negatively to teachers' experience of anger. The researchers also hypothesized that a teacher's "appraisal of goal conduciveness" and "coping potential" (p. 3) would positively influence teacher enjoyment and negatively influence teacher anger (p. 3). Goal conduciveness refers to a lack of impediments to one's goal, while coping potential refers to the teacher's perceptions of a particular student's ability to control his or her actions.

Participants consisted of German teachers and high school level students. Teachers were provided journals that posed two questions regarding the two emotions and a Likert scale questionnaire for appraisals. Students were provided with journals consisting of Likert scale questions regarding motivation and several yes or no questions regarding level of cooperation and disruption during the lesson. Questionnaires were administered to both teachers and students directly after a math lesson for a period of two to three weeks. Students' reported feelings of motivation proved the most robust predictor of teachers' experience of enjoyment. This discovery coincides with earlier research based in teachers' perceptions of student motivation and experience of enjoyment.

In addition, Becker et al. (2015) found that teacher anger was most prevalent when students reported low levels of classroom discipline during a given lesson. This finding also coincides with previous research reporting teachers' experience of anger to be more prevalent when they perceive children to be disruptive.

In regard to the role of teachers' appraisals of coping potential and goal conduciveness, these two factors were found to be significant mediators for teachers' experience of anger as it relates to students' level of motivation. In regard to discipline level, teachers' appraisals of goal conduciveness and coping were found to partially mediate their experience of anger. These findings suggest that teachers may have a difficult time managing their emotions when experiencing PB, even when they understand the underlying context of the child in question.

One limitation of this study was, again, the use of predetermined information through survey journals to measure variables rather than allowing teachers' perspectives to emerge organically. Also, the participant teachers and students were at the high school level, which limits the generalizability to younger children or children studying other subjects. In addition, Becker et al. (2015) pointed out the use of self-report to be a limitation worth overcoming in future studies through the use of observers. Finally, Becker et al. acknowledged that the teachers were volunteers, which could indicate a higher level of functioning and engagement in teaching and classroom management.

Special Education Teachers

Cancio et al. (2013) conducted a study to determine how special education teachers who work with children experiencing emotional behavior disorders define administrative support. Special education teachers surveyed identified some of the main components of effective support as ongoing training, adequate resources, awareness of emotional behavioral issues by administration, and availability of support people. Conversely, special education teachers identified components that lead to feeling unsupported as administrative lack of awareness regarding emotional and mental health issues, lack of needed materials, lack of time to complete necessary tasks, and unsuitable disciplinary actions.

Increasing shortage of special education teachers. Cancio et al. (2013) reported a shortage of special education teachers who work with children experiencing emotional behavior disorders. They explained the reason for this shortage as a higher instance of job burnout and attrition among teachers specializing in this area with 33.3% of special education teachers resigning from their positions after three years (p. 72). Cancio et al. cited studies indicating that inadequate administrative support is a significant factor contributing to the lack of new teachers coming into this field and the retention of those already in it.

Relevance to current study. The main limitation of this study in regard to its relevance to this dissertation is the focus on special education teachers. This study was selected for inclusion in this discussion because the focus included teachers' experience in relationship to PB, the context of that behavior, and the support teachers do or do not receive from their school administration. It stands to reason that if special education teachers experience feelings of stress and lack of support regarding PB, mainstream classroom teachers would have similar experiences.

Teacher Coaches

Several studies discussed the support component of ongoing coaching for teachers in providing positive behavior supports to children exhibiting PB. Coaching refers to tapping the input of an expertise in such areas as behavior, mental health, and social emotional wellness of a teacher who provides support such as feedback and suggestions to help teachers overcome struggles with intervention implementation (Domitrovich et al., 2016; Stormont et al., 2015).

Coaching and adherence to protocol. Stormont et al. (2015) conducted a review of literature containing coaching as an element of positive behavior intervention implementation. Stormont et al. were interested in how coaching affected a teacher's ability to adhere to the

protocol of a particular evidence-based intervention. In their review, Stormont et al. determined coaching to be an effective component of training for teachers, specifically in that it led to more fidelity to intervention protocols and overall use of learned skills. The authors suggested that a particularly significant component of coaching was the use of feedback. This observation is consistent with literature regarding teachers' views of effective and desired administrative support, as discussed above (Cancio et al., 2013). The authors asserted that more research is needed to explore this and other aspects of coaching. Other conversations within educational and psychological literature regarding the overall effectiveness of coaching suggests the benefits of this type of support could prove important to the effectiveness of a teacher as well as his or her overall wellbeing and sense of efficacy.

Coaching and perceived self-efficacy. Domitrovich et al. (2016), in the introduction to a study exploring the impact of two school-based prevention programs on factors related to teacher wellness, discussed research that explored the impact of a coaching component within positive support programs and their connection to teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. The researchers articulated a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits coaching may provide, pointing out that when teachers are supported through coaching, they receive both social and emotional support and practical advice regarding intervention implementation. The experience of social emotional support may empower teachers to explore new skills and feel more confident disclosing those areas in which they may be struggling. Domitrovich et al. pointed out that the coach-teacher relationship can enhance feelings of competence and efficacy for teachers, which can then lead to more engagement with program implementation, and ultimately a reduction in PB. In addition to support in the form of coaching, effective psychoeducational training in social

emotional wellness and interventions regarding PB comprise an integral part of teachers' feelings of efficacy and overall wellbeing.

Coaching and teacher-student relationships. Hafen et al. (2015) investigated the use of teacher coaching relative to the complex relationship between teacher and student. The authors asserted that the relationships teachers create with their students affect the way they interact with children in their classroom. In turn, this relationship and subsequent interactions affect students both explicitly and implicitly, in that this relationship leaves a lasting impression on the development of their academic success and social emotional wellness. The authors discussed research suggesting that interactions occurring early in the school year shape the relationship teachers form with students. In addition, students tend to perform to teachers' expectations, which creates a feedback loop whereby teachers tend to form these lasting opinions and expectations of students early on, and students tend to perform and behave to those expectations throughout the school year. Such a feedback loop, the authors suggest, can have a lasting impact on how students connect to their school and education over time. Hafen et al. hypothesized that students' exhibitions of disruptive behavior at the beginning of the school year would impact teachers' level of support for the student throughout the school year.

Hafen et al. (2015) also hypothesized that participation in a coaching program would impact teachers' projections of student future performance in the spring (end of school year), noting a significant lack of support in the form of training for teachers regarding the developmental context of children exhibiting PB. They suggested that such training may help to arrest the cycle of deleterious feedback loops and foster teaching strategies and techniques that are more sensitive to the developmental context of student behaviors.

The coaching program referenced in this study was implemented by expert teachers who were previously trained and proficient in both teaching and coaching classes for fellow teachers. The coaching process focused on aspects of student-teacher relationships and specifics of implementation within the framework of the program. Teachers participating in the program also viewed video tapes of previously trained teachers effectively implementing the program in their classrooms. Throughout the school year, participants received ongoing coaching and redirection from the expert teachers.

The outcomes of this study confirmed the initial hypotheses. Hafen et al. (2015) found that the PB a given student exhibits at the beginning of the year does have an adverse impact on how they are supported during the school year. In this way, students experience a downward trajectory in regard to PB, academic achievement, and the opportunity to receive supportive and developmentally sensitive intervention. Hafen et al. also asserted that early intervention, support from other successful teachers, and opportunities to reflect on their interactions, attributions, and reactions to student behavior aided teachers in their understanding of students. These coaching supports, they maintained, combined with education regarding the developmental context underlying PB, can help to break negative feedback loops and change the trajectory of student success.

Hafen et al. (2015) acknowledged several limitations to this study. The first limitation was the duration of the study, in that student progress was measured through only one school year. Continuing to follow the students through future development could provide a broader picture of how their actual progress is impacted throughout their education and reveal possible resiliency factors. The second limitation was a lack of measurement in regard to potential bias. Hafen et al. suggested that future studies involving this coaching program could focus on a

diversity of context. The third limitation was the use of scaled measures with limited information narrowing the context of the evaluations. Teachers' projections of student outcomes were measured using a one-item scale, thus restricting the input of teachers' experience and perception regarding a particular child. Although this study did reveal important aspects of how teachers respond to and impact student outcome in reaction to PB, these limitations restrict access to a broader picture of how teachers experience children exhibiting PB.

Mental Health Training

Several studies examined issues related to mental health training for teachers and school administrators.

Perceived Barriers to Addressing Students' Mental Health Context

In a Norwegian study, Ekornes (2015) set out to discover how teachers of children in grades 8–13 understood their collaborative role in mental health provision and prevention in their school, and the barriers to fulfilling that role. The researcher used a mixed method research design using focus groups and a follow-up survey. Themes explored in the focus group sessions included perceived competence in mental health, tension between policy and profession, school organization, interprofessional and parental collaboration, and school culture. The follow-up survey included Likert scale items as well as open-ended questions.

Results revealed that teachers felt collaboration with mental health professionals was necessary to ensure the effectiveness of their work with children exhibiting PB rooted in mental health problems. In addition to collaboration with mental health professionals, administrative support for mainstream teachers was also integral to teachers' success in this area, Ekornes (2015) asserted. The author maintained such support would require that those involved in

administration receive training to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues involved with PB and mental health.

Ekornes (2015) listed elements arising from both survey information and focus group interactions that teachers commonly indicated were barriers to effectively addressing the mental health issues of children in their classrooms. The most commonly experienced barrier was related to communication and confidentiality. Teachers indicted that although they were free to share any information in communication with mental health professionals, they were unable to attain valuable information from these interactions due to mental health professionals' constraints regarding confidentiality. This lack of information impeded communication between the parties and kept valuable information away from teachers, limiting their ability to effectively address incidence of difficult behavior.

In addition to confidentiality and communication, teachers indicated time as a major factor in managing teaching tasks, interpersonal relationships, and individual attention to students. Time was also mentioned in relation to children receiving services in school and also interacting with a lack of staff dedicated to mental health concerns.

The third most commonly mentioned barrier related to the idea that teachers perceive they have a very different contextual understanding of their students than do mental health professionals. Teachers expressed the belief that mental health professionals would gain important insights from spending time in the classrooms of the children they work with. And in fact, teachers commonly mentioned they rarely get contact with mental health professionals outside of crisis situations. Another frequently discussed barrier was a lack of leadership in creating collaborations between education and mental health systems. Teachers also indicated

they lacked the knowledge and understanding of how to identify mental health problems and how to effectively interact with children who have already been diagnosed.

On a Likert measure of teachers' self-reported competence and understanding of student mental health, 97% of participating teachers agreed that they have difficulty gauging the scope of children's mental health problems, and 83% agreed that they have difficulty differentiating the mental health concerns of their students. Qualitative responses revealed that teachers felt inadequate training was a particular problem and indicated that more training provided by mental health professionals and physicians would be most efficacious (Ekornes, 2015, p. 200).

While the use of qualitative methods revealed a more relevant, nuanced view of teachers' experience of working with children exhibiting PB, the findings are limited to the Norwegian educational system. The questions in general were also focused directly on teachers' roles in mental health delivery systems rather than taking an overall look at teachers' experience working with children exhibiting PB and the support they receive from the educational system, which may reveal unexplored aspects of their experience.

Cognitive Behavioral-Focused Training

In a qualitative study conducted to assess teachers' perspectives regarding their role in the implementation of a cognitive behavioral-focused program designed to provide early intervention for trauma, Baweja et al. (2016) interviewed teachers, clinicians, and administrative staff. The participants worked in schools located in either the Western, Midwestern, or Southern region of the U.S. that had participated in the program for at least one year. Baweja et al. discussed the integral role teachers play in the effective implementation of any mental health program provided through the school system. They stressed that in order to ensure effective program implementation, teachers need to believe that these programs work and that their own

roles in them are effective. Research on teachers' perspectives on what they need to fulfill this role is underrepresented in the current body of research.

The results of this study revealed that teachers felt they needed more feedback regarding the progress children were making within the program. Teachers expressed a need for more direct communication with mental health clinicians who were carrying out the interventions with their students. Clinicians reported a lack of time and coordination pose the most significant barriers to their ability to communicate regularly and directly with teachers. Baweja et al. (2016) suggested that more time for collaboration between teachers and clinicians as well as comprehensive training regarding PB and academic outcomes would be necessary to bridge these gaps.

The findings of Baweja et al. (2016) provided more support for this study's contention that training and collaboration with experts is wanted and needed by teachers. It also revealed a need for more information from teachers regarding how they interact with children and support systems for children who are exhibiting PB. The main limitation of this study is the fact that it was conducted based on a particular program implemented to address the problems specific to children who have experienced trauma.

Teacher Awareness of Extant School-Based Supports

Stormont, Reinke, and Herman (2011) surveyed 239 educators in early childhood and primary school with varied levels of education and teaching experience. The researchers focused their inquiry on teachers' knowledge of evidence-based interventions with children experiencing emotional behavior problems and their knowledge of supports made available to them by the educational systems within which they worked. The findings of this survey revealed that 57% of teachers surveyed were unaware of the availability of functional behavioral assessment or

intervention provided by their schools. In addition, a significant number of teachers surveyed were not aware their schools collected mental health data in the areas of functional behavioral assessment, the specifics of problems experienced by students, services provided by the school, demographics of students receiving services, prevalence of problems within the student body, teachers and staff who have received training, and the effectiveness of programs provided by their school.

These numbers underscore questions regarding how well teachers are informed of ways in which the systems around them operate to support their needs regarding PB. If teachers are not aware of those supports that are currently available to them, they will be unable to access these supports. The results of Stormont et al. (2011) are limited in their relationship to this dissertation because the study included no discussion of how teachers conceptualize, understand, or experience the supports they receive or do not receive.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

The goal of this research project was to discover how public elementary and middle school teachers experience students' problematic behavior (PB), the supports they consider most effective, and whether or not these supports are present or missing from the educational systems in which they work. I employed a qualitative phenomenological method, using a Post-Intentional Phenomenology (PIP) approach. Phenomenology as a research method focuses on the study of participants' lived experience relative to the topic under investigation. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research is best suited for studies exploring the shared, lived experience of multiple individuals interacting with a particular phenomenon and is useful for developing policies, procedures, and practices to address that phenomenon.

As argued in the literature review portion of this dissertation, evidence suggests current educational policies lack grounding in qualitative data gleaned from teachers' experience with the phenomenon of PB in the classroom. The literature review also demonstrated a gap in qualitative research regarding how teachers experience existing support from the educational system in regard to managing students' PB in the classroom. By employing a phenomenological approach, this study contributes an added dimension to the extant literature for which the norm of inquiry has been quantitative in nature, relying heavily on data gathered via surveys. While surveys are useful, they may be inherently biased because they assume a set of predefined constructs not necessarily applicable to the context of participants' lived experience (Näslund, 2002). As such, this phenomenological inquiry seeks to provide insight into the teachers' lived experience, within the context of the current political climate, as it relates to discourse within the educational system for which they work.

The PIP research process does not differ from traditional phenomenological research in the procedural way data is collected and aggregated. Instead, PIP is concerned with the idea of *throughness*, which recognizes individuals are influenced by a myriad of social contexts. It is through these diverse, shifting, and sometimes overlapping contexts that experience and meaning are in an endless process of evolution (Vagle, 2014). PIP requires the researcher to move through the data collection, analysis, and discussion process with a focus on the idea of throughness. For this research project, PIP provided a framework for inquiry that allowed the subjects' experience to be brought forth in terms of what *they* feel is meaningful in the specific cultural moment the interview took place. This approach also allowed participants to discuss their experiences, framed by their own cultural and historical context, accessing their own beliefs and principles.

Research Design

Participants

Selection criteria. Six general education, elementary, and middle school teachers were recruited from six different school districts in Western Washington, Oregon, and California. All participants were female. Participants were screened for eligibility using selection criteria in Appendix A.

Recruitment procedure. All public-school teachers of elementary or middle school children who met the criteria listed above were eligible for selection.

Referral procedure. Individuals from three school districts were identified through my personal and professional relationships to serve as initial points of contact. These individuals were general education teachers, a school nurse, and a school nutritional service employee. The contact persons distributed informational recruitment flyers (Appendix B) to teachers. Teachers were then free to respond to the flyer by contacting me when they decided to participate. No

direct contact regarding participation in this research was made prior to recruitment by either me or the contact individuals on school grounds, or at any school district sponsored event.

Snowball sampling. After at least one initial contact participant was identified, snowball sampling was employed, such that current participants referred other interested and eligible participants. Participants referring others to the study then took on the role of contact persons and were subject to the procedures for referrals listed above.

Participant contact. A recruitment flyer (Appendix B) was distributed to teachers with a contact phone number and email address. This flyer was posted by several participating teachers on Instagram. When an interested participant responded, I contacted them via phone, asked screening questions (Appendix A), and scheduled an interview. An informed consent form (Appendix C) was presented, explained, and signed before the interview. For interviews conducted by phone, the participants were mailed the informed consent form and the consent form was signed and mailed back using a self-addressed stamped envelope. Before the phone interviews began, I asked the participants if they had read and understood the consent form and obtained verbal confirmation of consent and understanding.

Interviews

Open-ended interviews with follow-up questions. Unstructured, in-depth interviews were conducted in person and over the phone. In-person interviews were conducted at a place of the participant's choosing. For in-person interviews the place chosen by the participant was required to provide a quiet, confidential space for the interview to take place. Participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions or discuss any concerns they might have.

Four qualitative, open-ended questions were adapted from Moustakas (as per Creswell & Poth, 2018) for the interview (Appendix D). Follow-up questions were used to clarify or expand

upon information provided and were based on the individual context of the interviewees' answers. Each interview lasted for approximately 1–2 hours and ended when the participant felt she had completed explaining her experience.

Follow-up interviews. After I was done with the initial analysis, I attempted to contact participants for follow-up interviews with the intension of clarifying understanding and allowing participants to expand on concepts or add context to their initial interviews. Only three participants responded after multiple attempts, and only two follow-up interviews were conducted. Although not all participants participated in the follow-up interviews, there was enough information with supporting context within the initial interviews to conduct analysis. In addition, both participants that participated in follow up interviews had a hard time recalling the details of their meanings from their first interviews. This lack of recall, even when hearing verbatim transcription, demonstrated the concept of the thoroughness of meaning as described in PIP. The circumstances surrounding the individual interviews, the wholeness of the discussion in relation to memory recall, and the time and events that occurred in the lives of the participants are a few examples of changes in context between the initial interviews and the follow up interviews.

Audiotapes of in-depth interviews. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and backed up with a computer recoding program. One copy of the digital recording was saved as an encrypted password protected MP3 file using the Boxcryptor program, then stored in the encrypted password protected cloud Dropbox (after which all other copies were deleted). The purpose of the audio recordings was to enable listening carefully to the interviews as many times as necessary to identify information units for coding, to use in written transcription of each interview, and to refer back to when I needed to clarify contextual

information that only the voice recordings could provide. When not in use, the digital recorder was stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office.

Bridling Journal

Because this phenomenological research investigated the lived experience of others, the way each participant conveyed ideas and the way these ideas were understood and interpreted by me comprise an integral sphere of the research process (Dahlberg, 2006; Vagle, 2014). Typically, when conducting phenomenological research, the researcher engages in *bracketing*, which refers to the practice of examining her own views and experiences relating to aspects of the research project in order to recognize and detach from any of her own preconceived understandings or biases, encouraging her to view the presented information from a "fresh perspective" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78).

As Dahlberg (2006) asserts, beyond bracketing, *bridling* fosters a more comprehensive and active approach, affording the researcher a broader effort to find meaning and examine the structures and frameworks that shape it. Dahlberg explains, working with meaning involves "adopting a phenomenological attitude" to be achieved through bridling (p. 16). Bridling allows preconceived understandings of the researcher to be restrained rather than cut off, as is attempted in bracketing. Such restraint allows researchers to remain open, and present to, various aspects of themselves, the participant, the phenomenon, and its meaning, thus priming the researchers' curiosity as they actively wait for nuanced aspects of meaning to emerge from the research process. Bridling calls for mindfulness of preconceived understandings relative to all aspects of the phenomenon, including the relationships between not only the participant and the phenomenon but also the researcher and the participant. In this way, bridling plays a crucial role

in phenomenological research from a post-intentional perspective as it allows the exploration of meaning itself to contribute a vivid dimension to the research and the researcher's understanding.

Incorporating a part of Vagle's (2014) PIP research methodology, I created a bridling journal, initiated at the outset of the proposal process and supplemented throughout each stage of the dissertation process to document an ongoing examination of preconceived understandings and the context in which they are framed. The first entry consists of an initial reflection into my connection to the phenomenon and the population of participants. This statement was revisited throughout the research process and provided grounding when I was engaged in interviewing and attending to my preconceived understandings.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis calls for a *whole-part-whole* approach to analyzing qualitative data (Vagle, 2014, p. 97). By examining data in its entirety, the researcher begins to identify and distinguish themes from the whole, separating these parts from their original surroundings. Having examined each part individually, the researcher then begins to weave common themes together, creating a whole that reveals new meaning in relation to the phenomenon.

Data analysis for this research project began as I transcribed each interview. Transcription was completed as soon as possible after the interview. To ensure accuracy, once the transcriptions were complete, the transcripts were read while simultaneously listening to recorded interviews and errors were corrected. After the interviews were accurately transcribed, they were read through in their entirety, as is suggested by Vagle (2014), to ensure the data were considered as a whole before being broken into parts by reading each individual interview.

For the first step of the analysis process I read all transcripts twice as a whole and then several times individually to help me immerse myself in the data. After the first reading of the transcript, I wrote reflexive notes in the margins of the transcripts to organize my thoughts for later steps in the analysis process. These reflexive notes were sometimes added to my bridling journal and used in the bridling process.

I then identified and highlighted meaning units. *Meaning units* are chunks, paragraphs, or quotes from an interview containing information related to the experience of PB and support and the intentionality of the participant. Meaning units were identified with codes that were noted in the margins of the transcripts. *Codes* are words and sentences that describe the content and context of the meaning units. The interviews were then reread to make sure that all contextual information relating to a meaning unit or code was included. This step was taken to ensure that intentionality related to the experience was emphasized rather than subjective experience (Vagle, 2014).

At this point in the analysis process I created follow-up questions designed to gain more insight into a concept and offer the participant the opportunity to expand on a concept they spoke about or clarify meaning. Follow-up interview requests were made, and interviews were scheduled as participants responded. Three participants initially responded to the request for follow-up interviews and two scheduled. Both follow-up interviews were conducted by phone as requested by participants. The follow-up interviews were transcribed, read, and meaning units were highlighted and coded and reflexive notes were created as described above. conducted.

The next step in the process was to use codes to arrange the meaning units under themes. The themes were created to organize the meaning units. Meaning units were clustered under themes in a document. Some meaning units were placed under more than one theme. At this

point I examined the meaning units for relevance to the themes they were assigned to and I removed any extraneous or redundant information.

The next step in the analytic process was to look for what did not fit or make sense. I did this by paying attention to my reflexive notes and codes to find places where data might fit too neatly into a theme. I then employed alternative perspectives to challenge or expand that theme or discover new themes. This process was employed multiple times throughout the analysis and writing process. This sometimes required me to reread the transcripts to look for portions that may have relevant information not included in the original meaning unit. When relevant portions were found, they were used to amend an existing meaning unit or create a new one.

Chapter IV, the text presenting the results was crafted to present the information under themes. The themes were arranged to provide an optimal flow of information within the dissertation format.

Chapter V, the text presenting a discussion of the results, considered the results within the framework of several theories, and discussions of the reflexive process, limitations, and recommendations for future research were included.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout all phases of this dissertation project I adhered to ethical principles and codes of conduct set forth by the American Psychological Association.

Current Risks

Although unforeseeable risks are associated with any research project, the following presents a list of anticipated risks for this study and how they were addressed.

Jeopardizing job security. Participants were asked to share details regarding their experience with support from the educational system. This experience included discussions of

interactions with those who have control over their employment. Because of this, a risk exists that if a given participant is identified by an employer, that participant may suffer repercussions at work.

This risk was addressed in several ways. First, participant interviews and data were kept confidential. Details of how data was kept confidential is discussed below. Next, the interviews were conducted in a confidential area agreed upon by both me and the interviewee. Participant input into the selection of a secure location served not only to provide a safely confidential area within a given community but also to mitigate possible anxiety or stress related to disclosure. I strove to enter into a collaborative rapport with the participants, by means of which a greater sense of mutual trust could be achieved. Finally, the participant quotes included within the dissertation contained no identifying markers. I reread quotes specifically to look for and remove identifying information. I also presented the quotes ambiguously removing individualizing labels such as, teacher one, teacher two, to prevent the reader from tracking several responses that together may lead to identifying information such linking experiences expressed by the same teacher or language use such as slang. This step allowed me to include quotes that contained important information in a way that made it harder to connect quotes within the text to one particular participant.

Triggering trauma recall. If a given participant has suffered distress from their experiences, either from the educational system or from individuals exhibiting PB as discussed in the Preservice Training section of Chapter II, there is a risk that this distress may be intensified or reinvigorated by the interview process.

This risk was addressed by the interview design. The participant letter contained a statement indicating a teacher may end an interview at any time for any reason. Teachers also

had the option to opt out of having their interview included in the research project for any reason. In addition, lists of therapy and support resources specific to the areas in which the participants lived were provided. I generated these resource lists after a participant confirmed an interview and her or his area was identified to ensure that local relevant resources were provided. Because participants hailed from school districts and communities across western Washington, Oregon, and California, the available resources varied. The participants were offered the list at the end of the interview. Only one participant accepted the resource list.

Extended Risks

To address future risks of breach of confidentiality, all raw data were kept secure and stored in an encrypted password protected file in an encrypted password protected cloud. As teachers provided referrals for snowball sampling, another risk arose that teachers would be able to identify fellow teachers who have agreed to participate. Having all referrals provide recruitment flyers to all of the teachers they knew prevented participants from having direct knowledge of which teachers may have chosen to participate in the study.

Risks Versus Benefits

This research project was intended to provide teachers a confidential outlet through which to share their voices and begin to gain power because their experiences would be used to inform research, policy, and the narrative of progress within the larger educational system. As discussed in the literature review of this dissertation, links among teachers' wellbeing, feelings of self-efficacy, and social emotional wellness have been consistently related to positive outcomes for students. In addition, the information gleaned from this research project could contribute an added perspective on the essence of PB to current discourse within the educational and psychological disciplines. Any remaining risks associated with participating in this research

project were outweighed by the potential benefits of this exploration of teachers' individual and shared experience. Although these risks remain significant, it is possible that participating in a project aimed at lending strength and meaning to teachers' experiences may serve to offset the risks.

Provisions for Privacy of Data

All consent forms and written data sources were scanned and stored on the encrypted password protected cloud Dropbox in password protected files. Audio recordings were encrypted and password protected using the Boxcryptor program and stored in the password protected and encrypted cloud Dropbox. All hard copies were kept in a locked office in a locked file and destroyed upon the conclusion of this study. To further protect participant identity, all participants were assigned a color. This color was used on notes and data generation. I reviewed the final dissertation document to scan for any information that might lead to the identity of any participant. Any identifying information was removed.

Validity

The definitions and explanations of validity in qualitative research vary (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Terrell, 2016; Vagle, 2014). The underlying constructs that guide the discussion of validity in qualitative terms include dependability, the ability to verify data, the relevance and quality of inquiry and analysis within the study, and the integrity of the researcher. Creswell and Poth (2018) point out several strategies used for validation in qualitative research. The following sections describe strategies by means of which this research project addressed validation.

Discovering a Negative Case Analysis or Disconfirming Evidence

Discovering a negative case analysis or disconfirming evidence refers to a strategy employed in this research project as I made an active effort to look for information that contradicted my analysis.

Clarifying Research Bias

Clarifying research bias is a strategy addressed in this research project through the use of bridling, as explained in further detail in the Bridling Journal section above.

Member Checking

Member checking involves confirming and clarifying the researcher's understanding with participants. This strategy was employed in multiple instances throughout the project. During the initial interview, participants were asked clarifying questions. After the initial transcription and coding, a second interview was conducted to clarify and verify any ambiguous or unclear information.

Having a Prolonged Engagement

Having a prolonged engagement refers to the level of depth with which the researcher engages with the participant. Although this project involved a limited face-to-face or phone interview period, participants were encouraged to contact me at any time to ask questions and be informed of the progress of the project.

Collaborating with Participants

Collaborating with participants refers to establishment of a cooperative, collaborative rapport between the researcher and participants. This research project was presented as a way for teachers to engage in the discourse around their interactions with children's PB. The participant letter was worded in a manner that invited partnership in the project and discussed the aim of the

study as providing a space for teachers to participate in the discourse surrounding issues in which they have expert knowledge. The use of phenomenology as a methodology inherently encourages collaboration in that the research can take place only via partnership with those who have experienced a phenomenon. In addition, an emphasis was placed on creating and developing a collaborative relationship through the researcher introduction letter and genuine communication between the participants and me.

Enabling External Audits

Enabling external audits refers to method checking by knowledgeable others during the course of the study. As part of the analysis process for this study, several Psy.D. and Ph.D student colleagues were consulted and asked for critical feedback throughout the analysis process. This action helped me process information with input from multiple perspectives. These perspective helped me to identify and counter any bias or misunderstandings that might have occurred had the study been limited to the perspective of a single researcher.

Generating Rich, Thick Descriptions

Generating rich, thick descriptions was achieved in several ways. First, the text itself presents the findings using a combination of paraphrasing, direct quotations, and my interpretations. Secondly, the text was presented to interweave insights from multiple references in order to enrich discussion of the data (Vagle, 2014). Touching on the theories and previous research discussed at length in the literature review, incorporating the current political climate, and including a section discussing my bridling process, this research study attempted to weave together multiple strands and perspectives and yield an enriched discussion as well as fulfill the theoretical tenets of PIP.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

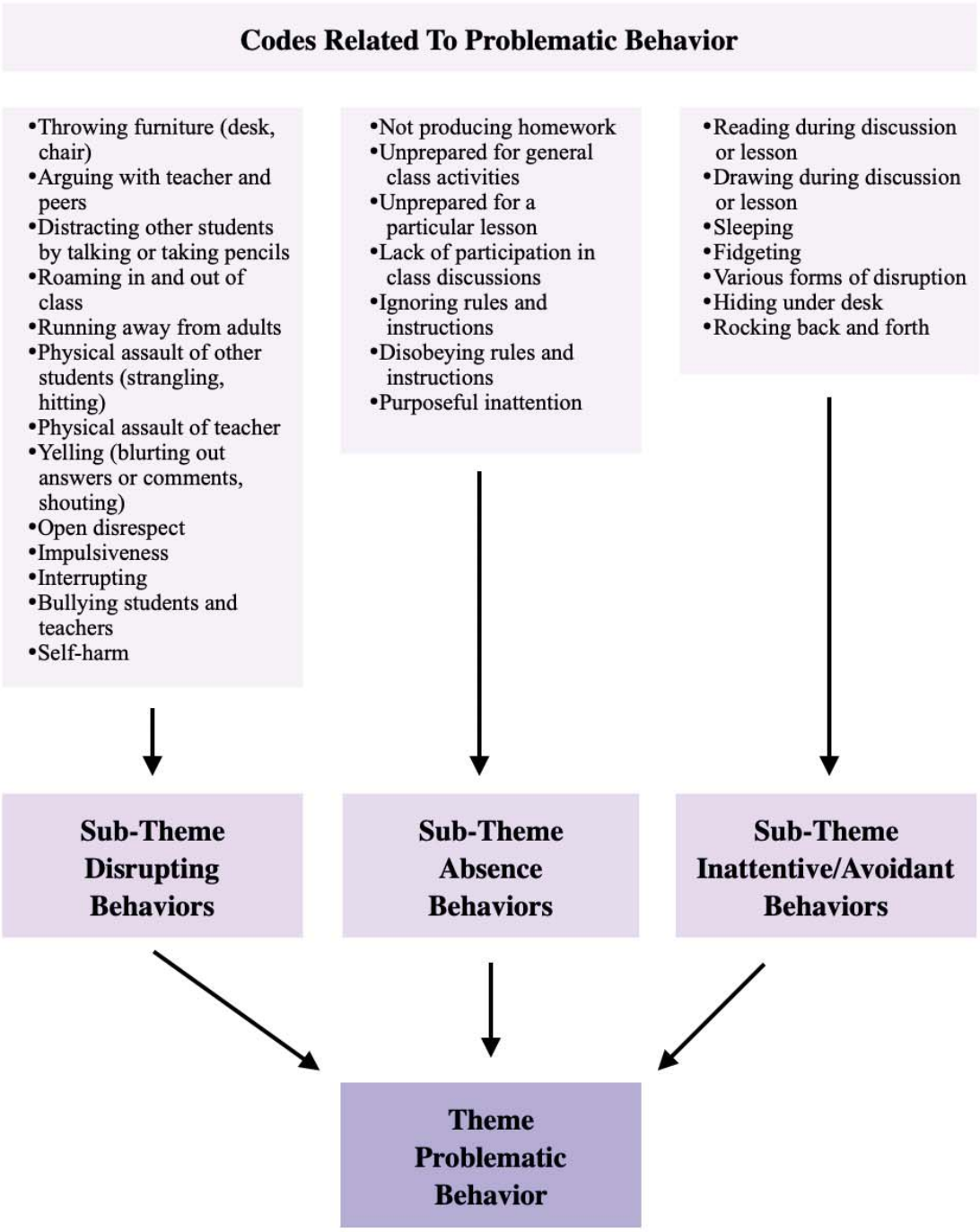
This chapter gathers the information relevant to the research questions that was gleaned from the interviews. I read all the interviews together as a whole document and then individually. I then identified meaning units and coded the meaning units and arranged these codes into themes across interviews. As information was arranged and refined, more themes emerged or were separated. These actions did not occur in a linear fashion. Coding and theme editing as well as revisiting original transcripts and reflexive bridling were carried out at all stages of the analytic process. The final results were organized into Twelve themes and arranged with a phenomenological lens within a post-intentional phenomenological framework to best address the research questions and provide optimal flow from one theme to the next. The themes presented below in the results chapter are as follows: Theme One, Experienced Behaviors; Theme Two, Impact of Problematic Behavior; Theme Three, Teachers Causal Attributions for PB; Theme Four, Individual Context; Theme Five, Teachers Experience of Emotion; Theme Six, Coping; Theme Seven, Relationships; Theme Eight, Class Size; Theme Nine Agency and Efficacy; Theme Ten Expectations and Duties; Theme Eleven, Help from the Educational System; Theme Twelve, Intervention.

Theme One: Problematic Behaviors

Participants' descriptions of specific problematic behaviors (PB) were discussed throughout the interviews and were organized from specific behaviors (codes) into three subthemes before being organized into the theme of Problematic Behaviors: The subthemes were disrupting behaviors, absence behaviors, and inattentive/avoidant behaviors (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Thematic flow of Problematic Behavior



Disrupting Behaviors

The subtheme of disrupting behaviors in which children act out were described as throwing furniture (desk, chair), arguing with teacher and peers, disrupting other students by talking or taking pencils, roaming in and out of class, running away from adults, physical assault of other students (strangling, hitting), physical assault of teacher, yelling (blurting out answers or comments, shouting), open disrespect, impulsiveness, interrupting, bullying students and teachers, and self-harm. One participant recalled a particularly impactful instance of self-harm, "I've been in a classroom where somebody shoved a paperclip through their ear just to get out of class."

Absence Behaviors

The second subtheme of experienced PB was absence behaviors. *Absence behaviors* are defined as an absence of compliant behavior. These behaviors included not producing homework, being unprepared for general class activities or a particular lesson, lack of participation in class discussions, ignoring and disobeying rules and instructions, and purposeful inattention when being spoken to.

Inattentive Disrupting Behaviors

The next subtheme of PB experienced by participants was conceptualized as both inattentive and avoidant behaviors. This conceptualization is dependent on the attribution teachers made regarding the particular student exhibiting the behavior. These behaviors were defined as reading and drawing during a discussion or lesson, sleeping, fidgeting, various forms of disruption, hiding under a desk, and rocking back and forth.

In addition to children's behavior, several participants spoke about parental behavior when discussing the concepts of PB. One participant stated, "So typically for me the problems are the adults more so than the kids. Adults, parents, other teachers not taking the initiative to listen and find out what is going on with the child." One participant described a defensiveness she experienced from parents. She presented a specific example of this defensiveness when trying to suggest a parent read with their child at home. "I noticed his reading has been even lower, so I'm like 'Can you guys read at home?' … and she's like 'How dare you say I don't read to my kid.'" The experience of parental behavior and its impact is discussed further in the section "Theme Seven: Relationships" below.

Theme Two: Impact of Problematic Behavior

Problematic behaviors have a direct impact on what is happening in the classroom at any given time. Participants spoke about how the context of what is happening in the moment is an important concept to consider when experiencing the intensity of a given behavior. When PB is exhibited at crucial times in the teaching process, the impact can be widespread and manifest in varying presentations of disruption and consequence. Participants reported that their intentions for instruction and flow of classroom activities for the day can be disrupted in several ways (Table 2). The stated impacts of PB were as follows: takes away from teaching time, derails other students, takes time (teaching, clarifying information missed from inattention) and attention away from other kids, derails lesson plans, and compromises the physical and emotional safety of other children. One participant gave an example of how the PB of one child can impact many aspects of the whole class, "I had to empty the classroom three times because of his behavior. It was dangerous it wasn't safe for the kids."

In addition to clearly stated impacts on the classroom, participants indicated that PB had a significant impact on the overall atmosphere of classroom culture and community. The themes of classroom culture and community are directly and peripherally shaped by PB and how it is addressed by the individual teacher, other students, and the educational system. The concepts of classroom culture and community will be discussed throughout this paper.

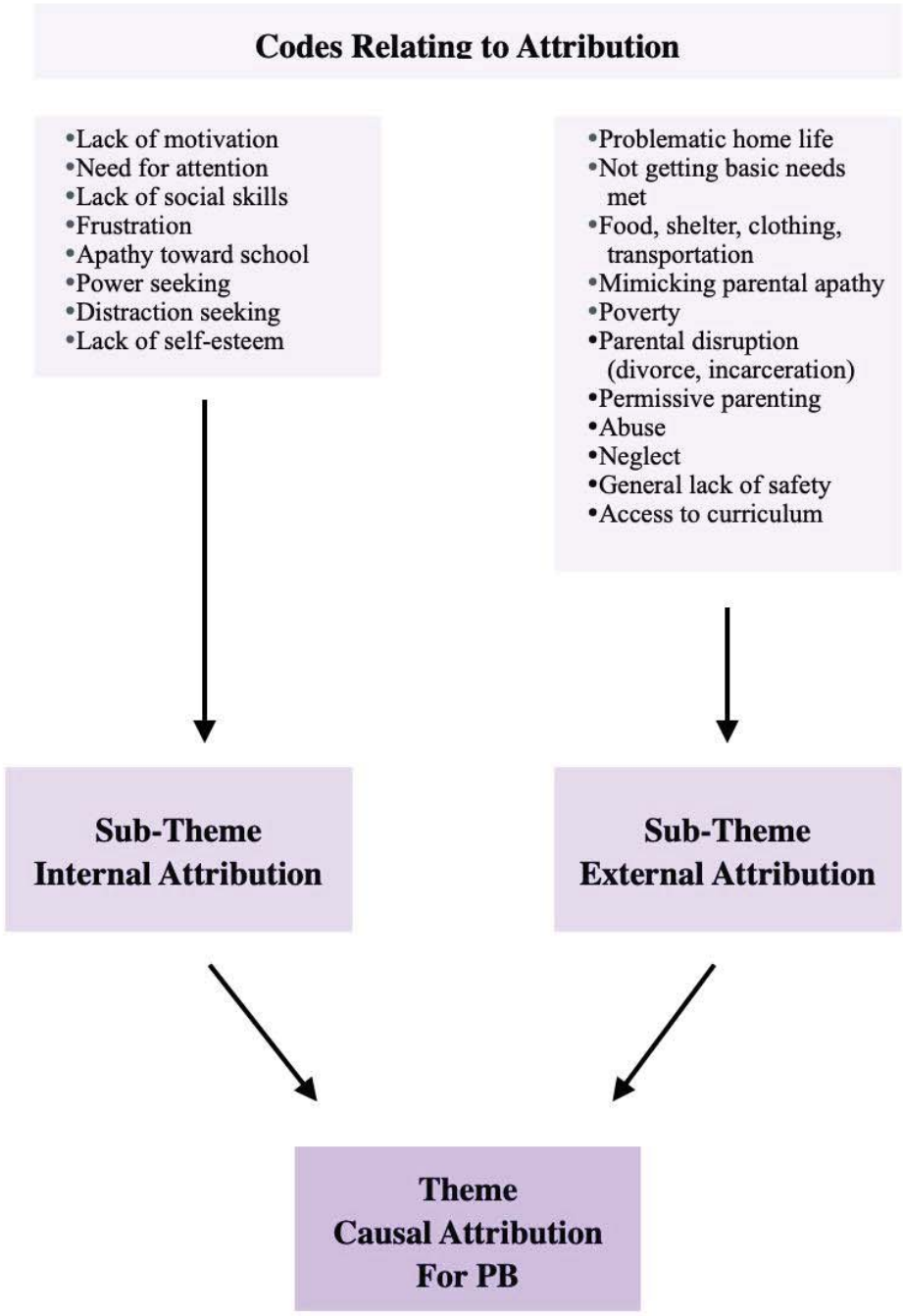
In addition to immediate impacts on the flow of a particular school day, PB has personal effects on teachers. All participants described how they experienced personal consequences from the impact of PB. The personal consequences participants experienced will be discussed more in depth throughout this document.

Theme Three: Teachers' Causal Attributions for PB

Teachers make many attributions for the PB they experience from students. Attributions are defined as the understanding of the reasons or causes for PB exhibited by a particular child. The theme of Causal Attributions for PB emerges from two sub-themes. These sub-themes were Internal Attributions and External Attributions. The flow of thematic analysis in regard to the theme of Causal Attributions for PB and are represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Thematic Flow of Causal Attribution



Internal Attributions

Internal attributions are defined as dynamics within the child that influence or lead to PB. External attributions are defined as environmental and contextual factors that influence or lead to PB. Internal attributions made by teachers in these interviews were sometimes secondary to, and sometimes separated from, more in-depth external attributions. Some of the internal attributions teachers made included lack of motivation, need for attention, lack of social skills, frustration, apathy toward school, power seeking, distraction seeking, and lack of self-esteem.

External Attributions

The external attributions teachers made were as follows: problematic home life; not getting basic needs met like food, shelter, clothing, or transportation; mimicking parental apathy toward their schooling; access to curriculum; poverty; permissive parenting; abuse; neglect; and a general lack of safety.

Participants discussed several personal factors they possess that served as the basis for how they came to make attributions for PB. These included interactions with family members with PB, experience with adverse life events, lack of experience with difficulty and PB, multicultural experience, training, cumulative experience with PB, and years of experience as a teacher. These personal factors directly relate to how teachers cope with PB. Participant coping with PB will be discussed in a separate section.

Theme Four: Individual Context

Several participants discussed the concept and experience of children's behavior and context and how it differentiated from what is considered "normal" for a particular age, diagnosis, or circumstance. This differentiation was seen as leading to difficulties for teachers when trying to get children evaluated or when using an evidence-based intervention.

One participant offered this experience when trying to get help for one of her students,

> For me, that's the problem with the system—I have a kid that has a problem, but because of some track or, pretty much, I was like, so I need to tell my student to come up with a suicidal plan in order for you to help her? Because she's already told me she's suicidal, she hasn't figured out how to kill herself. She can't get help? That, is a struggle as an educator, that's where I get grumpy and frustrated.

This quote illustrates the feelings teachers may have when they feel a particular child is struggling with a significant issue, but because the child does not meet the threshold or criteria for authorized intervention, the teacher cannot offer help and the student cannot get help from the educational system. This experience also illustrates how policies within the educational system can sometimes create conditions that feed back into behavior and feelings of helplessness experienced by both the child and the teacher.

One participant discussed experiencing difficulty and adverse reactions to a schoolwide token system that worked well for a colleague.

> What works with one student in one classroom is likely not going to work with another student. … In a typical classroom, that worked pretty well. I would say, on average, she had one maybe two kids for whom this method didn't work. I took that method into this classroom with lots of behavior issues. Those kids can't handle anything being taken from them. And if you cross off one dollar, they're likely to cross off the whole chart and rip it off their desk and wad it up and throw it. That would have been such a simple thing for the admin or even the school district to discuss with new teachers before you went into the classroom.

These types of experiences illustrated that teachers experience PB as nuanced and specific to a child or context. These quotes also illustrate that teachers can experience intervention as a one-size-fits-all approach from the educational system, which then restrains or limits their ability to provide relevant and effective intervention. This relates directly to teachers feeling of agency, which will be discussed below.

Theme Five: Teachers' Experience of Emotion

In phenomenology emotions play an essential role in how we discover and relate to the world and others who come into our experience (Elpidorou and Freeman, 2014). Because of the importance of emotion and its tether to experience, the concept of emotion will be used in following sections to better illustrate experience. Interacting with children, PB, and the school system evokes a range of emotions in teachers related to the PB they encounter and the support they receive from the educational system. Participants experienced emotions in direct reaction to PB and as cumulative emotional moods from repeated experiences with PB and support.

Participants described negative feelings such as frustration, overwhelmed, disrespect, stressed, fed up, exhausted, depressed, horrible, unprepared, hopeless, and blue. Frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed were the most frequently stated emotions. In addition to negative feelings, working with children exhibiting PB also evoked positive feelings in some participants. Feelings of accomplishment, joy, job satisfaction, and love were commonly associated with interacting and making a difference with children exhibiting PB. The experience of accomplishment and satisfaction when feeling that they had made a difference was reported to be more impactful when the child had exhibited a high level of PB and came from difficult circumstances.

Participants discussed their feelings, which I classified into two groups: immediate feelings and cumulative feelings. *Immediate feelings* are defined as feelings that occurred in the moment that PB was in play. *Cumulative feelings* convey an overall longer lasting emotional state and are defined as feelings that are built up over time when dealing with the difficulties of PB and a lack of support from the educational system. A participant offered this example of

immediate feelings when interacting with a child that is exhibiting PB, “you can feel it kind of boil up in your chest and you feel it in your throat.”

Another participant gave an example of cumulative feelings, “you can have a kid that like sucks up your soul, and all you do is think about it, you dread it, it makes your year miserable.” One participant described how these feelings come with her reflection on the day, taking us through her reflection process when she is experiencing difficult emotions after a particularly challenging day.

> The bad days were the ones where the drive home was depressing. You’re stressed, you didn’t know what to do, you honestly found yourself not even liking certain kids because of what may have happened in the classroom on certain days. I own things. I take things to heart easy. When something goes wrong or someone’s negative to me about something, it bothers me deeply. So on those days when I wasn’t clicking in the classroom, I questioned whether or not this is what I should be doing. Because it was like I was not making a difference here. Fortunately, there weren’t a lot of those.

This quote demonstrates how feelings related to PB can accumulate over a period of time and influence feelings over a longer period of time. This passage also illustrates how “bad days” were compartmentalized and overcome as a coping skill to prevent further emotional accumulation. The idea of “making a difference” was prevalent throughout the interviews and may serve as a significant mitigating factor in teachers’ experience of emotion in regard to PB.

One participant described how cumulative feelings were experienced after winter break, “I became very blue. Realizing I was going back. And it wears you down, because you spend x amount of time preparing for something, but you can’t get their attention. And you want to take it personally, you can’t be their teacher if you can’t get their attention.” The concept of teachers “taking it personally” seemed to be another area in which the theme of coping came up within all of the interviews.

Theme Six: Coping

Reports of how participants coped with PB and the support they received from the educational system varied. These variations included implicit and explicit coping skills, and the part their historical context played in aiding their coping style. *Historical context* is defined as any previous experiences that may have had an impact on how they understand, intervene, and ultimately cope with PB and its components. In addition to coping, historical context also provided a foundation for motivation to become a teacher and to continue teaching even when PB and experience of support became challenging.

Participants described several experiences with coping. The theme of coping was separated into two subthemes: internal/implicit or external/deliberate coping skills. Internal/implicit coping is defined as coping skills or thought processes that are performed with regularity and serve the function of coping but are not necessarily performed with the deliberate purpose of coping. External/deliberate coping is defined as a purposeful act one engages in to cope with their experience with PB.

Internal/implicit Coping

Refection is one way in which the participants of this study described internal/implicit coping. One participant stated “I’m very introspective. I always try to look at things and think about why did this work and why did this not work?” This example of reflection appears to serve the function of processing in preparation for external coping. Here the participant looked at what worked and what did not work and was then able to eliminate what did not work and then build on what did work. It became the process by which the need for an external coping mechanism was identified.

External/deliberate Coping

External/deliberate coping includes actions teachers take to move past the emotion of a difficult situation or day and enter their lives removed from those experiences. One participant stated,

> Now like, exercise, going to yoga has helped a lot, and learning how to just dump it and let it go … I like listening to audio books on the way home, because it switches my brain onto something else. I used to just listen to music and listen to the sad like, oh the world is ending and you're already sad and that's not good, so listening to audio books—so I listen to music on the way in and audio books on the way home …, sometimes talking to my husband … exercise has kind of been the key to helping me let go of stuff.

Another participant offered observations of how she experienced the problematic coping of her colleagues.

> I know a lot of people who do pills who are teachers, that are not healthy, but it's a way for them to cope. Because we see things and we want to make them better, but we don't have the resources or the time to do it all by ourselves. And I think that's the hard part. But … I know at least a hand full of functioning alcoholics.

This passage also describes how feelings related to support and agency can become part of the cumulative feeling process.

All participants expressed that their relationships with other teachers was one the most valuable resources they use for coping with PB. These relationships were also discussed in terms of how they helped participants cope with stress from the educational system. Teachers' relationships with each other is discussed further in the section below.

Theme Seven: Relationships

The experience of relationships was a recurring theme throughout all of the interviews. The six main relationship codes emerged as they were the most common relationships participants referred to throughout the interviews. These included: children's relationships with each other, teachers' relationships with students, teachers' relationships with parents, children's

relationships with parents, teachers' relationships with each other, and teachers' relationship with the school principal. Participants all spoke about the importance of creating a community within their classrooms and how the quality of the relationships discussed in this section served to exacerbate or mitigate their experience with PB.

Children's Relationships With Each Other

All participants discussed that the way children relate to each other affects the dynamic of PB within the class and shapes the teacher's experience of a given class. Participants expressed several problematic aspects of children's relationships with each other that affected their experience of PB. Conflict and arguing cause class disturbance and interruption of daily activities. One participant stated that "Bringing playground issues into the classroom" was a common dynamic. Participants frequently mentioned that children with PB have difficulty interacting with other students, especially if they were not a regular member of the class. A participant spoke about her experience of children who were mainstreamed into her class

> The (PB) intervention kids were housed in our building and then they would mainstream those kids into our classroom. Sometimes we would be given students and we didn't feel they were a good match for our classroom. But they wanted them there for socialization not the academic piece. … Many of the students who are in those behavior programs are there because of antisocial behavior and their aggressive behaviors toward others. … Many times they were quite bright kids but that derails the gen-ed classroom often because those kids will come in with those behaviors, not know how to interact, and it was 50/50 whether they send an aid or not. … So it was frustrating with those kids.

This passage illustrates how children who are not a regular part of a class can be experienced as outside the community of the class. It is implied that having children who are exhibiting aggressive behaviors enter a classroom affects the sense of stability within the class. This passage also highlights that this participant felt that she had children placed in her classroom without her input, which relates to the agency or lack thereof, teachers feel around what happens in their classrooms.

In this case *mainstream* was defined as the placement of children from a program for extreme PB into a general education classroom for a period of time.

One participant spoke of the importance of talking about social difficulties with a child who might be struggling in this area. This participant described her belief that teaching children how to form better relationships might be a good motivator for children to learn about how their PB affects others. Social skills and how children interacted with each other was a concept that ran through several areas of the interviews related to how teachers experience PB.

All participants spoke about classroom dynamics and the concept of community. They seemed to agree that the relationships children form with each other can be a significant component of successful classroom management. When children can trust each other and feel safe within the community of the classroom, cooperation is more prevalent and PB becomes less effective for the child.

Teachers' Relationships With Students

One participant spoke to the importance of building relationships with students, "That's essential. Yeah absolutely essential." She continued to explain how she began to build relationships with students at the beginning of the year. She explained that she would receive access to the cumulative records of students at the beginning of each year.

> I always made sure that … although I wanted to know what their needs were, I didn't put too much into that. I developed a relationship with the students and found out on my own. For my own point of view what the need is. Because I think you can get too … sometimes you get too caught up in what somebody else thinks. So you need to form your own opinions. I never read cumes [the word "cumes" refers to the cumulative educational record of a child] until a few weeks in, if I needed to read them at all. Because I didn't want to start with someone else's ideas.

This participant also stated that class size was an important part of her ability to build relationships with her students. Class size is addressed later in this paper.

Some of the other ways in which participants spoke about building relationships with students were allowing children to have responsibility, actively listening, and being honest about how children's PB affects the child's experiences and relationships as well as those of the people around them. These relationship building efforts served as a dynamic and effective intervention for PB.

All participants described an understanding that their efforts to provide consistency, stability, and structure were appreciated and impactful to their students whether this understanding occurred at the time the student was a member of the class or much later. One participant described that she discovered how the children in her classroom that exhibited PB actually felt about her. "In fact, other adults that are much more experienced would come into the room and attempt (to connect with the children exhibiting PB), but the kids have this interesting bond, this love hate relationship with me, they do trust me even as they hate me."

Another participant described the outcome of her relationship with a child who had exhibited extreme PB:

> The kid who threw the chair at me turned out to be one of my favorite little guys, because he went on to middle school and high school and came back and stayed in touch, and he just had some issues in his life at the time that just, he wasn't in a good place.

This passage also links the relationship that teachers build with children exhibiting PB to the feeling of satisfaction teachers experience when they witness the success of the child later in their education.

One participant spoke about how being consistent and communicative helped her to build relationships with her students.

> That you were there as their teacher that is wanting to help them for today for tomorrow and the next day and the next day and I think the kids are a lot more willing to listen to the importance of continued good behavior than a lot of people give them credit for. You know they need to be talked to so they can understand that you're trying to help.

Several participants spoke about the importance and effectiveness of being honest with children about how they, as the teacher, feel when they are struggling. These experiences appeared to demonstrate the effectiveness of modeling heathy ways to express and cope with feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed in the classroom. Active modeling also proved useful as an example of building the relationship between teacher and student through honesty, and it can also be thought of as an effective intervention. How teachers experience and conceptualize effective interventions is discussed throughout this paper.

One participant stated,

> And I think that's big … to be a teacher that goes to the kid and says, I'm sorry I was a brat yesterday. I'm sorry I was having a bad day and I'm sorry I yelled at you. And the kid's eyes are always like—they don't know what to do. It's okay. It's okay. You're just like yeah, I'm sorry, and it's big because I don't know, they gotta learn how to say sorry too. … Listening to children and allowing them to feel heard by asking their input and allowing them to critique you and tell you what they believe you could do differently or tell you what they need or how they feel.

This passage illustrates how this participant used frankness and transparency about her feelings to create a sense of honesty within the teacher/child relationship. By explaining why she behaved the way she did and her feelings of regret, she was able to model self-reflection and communication. Finally, by eliciting the child's input, she provided a balance of power between herself as the teacher and the student. This whole interaction allowed her to create a more even playing field in which an enriched dyadic relationship could grow.

Teachers' Relationships With Parents

The relationships teachers experience with parents and guardians was frequently discussed in efficacious and detrimental terms. Attending to the relationship between parent or guardian and teacher and having an understanding of the dynamics of this relationship can be

advantageous when trying to get consistency for a child exhibiting PB. When describing relationship building with parents, a participant stated that

> Parents can be defensive and react to being told that their child is behaving in a certain way as if you are calling them bad parents. There needs to be attention payed to how you speak to them and how you encourage them to do more intervention at home.

All participants discussed how strong relationships with parents and guardian also lead to valuable resources. One participant spoke about a particularly difficult class:

> The only time that period worked to my advantage was I had a regular adult volunteer, a grandma of one of the kids, and she came on Fridays. She was lovely. And she was quite helpful, and the kids liked her, so there was more calm when she was in the room.

This quote highlights the effectiveness of utilizing the parents and guardians who have trusting relationships with their children to help in the classroom. If one child responds positively to an adult this may translate to other children in the class and provide a consistent source of support for a teacher.

Children's Relationships With Parents

Participants discussed children's relationships with their parents as an important dynamic affecting PB. It is important to point out that participants interviewed for this study discussed a general belief that all parents care about their children in the capacity that they have to do so.

Difficult parent–child relationships were described as consisting of single or multiple aspects of apathy, abuse, neglect, indifference, unrealistic expectations, making excuses for the child, not providing proper boundaries, and lack of consistency, consequences, or praise. These types of problematic relationships were often experienced by participants to be reflected in how children related to other children and to their teachers. It was also commonly experienced that the relationship between parent and child was an important mediator in the quality and intensity of children's behavior. Efficacious relationships presented as parents supporting their child,

parents asking for teachers' input in intervention, and parents showing up to children's classroom events. Another common experience among the participants interviewed for this study was that, when a child has an efficacious relationship with his or her parent, it leads to a lower level of PB and a more collaborative intervention process for the teacher.

Teachers' Relationships With Each Other

Teachers' relationships with each other appeared be the most important relationships to the experience of support in relation to PB. Participants explained that their colleagues served as sounding boards for ideas, resources for interventions, and support when feeling overwhelmed. These relationships were also an important aspect of the experience of community in the classroom and school. One participant stated,

> I think I've had some really wonderful colleagues along the way where we've had those conversations. So I think that collaboration piece was very big. But I had to have those conversations and they're not always easy. And not everyone wants to have those conversations. They kind of enjoy their insecurities so … that helped me definitely just being able to do that and having people to have those conversations with me.

This statement illustrates how teachers work together and provide support for each other and the important role this plays in how teachers experience and cope with PB.

Another participant made a related point:

> But my school, I mean, there's kind of a culture there where people were really pretty supportive of each other. I think because we all know it's kind of a hard school, we try to support each other a lot.

In this case, the idea of relationships between teachers was part of the understood culture of the school. These relationships were a main component in the theme of community and culture that emerged throughout the interviews. Schools described by participants as community oriented provided positive experiences for teachers while they were teaching at those schools and

mitigated how they understood, coped with, and intervened with PB when employed at schools that were less community oriented.

Teachers' Relationship With the Principal

All participants discussed the integral nature of their relationship with the school principal and how it impacted their experience with PB. Participants seemed to agree that the principal is the primary facilitator of the provision of support for teachers and the promotion of the overall climate and culture of the school. *Good principals* were described as consistent with consequences and rewards for children, supportive, responsible, appropriately involved when needed, clear and consistent in expectations of teachers, unifying, relatable, and caring. *Bad principals* were described as untrustworthy, unsupportive, inconsistent, blaming, power wielding, unhelpful, unclear, and expressing different ideas and standards with different people.

One participant described the good or bad principal in this way,

> I think the principal makes a huge difference. If you have a good principal, things run a lot better and smoother. If the morale of the teachers is high, it makes things a lot easier and smoother, no matter how many behaviors you're dealing with every day. If you have a principal that's really difficult to understand or doesn't make their ideas clear enough, it was very fuzzy.

Two of the participants interviewed for this study described a similar duality of traits in their experiences with the most effective principal they worked with. The first participant stated, "the best principal I've had is one that kind of knew what everything was going on all the time and was a little bit scary in a sense, but calm and scary," while the other participant stated,

> Like she was kind of scary, but like, not scary. She had a really unique personality. But she was very respected, and she was very—when it came to teacher stuff, she was really strict, but when it came to personal stuff she'd want to know about your family and your goals in life and all that kind of stuff. She was really relatable. You felt like you were a person, you know?

These experiences of good principals appear to suggest that principals are most efficacious and respected when their goals and expectations are clear, they are willing to support teachers in their efforts to meet their expectations, and they respect teachers as individuals.

Theme Eight: Class Size

Teachers described experiencing class size differences ranging from 19 to 35 children in a given year. Overall, the experience of a smaller class size was reported to provide better conditions for addressing PB. Smaller class sizes were reported by participants to provide more community-oriented interactions among students and between students and teachers. Smaller class sizes appeared to help teachers to build relationships with students, know more about a student's context and individual needs, and individualize their management and intervention with PB. Smaller class size was seen as providing an environment in which children were naturally more supportive of and accountable to each other, which led to more positive peer relationships among students and an overall strong experience of classroom culture and community. Larger class sizes were reported to be more difficult to manage and less conducive to building a sense of community or culture. One participant stated,

> All kids have individual needs. You have to get to know them. Which isn't easy when you have 35 of them. It was always a beauty when we had 20 to 1. When I had 20 to 1 I knew everybody's middle name … yeah it was more like a family. Everybody kind of knew each other better … when you have 35 or 36 there's more kind of cliques and things going on. Just because it's a much bigger group there's different dynamics. So I think it has a big effect on how you can deal with behavior problems too. Because you have the time and you don't have as many kids … I think of how much time I could spend with kids and you know you could spend more time with them on things they don't understand, which are the things that lead to behavior problems.

When discussing class size with participants, a common caveat to class size was the ratio of children exhibiting PB to children who do not. Even with a small class size, too many children with PB was reported to be overwhelming and disruptive to the flow, climate, and culture of the

classroom. Participants named difficulties in classrooms with a large amount of PB including Individualized Education Program (IEP) responsibilities, interruption of lessons, interference with the learning of non-PB students, escalation of PB, feelings of being overwhelmed, and burnout.

Theme Nine: Agency and Efficacy

As noted in several preceding sections, all participants discussed their experience of agency and efficacy. *Agency* is defined as the feeling that one has the ability, right, permission, or power to address a particular situation in the way they feel will be the most efficacious. *Efficacy* is defined as the quality of an action or intervention taken to ameliorate a problem that is relevant and lasting. These concepts were expressed by participants both explicitly and implicitly within other concepts. These two concepts were linked together by all participants within their interviews.

In regard to agency, participants discussed a range of this experience. All participants felt that their experience of agency in regard to PB was mitigated by the educational system and most specifically by the principal as discussed in the Relationships section above. One common experience discussed was the lack of input afforded to teachers when determining which children will be included in their classroom and how and when children will move in and out of the classroom for specialized education and mainstream placement. *Mainstream placement* occurs when a child with severe PB or other difficulties is placed into a general classroom either full- or part-time (as illustrated in the section Children's Relationships With Each Other). This student movement was experienced by participants as students being placed in their classrooms for a full day or for shorter periods for a particular purpose such as socialization or a specific academic

experience. One participant offered her experience of agency in regard to mainstreaming in her classroom:

> Students who were being "mainstreamed" were added to the classrooms for different periods or subjects. Now the key here is when *they* felt the students were ready, because sometimes we would be given students and we didn't feel they were a good match for our classroom, but *they* wanted them in there for socialization, not the academic piece.

Another area in which teachers experienced a lack of agency was in the curriculum they were required to teach. At times participants experienced that the curriculum they were expected to use was not relevant or appropriate for the children in their classrooms. This idea was also a factor in their experience of PB in that the curriculum did not keep the children interested and engaged. Children not being interested or engaged was seen as a catalyst for PB.

Several participants spoke about how they experienced a lack of agency in regard to choosing curriculum. In addition to feeling a lack of agency in this regard, it was common for participants to describe how these experiences adversely affected their relationships with parents. One participant stated,

> They would say of whatever book we were reading, which was decided by the district, "you're reading this chapter novel." So whatever novel I am reading with the kids that the district says I must read with them, these other adults would come in and say, "That story has no relevance for these children, and the life that they're leading. No wonder they're not interested in this story. No wonder they won't read it with you." But I as a teacher I didn't have the choice of what the literacy book would be.

Another participant described experiencing how the administration made changes to curriculum without an explanation to teachers or parents. She described how teachers at her school were expected to make these changes without knowing why the changes were made or how they might be beneficial to the children. She was then left to explain these changes to parents and other administrators when parents realized their children had not been taught certain specific skills.

> They … mailed out our schedules to us before school started (for the year) and it was all math and reading … no science no social studies no cursive writing … and I went to the principal and I said well, what about science, the kids need science … and I said "what about cursive? Can't we do just like 10 minutes a day?" No its all math and reading … and a few years later when … their parents realized they didn't know how to write in cursive, they went to the school board and then they came and asked us "how much time have you spent teaching cursive?" I said "absolutely none. I've tried to fight for 10 minutes a day and I was told absolutely not."

This passage also illustrates how teachers experience being left out of the decision-making process. This participant felt like she was left to explain the consequences of a decision she did not agree with without support from those who mandated or facilitated the changes. This same participant also described how her personality helped her to create her own sense of agency:

> I was never afraid to speak up and tell it the way it is. A lot of teachers are just not going to speak up. They are just going to follow whatever. And I wanted them to know … it wasn't my choice.

Although she felt a lack of agency in choosing curriculum she felt was important, she was able to voice her dissatisfaction to the administration and parents.

Another area in which participants had varying experiences with agency was in intervention from the educational system. One participant described her experience with an IEP meeting. *IEPs* are defined as a series of accommodations and interventions created to provide mandates that inform what interventions and accommodations a teacher or school has to provide on a daily basis for a given child. One participant described her experience with IEP meetings in this way: "IEP meetings with parents and district level people determined if a child was ready for mainstream. They pulled gen-ed teachers into these meetings, but we didn't have input or say … close to 0%. … So that got frustrating." This passage is an example of how teachers experience a dearth of opportunities to share not only their expertise and experience as a professional but their expertise and experience with an individual child.

Theme Ten: Expectations/Duties

Several participants described how they experienced what others expect from them. This experience was discussed consistently by participants when they described the role teachers play in the educational system. Commonly, participants felt they were expected to take on a variety of duties and responsibilities. These expectations varied and came from both parents and the educational system.

Several participants spoke about experiencing expectations in regard to test scores. One participant stated,

> [I] always was aware of making those test scores, and that's a district thing, you know the administrators are driving that as well. You know it's frustrating, so I can see why young teachers bail out, it's just overwhelming and I just have always felt like there's such lack of respect at times for what we do, for what teachers do, that it's we are the babysitter, we are the cause of all the issues, and the kids aren't learning, and as you go up the grades you even have some differences amongst colleagues because different grade levels look back on prior ones and say, "why didn't you do this, this, and this?"

Another participant shared,

> There's huge amount of pressure from the school district to raise test scores and have growth. So it's just this really hard challenge. Because you have all these social issues with these kids in your class that you have to—it's almost like I felt like a lot of times I had to be like a miracle worker, which is impossible.

These quotes describing the experience of overwhelming expectations were typical for all participants. They illustrate how teachers combine their experience of what others expect from them into a global feeling of being marginalized through feelings of disrespect and expectations that are impossible for an individual to achieve in isolation.

Theme Eleven: Help From the Educational System

In regard to help from the educational system, teachers experienced similar interventions in conflicting ways. The following passages show how in-class behavioral interventions had differing degrees of relevance or applicability.

One participant experienced in-class behavior assessment as helpful. “They would come in for say half an hour or an hour, take notes on their (the children’s) behavior, how attentive they were, how on task they were, what they did, how the interacted with the other kids.” She found this type of assessment helpful. She experienced the assessments as providing extended perspective and access for the kids to get relevant services.

Another participant felt that in-class behavior assessment did little to help her understand or intervene with PB.

> But they often didn’t really help much. They would sit and they would track the behavior on a clipboard, but they wouldn’t really help, they would leave the behavior correction to me for the most part, because they were monitoring and watching how the student did and they didn’t want to interfere with that. So, it wasn’t much of a help to the classroom teacher, really.

Both of these interventions used outside actors to conduct behavioral observation to attain information regarding PB in the classroom. Participants’ understanding of the relevance of these interventions may be mitigated by the amount of information an individual teacher is given regarding the purpose of the assessment and the outcome or findings.

Participants described their experience getting help from administrators in their schools in various ways. As described in a previous section, principals are considered the most important administrative figure in determining the strength or weakness of support around PB. Several participants spoke about working around administration or not engaging administration for help with PB. One participant explained,

> And I found that, as my experience went on, I dealt with behavior problems gen-ed wise pretty much on my own. I didn’t seek out administrative help, I used the counselor, but we grew in our building to over 700, and in elementary school that is huge, and a counselor cannot deal with K through 5 student behavior issues in a timely manner. There’s just too many needs.

This passage speaks to how teachers may be limited in the amount of help available to them based on the amount of need in the school and the number of support staff a school may employ. This passage also offers an example of agency in that this teacher had an understanding that there are not resources available to her. She believed help was severely limited, so she did not seek help.

Another participant spoke about her experience eliciting help from administrators and how these experiences affected her understanding of agency as discussed above.

> So it there's like a disconnect between the kid, the teacher, the parent, the psych, the admin, it's like weird ... and like a lot of time they don't listen to teachers. Um. Unless you get a good psych, a good psych will, and I mean I've had an amazing psych that … "just write it down and I'll take it for what it is" but I've had psychs that are just like "Well I didn't see it in the classroom, so it doesn't exist." And you're like ahhhh. I'm with them every day! The thing is, I wouldn't be making this up, why would I be coming in to make more work for you, more work for me, more work for everyone?

This passage illustrates an inconsistency in intervention and collaboration from the educational system that was present throughout the interviews. The passage also serves as another example of how teachers' expertise is underutilized and highlights an unbalanced power dynamic between administrators and teachers.

Several teachers discussed how they experienced children being pulled out of class for outside intervention. Sometime these interventions occurred for specialized education to address either learning concerns or social emotional issues. One participant spoke about how the period of time after children returned from working with a specialist was one of the most difficult times of the day for managing PB.

> The worst part of my day always was from after specialists, the kids went to specialists and got through with specialists about five minutes of noon, so five minutes of noon until twelve forty when we went to lunch was the only time of day I had all 17 students. And it was horrible. It was also the only time of day that I could never ever have a para. There was never anybody available at that time. So I was just on my own.

Theme Twelve: Intervention

Several participants spoke about schoolwide interventions. There was variability in the experience of the effectiveness of interventions for the school and individual classroom . One participant spoke about the effectiveness of a schoolwide intervention.

> We did a lot of mindfulness at that school and so we did lots of breathing techniques, and the counselors would come in and lead that. And that was good for the kids, but I think it was mostly beneficial to me to watch how they tried to get the kids engaged.

This type of intervention was not only experienced as having provided coping skills for the children but offered the teacher the opportunity to see how counselors interacted with children effectively. This is also another example of how teachers learn by watching others teach effectively. Overall, participants experienced support as positive when it was congruent with their experience and thus considered relevant. These types of interventions may also serve as a strengthening influence on perceptions of community as they are not punitive or harshly instructive and allow teachers the room to experience how an intervention can work. Teaching and learning through modeling was seen as a way of creating relationships and building a strong sense of community. There was an interesting parallel between the experiences of learning by watching other teachers and the experience of teachers modeling behaviors for students. Both are seen as effective intervention for children exhibiting PB.

When discussing effective techniques for intervening with PB, participants spoke about finding a balance between positive reinforcement, relationship building across contexts (as discussed in the relationship sections), self-awareness training, self-esteem building, and establishing consequences and boundaries.

All participants explained that they did not experience significant training in PB or what to expect in regard to PB in the classroom in their precareer education. One participant stated,

"I'm sure I had a classroom management class, but I don't remember a whole lot about it." Another participant stated that even in her precareer special education training there was a dearth of information on PB.

> I had one special ed class, but it was more or less like, don't say you're going to do something, more the legalities of special ed versus like here's how you deal with somebody who has autism and here's how you deal with somebody who has oppositional defiant disorder. I didn't get much of that, that was all just kind of—I got thrown into the fire.

This quote also demonstrates how a lack of relevant training and information can provide a foundation that leads to an experience of feeling unprepared and unsupported around PB as evidenced by the experience of being "thrown into the fire." An absence of training and information about what to expect in regard to PB can in turn can lead to a breakdown in a teacher's ability to understand how to command a classroom. When a teacher experiences this lack of grounding in what is happening around him/her, it may provide an environment in which PB can be amplified. If there is no frame of reference or expectation of PB, it is reasonable to assume that a teacher would feel this way.

The idea that teachers could benefit from training and in vivo teaching observations and experiences in the origins and context around PB was demonstrated by all of the participants in this study. One participant spoke about the most relevant training she had in regard to PB. In her experience the PB in her school was significantly related to trauma. Her school sent her to an adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) training, which helped her understand PB and provided context for how and why children might respond either positively or negatively to a particular interaction or situation.

> And they did talk about where baseline stress is for most people versus where the stress level is for somebody that's had lots of mayhem in their childhood. And what I really saw was, I would say that as kids escalate, the more they escalate the more you have to become like Mr. Rogers. Your voice has to get softer, calmer, step back, and if you push,

> if you say “If you don’t x, y, z you’re going to have to—” that will cause things to escalate.

Another participant described similar effective training experiences. In her experience, her school expanded on a previous training and provided more support opportunities for teachers,

> the whole social-emotional training. Because a lot of these kids have a lot of trauma. Like my school, we were labeled a trauma-sensitive school, so most of the kids have experienced trauma and there’s the whole ACEs thing, so we’ve had training on that. So we just started the last two years doing morning meetings in teaching social-emotional lessons, short ones, having a social-emotional focus which I think helps.

This quote highlights the concepts of communication and cooperation that appear to be vital to effective intervention with children exhibiting PB and the context from which PB arises. This quote also provides an example of how incorporating intervention into a daily practice for all teachers can support the integration of PB with a sense of community.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Social Emotional Wellness and Discipline

Throughout the interviews conducted for this paper, the participants all used an intuitive integrated approach when interacting with children exhibiting PB. All participants used behavior-based interventions to varying degrees, and all had a belief that interventions and approaches to children exhibiting PB needed to be developed and implemented based on an individual child's context and need. It appeared that even when a participant did not experience training in all areas of PB, she developed implicit intuition in regard to what might work best for a particular child. All participants demonstrated an understanding that social emotional health played an integral role in PB as evidenced by the emphasis on relationships throughout the interviews, even though most participants did not receive notable training in this area.

Attribution

Participants used a variety of references in forming their attributions for PB. One participant discussed how interacting with a family member helped her to recognize and understand PB, which provided her a reference for when she experienced similar behavior from a student. This teacher also used references from her own experiences as a child to empathize and guide her attributions for PB. Another participant had a harder time processing her attributions and discussed how, in the beginning of her career, she had no reference for why children would not be focused and excited about learning. Several other participants referenced experiences with their own children as important factors in their forming attributions.

The area of attribution and how to determine the underlying causes of behavior was a significant concern when discussing training. Overall, teachers felt they were not prepared by their prework training to determine the basis for PB. They also felt unprepared in regard to how

to adapt interventions for optimum efficacy of intervention for a particular child. Attribution relates directly to coping because both coping and attribution are related to direct and past experience, training, and support. When participants did not have learned knowledge from their precareer training, they appeared to rely on their own context to make attributions.

Some participants had past experiences that allowed them to be less affected by emotional reactions when they were confronted by PB, which then allowed them the space to learn from their direct experience. These experiences allowed them to empathize and understand that there is something to be discovered about the basis of PB. As in the case of the participant that had no prior life context related to PB, participating in training on the basis of PB through the ACES program was especially helpful. This training helped her to understand, empathize and intervene with children exhibiting PB in a way she hadn't before she attended the ACES training. The dynamics of attribution and coping could be important factors in the development of future training and support for teachers. This is an area in which the field of clinical psychology would be especially relevant.

Political Climate

Education is inextricably tied to the political. First, education is a common topic of debate in regard to policy and shared values. Currently, debates over issues that directly involve teachers, such as charter schools, teacher salary, the ability to unionize, how teachers should be trained, and how teacher competence should be measured, are all in active and polarized debate (Saltman, 2018). In addition to debate over education as a discipline and public service, there is also discussion among scholars that education is a reflection of democracy and in turn plays a role in shaping democracy (Apple, 1989; Giroux, 2015; Saltman, 2018).

The theory of critical pedagogy closely links teaching with the political. Critical pedagogy is concerned with the concept that teachers play a much more critical role in shaping democracy and how it functions than is overtly recognized. Created by Paolo Freire, critical pedagogy was developed with the idea that helping rural Brazilian people to read would in turn help them to understand their position in the power dynamic that kept them from challenging their marginalized place within their culture (Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Voight, A. M., & McWhirter, E. H., 2016). Power dynamics were discussed in relation to children exhibiting PB by all participants both in terms of the function of PB and the context around their attributions for PB.

Based on the experiences of participants in this study, teachers appear to have a conscious knowledge of the ideas discussed through the theory of critical pedagogy. This knowledge is expressed as fragmented feelings that teaching is so much more than is recognized by any entity involved and the shared experience that they do not receive recognition for the value of their work in this regard. For all of the teachers in this group, this way of critical teaching is one of the aspects that defines their intentionality in dealing with the phenomenon of PB, even when a there is an acknowledged lack of ability to manage a classroom.

Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Gresson (1996) offer a challenge to the accepted conceptualization and evaluation of academic achievement. The authors posit that education has become a pawn for the dissemination of information and the endowment of power as decided by those in power. The determination of who is intelligent enough to receive more information and move into positions of power is based on a standardized evaluation of academic achievement. The authors explain that that these determinations are not valid across the range of the contexts of children or teachers within the system. This conceptualization rings true throughout the

experience of the participants and their discussions of testing, support, data gathering, and the feeling that children do not fit into the molds that are created, or not created, to provide assistance when a child or teacher is struggling. It is worth questioning the possibility that this system is both explicitly and implicitly used to keep existing power structures in place.

Several authors of literature regarding critical pedagogy discuss the dynamics of teaching in regard to political theories through several aspect of a paradigm shift. Giroux (2015) highlights a shift in the paradigm of public education from a perspective of education as a public service to education as a private right. This shift began in the 1980s, and a result of this shift is that it has also shifted the paradigm of the role of teachers. When schools are conceptualized as a private right, teachers become tools to implement the ideas of others and cease to be autonomous experts in how to reach the children they teach within the relevant context of the class. In an article discussing the political nature of education, Apple (2011) discussed this paradigm shift with idea that schools are microcosms for American society. He pointed out the complexity of the concept of society and how this complexity is routinely reduced to the idea of economics and marketization for the sake of simplicity and efficiency. This reduction shows up in education through the creation of concrete competency measures for both students and teachers such as standardized tests and achievement expectations. These measures marginalize the complexity of culture and context and render the resulting product of the system to be disjointed. This reduction also shows up in well-meaning policies and programs. In this study, all participants expressed an intuitive understanding of this paradigm shift. This intuition is revealed in their feeling of being marginalized, undervalued, and underappreciated for the work that they do, especially regarding their work with children who are exhibiting PB. One of the participants who had recently retired after many years of teaching illustrated the experience of this shift when she discussed how the

educational system used to be in comparison to how it has become. She emphasized the transference in funding and resources from the classroom itself to administrators and policy makers.

In education, policy and practice makers tend not to spend time in the classrooms where their work will be implemented (Apple, 2011). Even those who focus on broader social issues such as social emotional wellness risk the irrelevance of their work if they are not in touch with the day-to-day issues of the classrooms where their programs will be used. This lack of connection leaves out the integral piece that links practice to culture and context. This missed step may be an integral part of what's keeping institutional marginalization in place, even as these programs seek to ameliorate just that.

The political nature of public schools is reflected in how participants discussed their experience of standardized testing and global behavioral programs. Although the pieces of these programs and policies seemed to be relevant to actual experience, the implementation and results were often lacking. The participants in this study were sometimes able to find relevant aspects of these programs but often felt frustrated, overwhelmed, misunderstood, and ineffective when they did not work.

One of the recurring concepts from the interviews was ambiguity. All of the participants interviewed for this dissertation discussed aspects of their jobs in which they were required to deal with thick ambiguity. There were several areas in which ambiguity was discussed. First, in their interactions with the educational system, teachers expressed a lack of information and clarity from administrators. Ambiguity emerged from other concepts throughout the interviews. The directives participants received in regard to curriculum were often reported to be vague or irrelevant. The ways in which their teaching performance and the children they teach are

measured were reported to be inconsistent and often unconnected to what was actually happening in the classroom. In addition, the meaning that was gleaned from these measures was often not directly disseminated to the teacher, leaving them with a sense of being left out or removed from the system.

Throughout the interviews all participants frequently used the word “they,” without an explicit indication of a person, group, or entity, when referring to administrators. The use of this term suggests that teachers do not always know who is making the decisions in regard to what they teach, how they are required to interact with PB, and how to get help for problems they are experiencing.

Another way in which ambiguity was discussed was through methods of surveilling performance through data. The concept of surveillance was also discussed in regard to physically being watched and evaluated. One participant described being closely watched at the beginning of her career but not at all after a while. Several participants experienced other teachers being monitored more than others and experienced this as significantly stressful for teachers in general. One participant spoke about always having to collect data that did not provide a whole picture of a child. This incomplete picture of the child provides more evidence of the consequences of the political educational paradigm shift discussed in this section.

Power Differentials

The concept of power differentials came up throughout the interviews both explicitly and implicitly. Participants tended to express feelings of powerlessness when describing their role in the formal intervention process within the educational system. Participants also expressed feelings of diminished power in their ability to get help for children who were in need, regardless of whether the need was academic, behavioral, medical, or contextual. Several participants

described an understanding of how power differentials play a part in PB and how helping children to feel a sense of agency was an effective intervention for PB.

Making a Difference

All teachers gauged their experience of effectiveness as a teacher by how they understood their ability to make a difference in the life of either an individual child or a group of children. Positive feelings about being a teacher and motivation to keep teaching were often discussed in terms of how they understood they were making a difference in the lives of the children they work with. This was expressed to be most pronounced in children who routinely exhibited PB. There was an implicit belief that the educational system based efficacy on test scores and that this practice is flawed in many ways.

Intentionality

In phenomenology *intentionality* is defined as the way(s) in which a given individual comes to experience and make meaning of, from, and through a phenomenon. As described in Chapter III, PIP focuses on how experience and meaning manifest through diverse, shifting, and sometimes overlapping contexts and are engaged in an endless process of evolution. In this way teachers' experience with PB is always shifting and in the process of developing.

The teachers in this study all discussed the context that brought them to the current moment in their meaning making and experiencing of PB. They all described how their understandings of individual children, their relationships to others, the phenomenon of PB, and the support they received from the educational system has shifted through their trial and error, reflection, and adaptation regardless of support or training. The experiences shared by the teachers who participated in this study illustrate the dynamic and continuous process of meaning making and approach to the phenomenon of PB as described by PIP. Whether a teacher was

conscious of this process or not, it leads to the creation of richer meaning making and understanding of PB and this same process happening in others.

In addition to providing evidence of dynamic meaning making, these interviews provided evidence that the experience of being a teacher in general is heavily influenced by PB and its consequences. How successful or unsuccessful a participant was in their ability to make a difference in the lives of children exhibiting PB was an important factor in teachers' feeling of efficacy as a teacher overall. Being a teacher and PB cannot be separated. They move together in a dynamic dance of meaning making that neither the child exhibiting PB or the teacher has full control over. The movement is conducted by the context of the child and the context of the teacher, and then ultimately determined by the educational system. If the education of a child can help an individual understand their position within a power dynamic as proposed by critical pedagogy, how a teacher addresses the relationships and self-understanding of a given child could facilitate this larger idea. Following the same path of logic, teachers' experiences as active and respected participants within the power dynamics of the educational system could be facilitated by precareer training and experiential internships.

The information gleaned through this phenomenological study highlights many questions left to be answered. What do we as a culture understand to be the necessary foundation for optimal academic performance? What is the educational paradigm of those in power? How is meaning shared and used to strengthen the goals of the educational system? How are meaning making and ambiguity related and understood by all within the educational system? There continues to be debate about what precareer training and education teachers need to be effective and what children need to achieve academic success (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018). Based on the

results of this study, teachers believe that training, experience, and support around PB is an essential piece of this debate.

These interviews have made it clear that teachers have a good understanding of their own role. This role to them is dynamic, and they see themselves as artists who can see need, context, cohesion, or lack thereof and come to find an equilibrium in this process if they are afforded the space, understanding, voice, and resources to do so. Teachers' belief in their expertise and their experience with the education system may also be related to the political in the way that the teacher's role is conceptualized so contrarily within differing political ideologies (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018).

Bridling

I have many connections to this research. First, my mother was an elementary school teacher. I spent many summer days in my youth helping my mother set up her classroom for the coming year. I also often heard my mother speak about difficult situations resulting from the behavior of her students and their parents. In addition to my experiences growing up, I also have a background in child development and behavior through my former work as a childcare provider, my training as a child care provider for the US military, and throughout my education.

The following paragraph contains an example of bridling after an interaction in which a participant spoke about a concept that I connected to my own knowledge and experience. While conducting PIP as part of the bridling process, I am to pay particular attention to times in which I feel discomfort. It is theorized that these feelings signify a possibly important meaning making experience. During the first interview conducted for this dissertation, there came to be a moment when I became viscerally uncomfortable with where the participant was taking the interview. I was listening to the experience of a teacher who had some particularly adverse experiences with

PB and the educational system. For the purposes of anonymity of the participant in question, no direct quotes are used in this section. The teacher discussed working in a community with a historically marginalized population. She described this population as having a great deal of control in regard to how PB was addressed by the teachers and administration. Initially, I became alarmed at how the teacher was describing the marginalized community. Based on her education and own experiences, it felt racist. I made a momentary judgment that the marginalized community in question was being unfairly experienced. Because I was engaged in the process of bridling, I was able to be mindful and curious of these feelings and hold them steady while I listened and allowed the teacher's experience to unfold. In the end, my purposeful awareness and holding of these thoughts allowed me to remain open to the experience of the teacher and use the awareness to develop a new understanding of how systems created to be more equitable for one population might then lead others to the experience of being left in the margins of the system. This concept emerged again when I studied the theory of critical pedagogy (Diemer et al., 2016). From reading texts on critical pedagogy, I learned that Paulo Freire recognized a danger that people who had had the experience of being oppressed and rose up to positions of power had a risk of then becoming the oppressors of others themselves. Because of this possibility, Freire stressed the importance of educating people to fight for equality for all rather than to reverse the power structure. In this way the idea of an out of balance power structure was the thing to be ameliorated, which then rendered the decision of who should hold the power irrelevant.

This idea related directly to this participant's experience. She experienced more lenient rules and an emphasis on cultural context with one group and perceived careless regard for another. She also experienced a disregard for her input and opinion based on her ethnicity. The

concept of power differentials and how they play an integral part in all aspects of experience was palpable throughout this process.

Limitations

One of the biggest limitations of this study was the low number of participants. A few more participants may have led to a deeper understanding of experience. Another limitation was the time it took to conduct and write the study. Qualitative analysis is a lengthy process, and although PIP is concerned with a snapshot in time, it is possible that a timelier process would have led to a quicker completion. Finally, I had trouble finding and communicating with participants after the initial interviews. More communication may have yielded more participation in follow-up interviews or helped to reveal new avenues of meaning.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study could be replicated with parents, school principals, special education teachers, or administrators less connected with what is going on in the classroom. The resulting interviews could help to create a systematic understanding of how PB is experienced by others and how meaning is constructed, used, and shared by these entities within the educational system. In addition, seeing how others experience PB within the same system could create deeper relevance to policy and practice. In addition, this dissertation revealed that teachers experience a disconnect between how teachers' roles are conceptualized by stakeholders. Research conducted with various stakeholders in this area could bring about a discussion of what teachers expect to do in their roles and what is expected of them.

Another avenue of research that emerged from this dissertation is the reality of ambiguity and its part in the web of experience. Exploring ambiguity within the school system as a

phenomenon may shed a bright light on inequities and inefficiencies within the system that may be overlooked due to the nuances and consequences of ambiguity.

As stated in the literature review section of this paper, internalizing behaviors are not often recognized as PB by teachers. This was reflected by participant interviews in this study. Although here was some mention of internalizing behavior that was conceptualized as avoidant and inattentive behavior, most of the participant focus was on disruptive behavior. Future studies could explicitly focus on how teachers recognize, conceptualize, and interact with children who are exhibiting internalizing behaviors.

Recommendations for Training and Policy

The teachers that participated in this dissertation study all stated that they needed more preservice and ongoing training and resources designed to address the basis of problematic behavior. It is recommended that teachers have access to preservice and ongoing training from ACES and other organizations and professionals related to trauma, learning disabilities, and other underlying contextual factors that often result in PB. It is also recommended that teachers be given regular access to mental health professionals for consultation to aid in their understanding and intervention with PB. This type of training and consultation could improve proficiency in how teachers understand and intervene with PB. In addition, it is recommended that training in the basis of PB for all levels of administration and those involved with policy making be provided as preservice and ongoing training. Training for educational administration could help create a better understanding of the basis and prevalence of PB by policy makers and may result in the development of more effective interventions and attention to what teachers are facing on a daily basis in regard to PB.

Throughout this dissertation study, the concept that support from the educational system did not always line up teachers' experience with PB was commonly discussed by all participants. As teachers are uniquely positioned to provide important information about a myriad of aspects of policy and procedure and how they work in a given classroom, it is recommended the educational system use the experience and expertise of teachers when developing and evaluating classroom policy and procedure. Placing a focus on the voice and knowledge of teachers working in the field could provide unique and relevant solutions designed to enrich the educational experience and success of both teachers and students.

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APPENDIX A

Screening Questions

Screening Questions

1. Are you currently, or have you been in the last 3 years, a general education teacher of elementary or middle school children?
2. Are you currently or have you in the past 3 years worked with children exhibiting problematic behavior?

   NOTE: For the purposes of this study, problematic behavior is defined as any behavior that has problematic implications for teachers or children in any capacity.

3. In what school district are you currently or were most recently working?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

Are you a Teacher

who has worked with children who exhibit behavior that is problematic for themselves and/or others?

Hi. My name is Kristen Brashear. I am a doctoral student of psychology at Antioch University. I am interested in hearing directly from teachers about:

- how you experience, think and feel about your interactions with your students when there is problematic behavior involved;
- the support you receive from your school administrators or others related to support.

Participant Criteria: former and current teachers of elementary and middle school aged children who have worked with children exhibiting problematic behavior in the past 3 years.

Participant Involvement: 1-2-hour interview to be conducted in a location of your choosing and brief follow up interview. Interviews will be audio taped and all information will be kept confidential.

If you would like more information about participation please contact me, Kristen Brashear, at:

[redacted]

or by phone at

[redacted]

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

This letter is a request for your consent to participate in the research project, "Teachers' Experience with Problematic Behavior and Educational Support." This research project is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a doctoral degree in clinical psychology. This research project is being conducted to explore the experience of elementary school teachers in relation to the problematic behavior of children whom they teach and the support they receive from the educational system. The goal of this research is to discover how teachers experience problematic behavior and what supports they feel are most effective or missing, with the intention of using teachers' voices as an integral component of the psychological research on which implementation of policy, programs, and interventions is based.

Your participation in this study is being requested because you have experience with working with children exhibiting problematic behavior as a public school teacher of elementary or middle school aged children.

Although there is always a possibility of unforeseen risks and benefits associated with participating in any research study, every precaution has been and will be taken to reduce or eliminate any risk. Your participation in this study will add to the discourse around problematic behavior, teachers' voices as an expert source of information, and the efficacy of support teachers receive regarding problematic behavior. Your input into this multifaceted issue could benefit future educational policy and procedure development and implementation.

Because you are being asked to discuss your interactions regarding problematic behavior and how you are supported by the educational system, you may experience some feelings of distress. If at any time you feel distress as result of sharing your experience, you will be provided with a list of supportive resources in your area. In addition to feelings of distress, and because you may be discussing your experience of support from those who may have power over your position, there is a risk your participation could be problematic if discovered by your superiors. To mitigate this risk, Participants associated with this study will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement barring them from revealing any identifying information. In addition, all physical materials will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office by the principal researcher. All electronic data will be de-identified, kept on an encrypted drive, and stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. The results of the research will be a compilation of information provided by all participants and will not contain identifying information. You have the right to end your participation at any time and are not required to disclose the reason.

Your participation will consist of one interview of approximately two hours and a follow up interview of approximately one hour to be conducted one to three months after the first interview. The projected end of the project is estimated to be January of 2019.

The student researcher conducting this study is Kristen Brashear, MA. If you have any questions at any time regarding this study and/or your participation please contact Kristen at [redacted]

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and Certified by the Institutional Review Board, Antioch University, Seattle. For research-related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I can contact Antioch University's Institutional Board Chair, Mark Russell, PhD at [redacted]

I have read and understand the description of this research study, my role, responsibilities, and rights as a participant. My signature on this form authorizes my consent to participate in this research study, as described in the terms and conditions stated in this document.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Signature:_____ Date: _____

Participant Phone Number:_____

Is it OK to leave you a voicemail message on this phone? Yes ☐ No ☐

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded.

Participant Signature:_____ Date: _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____ Date: _____

(The participant should retain one of the two copies of the consent letter provided by the principal investigator).

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. In your role as an educator, what have you experienced in terms of children's problematic behavior?
2. What have you experienced in terms of support from the educational system regarding children's problematic behavior?
3. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of support from the educational system regarding children's problematic behavior?
4. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of children's problematic behavior?

Examples of Follow-Up Questions

a. Please Describe what it is like to be in the classroom when a child is exhibiting problematic behavior.

b. Please describe the training you have received in regard to problematic behavior

c. Please describe the expectations, if any, that your school has of your performance in regard to problematic behavior

d. Please describe how you are supported by your _____ (peers, the administration, the school system)

e. You mentioned _____. Can you describe what you did (how you felt) when _____ happened?

f. Can you describe a typical day is like when you experience problematic behavior from the time you wake up to the time you go sleep.

g. Can you describe behaviors that are problematic for you or your students?

h. Can you describe the atmosphere of your school regarding problematic behavior?

i. What happens when _____?

j. Can you describe how you feel when _____ happens?

k. What happens for you when _____ happens?

APPENDIX E

Use Permission Wiley Publications for Figure 2:

Factors Affecting TEHSM

Tsouloupas, C. N., Carson, R. L., & Matthews, R. A. (2013). Personal and school cultural factors associated with the perceptions of teachers' efficacy in handling student misbehavior. *Psychology in the Schools*, (51)2, 164–180.

Expected presentation date	May 2020
Portions	Figure 1 Pg. 166