MAKING SENSE OF LOW-LEVEL BEHAVIORS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A doctoral thesis presented

by

Hilary L. Kreisberg

to

The Graduate School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In the field of

Educational Leadership and Curriculum Development

College of Professional Studies

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

January 2017
Abstract

Elementary educators face a variety of problematic behaviors on a daily basis. Even with these daily occurrences, minimal research has focused on teacher perspectives of these low-level misbehaviors. This interpretative phenomenological analysis explored the perspectives of nine elementary school teachers who have experienced low-level misbehavior in the classroom. Results showed that primary school teachers view low-level misbehaviors as significant disrupters of daily instruction. Evidence also revealed that elementary school teachers’ interpretations of low-level misbehaviors varied depending upon their tolerance levels, personality, and respective grade-level. As a result of this study, it is evident that elementary school teachers need a stronger understanding of applied behavioral analysis (ABA) in order to more successfully manage low-level misbehaviors and more importantly, prevent them from occurring in the first place. This research demonstrates the importance of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in understanding the functionality of behavior, emphasizing the need for educators to have a strong background in behavior modification strategies to successfully prevent low-level misbehaviors in the elementary school classroom.

Keywords: Behavior, behavior modification, low-level misbehavior, minor misbehavior, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Gramma Shirley. Gramma, you have always been my rock, confidant, and best friend. I miss the days when you lived 30 minutes away and I would drive over and we would talk for hours, paint each other’s nails, go for walks, and of course go through all of your beautiful jewelry and set some aside for when I was old enough. I remember growing up watching you read book after book – never did I think I would have one of my own that you could read some day. You may be 93 and living with dementia, but I know that you are proud of me and would read this if you could. As far as I know, the mind replays what the heart can’t delete – so hold close to the memories you love and I know our good times will stay near to your heart. That’s about all for now, kiddo, nothing else new here.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

- Dr. Kimberly Nolan, my faculty advisor and principal investigator for your constant support, guidance, and brutally honest feedback – you made me a much stronger researcher, scholar-practitioner, and writer.

- Dr. Joseph McNabb, my second reader, for your impeccably detailed edits and feedback. Your passion for this doctoral program is what makes it so rich and meaningful.

- Dr. Anne Collins, my third reader, boss, and mentor. Thank you for trusting my expertise, enthusiasm, passion, and dedication to follow in your footsteps! Also, for your detailed edits during a very busy month at work!

- My parents, Jay and Cindy. Mom and dad, you have always been my greatest fans. Without your guidance and support, I would never be where I am today. Whenever this process got challenging, you knew I could do it and always reminded me of that. I love you.

- My dear sister, Mandy, for your unwavering support, countless edits, and for reading this whole thing – multiple times! You gave me the courage to carry on, even when writer’s block got in the way. I could not have finished this without you. There is no friend like a sister and no sister like my sister.

- My roommate, Jennifer, for your friendship and support through this long and arduous process.

- Erika Wentworth, my incredible Zumba® instructor, for motivating me to keep dancing, even when life gets tough.

- My New York Times Crossword subscription for keeping me sane most Mondays and Tuesdays (Wednesdays and on are impossible to finish).
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study and Theoretical Framework** ........................................ 8  
  Context and Background .................................................................................................................. 8  
  Rationale and Significance ........................................................................................................... 10  
  Research Problem and Research Question .................................................................................. 12  
  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................ 14  

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** .................................................................................................. 21  
  Low-Level Misbehavior ................................................................................................................ 22  
  Effects of Low-Level Misbehavior ............................................................................................... 24  
  Proactive Strategies for Handling Misbehavior .......................................................................... 31  
  Reactive Strategies for Handling Misbehavior ............................................................................ 38  

**Chapter 3: Research Design** .................................................................................................. 41  
  Qualitative Research Approach .................................................................................................. 41  
  Research Participants .................................................................................................................. 44  
  Procedures .................................................................................................................................. 50  
    Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 50  
    Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 51  
    Ethical Considerations .............................................................................................................. 53  
    Trustworthiness ........................................................................................................................ 54  
    Potential Research Bias .......................................................................................................... 56  
    Limitations ................................................................................................................................. 57  

**Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis** .......................................................................................... 59  
  Theme 1: Understanding Low-Level Misbehavior ................................................................. 60  
    Sub-Theme 1.1: Definitions/Examples ..................................................................................... 60  
    Sub-Theme 1.2: Impacts ............................................................................................................. 63  
    Sub-Theme 1.3: Causes ............................................................................................................... 66
### Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Low-Level Misbehavior</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Finding: Inconsistency in Defining Low-Level Misbehaviors</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Finding: Repeated Occurrences of Low-Level Misbehaviors</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Low-Level Misbehavior</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Finding: Consequence and Reinforcement-Based Interventions</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Finding: Inconsistent Responses to Low-Level Misbehavior</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in Reflective Practice</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Finding: Inconsistent Results from Disciplinary Strategies</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Finding: Understanding Intervention</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Participant Recruitment Letter</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Teacher Questionnaire</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Letter of Intent Forwarded to Principals..........................................................158
D. Participant Selection Letter..............................................................................159
E. Member Check E-mail.....................................................................................160
F. Informed Consent Form..................................................................................161
G. Interview Protocol..........................................................................................164
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis is to understand teachers’ experiences with low-level, disruptive behavior in elementary schools. At this stage in the research, low-level disruptive behavior will be generally defined as non-threatening and non-destructive behaviors that are disruptive to the learning environment, but not severe or dangerous. Knowledge generated is expected to inform current educators, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and others in order to reframe their thinking about behavior. In addition, teacher preparation programs can be improved through the results of this research as a means to better prepare educators before they enter the workplace.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to low-level misbehavior in order to provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed next, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the theoretical framework, serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

Context and Background

A child’s misbehavior can take place in many forms, such as, but not limited to disruptiveness, aggressiveness, hyperactivity, lack of self-regulation, defiance, and more (Schiff & BarGil, 2004). Disruptive behavior is a general term used to categorize infractions of school rules and expectations. Poor social and emotional behaviors, along with general disturbances of the learning environment, are evidences of disruptive behavior (Liber, De Boo, Huizenga, & Prins, 2013). Students who display repetitive, disruptive behavior can influence other students
negatively, decrease instructional time, and lessen the morale of the school climate. Unfortunately, the literature reveals that many teachers assume problematic behavior originates at home and thus cannot be fixed at school (Faupel, 1990; Hope & Bierman, 1998). However, managing student behaviors is a priority in order to salvage academic achievement.

A recent study conducted in England showed that teachers have begun to accept low-level disruptive behaviors, such as calling out of turn or talking to classmates while the teacher is talking, as “part of everyday life in the classroom” (Ofsted, 2014, p. 5). Learning to tolerate low-level, disruptive behaviors is not a solution to the issue, but rather a teacher’s coping mechanism directly influenced by the changes in student behavior (Sherman & Cormier, 1974). Students who are repeat offenders often get branded by their teachers as ‘disruptive’ and fail to learn how to earn positive reinforcement (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008). Observations of classrooms, for example, have indicated that only 11% of interactions with disruptive children are supportive of appropriate behavior, as compared to the 82% of interactions with non-disruptive peers involving support for appropriate behavior (Walker & Buckley, 1973).

Minimal research attention has been directed toward teacher perspectives of the causes of misbehavior in children (Pochtar & Del Vecchio, 2014). Moreover, much research around problematic behavior has been conducted at the pre, middle, and high school levels, but there is a gap in the research regarding elementary school children and teacher understandings of students’ misbehavior. Regrettably, behavior management has been heavily focused on the output: the behaviors of students. By gaining an understanding of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), teachers can focus on the drivers of student misbehavior: their thoughts and functions. Teachers who are
trained to use prosocial, positive behavioral strategies and supports, and who understand how to effectively teach emotional regulation and self-efficacy, will have better classroom management and promote greater academic achievement (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). Therefore, as a result of this research, educators can change the outcome for at-risk populations who exhibit low-level, misbehavior in schools, while also gaining background knowledge needed in order to teach students how to self-regulate their behaviors. Therefore, this study seeks to understand elementary teacher perspectives of low-level, disruptive behavior.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study is the researcher’s interest in examining metacognitive strategies of teachers, as one potential method for reducing low-level misbehavior in the classroom. Over the past two decades, the treatment and prevention of problem behaviors within elementary level school systems has transformed from punitive with negative consequences to proactive with positive reinforcement (Chitiyo, May, & Chitiyo, 2012; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Benefits of these prosocial adaptations, such as a decrease in problematic behaviors and an improvement of overall school climate and culture, have allowed elementary schools to increase time on learning. Studies indicate a “40-67% decrease in behavioral referrals” to the office since the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Curtis, Vanthorne, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010, p. 161). Unfortunately, the remaining 33-60% of behavioral referrals and interviews of teacher experiences in dealing with problematic behavior, illustrate that teachers have yet to reach 100% student compliance toward even the basic of tasks.

Humans learn behaviors and response patterns through observation and direct experience and therefore are not innately equipped with behavioral strategies to be successful (Bandura, 1977). Teaching students cognitive and behavioral strategies to self-regulate their behavior, such
as observing others’ good behaviors and the direct positive reinforcement those students receive, will enable students to be in control of their own behaviors. Furthermore, educating all students to advocate for an undisrupted learning environment is critical. By silently observing poor behavior and sitting idly, peers reinforce disruptive behavior (Coie, Dodge, Terry, & Wright, 1991). Therefore, it is critical that teachers be well versed in cognitive learning theories in order to teach their students not only how to behave themselves, but also how to positively influence others.

Research continues to indicate that teachers with poor classroom management skills and a lack of preparation and strategies for how to handle challenging behaviors often show higher rates of misbehavior in their classroom (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). In a study conducted on pre-service teacher preparatory programs and classroom management instruction, analysis of the results illustrated that the majority of U.S. states do not require pre-service teachers in general education preparatory programs to take a classroom management course (Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014). According to Freeman et al. (2014), only 4 U.S. states require specific evidence-based classroom management strategies regarding responses to inappropriate behavior. Similarly, only 8% of the teacher preparatory programs in the study offer instruction on how to respond to inappropriate behavior. In a separate study done on special education teacher preparatory programs, only 27% of the 26-special education teacher preparatory programs analyzed offered a course on classroom management (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Disruptive student behavior challenges teachers to meet the instructional needs of their classroom. For teachers to be competent in handling classroom misbehaviors, they must receive proper training and exposure to behavioral, social, and cognitive learning theories.
This research will benefit all elementary school educators or staff who handle misbehavior in the school setting. Included in this discussion can be (but not limited to) educators; aides; psychologists; guidance counselors; principals; assistant principals; and parents. In speaking to this audience, it is anticipated that stakeholders will explicitly teach metacognitive strategies to decrease problem behavior based on the results of this study.

Research Problem and Research Question

Despite implementation of researched-based positive behavioral supports, elementary schools have yet to reach 100% of student compliance toward basic tasks (standing in line, sitting quietly, etc.). The small group of students who are not compliant continue to repeat the same disruptive behaviors, which can influence other students’ behavior (Baker, 1985). While these behaviors are low-level (speaking out of turn, wandering the classroom, pencil tapping) they disturb the learning environment. Students who exhibit repeated, low-level behaviors need additional interventions. Students who cannot perform the expected, basic behaviors will continue to exhibit low-level, repetitive misbehavior until they are taught how to self-regulate their actions through explicit instruction of how and what to change.

The purpose of this study is to understand elementary school teachers’ perspectives of low-level, disruptive behaviors. The research question that the study will seek to answer is:

How do elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom?

In finding out teachers’ experiences with low-level, disruptive behavior, the researcher can explain what is happening from the teachers’ perspective and identify the necessary supports to
best prepare teachers. Additionally, the researcher can make recommendations and suggestions for future teacher training programs.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Classroom misbehavior**- inappropriate behavior, as judged by the teacher, for the given time and/or place (Charles, 1985).

**Low-level misbehavior**- non-violent actions that generally annoy others and disrupt the learning environment, but do not cause harm.

**Human agency**- belief that humans are self-examiners of their own abilities and functions and are intentional executors, not just participants, of experiences (Bandura, 2001).

**Outcome expectancy**- belief of consequences one will endure because of performed, or not performed, behaviors. The assumption that one will behave in a way to obtain a positive outcome and will not behave in a way that will result in a negative outcome.

**Self-efficacy**- belief in one’s self to control one’s own behaviors, motivation, and social environment, so that one can perform successfully (Bandura, 1986).

**Vicarious Reinforcement**- process whereby humans repeat others’ behaviors that are seen as rewarded - learning through others’ gains or mistakes (Engler, 2014).

**Self-Reinforcement**- process whereby humans decide for themselves what behaviors are worth repeating based on the risk or reward; rewarding oneself for achieving something or punishing oneself for not achieving.
**Self-regulation** - the process whereby learners are active participants in their own learning and are able to manage emotions, maintain focus and attention, and control their bodily functions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Behavioral learning theories have evolved significantly since the early 1900s (Bandura, 1971, 1977). During the early 20th century, behaviorists such as Skinner, Pavlov, and Watson, believed that human behavior was shaped by the positive rewards or negative consequences received once the behavior was exhibited (Bandura, 2001). Based on the reward or punishment, humans would learn to repeat or not repeat said behavior through observing others vicariously. Toward the mid-20th century, Miller and Dollard, the first social learning theorists, built upon other theories of learning to reflect social and cognitive contexts (Sapp, 2004). Unlike past behavioral learning philosophies, which focused on the reactive models of behavior, social learning theories held humans accountable for their agentic perspective, or their ability to act and be present in an experience (Bandura, 2001). Social learning theorists determined that humans, as both producers and products of their environment, also use their cognitive processes to influence and control their behavior (Thyer & Myers, 1998). Realizing the need to express human agency as a key role in behavior, Bandura further contributed by developing his own Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 2001).

Bandura, a psychologist and professor known for his work on expanding former behaviorists’ theories, enhanced social learning theories to reflect further cognitive factors,
elements he determined were missing from prior theories (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). Rejecting the strict behaviorist approach, Bandura (1971) refused to agree with traditional behaviorists of the time who thought that the environment alone determined human behavior. While former theories suggested that behavior is influenced by consequences of the actions, Bandura’s SLT focused on the regulation of behavior through self-reinforcement and vicarious reinforcement, not just through direct experiences (Bandura, 1971, 2001; McCullough Chavis, 2011). This focus on the cognitive processes led Bandura to further enhance his theory of Social Learning and ultimately rename it Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in order to affirm learning as a mental process that can result in immediate changes of behavior (Bandura, 1986).

SCT posits that three factors (cognitive, behavioral, and environmental) work in unison to create a yearning to self-regulate one's future behavior (Bandura, 1991). Unlike past learning and behavioral theories of the early 1900s, SCT introduced the concepts of self-efficacy and cognition as additional constructs for how people learn to behave (Swearer et al., 2014). Bandura (1977) believed that cognitive functions were an integral part of understanding our own behaviors and their consequences. The threefold interaction between behaviors, cognition, and the environment, also known as the triadic reciprocal determinism, allows people to inform their behaviors through making connections between actions and consequences (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). SCT justifies behavioral patterns for how people acquire and maintain behavior, for example low-level, disruptive behavior (Van Zundert, Nijhof, & Engels, 2009). By using SCT as a theoretical lens, the researcher can see teacher experiences of disruptive behaviors and relate it to their understanding of the causes of repetitive behaviors.

SCT furthers the studies of previous learning theories by including cognitive processes to elicit a desire to self-regulate future behavior that may or may not be observable (Burke &
Mancuso, 2012). Whether being intrinsically motivated by the forethought of future consequences (outcome expectancies), or the internal motivation from a feeling of accomplishment (self-efficacy), Bandura and Cervone (1983) argue that cognitive factors assist in determining behavior. Ultimately, as humans become more self-regulated and aware of their own mental processes and behaviors, they then learn to reinforce and motivate themselves to improve (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). By gaining an understanding of the cognitive factors that affect behavior outcomes, educators can proactively teach metacognitive strategies as methods to suppress low-level, disruptive behavior.

In addition to self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, Bandura (2001) notes that goal-setting and self-regulation are critical cognitive factors that support a person’s ability to control his/her behavior in order to achieve a specific goal. Also known as ‘human agency’, this ability to monitor one’s own behavior with cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors, allows for more academic learning (Bandura, 2001). An agentic perspective ensures humans are accountable for their ability to make use of the four main components of agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). The problem statement is shaped by SCT because this cyclical process of assessing cognitive tasks will enable students to self-regulate their behaviors and in turn will promote effective learning during academic tasks (Ness, Middleton, & Hildebrandt, 2015).

In studying aggressive behaviors, Bandura’s research findings contradicted beliefs of the time, showing that learning can occur in facets other than by purely observing behavior (Burke & Mancuso, 2012). Because aggressive behaviors have been explained through SCT (Bandura, 1978; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961), SCT can also be used to support teachers’ understandings of low-level misbehavior. Applying Bandura’s SCT as a theoretical lens will help the researcher
to better understand how teachers use metacognitive strategies, such as self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy, as instructional tools to improve student misbehavior.

**Critics of SCT**

Bandura (1971) notes that past behavior and learning theories focused on the inner drive and the subconscious impulses as the determinants of behavior. The conceptual structures of these theories were criticized for neglecting the complex level of a human’s capability to consciously respond to external stimuli (Bandura, 1971). Bandura (1971) also states that according to social cognitive theories, one must learn behavior before performing it. However, critics of social cognitive theories state that these theories pay too little attention to biological and emotional regulations of certain individuals (Shaffer, 2009). Numerous studies show that some students with impulsivity, poor executive functioning, and emotional negativity are also prone to information processing insufficiencies which can lead to aggressive behaviors or antisocial conduct later in childhood (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000; Shaffer, 2009). Critics of social cognitive theories argue that some of these behaviors are not all learned behaviors, but rather inherited by genes and part of general development. Dodge et al. (2006) note that even Bandura himself acknowledged biological restrictions for learning, but Bandura did not determine them to be major limitations. Shaffer (2009) also indicates that other criticisms of social cognitive theories are that the theories do not explain why children become aggressive, or nonaggressive. Instead, Shaffer (2009) explains that the social cognitive theories focus on why children might behave aggressively in particular situations. Researchers would prefer a theory that focuses on the factors that cause information-processing deficiencies (Shaffer, 2009).
Rationale

Approaching this study through a SCT lens allows researchers to provide psychological and behavioral background knowledge to elementary school teachers to assist in the reduction of low-level, disruptive behavior. The researcher could have chosen to view the study through the theoretical lens of Choice Theory, specifically Glasser’s Reality Therapy, a behavior management theory that focuses on humans’ ability to control thoughts and behaviors to ensure that they only make good choices (Glasser, 1964). In this theory, Glasser (1964) argues that the role of the teacher is to structure the classroom environment to help students make positive decisions. Glasser’s Reality Theory, however, does not account for teacher understanding of child development and cognition, nor does it take into account past behaviors and experiences (Glasser, 1964), which Bandura notes are pivotal in informing our future decisions (Bandura, 1986).

SCT has been used as a framework in many different studies and researchers generally use SCT to explain behaviors (health, mental, and physical) and SCT’s applications to behavior and psychology. Originally, SCT was used as a lens to study children’s aggressive behaviors and bullying. SCT has also been used to explain gender development and functions (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), simulation learning activities and their effect on adult learners in nursing programs (Burke & Mancuso, 2012), and digital movie downloading piracy behaviors (Jacobs, Heuevelman, Tan, & Peters, 2012). In a general overview, SCT is often used in education to explain children’s behaviors. However, the researcher will be entering new territory by applying this theory to educators’ decisions in managing children’s behaviors and identifying how teacher experiences with disruptive behavior are informed by SCT.
**Application of SCT**

SCT will impact how the researcher views teacher experiences with low-level disruptive behavior. Using SCT as a lens for this study will also illustrate how teacher experiences are impacted by this framework. Brady, Forton, and Porter (2012) explain that children learn how to behave in many ways, one of which is through observing how teachers respond to misbehavior. Research indicates that teachers often ignore low-level misbehaviors, which can act as a negative reinforcement while also leading those low-intensity misbehaviors to escalate to a stage where teachers are unable to control the behaviors (Brady et al., 2012). Because SCT is grounded in several factors: intentionality, forethought capability, self-regulatory capability, and self-reflective capability, by using it as the guiding theoretical framework, the researcher can gain a better understanding of how teacher experiences are impacted by their intentionality, forethought, self-regulatory, and self-reflective capabilities.

According to Bandura (1986), forethought capability is the notion that humans anticipate likely consequences of their actions and then are motivated to set goals for themselves to direct their future actions. Educators often unintentionally accelerate negative behaviors through quick behavior management decisions. These high-pressure situations frequently leave little think time for teachers to properly handle the misbehavior. An important part of teacher experiences with low-level misbehavior will be in seeing how many teachers use their forethoughts to guide their behavioral decisions. In addition to forethought capability, the self-regulatory capability influences the nature of humans (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) defines the self-regulatory capability as behaving to satisfy self-produced influences. Teachers are under an enormous amount of pressure to create safe, instructional learning environments for their students. As such, they often have to control their responses to misbehavior when confronted with external
stimuli (e.g. administrator’s feedback, student reactions, etc.). Identifying how teachers self-regulate their own behavior and responses will help inform the researcher how they instruct children to self-regulate behavior.

Lastly, self-reflective capability is a true human characteristic. Self-reflective capability allows humans to contemplate their own experiences and thoughts, gain a better understanding through reflection, and change future behaviors to warrant a different result (Bandura, 1986). One of the most critical facets of teaching is in one’s ability to reflect on decisions, lessons, and effort throughout a day. Additionally, Bandura (1986) notes that the most pervasive type of thought that affects actions is a person’s judgment of their own capabilities. An example of this type of thought is when teachers judge “how long to persevere in the face of disappointing results (Bandura, 1986, p. 21)”. When student low-level misbehavior repeatedly interrupts a classroom environment, finding a successful management strategy may take time. Assessing how teachers use their self-reflective capabilities to evaluate decisions they have made regarding student misbehavior will be a vital component of the conducted research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ask any elementary teacher if they have ever had a class without student misbehavior and you may receive a laugh in return. The United States Department of Education (2005) reports that problematic student behavior has been ranked as one of the primary reasons why many teachers leave the profession or transfer to a different school system. Several studies have also noted significant correlations between teacher burnout and discipline-related issues, indicating that teachers’ inability to handle disruptive behavior is a factor in overall dissatisfaction within the field (Kerr & Valenti, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Allday (2011) reveals that teachers spend a significant amount of time refocusing their attention from instruction to misbehavior, resulting in a loss of instructional time. Since academic achievement is the ultimate goal, teachers need to have strategies in place to reduce and diminish problem behaviors within their classrooms. While detention, suspension, expulsion, and other forms of consequences work in certain circumstances, low-level disruptive behaviors are not threatening enough to warrant dismissal from school. A growing body of literature indicates that teachers need a better understanding of behavior change theories and more strategies and intervention tools to reduce the number of misbehaviors presently in classrooms (Briesch, Briesch, & Chafouleas, 2015).

This literature review is sectioned into several parts to represent the streams of literature. The first section defines low-level misbehavior and compares it to other types of misbehavior generally seen within an elementary school classroom. The second part introduces the effects of low-level misbehaviors. The third segment assesses current proactive strategies used to handle low-intensity misbehaviors. The last portion discusses reactive strategies for handling misbehavior and the current research on the use of consequential reactions. In the case of this literature review, elementary schools act as the focus of study. Following the discovery
argument, an advocacy argument is presented to identify limitations and gaps within the
literature. Lastly, the conclusion reiterates the main themes from the literature and provides
suggestions for future research.

**Low-Level Misbehavior**

Low-level, low-intensity, minor, challenging, noncompliant, or surface-level disruptive
behaviors are all terms to describe the result of common acts some students exhibit within an
elementary school classroom. These noncompliance acts, such as students calling out of turn,
dawdling, tapping a pencil, showing disrespect, or refusing to do an assigned task, have been
identified as major contributors to teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, and stress (Skaalvik &
Skaalvik, 2011). In addition, while teachers find ways to handle and prevent these disruptions,
instructional time is hindered and the classroom climate and culture are negatively affected (Kerr
& Valenti, 2009). Often referred to by educators as minor, or low-level misbehaviors, these
behaviors have been recently reported by teachers as behaviors that are progressively increasing
within the classroom environment (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012).

Noncompliant behaviors are a main cause of teacher frustration, stress, and disruption in
academic learning time for students.

There are many interpretations of disruptive behavior. Rhode, Jenson, and Reavis (1993)
define noncompliance as “not following a direction within a reasonable amount of time” (p.
7). Similarly, Smith and Fox (2003) define challenging behaviors as “any repeated pattern of
behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal
learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults” (p. 5). More specifically,
Lawrence, Steed, and Young (1983) state that disruptive behavior interferes with instruction and
upsets the typical classroom activities. Applying these definitions to low-level disruptive
behaviors, researchers can generalize that students who exhibit low-intensity misbehaviors are displaying non-threatening, non-destructive actions that cause teachers frustration and distract the classroom environment from proceeding with the intended lesson (Allday, 2011).

A child’s misbehavior can take place in many forms, such as, but not limited to: disruptiveness, aggressiveness, hyperactivity, lack of self-regulation, defiance, and more (Schiff & BarGil, 2004). Allday (2011) lists examples of minor misbehaviors, some of which are talking out of turn, disobedience, and distractibility, and notes that these behaviors occur much more often than severe misbehaviors, such as fighting, as evidenced by office referrals. Mundschenk, Miner, and Nastally (2011) add that disruptive surface behaviors may also include arguing and blaming others, annoying and bothering peers, and not completing work. While Bellipanni, Tingstrom, Olmi, and Roberts (2013) acknowledge that noncompliant minor misbehaviors are the most regularly disclosed problems by both parents and teachers, Clunies-Ross, Little, and Kienhuis (2008) note that in the primary setting, talking out of turn is the most frequent minor misbehavior.

In order to properly identify any behavior that is presented, it is crucial to understand the difference between minor and major misbehaviors. The qualifier is what helps one determine the type of misbehavior a student exhibits. For instance, if a student’s disruptive behavior is identified as aggressive, one should assume that the behavior was classified by some sort of violence or a serious act of defiance, not by a minor act of noncompliance. Aggressive behaviors can range from verbal assaults and cursing, to outright defiance or disobedience, to physical attacks. It is important to note that this literature review does not focus on aggressive, violent, severe, serious, or major misbehaviors. It is low-level misbehaviors in which this review seeks
to concentrate. Additionally, throughout the literature, researchers use the terms misbehavior and disruptive behavior synonymously.

Overall, disruptive behavior is one aspect of teaching that educators often report as the most challenging issue they face (Scott & Hirn, 2014). Minor misbehavior has also been identified as the most frequent type of disruptive behavior in the classroom (Infantino & Little, 2005). Given that on average most students respond to a teacher’s instruction 93% of the time and the rest of the students require between 4-5 exchanges with the teacher before adhering to the requests, educators agree that minor misbehaviors are a major problem (Dhaem, 2012). Due to minor misbehaviors occurring more frequently than severe problematic behaviors, teachers must allocate more of their instructional time to handling behavior issues, ultimately causing frustration and stress in addition to a loss of time on learning (Allday, 2011). Though the literature uses the term minor misbehaviors synonymously with low-level misbehaviors, low-level misbehaviors are anything but minor. These behaviors affect more than just the loss of instructional time. There are numerous implications from low-level disruptive behaviors that ultimately affect many stakeholders.

**Effects of Low-Level Misbehavior**

Classroom misbehavior affects teachers, students, and the learning environment in many different ways. Research emphasizes that many implications are a direct result of student misbehavior (Miller, 1995). Disruptive behavior affects classroom teachers by causing stress, burnout, and aggravation. Misbehavior also negatively affects the classroom culture and environment through reducing the amount of instructional time due to distractions. Ultimately, the students who present the misbehaviors suffer the effects, too, whether from personal
branding, academic achievement, or social interactions. Minor misbehaviors have grand effects on multiple stakeholders.

**Professional Implications**

Teachers across the nation face the challenge of creating a positive classroom environment that is also conducive to learning, but disruptive behavior prevents teachers from successfully maintaining a focused classroom (Barbeta, Leong Norona, & Bicard, 2005). Unfortunately, these minor behaviors have professional implications that extend beyond just being ‘irritating’. Student misbehavior largely affects classroom teachers in three main ways: creating undue stress, causing teacher burnout, and altering teacher behaviors.

**Teacher Stress.** While student misbehavior in general is a major factor contributing to teacher stress, research specifies that primary and secondary teachers have identified minor misbehaviors as the greatest contributor due to the high frequency of occurrence (Infantino & Little, 2005). Infantino and Little (2005) cite several studies that have indicated that talking out of turn and interrupting others are frequently described as most problematic behaviors for teachers to handle. Aside from their responsibilities for teaching the academic curriculum, teachers are now expected to also implement behavior interventions, as a result of the increase in problematic behaviors in schools (Briesch et al., 2015). It is reported that nearly 40% of all school-based mental health interventions involve teacher support and about 18% of interventions are a teacher’s responsibility, exclusively (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Montgomery, 2012). Adding even one more item to a teacher’s responsibility can cause undue stress and further restrict the teacher from instructing all students. Studies show that behavioral interventions can be complex and time consuming (Briesch et al., 2015). Lack of time and the complex role of a teacher can be frustrating, which can cause teacher stress. Furthermore,
research reveals that the more stress a teacher experiences, the greater the chance the teacher will be less tolerant of disruptive behaviors (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Eventually, too much stress can cause teacher burnout.

**Teacher Attrition.** Teacher burnout is a colloquial phrase used in the educational realm to describe emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation that can lead to teacher attrition. Statistics regarding teacher attrition are shocking, with 50% of new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years and of those teachers, 25% due to student misbehaviors (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson, & Rinker, 2014). A teacher’s inability to handle some forms of problematic behavior is one of the leading causes of teacher burnout and the increasing turnover rate of inexperienced teachers (Kerr & Valenti, 2009). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) indicate a strong correlation between disruptive behavior and a teacher’s ability to achieve his or her goals. Essentially, educators who are able to create a classroom climate with good behavior management systems will encounter less behavioral issues than teachers who struggle to put in place behavioral expectations for students. Effects of stress caused by student misbehavior can have detrimental effects on a teacher’s performance, job satisfaction, and overall health (Klassen, 2010). In fact, a study conducted in 1995 revealed that low-level misbehaviors, such as disrespect and inattentiveness, can be credited for 22% of “the variance in predicting teacher burnout across all grade levels” (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1351).

**Teacher Behavior.** Students’ low-level misbehaviors can drastically affect teacher behavior. Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, and Wehby (2010) report that as a method of avoiding disruptions, teachers may “lessen instructional interactions” so as not to trigger or escalate a misbehavior (p. 173). This means that rather than responding to misbehavior, some teachers may disregard a student, potentially ignoring needed academic support, in order to
prevent and avoid problematic behavior. Although teaching is complex in nature, averting the issue does not foster a classroom that supports students’ academic and behavioral needs.

Additionally, as teachers become emotionally exhausted from handling constant disruptive behaviors, research shows they begin to exhibit negative feelings, a decreased quality of instruction, and less flexibility in their mindsets (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). This change in teacher behavior negatively impacts students and their academic achievement, and simultaneously increases problematic behaviors, causing additional teacher stress and burnout. Mundschenk et al. (2011) explain that sometimes teacher responses can reinforce the negative behavior, causing it to escalate. Myers, Simonsen, and Sugai (2011) agree that teacher behavior certainly has an impact on student behavior. Therefore, Alstot and Alstot (2015) suggest that teachers better understand the functions of misbehavior in order to address the consequences most appropriately. This emphasizes the need for teachers to reinforce appropriate behaviors more than focusing their attention on the negative behaviors (Mundschenk et al., 2011).

**Instructional Implications**

Obvious or not, minor misbehaviors within a classroom can distract other students, thereby affecting the learning environment for all (Little, 2003). The need for teachers to redirect student disruptive behavior is so substantial that actual instruction time for all students is significantly shortened (Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, & Marsh, 2008). Redirecting misbehaviors is only one factor impacting instruction. These misbehaviors becoming normative also causes large distractions within the classroom. Unfortunately, low-level misbehaviors can affect the quality of instruction and can cause others to copy or mimic similar behaviors, further preventing
teachers from using classroom time productively. Loss of learning time and the increase of learned behaviors make focusing on instruction a challenging task.

**Loss of Learning Time.** The presence of minor misbehaviors may cause students to become easily distracted, off task, and unfocused from the academic instruction (Tsouloupas, Carson, & Matthews, 2014). The time spent observing and curbing minor misbehaviors takes away valuable learning time from other students (Bru, 2009). Furthermore, a study conducted in 2005 reported that according to the accounts of 56% of the teachers interviewed, approximately 50 instructional days are lost when calculating the total number of minutes taken out of learning time from minor misbehaviors (Scates, 2005). Given that most states require only 180 days of schooling, losing about 50 instructional days to low-level misbehaviors is a little over one quarter of the school year - and that does not include assemblies, fire drills, and other types of environmental disruptions during a school day.

Moreover, because of consistent minor misbehaviors, teacher absenteeism can increase, adversely affecting student academic achievement (Aloe et al., 2014). When teachers are absent, substitutes are sent in their place to continue instruction. Although state requirements differ, in general, the quality of teaching from substitutes is not directly interchangeable with the quality of teaching from certified educators (Bruno, 2002), which can further result in lost instructional time.

**Generating Normative Behaviors.** Adding to the loss of quality instructional time is the fear that these minimal misbehaviors can become normative, causing students who may otherwise be non-disruptive to mimic and learn inappropriate behaviors (Pas, Cash, O'Brennan, Debnam, & Bradshaw, 2015). Some students are especially at-risk to adopt minor misbehavior habits because they have learned the behavior from others and in some circumstances have seen
benefits of the misbehaviors (Dhaem, 2012). Depending upon the teacher’s relationships with students and students’ attitudes, studies have determined that students are more likely to adopt peers’ misbehaviors as their own if they believe they can get away with it (Way, 2011). Indeed, Infantino and Little (2005) found that on average 23% of the students in a classroom are reported to display problematic behaviors. Minor misbehaviors are becoming commonplace in the classroom, with evidence of, on average, one quarter of a classroom of students exhibiting misbehaviors. While low-level misbehavior can have negative professional and instructional implications, students who exhibit the misbehaviors themselves are also adversely affected.

**Personal Implications**

Low-level disruptive behavior can greatly impact the students who present the misbehavior themselves (Tsouloupas et al., 2014). While most of the research has focused on professional and instructional implications of student misbehavior, recent literature has emerged which focuses on how misbehavior affects the students who behold the behaviors themselves. For example, problematic students suffer the risk of developing more severe behavioral conditions later in life, as well as limiting their own opportunities for success (Dunlap et al., 2006). Even more, disruptive students may lower their chances of high academic achievement and potentially restrict themselves from having strong social interactions with others.

**Personal Risks.** Much of the literature reveals that children who exhibit misbehavior, regardless of the level of intensity, are at a significant risk for developing conduct disorders, being suspended, and more in the future (Bellipanni et al., 2013; Forehand & Wierson, 1991; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). If preventions and interventions are not put in place early, studies indicate that problematic behaviors will worsen (Dunlap et al., 2006). Evidence
also shows that noncompliant students create fewer educational opportunities for themselves (Austin & Agar, 2005). One example of this is the shift in various teacher and student relationships. Teachers and students interact differently after students exhibit consistent, minor behaviors. These changes may cause teachers to give more attention to inappropriate behaviors and place a greater focus on the negative behaviors of the child (Infantino & Little, 2005). As a result, students who consistently misbehave will often receive less academic support from teachers, contributing to a further dislike of school (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008).

**Academic Achievement.** Students who misbehave not only disrupt other students’ concentration, but often struggle to focus on the academic task before them (Tsouloupas et al., 2014). As noted by Parker, Nelson, and Burns (2010), students who are involved in academic activities show indications of cognitive engagement, a factor which leads to improved academic success. In contrast, a reduction in students’ time on learning can significantly impact their academic achievement (Way, 2011).

**Social Interactions.** Students who are disruptive also tend to have trouble getting along with others and generally need support expressing their negative feelings in ways that are deemed safe and appropriate (Cook, 2005). Scholars also pinpoint that student misbehavior can discourage interactions in order to avoid potential distractions, limiting students’ possibilities to build positive relationships with others (Tsouloupas et al., 2014).

It is paramount that educators respond to misbehavior in thoughtful and meaningful ways in order to maintain classroom safety and keep the focus on learning (Brady et al., 2012). According to Skinner (1953), behavior is a phenomenon each individual experiences differently; thus, it is vital for teachers to have a myriad of strategies to handle challenging behaviors given that each student will react uniquely and require different approaches.
Proactive Strategies for Handling Misbehavior

Classroom management strategies are generally classified within two main categories: proactive and reactive strategies (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). Proactive strategies are positive and planned techniques to prevent misbehavior before it occurs, while reactive strategies are responses to misbehaviors. Proactive approaches are behaviors that teachers exhibit in the hopes of altering a situation to minimize and prevent child misbehavior (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). Children who display disruptive behavior often respond best to positive reinforcement (Cook, 2005). Allday (2011) argues that teachers need predetermined responses to minor misbehaviors that allow them to optimize instruction, while also minimizing the disruptive behaviors. To reduce common classroom misbehaviors, studies indicate that pre-teaching expectations and creating a responsive management system is operative (Allday, 2011). Kohn (1996) suggests that rather than viewing low-level misbehaviors as a disruption, teachers should perceive inappropriate behaviors as an opportunity to educate the misbehaving students. By implementing proactive strategies, teachers are able to respond to misbehavior, not react to it (Allday, 2011).

Creating a Positive Environment

Schools and classrooms that have deep rooted positive school climates tend to be more successful than schools and classrooms which lack a school-wide culture that is supportive of all stakeholders (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Having a positive school climate means that the beliefs, attitudes, and values of staff members, students, and administrators are shaped from their interactions and from the expected norms and acceptable behaviors identified through a shared vision (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). Essentially, positive school climates
are understood as healthy organizations that teach stakeholders to be respectful, collegial, and safe (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). These positive social relationships influence a child’s social, cognitive, and psychological development, create a safe environment for all, and provide an atmosphere that promotes a high morale, which can lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction among teachers and academic achievement and performance among students (Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chen, 2011; Witcher, 1993; Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008).

In addition to teaching the typical academic curriculum, character education is the non-academic curriculum that encourages teachers to model positive and expected social behaviors (White & Warfa, 2011). Educators often put a greater emphasis on the scholastic component of teaching, often times putting one “hidden curriculum”, behavioral education, on the back burner (Wren, 1999, p. 593). Overlooking the establishment of a positive school climate can have hindering effects on a school’s efficacy to support and maintain a happy work environment (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). As noted by Freiberg, school climate has been known for decades as “the heart and soul” (as cited in Collie et al., 2012, p. 1191) of a school. Incorporating a positive school culture into the norms of a school can be a proactive attempt to avoid or reduce misbehavior (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012), while also keeping the morale and social values of a school high (Koth et al., 2008). In creating a psychologically supportive environment, teachers can influence the outcomes by merely changing what they say and how they say it to reflect a positive culture (Kerr & Valenti, 2009). Developing a community of positive learners encourages classroom management to be preventative in nature (Smith & Bondy, 2007).

Positive Behavior Supports
One way districts across the nation have been adjusting their organizational behavior is by implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS). SWPBS is an approach for improving the climate and environment of an entire school body (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012). SWPBS is an all-inclusive practice, adopted by a school community, to establish a collective culture and climate in which all students are held to the same behavioral expectations (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). SWPBS is a three-tiered system that is differentiated to help all students succeed. The first level implements the basic tenets of positive supports, typically reaching about 85% of the student population. The second tier is needed for about 10% of the student population and introduces a more directive and focused intervention. Finally, the third tier represents only about 5% of the school population and focuses on individualized behavior plans to support the targeted group of students who are unresponsive to the first two tiers (George, White, & Schlaffer, 2007). Essentially, the motivation for SWPBS is to heighten the quality of life and curtail, or prevent, problematic behaviors through the use of consistent positive reinforcement (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Grounded in team-problem solving, positive psychology, and cognitive-development theory, SWPBS is a positive and proactive intervention system in which expected behaviors are of main focus, rather than the misbehavior (George & Kincaid, 2008). SWPBS has been extensively researched for over 15 years and is a validated framework used to decrease challenging behaviors, while simultaneously increasing positive academic performance (Hume & McIntosh, 2013; McIntosh et al., 2014). The basis of SWPBS is a positive, social climate in which the expectations of student behavior are explicitly defined, reinforced, and consistently assessed and revisited by school staff (Hume & McIntosh, 2013).
Mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, have prompted more interventions that focus on all populations of students (Evans & Lester, 2012), in this case, even students who already behave according to expectations (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Through the prosocial teachings of SWPBS and the multi-tier intervention level, most learning environments are enhanced (McIntosh et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Sugai and Horner (2006) also note that the population of the most severe problem behaviors is often not responsive to punitive consequences and negative management of misbehaviors. Overall, the fundamental idea is that SWPBS focuses on the positive behaviors and approaches as opposed to waiting for problem behaviors to occur and then responding with negative approaches, such as delegating punishment and consequences (Yeung, Barker, Tracey, & Mooney, 2013).

By creating and teaching classroom rules and expectations of behaviors, teachers create an environment that encourages positive behaviors and reinforces the behaviors that are wanted within a classroom (Allday, 2011). Managing a positive climate encourages students to succeed and allows teachers to focus on students who deserve praise (Smith & Bondy, 2007). Conroy et al. (2008) argue that without classroom rules and expectations in place, minor misbehaviors are more likely to occur.

**Contingent Praise**

The majority of literature indicates that one of the most effective preventative measures in hampering minor misbehavior is to “catch ‘em being good”, a frequently used tactic among teachers (Conroy et al., 2008, p. 27). In this instance, teachers increase their use of positive affirmation directly after a student demonstrates the expected behavior (Briesch et al., 2015). For example, if a student who exhibits low-level misbehavior is caught being on-task, the teacher would then recognize the appropriate behavior to reinforce the expectations. Alstot and
Alstot (2015) stress that if a student is frequently displaying attention-seeking misbehaviors, it is crucial for the teacher to only give attention when an appropriate behavior is shown in order to boost the number of instances the child exhibits expected behaviors. According to Polirstok (2015), classrooms where teachers offer more praise and approval tend to foster students who acknowledge expected behaviors.

Chalk and Bizo (2004) note that praise that is unrelated to the expected behaviors (non-contingent) will not influence behavior. Chalk and Bizo (2004) also found that there has been a significant increase since the 1970s in the use of praise, though Beaman and Wheldall (2000) contend this is strictly due to adaptations in practical definitions of the word ‘praise’, not because there was a shift in teacher behavior. Many researchers recommend that teachers make 4 to 5 positive praise statements for every 1 disciplinary statement (Good & Grouws, 1977). According to the literature, when teachers increase their use of praise, both social and academic behaviors improve (Conroy et al., 2008). In contrast, when teachers show disapproval of the presented behavior, some students are reinforced by the negative attention and continue misbehaving (Polirstok, 2015).

**Behavior Charts and Contracts**

Teachers use behavior charts in elementary settings as a proactive attempt to avoid minor misbehaviors and celebrate appropriate behaviors. Smith and Bondy (2007) discuss two types of charts: daily report card and contingency plans. A daily report card requires the teacher to rate the child’s daily behavior and is then given to the parents to connect behavior management from school to home. Alternatively, a contingency contract outlines the expected behaviors and what rewards students can earn if they display such behaviors for a specific amount of time. Levy, O’Hanlon, and Goode (2001) discourage long-term usage of behavior charts, such as
implementing them for more than three to six weeks, since students often become accustomed and do not continue to work hard for the reward. Cook (2005) emphasizes the importance of focusing on target behaviors, a few (not all) of the disruptive behaviors children exhibit, and ensuring that behavior charts and plans are achievable for the students.

**Planned Ignoring**

While small misbehaviors, such as talking out of turn, are the most frequent types of misbehaviors, Brady et al. (2012) point out that many elementary educators often ignore low-level misbehaviors and wait until the behaviors have escalated and are much more challenging to reverse. Some researchers state that low-level negative behavior should always be ignored in order to focus on the desired behaviors (Cook, 2005). Barbetta et al. (2005) agree that ignoring can be an effective strategy to reverse minor problem behaviors, but only if used wisely. When a student displays attention-seeking behavior, Alstot and Alstot (2015) say planned ignoring is the best approach. In doing this, they claim teachers are not allowing the student the attention he or she seeks. Most of the literature states that ignoring behavior should only occur if the action is an attention-seeking behavior (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). While ignoring the behavior does not teach the student what to do, it does show them what is not expected (Barbetta et al., 2005).

**Proximity Control**

Moving around the classroom to monitor and supervise academic and social behaviors is one proactive strategy teachers use to control student behavior (Gunter & Shores, 1995). Used as a cue, or reminder for students, proximity is a nonverbal response to misbehavior that subtly prompts students to engage in the current expected task (Allday, 2011). Increasing proximity to a student who is evidencing a minor misbehavior is a silent reminder to refocus, which has
shown to be particularly useful when a teacher does not want to draw overt attention to the misbehavior (Brady et al., 2012). Closely supervising and monitoring the classroom allows teachers to intervene when appropriate, provide helpful feedback, and prevent problem behaviors (Conroy et al., 2008).

Proximity is not always successful in reducing misbehavior, especially when overused (Belfiore, Basile, & Lee, 2008). Giving too much direct attention to an inappropriate behavior can occasionally be seen as a reward for students who seek attention from others. Therefore, it is critical that teachers develop an understanding of triggers or functions of misbehavior in order to best prevent it from occurring (Alstot & Alstot, 2015).

**Visual, Verbal, and Nonverbal Cues**

Visual, verbal, and nonverbal reminders are intended to be used as educators notice the first signs of non-compliance, thereby making this strategy proactive, or an attempt to stop the misbehavior before the behavior can intensify (Brady et al., 2012). By giving students a “frame of reference”, visual prompting and cues can be proactively applied before misbehaviors have a chance to surface (Mundschenk et al., 2011, p. 100). Alternatively, other researchers suggest using prompting as an antecedent strategy, rather than waiting for the first signs of non-compliance (Scott & Hirn, 2014). Visual, verbal, or nonverbal cues act as friendly reminders, giving students extra support to display appropriate and expected behaviors before the opportunity arises to present any challenging behaviors.

Overall, proactive strategies have been identified as effective behavioral support practices by researchers and practitioners (De Pry & Sugai, 2002). Conclusively, the bulk of the literature shows there is a general consensus that proactive strategies are considered classroom
management best practices (Caldarella, Williams, Hansen, & Wills, 2015). These classroom management approaches help to reduce the chances of inappropriate behavior and alter the circumstances so that problematic behavior does not continue to occur (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). While proactive strategies have been documented as the most effective behavior management practice, there are times when it is too late to implement a proactive approach and a reactive strategy is needed.

**Reactive Strategies for Handling Misbehavior**

Reactive strategies are employed when misbehaviors occur and teachers do not have predetermined responses. Clunies-Ross et al. (2008) explain that reactive approaches typically occur after a child presents a misbehavior and are often just a reaction to the student misbehavior, not a response. Allday (2011) asserts that reactive strategies are usually temporary solutions to reducing minor misbehaviors. Though conventionally schools have utilized a negative corrective approach to misbehavior, research has shown that the traditional punishments, such as suspension, are not effective enough in concentrating on the problem (Chitiyo et al., 2012; Evans & Lester, 2012; Kern & Manz, 2004; Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). While reactive strategies sometimes alleviate immediate issues, they generally do not reduce misbehaviors in the long-term, especially because they do not offer an opportunity for students to learn how to improve (De Pry & Sugai, 2002). In other words, responding to misbehavior does not raise the probability of student behavior changing in the future, but sometimes can assuage challenging behaviors in the moment (Scott & Hirn, 2014). Polirstok (2015) concurs that proactive strategies are often better solutions to preventing minor misbehaviors, but asserts that reactive strategies can work, if used sparingly.

**Removal from Classroom**
A time out, or removal from the classroom environment, can sometimes be used effectively to control minor misbehaviors (Smith & Bondy, 2007). Smith and Bondy (2007) caution teachers from using this strategy, though, due to its quick effect to act as a negative reinforcer. Alstot and Alstot (2015) emphasize the importance of understanding the cause of misbehavior for this very reason. They state that if the function of the misbehavior is to escape, or avoid an activity, then time out is not a logical consequence, as it reinforces the behavior (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). Also, Milner and Tenore (2010) note that any time a child is removed from a classroom, the child’s opportunity to learn is taken away, which ultimately affects academic achievement.

**Reprimands**

Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, and Merrell (2008) define reprimands as “verbal comments or gestures made by the teacher indicating disapproval of student behavior” (p. 319). While scolding students for their misbehavior can temporarily relieve some minor misbehaviors, the literature reveals that many students tend to respond to reprimands with noncompliance and due to the embarrassment or anger they feel, perhaps with increased outbursts (Allday, 2011). Engaging in power struggles can limit the success a teacher may have with reducing the problematic behavior and often leads to teachers threatening a punishment (Kerr & Valenti, 2009). Common reprimands overheard in classrooms daily range from: “If you continue this behavior, then you can’t…” to “You have now lost 15 minutes of recess.” (Polirstok, 2015). Unfortunately, as Polirstok (2015) identifies, removing privileges can cause the child to be resentful and escalate the negative behaviors.

While much of the literature favors proactive strategies and quickly dismisses reactive strategies as a means of handling misbehavior, Irby (2014) stands radically against the grain,
offering that eliminating punishment is not a reality. She states that even if getting out of trouble involves punishment, the ordeal alone can be a worthy and valuable learning experience (Irby, 2014). Other researchers contend that reactive approaches can be used occasionally for handling major and severe misbehaviors, but should not be the main strategy for low-level misbehaviors (Caldarella, Williams, Hansen, & Wills, 2015).

**Conclusion**

Low-level misbehaviors may not be dangerous or harmful, but they certainly impact each and every stakeholder involved, in addition to taking away time from instruction. Unfortunately, teachers and peers can sometimes evoke surface level behaviors by reacting to inappropriate behaviors or engaging in a power struggle (Smith & Bondy, 2007). Furthermore, the literature reveals that teachers respond more to inappropriate rather than appropriate social behaviors and more positively to academic behaviors than appropriate social behaviors (Chalk & Bizo, 2004). Ultimately, Brownell and Walther-Thomas (2001) report from an interview with a classroom management expert that teachers need a better understanding of cognitive approaches for handling misbehaviors and a more comprehensive grasp on self-management techniques to give students the control over their behaviors and encourage behavior management to be less reliant on teachers. This leads the researcher to believe the necessity of utilizing a qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach in order to assess the phenomenon of low-level misbehavior in classrooms and identify commonalities and differences among those educators who share this experience.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Student misbehavior has emerged to be a common phenomenon in elementary school classrooms today. More specifically, low-level misbehaviors that students exhibit take time away from the learning environment and are challenging for teachers to dismiss. Therefore, a qualitative study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences of current elementary educators who manage low-level misbehaviors daily.

The following research question was used to focus the study:

How do elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom?

The purpose of answering this question was to gain an understanding of the perceptions that educators have regarding their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in their classrooms and how they make sense of these experiences. While there is a large range of literature on student misbehavior, very little research has been conducted on low-level misbehavior and there has been no research organized around teacher experiences and perceptions of low-level misbehavior at the elementary level.

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research design enabled the researcher to explore the lived experiences of a select number of elementary public school educators and focus on how they experience low-level misbehavior in their classrooms. While some researchers do not outright define qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) evolving definition offers a sound summary of the approach to research. They note that qualitative researchers are interpretative and naturalistic in their approach to research and while qualitative research places the observers somewhere and
asks them to make sense of specific phenomena, they are also bringing meaning from their observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative research is centered on an inductive approach, which allows researchers to focus on individuals, while also emphasizing adaptability based on the given data and situations presented (Maxwell, 2005). Given that all researchers have philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and theories, qualitative researchers must be especially careful in how they incorporate these biases to inform their research since they are dealing with evolving data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) builds on Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) idea that qualitative research has several distinct characteristics and specifically denotes them as using multiple methods to gather data, in a natural setting or at the participant’s site, with data tools created and provided solely by the researcher. He also indicates the importance of focusing on the participants’ meanings, the ability to adapt during the data process, the reflexivity and positionality of the researcher, and being open to multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013). According to van Manen (1990), when studying human science, it is preferred to use a qualitative approach since we are not looking to explain, but to understand lived situations.

A constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was applied within this qualitative research due to the interaction between the researcher and the object of the research (Ponterotto, 2005). Since the researcher conducted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was logical because in social constructivism, people explore to understand the world around them (Creswell, 2013). Together, the researcher and participants engaged in an interactive dialogue that led to a collaborative construction of findings (Ponterotto, 2005) that allowed for the development of theories, not a proving of hypotheses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Ultimately, a qualitative approach to this research was most appropriate since the
researcher conducted a study that required exploration and development of a deep understanding of a problem (Creswell, 2013).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

An appropriate model of inquiry for this research was an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), since the researcher sought to better understand experiences that participants shared in common about handling low-level misbehaviors. An IPA study is centered philosophically around three main constituents: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology is the general study of lived experiences and how the participants make sense of their encounters (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2011). What makes IPA a specific type of phenomenological study is its basis within hermeneutics and idiography.

Hermeneutics is the ability to interpret phenomena to see the informative and instructional significance (van Manen, 1990). As the participants tried to understand and reflect on their own experiences, the researcher also tried to make meaning and sense of the experiences. Smith et al. (2009) define this process as double hermeneutics. Double hermeneutics is a unique trait only represented in IPA studies since the researcher is “trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith et al., 2009, p.3). Applying a double hermeneutic lens shifts the researcher into a dual role, one that is similar to the participant and one that is different (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is like the participant in that she is a person trying to make sense of an experience; however, she differs from the participant in that she is not interpreting her own experiences, but rather the experiences of someone else. Smith (2011) acknowledges that one cannot study lived experiences without
engaging in a hermeneutic process of acquiring meaning and understanding of those experiences.

Idiography is the study of individuals and therefore because of the idiographic nature of IPA studies, Smith (2011) stresses the importance that these cases are interpretative, not descriptive. IPA studies seek to hear the participants’ experiences, but more importantly interpret how the participants themselves make sense of their own experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Even though the researcher observed patterns across all participants’ responses, she also used an idiographic approach to understand and interpret all individual cases.

In conducting this study, the researcher constructed meaning and attempted to understand common experiences from elementary school teachers who have dealt with low-level misbehavior in their classrooms (van Manen, 1990). Once the researcher better understood the participants’ experiences and their sense-making, she then analyzed the semi-structured interviews for patterns, convergences, and divergences, while also keeping in mind the individual experiences and how these patterns influence each participant (Smith, 2011).

Participants

According to Smith et al. (2009), phenomenologists should keep their research sample size relatively small and homogenous in order to obtain the most meaningful data. As such, the researcher selected nine participants for this study. Each participant was identified as a certified elementary school educator of grades 1-5. Of the participants, three educators had 0-3 years of teaching experience; three teachers had 4-7 years of experience; and three teachers had 8 or more years of experience. Different elementary schools within the same Massachusetts’ public school district served as the field site. Participants’ demographic statuses varied and depended on the recruitment of the participants. The researcher could
have chosen to study the K-12 population, administrators, and school psychologists and guidance counselors, but understanding that phenomenology is meant to focus on small segments of the population, the researcher focused solely on 1-5 educators.

Voluntary purposeful sampling was used to acquire participants. The sample was intentionally selected based on several criteria: (a) employee’s role (certified elementary teacher); (b) grade level (1-5); (c) years of teaching (0-3, 4-7, 8+); and (d) experiences with low-level misbehavior in classroom (rarely, monthly, weekly, daily). The recruitment process for choosing the nine participants followed the subsequent steps.

Once the researcher obtained approval to begin collecting data, the researcher sent a letter of intent via email (Appendix A) along with an attached participant selection questionnaire electronic link (Appendix B) through the field site’s central office to a Listserv of all grade 1-5 teachers across the district. In this email, the researcher requested responses to be sent to the researcher’s Northeastern University Student email address within two weeks of email distribution. The researcher chose participants on a rolling basis until nine participants were selected and three representatives from each band of teaching experience were included within the nine candidates. The study was voluntary in that participants were given the opportunity to choose to take part in the collection of data by voluntary response to the questionnaire through email. The researcher did not receive enough responses, so after two weeks, the researcher sent the same letter of intent to each elementary school principal in the district field site with a brief message indicating the need to forward the letter of intent to teachers in their buildings (Appendix C). Participant selection was done on a first-come, first-served basis so long as the participant fit the needed grade band range. As the participants were selected, the researcher sent an email (Appendix D) letting them know the next
steps. From there, the researcher and participants identified a time and place for the face-to-face, audio-recorded interview to occur. After the face-to-face interviews were complete, the interviews were transcribed on a rolling basis by Rev, a transcription service. The researcher then sent email based member-checks for all participants (Appendix E) to ensure accuracy among the transcripts and to allow for any questions or follow-up information.

Four different elementary schools were represented within this district. Participants’ responses to the initial questionnaire sent during recruitment can be seen in Table 1. In this questionnaire, teachers self-reported how often handling student misbehavior was a struggle, the rate of misbehaviors in their classroom, and whether they felt they had enough strategies to handle misbehaviors in their classrooms. The interviews ranged from 40-60 minutes in length. Each participant was asked several background questions to develop context of their teaching and classroom management experience.

All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. In order to protect anonymity, all pseudonyms and pronouns reflect females, though not all participants were female. Additionally, the original questionnaire had participants define their grade level specifically, but due to the protection of participants, their grade level is not revealed throughout the research report and rather just reported as lower elementary if they are a teacher of grades 1 or 2 and upper elementary if they are a teacher of grades 3, 4, or 5. Table 1 lists each participant by pseudonym and provides background information obtained from participants within their voluntary response to the study’s questionnaire.
Table 1

*Pseudonyms and Classroom Management Data as Reported by Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade Level Range</th>
<th>Teaching Experience Range in Years</th>
<th>Handling Student Misbehavior is a Struggle</th>
<th>Rate of Misbehaviors in Their Classroom</th>
<th>Has Plenty of Strategies to Handle Misbehaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayna</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Lower Elem.</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Upper Elem.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Lower Elem.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jackie.** Jackie is an outgoing, passionate upper elementary teacher who has taught for nine years in the studied school district and one year in a different school district. All years of teaching for Jackie have been at the upper elementary level. Jackie was a career changer; she received her Bachelor’s degree in psychology with a focus on child development, spent 15 years
in an unrelated field, and then returned for her teaching certification and Master’s degree in Elementary Education.

**Michelle.** Michelle is an extroverted, dedicated upper elementary teacher who has taught for 18 years in the studied school district. Michelle has only taught at her designated grade level. She has her Bachelor’s degree in Human Growth and Development and her Master’s degree in Special Education. She has a strong sense of humor, is confident and knowledgeable, yet amiable and kind.

**Shayna.** Shayna is a reserved and happy upper elementary educator who has taught for six years in the studied school district. She has her Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a focus on Mathematics and a Master’s degree in STEM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Shayna has taught two different grade levels, both within the confines of the upper elementary level according to this study.

**Kristen.** Kristen is an optimistic and determined upper elementary teacher who has taught in the studied school district for six years. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in geography and Earth science and a Master’s degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in STEM. She loves teaching because every day is different and she loves that each day one never knows what to expect. Kristen has taught two different grade levels, both within the upper elementary range.

**Eva.** Eva is a creative and jovial upper elementary educator. She has taught in the studied school district for four years. She has her Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education and her Master’s degree in Literacy and Language. Eva loves teaching because it is meaningful and she loves seeing students’ progress.
**Erica.** Erica is a happy and confident lower elementary teacher. She has taught in the studied school district for eleven years, at two different grade levels, both within the lower elementary range. She has her Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a concentration on Human Development, her Master’s degree in Educational and Developmental Psychology, and her Doctorate in Adult Learning and Development. She, like other participants, loves teaching because she believes it is purposeful.

**Amy.** Amy is a unique and creative upper elementary educator who has her Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Geography. She has only taught for two years in the studied school district, but comes across as much more experienced and mature. She is currently working toward her Master’s degree in Teaching English as a Second Language.

**Sue.** Sue is a charismatic and witty upper elementary educator who just finished her first year of full-time teaching, although the year before she filled in as a long-term substitute in another school district. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology with a focus on Environmental Conservation and Women’s Studies. She plans to enroll in a Master’s program soon.

**Kayla.** Kayla is a charming and well-articulated lower elementary educator who also just finished her first year full-time teaching, though she also fulfilled a long-term substitute position the year before. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in English. She also holds a Master’s degree in Elementary Education and a concentration in English. She enjoys teaching because she loves seeing all the kids’ different personalities and watching the students grow over the course of the year.
Procedures

The following section outlines the step-by-step protocol the researcher followed to ensure transferability of the study. In this section, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, potential research bias, and limitations will be examined. The researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before starting the procedures section of the study.

Data Collection

Shaw (as cited in Forrester, 2010) establishes that semi-structured interviews are the main approach to collecting data during phenomenological investigations; therefore, interviews served as the main data source to ensure a complete and thorough exploration of experiences was recorded. Each participant partook in one, semi-structured, 40-60 minute interview. As Butin (2010) reminds researchers that interviewing is a complex task that requires thoughtfulness, strict procedures that are followed, and preparation, the researcher had to be sure to practice and be fully prepared. Interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher the flexibility to modify questions based on the participant responses (Shaw, as cited in Forrester, 2010). By building a rapport with the participants, the researcher was able to obtain rich, meaningful data. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for accuracy. Due to the time commitment of transcribing, the researcher used Rev.com, a professional audio recording and transcription service, to record and notate the interviews. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, the researcher also listened to the audio recordings and matched the audio to the written transcripts. The researcher made any edits necessary to ensure accuracy. The researcher strategically chose a small sample size due to the quantity of interviews and paperwork that follows phenomenological studies (Smith, 2011).
Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the researcher began a six step process of data analysis by following Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s (2009) IPA analysis guidelines. The following process is written in the order in which the researcher analyzed the data. It is important to note that the first four steps were done with one participant and his or her transcripts at a time.

Reading and Re-reading. Once the data collection process was complete, the researcher began the analysis process by immersing herself in the data through reading the transcripts of the interviews. Once the researcher finished familiarizing herself with the data (Shaw, as cited in Forrester, 2010), the researcher then re-read the transcript several times, some with the audio recording playing, to hear the tones and moods of the participants’ voices. At this stage, the researcher was just focused on the participants and listening to their experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Initial Noting. Once the researcher had a grasp of each participant’s experiences, the researcher then began the initial noting phase (Smith et al, 2009). The researcher used the digital program MAXQDA to note anything of interest. This was done by highlighting the text and creating any relevant code names. These descriptive summaries allowed the researcher to explore within a free textual analysis, where she summarized important points, noted connections, and made sense of understandings the participants made of their own experiences (Shaw, as cited in Forrester, 2010).

Developed Emergent Themes. Using the initial notes, the researcher then analyzed the meaning of the participants’ experiences and drew conclusions and interpretations based on their stories. The researcher focused on what was most salient from each set of comments from the initial notes and pared down the transcript so it reflected themes and phrases that represented the
participants’ words. The themes emerged from the double hermeneutic process, whereby both the participants’ original thoughts and the researcher’s interpretation were explored (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher developed emergent themes using the MAXQDA coding system and also indicated on memos how she arrived at the theme to demonstrate how her interpretations matched the raw data (Shaw, as cited in Forrester, 2010).

Searched for Connections Across Themes. Subsequently, the researcher then looked at each participant’s transcription to see how each candidate made meaning of his or her own experiences (Shaw, as cited in Forrester, 2010) and put the emergent themes in a spreadsheet. The researcher used abstraction as her method for finding connections. With abstraction, the researcher put similar themes together and created a new cluster title to denote the newer generated theme (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher did this using the creative coding feature in MAXQDA.

Moved to the Next Case. Once the first transcript was thoroughly analyzed according to the first four steps, the researcher then moved on to the next participant and other transcripts. Due to hermeneutics, it was only expected that the researcher was influenced by previous analyses. The researcher did her best to bracket out the ideas that emerged from the previous analysis in order to view each transcript as a new case.

Looked for Patterns Across Cases. Finally, the researcher created a final table of emergent themes and highlighted any convergences or divergences between participants’ data. Any additional patterns or themes were identified. Ultimately, the themes were translated into the researcher’s narrative account. Once the interpretative process was complete, the researcher ensured trustworthiness of interpretative accounts by sending the participants the
analysis and seeking approval that the analysis matched the participants’ statements and meanings.

**Ethical Considerations**

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) reports that researchers have three basic ethical principles to withhold when conducting any study with human subjects: (a) respect for persons; (b) beneficence; and (c) justice. Seidman (2006) also details ethical considerations of which to be mindful when conducting human based research, such as the risks and benefits of participating and the confidentiality of records. It is imperative that prior to conducting research that the researcher has a strict protocol for collecting data.

To ensure these principles be met with fidelity, the researcher protected the human subjects by taking the following measures: (a) participants were given informed consent of voluntary participation through signature on form; (b) participants were informed through an introductory letter that participation is strictly optional and should not be considered if the faculty member feels threatened or in any way uncomfortable; (c) participants’ professional status was not in any way affected; (d) participants were given a description of the study and provided requested permission prior to conducting any interviews; (e) participants were given pseudonyms to protect their personal identity; (f) data collected from interviews were held in strict confidence; and (g) all audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of research. Though Stake (1995) reminds researchers that “most educational case data gathering involves at least a small invasion of personal privacy” (p. 57), the researcher did her best to ensure ethics were considered. Additionally, the researcher followed standard protocols of
handling research with human subjects as regulated by Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Upon completion and publishing of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All physical data was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s personal home. All digital data was stored in a password protected folder on the researcher’s personal laptop.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher’s purpose for this study was to make sense of teacher experiences with low-level misbehavior. Therefore, the study was an exploration of subjective experiences of the participants. As such, it was critical that the researcher adhered to the four basic tenets of trustworthiness for qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a study is credible when it has proven confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings. They also posit that a study is transferable if it is clear to the reader how the study could be applied in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a study is dependable if there is a clear trail of evidence so the study could be conducted again in exactly the same manner. Lastly, they state that a study has confirmability if it exudes neutrality and does not promote any personal researcher interest or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure that the study was conducted with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the researcher made certain that several validation strategies were employed.

**Credibility.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that member checking is the most important technique for verifying credibility in a qualitative study. As such, the researcher ensured that the participants received a copy of the transcripts of the interviews and were given ample time to review the transcripts for accuracy. Also, the researcher used triangulation of data sources by
making sense of all participant responses both individually and compared to one another to examine consistency. Moreover, through deep and meaningful interviews with participants and spending large amounts of time in the research setting, the researcher could build relationships and learn the culture of the members in order to make decisions about what is most relevant and salient to the study (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, the researcher included extensive quotes from participants to focus on the participants’ views.

**Transferability.** Additionally, providing detailed and robust descriptions about the participants and the settings provides transferability, or the capability of conveying information in alternative settings. Thick descriptions of each participant were included to achieve external validity and the phenomenon was described in sufficient detail to aid the researcher in assessing the transferability.

**Dependability.** The researcher also maintained an audit trail so that there was a clear description of the research path (Yin, 1989). This audit trail included the researcher’s research question, research notes, interview schedule, audio tapes, annotated transcripts, tables of themes, draft reports, and the final report.

**Confirmability.** Furthermore, to continue promoting reliability, extensive clarification of researcher bias was provided through commentary on biases and past experiences that have imaginably shaped the researcher’s approach to the study. By disclosing the researcher’s positionality and through ensuring trustworthiness, any internal threats to validity were avoided. In addition to showing understanding of researcher bias, the researcher kept a reflexive journal via memos where she recorded methodical decisions, reflections, and reasoning as to her decision making throughout the process.
**Potential Research Bias**

Understanding the importance of positionality, I realize that people build their own understandings from relational roles, for example: race, gender, or location (Carlton Parsons, 2008, p. 1129). Jupp (2010) reflected similarly when he identified that his research journey “has been a long one that required a lot of personal change” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010, p. 200). As a member of the teacher perspective, I had to be cautious not to exhibit researcher bias that “protects and serves the interest of the group” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 28).

I am biased in several ways. I am biased as a teacher because my experiences of having to handle low-level misbehaviors have caused me frustration and at times I did not handle misbehavior with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in mind. I am also biased because I was a member of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) team in my former district. As a member of this team, I received official training in PBIS and I spent much of my time researching behavioral interventions. Lastly, the fact that I have only been teaching for six years will certainly affect my research mainly because I lack experience and knowledge in many areas. Nevertheless, using Jupp and Slattery’s (2010) words as a reminder, I was sensitive in understanding participants’ narratives in context throughout my research (p. 201).

It was clear to me that my personal connection to this problem of practice was relational and that I needed to take on a true identity of a scholar-practitioner to work open-mindedly throughout my research. In order to successfully conduct my research, I had to place myself as an observer and phrase my interview questions carefully to avoid influencing my participants. Undoubtedly, my background as an educator posed some issues in my research because I am a member of the field in which I am studying. This means that I have more extensive background knowledge of the field than someone outside of the field.
Limitations

In conducting an IPA study, one limitation rests in the semi-structured interviews. While semi-structured interviews serve as the main data collection tool for IPA studies, these types of interviews can lead the researcher in unexpected directions since they are semi-structured rather than structured. Because the researcher is the main data collection tool, during semi-structured interviews, the researcher may further probe participants with open-ended follow-up questions that were not initially planned, which could potentially take away from the control of the investigation. Ultimately, not using a completely structured nature can be a limiting factor in the research.

Additionally, the sample size acts as a limitation. In this study, only nine participants were selected. While the researcher attempted to create diverse sample groups, the researcher was limited in choices of representatives because voluntary purposeful sampling was used. Furthermore, only one school district was used for the study. This data was only representative of a small population sample from a public school district located in the Northeast region of the United States. Since the value of this research project was to gain an understanding of the perspectives from teachers, a larger sample set could have allowed for more data. Also, the study only addresses elementary educators, not school psychologists, principals, and guidance counselors. The study would be more thorough and inclusive by increasing the sample size and representation in order to gather more data.

Lastly, the transferability to like institutions can be seen as a limiting factor since the study was conducted in a large, urban school district that subscribes to Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). This affects the transferability because low-level misbehaviors in large, urban, diverse, public school districts can be much different from small,
suburban districts. Also, given that the district’s initiative is to increase teacher use of PBIS, this study will be most useful for districts that also encourage their staff to use PBIS as a behavior prevention and intervention support.

**Conclusion**

Conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) qualitative study allowed the researcher to use in-depth interviews to collect a comprehensive overview of the participants’ lived experiences with low-level misbehavior in their classrooms. A qualitative, IPA approach was the best method of inquiry due to its adaptability and construction of meaning from real, lived experiences. Once the data was collected, the researcher analyzed the phenomenon and clustered similarities and differences. Then, the researcher created a narrative account of the findings.
Chapter 4: Reporting of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of a small number of elementary teachers who have experienced low-level disruptive behaviors in their classrooms and how they make meaning of these types of behaviors. The researcher conducted one round of semi-structured in-person interviews with nine teachers of grades 1-5. Influenced by one theoretical framework, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the interview questions were intended to answer the central research question for the study: *How do elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom?* Smith et al. (2009) recommend that a significant portion of the analysis be direct quotes from the transcripts. Therefore, in order to preserve the prosody and mood of the participants’ voices, verbatim responses are used throughout the findings and analysis.

Analyses of the nine participants’ interview transcripts led the researcher to determine three superordinate and ten subordinate themes, which directly address the research question. The identified themes are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

*Superordinate and Subordinate Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding Low-Level Misbehavior</th>
<th>Responding to Low-Level Misbehavior</th>
<th>Engaging in Reflective Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Definitions/Examples</td>
<td>• Preventative Strategies</td>
<td>• Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impacts</td>
<td>• Reactive Strategies</td>
<td>• Realizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Causes</td>
<td>• Keys to Success</td>
<td>• Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explanation of Persistence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These themes represented the experiences each participant had with low-level disruptive behaviors in their classrooms. They further illustrated how teachers understood and explained
their experiences with low-level misbehaviors, responded to these types of behaviors, and engaged in reflective practice to improve their classroom management.

**Understanding Low-Level Misbehavior**

Low-level misbehavior was one superordinate theme that emerged from the data. Participants discussed the most common and the most distracting low-level misbehaviors with respect to the impact on all aspects of the classroom. In doing so, they considered the root causes of misbehaviors and why these behaviors persist despite interventions that are in place. This section will be broken down into the definitions and examples teachers gave to describe low-level misbehaviors; the impact these behaviors have on all stakeholders; the suspected causes; and explanations of persistence despite the work educators do each day to prevent misbehaviors from occurring.

**Definitions/Examples**

The data revealed that these participants have all experienced low-level misbehaviors in their classroom at some capacity. Each participant swiftly named examples of low-level misbehaviors, though three participants requested to see a list of examples first to help generate their thought process. All the examples participants described as low-level misbehaviors were organized into groups and can be seen in Table 3 below. The researcher organized the categories according to how the participants described the behaviors. The first category, “Off-task”, encompasses behaviors that sidetracked the student presenting the misbehavior. The second category, “Non-Compliance”, indicates behaviors the participants viewed as disobedient or not following the set rules. The final category is “Noise Making”, which incorporates behaviors that make sounds. Identifying the best fit groupings was challenging for the researcher given that
many naturally fit within some superordinate themes. Yet, the researcher made choices that best matched the participants’ descriptions. For example, “Out of Seat” could have been placed under “Off-Task” since this behavior could distract the student from the assigned task, but participants described out of seat behavior as doing something without permission, and therefore, was placed in the “Non-Compliance” category. Alternatively, the researcher struggled to categorize ‘calling out answers’ and ‘talking out of turn’ since they broached all three categories, so the researcher created a merged section indicating that the behaviors fit within all three categories. It is also important to note that this table represents a cumulative overview of all nine participants’ responses.

Table 3. List of Participant Named Examples of Low-Level Misbehaviors Grouped by Researcher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Off-Task</th>
<th>Non-Compliance</th>
<th>Noise Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Meltdowns</td>
<td>• Out of Seat</td>
<td>• Tapping pencils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Checked out</td>
<td>• Defiant</td>
<td>• Foot tapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impulsivity</td>
<td>• Disrespectful</td>
<td>• Whistling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incomplete tasks</td>
<td>• Disobeying</td>
<td>• Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doodling</td>
<td>• Refusal to do work</td>
<td>• Humming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flipping pens</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Drumming on desk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Off-task, Non-Compliance, and Noise Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Talking out of turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Calling/Shouting out answers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All nine participants named ‘Talking out of turn’ and ‘Calling Out/Shouting out’ as two of the most common low-level misbehaviors in their classroom. Additionally, seven of the nine participants identified “Noise Making” as one of the most distracting low-level misbehaviors. Shayna thinks “kids generally like a quieter atmosphere when they’re working or learning to stay focused”, and thus believes that noise making is the most distracting behavior
because it interrupts the students’ quiet working environment. Similarly, Kristen insisted that students who are “flipping pens, drumming on the desks, drumming with the pencils, singing, humming, whistling” are the most distracting. Amy added on that she, herself, does not work well with noises and wonders if her dislike for noise making is the reason she finds low-level misbehaviors so distracting. She explained, “I'm a very auditory person. If I have distractions, I can't focus, so I think I just probably project that on my kids and assume that if there's noise, they can't focus…” In contrast, Michelle focused mostly on general off-task behaviors as her source of impact. She described student actions that require constant redirection from the teacher to get the students back on track. For example, she reported having students doing origami during math, reading instead of completing an assigned task, tapping their pencils, and talking out of turn. In fact, Michelle deemed general off-task behaviors as the most frustrating to handle as an educator. She expressed her belief that off-task behavior is frustrating because the primary purpose of school is to show academic growth and when the kids are off-task, they're not doing the work that will help them achieve.

Erica, as a lower elementary school teacher, had a different perspective of off-task behavior. She justified that learning how to be on task and talking in turn are learned behaviors and that her younger students are still learning how to do what they are supposed to do. Thus, with her students, she does not consider most off-task behaviors as misbehaviors, but rather inexperience. Michelle also noted that schools encounter many different kinds of learners with varying background experiences. She wondered if low-level misbehaviors should be defined differently for different learners. For example, she questioned whether the frustration her English Learner (EL) students experience “is around some tiered language that they're not
properly accessing”, or understanding. She then would not consider that a low-level misbehavior, but rather a lack of access to the curriculum.

Ultimately, it became evident that how participants defined low-level misbehaviors was influenced by the grade level they teach and the diversity of the learners. Additionally, participants’ personal preferences for working environments also determined whether they considered a behavior disruptive or not. It was clear from the data that teachers were not the only ones strongly affected by low-level misbehaviors - as the interviews progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the entire classroom as well as the student who presented the misbehaviors were heavily impacted.

**Impacts**

Regardless of the behavior, it is evident from the research that low-level misbehaviors influence many aspects of the elementary classroom. One aspect is the teacher. During the study, participants often shared feelings of frustration due to low-level misbehaviors. Shayna relayed that when she is confronted by repetitive low-level misbehaviors, she feels like she is not making a difference and this sometimes results in her going home frustrated and upset. Similarly, Jackie explained that these behaviors cause her frustration, stress, and insecurities that she inadvertently takes home with her. She stated that her life at home was often impacted by the low-level misbehaviors in her classroom and that her family could visibly tell when she had a bad day. She revealed that her frustration stems from a feeling of self-doubt about herself as a teacher and her skills and abilities to handle and prevent misbehaviors.

While Eva shared similar feelings of frustration she claimed low-level misbehavior frustrates her especially because “it can affect how much content I cover in a day, whether it sets
me behind on certain things.” In fact, eight of the nine participants coupled frustration with losing momentum in a lesson. Kayla shared that she feels her lessons are less effective when she is constantly dealing with misbehaviors because she must stop her lesson to handle the misbehavior and she ultimately loses her focus on what she was teaching. Michelle emphasized that teachers do not read from cue cards and that when misbehaviors occur, educators can quickly lose their train of thought. Sue evidenced similar feelings and added that she feels as though when she has to stop a lesson to handle an issue, she worries that her students are not getting the instruction they need. Low-level misbehaviors clearly frustrate teachers, but they also cause exhaustion and stress. Sue, Shayna, and Jackie all captured moments when they have gone home exhausted, needing to vent about their bad day. In fact, some participants shared the feeling of wanting to quit due to stress and exhaustion.

From stress and exhaustion to losing momentum and not completing what they expected to accomplish, teachers face the impact of low-level misbehaviors every day. As teachers find ways to cope with their own personal or professional impact from low-level misbehaviors, it is important to remember that these behaviors also impact the general classroom and the students who present the misbehaviors. Shayna confessed that these low-level misbehaviors interrupt the flow of a lesson and may cause confusion for students since the lesson is no longer fluid and certain connections may be missed every time she has to stop a lesson to handle a minor misbehavior. Erica wondered the greater impact these behaviors have on the entire class and the time on learning. She reflected:

You've got all this delivery, you've got a sequence, you've got this plan for how the next 30 minutes are going to go, and then it all goes, you know, to hell pretty quickly. Then you have to figure out how to scramble and get it back during that instructional time.
Then you figure out what am I going to cut out to get to X by the end, or do I just scrap this and say we've got to start again tomorrow? I mean, it can have a bigger impact than just that 30 minutes. It can change the whole day. It can change the way you planned out the rest of those lessons for the week because you may have to bump something or change something because you just can't get everybody back on board.

While Kristen advocated that these repeated interruptions impact student learning, she also contended that other students can become frustrated, too. She explained that when a student is disruptive or repetitively distracting, many other students become easily irritated because the distractions can ruin the flow of a lesson. Aside from the lesson losing its flow, Kristen explained that it takes time to handle the misbehavior, which takes the focus away from the students who are exhibiting the expected behavior. In turn, students who are focused become annoyed with the constant low-level interruptions. Kristen presumed that minor misbehaviors impact the culture in the classroom because it causes frustration among other students, too.

When questioned about how these low-level misbehaviors affect the students who present the misbehavior, Jackie was clear in that “they do not achieve at the rate that they should.” She explained that repetitively misbehaving students often do not develop a love for school and lack the development of a natural curiosity that other students tend to possess. In some cases, Kristen believed the students presenting the misbehaviors just did not care. She reasoned that the students do not see what is wrong with what they are doing. She said they do not understand, “that they are distracting other kids or me.” The majority of the participants argued that the students who display these misbehaviors are not receiving what they need, either educationally or socially. In contrast, Erica and Sue offered alternative perspectives. Erica contended, “if what [s]he needs is attention and to get it out, then I guess maybe [s]he is getting what [s]he
needs.” Sue noted that “some of the things they're doing to be funny, so socially it could help them” with their peers. Regardless of the shift in perspective, Erica and Sue, along with all other participants, agreed that students who consistently show low-level misbehaviors are missing instruction at some point and are ultimately affected academically, whether with a low test score, a low grade, or a lack of content understanding.

Overall, the data revealed that low-level misbehaviors impact the classroom, the teacher, and the students who present the misbehaviors. It was clear from the interviews that lost instructional time had the greatest impact on the teacher. The data showed that lost instructional time caused participants stress and frustration because they believe their foremost job is to provide students with a solid academic education and when low-level misbehaviors occur, teachers are prevented from helping all their students meet their learning targets. Ultimately, the participants explained that low-level misbehaviors affect the entire classroom, too, because it prevents other students from focusing and staying on task. Lastly, the participants described that the students who are misbehaving are also impacted, both positively and negatively, by their own behavior. Low-level misbehaviors clearly impact many aspects of the elementary school classroom, and therefore identifying what causes these misbehaviors might help to prevent them from happening.

Causes

Although it is not a teacher’s job to diagnose behavioral issues, it is important to understand what teachers believe causes children to misbehave because if teachers understand the root cause, then they might potentially prevent the behavior from happening. All nine participants suggested 14 reasons as possible causes for misbehavior. Among the most frequently cited was “Lack of attention”. In fact, all nine participants at one point or another
offered “Lack of attention” as a critical reason why students might misbehave. “Academic Frustration”, also cited as “Not knowing what to do”, appeared 20 times across six transcripts. Shayna explained that boredom, academic frustration, or just not knowing what to do once assigned tasks are finished can be reason enough to go off-task. Jackie displayed similar beliefs and shared an anecdote from her own classroom when she realized that low-level misbehaviors might occur because of academic frustration. She was reminded of a time during math instruction when a word problem had the term ‘patio’ and she expected upper elementary school students to know the word. She later realized that the word patio might have been a source of frustration for some students since if a student cannot access a word problem, then he or she often times just refuses to do the work or just sits there, unable to self-advocate.

While attention and academic frustration were the most commonly discussed causes, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and other medically related issues were also frequently discussed by participants as factors of some of the misbehaviors. Kayla discussed a student who had an official diagnosis of ADHD, “but was not medicated”, while Kristen talked about how many of the students that she has “exhibit these behaviors” and are diagnosed with ADHD. Michelle had a student this year that she believed had ADHD, but his parents would not entertain the idea. She stated that she had to “speak to him two or three times an hour” and “the class expects him to misbehave”, but she cannot help him control his behavior if it is a medical issue. Participants were quick to use the term ‘ADHD’ and specifically when discussing these low-level misbehaviors. Other medical causes mentioned were general anger and depression issues, anxiety, and executive function disorders, but ADHD was by far the most discussed medical issue that participants believed was a cause of low-level misbehaviors.
Also mentioned during interviews were factors unrelated to school, such as environments that can cause low-level misbehaviors to happen. Jackie realized that some of the misbehavior that occurs might be caused by outside sources. For example, she wondered if getting into a fight with someone or being punished at home may cause a child to relay his or her frustration through low-level misbehaviors in the classroom. Jackie also questioned whether home life might play a factor in student misbehavior. She explained that some of her students come from situations where meals are not guaranteed and that hunger might play a part. Amy also acknowledged that she works in a low-income area and wondered if the stressors from those households could cause some of the misbehaviors she experiences. For instance, Amy expressed that some of her students often appear to be sleep deprived, which may cause her students to misbehave. Participants generalized that low-level misbehaviors can be driven by a vast number of initiators.

The data revealed that there are a wide range of factors that contribute to low-level misbehaviors. Participants could identify potential causes of low-level misbehavior, but were not certain that their assumptions were always valid. Not being certain of the issues that cause these low-level misbehaviors to occur makes it even more challenging for teachers to prevent and handle the behaviors as they happen. Ultimately, it proved to be even more difficult for participants to explain why misbehavior still occurs, despite all the interventions that are currently in place.

**Explanation of Persistence**

During the course of interviewing, the participants answered with certainty what they believe causes children to exhibit low-level misbehaviors. In fact, all nine participants answered without hesitation. Interestingly, when asked to explain the persistence of misbehaviors, or to
describe why low-level misbehaviors continue to occur even though there are interventions in place, three of the participants laughed and said, “I don’t know.” Kayla was truly stumped by the question, “I don't know. I ask myself that every day. [Laughs] Honestly, I don't know.” This raises the question of why is it so easy for educators to identify reasons kids misbehave, but difficult to explain their repeated occurrence?

The constancy of low-level misbehaviors, as identified earlier, is often a source of frustration for teachers. Kristen vented that she feels frustrated when she has repeatedly told students to be respectful and to follow the directions, yet they still exhibit the misbehaviors. It seems what is most frustrating for her is not being able to prevent the misbehaviors from happening. When asked to explain why she thinks students still misbehave, she responded that it depends on the student. She explained that impulsivity, or the act of displaying behavior with little or no forethought, can sometimes be the reason low-level misbehaviors still occur. Despite the fact that she has set the expectations for how her students are expected to behave, she understands that there is a level of impulsiveness in youngsters that prevents them from controlling their behaviors. For example, she acknowledged that when recess is approaching some struggle to control their excitement and ultimately lose focus and appear off-task. Like Kristen, many other participants talked about impulsivity and attention. Michelle stated that it would be “statistically impossible” for all her students to sit quietly and passively while they wait for the next direction. She says, “I have a class of 24 kids so at any given moment, someone is just always gonna have to have something going on with them.”

Eva reasoned that low-level misbehavior can often times persist because teachers’ reactions and behaviors or their intervention plans are inconsistently implemented. She described how it is frustrating to decide how to best handle these behaviors. Sometimes she
simply walks away rather than engaging. Similar to Eva, Amy believes that sometimes it is just easier to ignore the behavior rather than stop the lesson to address one student. She explained, “It's kind of like, pick your battles.” Amy compared minor misbehaviors to major misbehaviors stating that major misbehaviors, which she describes as “dangerous and destructive”, are much easier to stop because they are easily labeled and identifiable. Essentially, she thinks low-level misbehaviors, in comparison to major misbehaviors, are harder to handle as a teacher. She said, “that might be why they're so prevalent… because there's so much gray area depending on my mood, depending on my attention, depending on me.” She recognized that determining whether a behavior is considered low-level is very subjective. She insisted that depending upon the teacher’s mood, the reaction might vary, causing children to question, "Well, she sometimes yells at me, sometimes doesn't”, which according to Amy may explain the persistence of low-level misbehaviors.

Erica wondered whether the persistence varies depending upon the child’s grade level. She reminisced back to her student teaching days when she worked with upper elementary students, which she says was a totally different experience than her current lower elementary classroom. She theorized that as students get older, their behaviors are more purposeful and intentional, in contrast to younger elementary students who may just not understand how to handle their behaviors. Erica was the only participant to question the persistence of low-level misbehaviors and the intentionality behind them through the lens of multiple grade levels. Her insight into other perspectives helped the researcher understand that a child’s maturation may play a role in the persistence of misbehaviors.

**Conclusions.** Overall, all participants have dealt with low-level misbehaviors in their classroom at some point or another, despite the grade level. Participants were able to easily
identify the difference between minor and major misbehaviors and had a plethora of examples of low-level misbehaviors from their own classrooms. The participants expressed several ways in which these minor misbehaviors impact themselves, the classroom, and the student who presents the misbehavior. In addition, the participants were able to name several potential causes of low-level misbehaviors, but some struggled to explain why misbehaviors continue to occur when they may know the source of the issue and have worked to prevent it. Eventually, the participants revealed that no matter how much they understand low-level misbehaviors, students will still misbehave. There is a serious need to change the expectations of classroom behavior since most children cannot sit quietly or maintain attentiveness all day long. Some of this misbehavior may be due to the teacher’s behaviors. Therefore, teachers need a variety of strategies in place to respond to these low-level misbehaviors.

**Responding to Low-Level Misbehaviors**

Another superordinate theme that emerged from the data is the way in which teachers respond to low-level misbehaviors. Since the participants have defined and provided examples of low-level misbehaviors, discussed the potential causes, impacts, and persistence, it seemed natural to the researcher to look at how teachers prevent and handle the misbehaviors that occur. As the researcher was grouping the codes, it was clear that most responses fit into one of two categories: Preventative or reactive strategies. Participants talked about ways they set up their classroom systems to prevent misbehaviors from occurring and they also shared many strategies they implement once misbehaviors occur, since they believe misbehaviors persist despite the number of preventative strategies that are in place. Other responses fit within a subcategory of keys to success; ideally, advice these participants would give a pre-service teacher entering a first time teaching experience.
Proactive Strategies

Proactive strategies are those that teachers put in place to avoid minor misbehaviors from occurring. These strategies are not reactive; they happen before the misbehaviors take place. Participants focused on positive reinforcement as their main preventative strategy, but also discussed reward systems and praise as common proactive plans. The participants were very apt to share ways in which they engage learners positively so that other students can observe and learn from the positive feedback, such as providing praise. Many participants mentioned that their district subscribes to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a system in which staff pre-teach the expected behaviors to students and reinforce with praise and rewards. Thus, the participants admitted their daily focus is on preventing misbehaviors before they begin. Additionally, more than half of the participants described Open Circle as a social curriculum that their district uses to help students work through problems. Students role-play tricky situations and demonstrate how to behave and act responsibly in a variety of circumstances. Participants attested that Open Circle has supported the prevention of these low-level misbehaviors and provided situations in which they can praise positive behaviors, though some participants disclosed that finding time in the school day to teach the additional curriculum is a challenge.

In addition, the participants connected positive reinforcement with laying the foundation, or pre-teaching expected behaviors, so students are aware of exactly what is expected of them. Participants unanimously stressed the critical nature of starting the year off by teaching students how to behave. It is important to note that some participants focused on modeling and role-playing desired behaviors so students could observe and experience the expectations themselves. These select participants did not refer to teaching as “telling” students the rules and
routine. Shayna explained that through modeling the behaviors she wants to see in her classroom, she is able to better reinforce what she would have said just in words. She demonstrated how she would phrase it to her students, “I want you to be respectful and responsible. That looks like raising your hands, not calling out.” Similarly, Sue stressed the need to be explicit and direct, and to withhold any assumptions. For example, she shared that by upper elementary school, many teachers assume that the students know how to walk in a silent, straight line. She said, “Even though they've known to do that since kindergarten, you know, it's not something that they're going to do for you unless you make it explicit.” She justified modeling desired behaviors mainly because she said “it’s not natural” to walk in a straight line, or raise your hand to talk; these are rules in school, but in the real world children do not need to think about these behaviors. Kayla also uses frequent reminders and check-ins to be direct and explicit. She stated that she does not need to remind students all the time, “but when there's things that we don't do all the time, they need to be reminded before it happens.” Kayla and a few others use this strategy proactively, while others exhibited a more reactive use to the reminder strategy.

Eva indicated that setting expectations is not enough; she believes teachers need to hold students accountable for following those expectations. One way she has found to be very successful is through praise. She claimed that focusing on the students who are doing the right thing has done “wonders” in her classroom. She tries to “acknowledge the positive behaviors that are happening in the classroom” in the hopes of others observing the praise and catching on. Sue also uses praise as a positive reinforcer in her classroom. Sue offered the following suggestion when giving praise, “be specific with your positive reinforcement, not just, ‘Good job,’ but, ‘I really liked how you did [state specific behavior]’.” Eva shared similar advice as
Sue, explaining that any time a teacher gives praise it should be specific so that the desired behaviors happen more often. She provided the following example of specific praise she would give in her classroom, "I love the way Theresa has already started her morning work", where she states the desired behavior.

Additionally, Eva tries to focus on the students who are doing the behaviors she wants so she can easily give praise. Agreeably, Erica advocated that praising the positive behaviors helps to prevent misbehaviors from occurring. For the students who are the ones seeking attention, Kristen suggested that teachers “try to find a way that they can have more positive attention versus more negative attention”, which admittedly participants described as not being as easy as it sounds. Overall, it is clear from the data that participants felt positivity and praise are good motivators for students to behave as expected. Amy mentioned that another critical component of positive reinforcement is finding a moment to give immediate praise to those who have recently misbehaved. If a student has just turned around a minor misbehavior and is on task, she encourages teachers to then positively reinforce with either praise or a reward.

Rewards are another way of giving positive reinforcement. The studied district’s push to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in all classrooms has been well-received by the interviewed staff. The participants particularly liked the idea of giving tangible rewards to students who demonstrate the desired behaviors. Whether utilizing a school-wide ticket system, a whole class ticket system, an online app such as ClassDojo, or using marble jars, all nine participants mentioned some reward system that they use in their classroom to reinforce the positive behaviors. Despite the variety of systems, they all work in a similar manner - if students are caught doing the expected behavior, they get a ticket placed into a raffle for an individual reward, a marble placed into a jar which then builds up for a whole-class
reward, or points on an online app that enable the students to increase their chances to win a prize. In all interviews, it became apparent that participants used both whole-class and individual rewards to motivate their children to behave.

The participants exhibited ownership and happiness around the District’s PBIS initiative and supported the stance that positively reinforcing students aids in preventing minor misbehaviors. While participants were able to identify some proactive strategies they have in place to prevent misbehaviors in their classrooms, it was clear overall, that participants need more strategies and professional development around preventing misbehaviors. Many participants initially responded that they are unable to prevent misbehaviors despite their use of proactive strategies, and many acknowledged that it is impossible to completely eliminate minor misbehaviors. While participants shared limited proactive strategies, they offered a vast amount of reactive strategies they employ in their classrooms.

**Reactive Strategies**

Unlike proactive strategies, reactive strategies are not intended to prevent misbehaviors (though they can certainly have that effect), but rather are strategies that teachers exhibit as a reaction to a situation. The researcher noted that many participants often related reactive strategies with negative responses, even though not all reactive strategies are negative. After analyzing the data, it was clear that there were three categories within reactive strategies that fit the teacher responses. The researcher grouped the reactive strategies by their distinguished traits: redirective strategies if the reaction sought to change the child’s focus, negative strategies if the reaction involved a loss of something or public shaming, and outside help if the reaction resulted in the need for external assistance.
Redirective Strategies. While some of the redirective strategies that are mentioned in this section might appear as proactive and preventative, the researcher labeled them as reactive and redirective based on the way in which the majority of participants described them. One redirective strategy mentioned is the use of frequent check-ins and reminders. For example, Kristen shared that when students show signs of calling out, looking distracted, or doodling, she does a class check-in, where she will stop her lesson and remind students of the expectations. Kristen indicated that her use of the strategy is unplanned and based on the read of the room, which lends itself to being redirective rather than preventative. Eva also evidenced moments of reacting to misbehavior when she described using a check-in directly after a minor misbehavior has occurred. She explained she might check in with them quietly and “ask them to redo the behavior the right way.” It is unclear to the researcher whether she models the expected behavior or if she leaves it up to the students to demonstrate their understanding to her.

Alternatively, several participants described their use of ‘frequent reminders’ in a different way than intended. Many explained that when a minor misbehavior occurs they remind students that an adjustment in their behavior can result in a prize of some sort. In this case, the participants’ reminders are less about the corrective nature of the behavior and more about a quick and easy fix to stop the behavior. Unfortunately, bribery does nothing to teach students the correct behaviors, reinforce the expectations, or encourage intrinsic motivation.

Jackie and Eva also rely on breaks as a frequent redirective strategy. Eva outlined the strategy her special educator shared with her for students to take a break. She specifically reminisced about a particular student who refused to do work. She explained that her special educator suggested giving the child an off-topic task, such as bringing a box of pencils to another room, for when he refused to do a task in order to distract him from his current behavior.
an ‘antiseptic bounce’, as the research calls it, allowed the child to redirect his or her attention and be successful in some other task, it also gave the teacher a moment for a break. Jackie understands the need for teachers to have breaks all too well. Even though she acknowledged the positive outcome of asking a misbehaving student to take a short break, she also indicated that she uses a break for herself, too. She said breaks are important “because there's going to be days when teachers might come to tears. [Laughs] It's happened with me. I've had to leave the room a couple times um this year. Never had to before.” She went on to describe this specific situation in which her reactive behavior was to eliminate herself from the situation. She justified, “I needed a break because everything I was trying wasn't working and I was getting frustrated. More with myself, because I knew if I stayed, I was going to lose my cool and I didn't want to do that.”

Sue emitted frustration when discussing low-level misbehaviors and constantly having to redirect students’ attention away from misbehaving. She claimed she cannot teach in the way she wants to teach because much of her time is spent redirecting low-level misbehaviors. She admits she gets frustrated because the students who may need academic support are not always the focus. It could be assumed through analysis of the research that educators want to be positive and proactive, but that their frustration from low-level misbehaviors and other constraints might restrict them from always having positive solutions.

**Negative Strategies.** Though participants in this research study stressed the importance of positive reinforcement and utilizing proactive strategies to help prevent misbehavior, it was still evident that the participants sometimes struggle to find positive ways to handle misbehavior. Each participant mentioned at least one negative reactive strategy, though many participants prefaced that these strategies are only utilized when they have hit a wall and do not
know what else to do. The most commonplace reactive strategy was the usage of a Clip Chart. Erica described the Clip Chart as a behavior chart in which all students have a clothesline clip with their name and they start at green, usually indicated as “ready to learn.” She explained:

It goes up to purple and down to red or whatever. So the idea is that when you're there at green, you're doing everything that's wonderful. If you're moving up the chart, you know, then that's fantastic. It's not expected; it's going above and beyond, and there are rewards for doing that. And the goal is that's not something that happens every day. It's something that is special. You know, a child might get to the top of the chart twice in a year.

Though this sounds positive in nature, few participants talked about using the Clip Chart as a proactive strategy; instead, many focused on the colors beneath the green: yellow, orange, and red. Amy described the bottom portion of the Clip Chart:

So under green is “think about it”, yellow, orange is “consequence”, that means you lose recess the next day. Red is “call home”. That means that we are going to call your parents at the end of the day if you didn't turn your day around, or if you did a behavior that was dangerous or destructive.

She added on that students “almost continue always going down until they get to red, in which then during the last 10 minutes of the day they'll try and change their day around.” When questioned about how the students react to going down on the Clip Chart, Amy responded, “They're mad at me.” She answered that they will roll their eyes and start “muttering, slumping, stomping around”, which indicates that this reactive strategy is not improving their misbehavior, but actually instigating other misbehaviors. Erica has mixed feelings about the Clip Chart, since she has read articles that argue that there is an aspect of public shaming. At the lower
elementary level, she does find the chart helpful in stopping misbehaviors, but understands that “there is an aspect of public shaming” that she does not really like since “everybody can see where everybody's names are at any point.” However, since students physically move their own clips down, she believes there is a profound moment on the student where he or she is “probably feeling like, oh god this feels awful, I don't want to do this again.” Although, according to Amy, it sounds as though in the upper primary grades, the reaction is met with different behaviors and little positive reflection, as noted by her examples of eye rolling and increased misbehaviors. Kayla has decided to start “weaning off of using” Clip Charts because of similar readings that Erica mentioned. She did acknowledge, however, that she used the Clip Chart this year but attested, “I don't know that I'll use it again next year.”

Another reactive strategy, verbal reprimanding, is one that many participants explained does not work in controlling minor misbehaviors, yet they admit to using it anyway. Sue blames high stress levels and lack of patience for resorting to reprimanding a student. She showed deep understanding that this strategy is ineffective, but realized that she would continue to use it despite her knowledge and experience with its lack of efficacy. She says it does not work because calling students out makes them even more distracted from the lesson. Sue admitted that students end up “just concentrating on the fact that they're humiliated”, which she recognized is not helpful for keeping kids on task. Kayla noted that although she uses reprimands and consequences as reactive ways to handle misbehaviors, she noticed this year that reprimands and negative attention affected her students in a negative way. She explained, “anything that was positive always worked in a positive way and the minute something negative happened, it took a downward spiral completely.”
*Outside Help.* The last set of reactive strategies discussed by the participants centered around outside help. Jackie said this school year has had the most administrative involvement in her entire teaching career. She reminisced with her assistant principal at the end of the school year on her challenging class and specifically her students’ low-level misbehaviors in which she stressed her need for help with “behavior plans” and “more tools for [her] tool box.” She claimed she had never “been trained” and “it’s not a book [she’s] read”, but something she plans to actively seek out next year in order to prevent having to utilize outside help as a reactive strategy. At Amy’s school, the disciplinary routine is school-wide. According to her, if a student in her classroom has four minor misbehaviors, that automatically warrants removal from the classroom to the office. When discussing the strategy of sending students to the office, she seemed uncomfortable. While she wants to be able to use the principal’s office as a successful preventative strategy, she finds its current set up as a reactive strategy more frustrating than helpful. Amy recalled students going to the office and coming back as “happy little clams.” While she sees some good in the fact that the student behavior has turned around, she worries about the long-term consequences. She disclosed that the culture among staff is that the administration is “patting the kids on the back and giving them a hug and a kiss and sending them on their way.” She appreciates that often times the kids come back from the office in a good mood, but is frustrated when the behaviors continue, which prompts her to realize that there are relatively no consequences for low-level misbehaviors like there are for major misbehaviors.

Eva had a tremendous struggle this year with refusal to do work. She relayed that she had never experienced a child who refused to do work prior to this school year. She was not prepared for the low-level misbehavior and claimed she “didn’t know what to do with that.” Like many other participants, she mentioned having high hopes of being “that” teacher to
get through to the student, but after two months into school, she realized it might not be her. She struggled to be consistent with this particular student, even though consistency is one factor she deems most important for managing a classroom. She remembered using all her management strategies she knew, but this student’s constant refusal to obey made it challenging for her to stay calm and consistent. For example, when nothing else worked, she would ask the student to leave the classroom, but he would refuse. As a result, she often relied on outside help from administration or the guidance department to come and remove the child from the classroom so she could continue her lesson. She acknowledged that she only uses outside help when she is unable to gain control in her classroom. She added on that she feels the situation “goes nowhere”, ultimately does not change the student’s behavior, and inconveniences the person who helps.

Most of the time that participants spent talking about sending students to the office was in direct relation to the Clip Chart’s red portion. Some of the participants gave the impression that sending students to the office is not an actual strategy these particular educators care to use, but rather a formality of the Clip Chart, since some schools use it as a school-wide tool. Though many participants rely on parent support, several participants only discussed parental communications with regard to the sequence of the Clip Chart. Additionally, many participants talked about involving parents as a strategy to stop misbehaviors that have been occurring, leaving the researcher wondering whether or not those participants had made positive attempts to connect with the parents prior to them receiving negative feedback.

Though the educational world deems the use of proactive strategies as best practice in a classroom, the data from this study suggests that reactive strategies are easier for teachers to implement at a time of crisis. Kristen openly and honestly admitted, “I don't know that I prevent
misbehavior as much as react to misbehavior.” How can educators find ways to prevent low-level misbehaviors in their classrooms, so as to limit the occurrence of minor misbehaviors? Perhaps looking at participants’ ideas of keys to success might provide some insight.

**Keys to Success**

As noted, participants’ responses to low-level misbehaviors vary. All participants rely on both proactive and reactive strategies in order to manage the behaviors within their classrooms. Given the opportunity to provide advice to new teachers, participants were asked what new teachers absolutely need to know in order to respond to minor misbehaviors well. The amount of advice was overwhelming and needed to be paired down by the researcher. Ultimately, the researcher identified two subgroups: Proactive Advice and Reactive Advice. The researcher grouped similar responses into further categories that support those two subgroups. For example, the researcher placed Make Teaching Meaningful, Seek Help and Gain Experience, Differentiate, and Build a Strong Classroom Community within Proactive Advice because all of the advice within those categories identified behaviors teachers needed to do before the misbehaviors occurred. The researcher put Stay Calm and In Control in the reactive category because it had to do with reactive behaviors the teachers needed once a misbehavior happens. Interestingly, one can observe that although teachers had many reactive strategies that they use in the classroom, when given a chance to advise others, their focus lent itself to proactive strategies.

**Proactive Advice.** After sharing their experiences with low-level misbehaviors, participants were asked to give advice to pre-service educators about how to prevent low-level misbehaviors. One consistent opinion was to make teaching meaningful for both students and
the teacher. Participants were quick to advise loving what you do. They unanimously advocated that teaching is a fun occupation that, regardless of the stress, exhaustion, and frustration that can arise, is purposeful and meaningful to society. It was clear from the data that participants love what they do and are passionate about making a difference. Many participants compared teaching to office jobs and explained that in education they can watch kids grow and help them to succeed. Personal satisfaction and the ability to have unpredictable, daily authentic experiences were conveyed as important factors to being positive and happy, which participants ultimately relayed as helpful for being proactive rather than reactive. Essentially, according to the participants, a teacher’s mood and general attitude affect the climate of the classroom.

Additionally, participants revealed that asking for help and gaining experience within the field would also assist incoming teachers in finding strategies that work for them. Six of the nine participants claimed their student teaching practicum was the best learning experience for preventing and handling low-level misbehaviors. Participants like Shayna, for example, created classroom management systems that they observed from their practicum experience. She created her marble jar positive reward system from her cooperating teacher and built upon it to make it unique to her philosophies. Amy also recognized that she learned a lot about classroom management from her supervising practitioner. She said she learned how to be empirical about behavior and data, which curbed her from saying, "Oh my gosh, he's always out of his seat" to "Well, how often is he actually out of his seat?" and documenting that data. Likewise, Kayla believes the student teaching practicum is one of the greatest learning experiences for how to manage a classroom. Conversely, she does not believe that you can learn classroom management through a textbook.
I definitely think that's one thing that is learned, not taught. I mean, I took a lot of classes, but I feel like there's no actual class that teaches classroom management. You just… until you do it, you don't really know ...

Unlike Shayna, Amy, and Kayla, Erica had what she describes as an awful student-teaching experience, but still validated that even the worst mentors can offer the best learning experiences, teaching us not necessarily what to do, but perhaps what not to do. She reminisced about her supervising teacher:

… who had a time-out chair in the classroom and… while they were in time-out, not focusing on what everyone else was doing, they were journaling about why they were there. And so, they really were missing time on learning or time on task and removed from the important things they were probably trying to escape anyway. And I remember being like, this can't possibly be right! And I hadn't necessarily seen what the right thing was, but I knew that that definitely was not it! That was a really pivotal experience for me.

Whether learning from positive or negative experiences, eight of the nine participants cited seeking help and learning from experience as ways to improve classroom management. Other ways participants described seeking help was from colleagues. Observing others, co-teaching, attending new teacher seminars, collaborating with the guidance counselor or social worker were all ways in which participants advised new teachers to improve their classroom management skills.

Furthermore, all participants spoke about building a strong classroom community as a significant way to prevent misbehaviors in the classroom. The most popular responses for how
to create a strong classroom community revolved around setting clear expectations and routines in the beginning of the year and being organized so there is no downtime for students to misbehave. Michelle stated, “I try to maintain clear classroom management in that we're always clear that there's always something to be done, there's always work to be done.” In a similar fashion, Kristen tries to eliminate distractions at all costs by taking away items that might be used as noise makers beforehand, or being over prepared so that there are no questions about what to do next. She said, “That helps, I think, to prevent some, because I think that some misbehavior happens when kids aren't sure of what to do.” Eva added that part of building a strong community is through creating structured routines and modeling exactly what is expected. She claimed, “You have to be very structured with everything for the first six, you know, seven weeks. It's going over, it’s repetition, going over the routine modeling for them everything.”

Lastly, participants advised differentiating management to meet the needs of the individual learners. One main connection among participants is that they each have whole class and individual management systems in place. A whole class management system is one where the class’ behavior as a whole determines whether the entire class gets a reward or consequence. Individual management systems are unique to each individual student, such as behavior plans, which allow individual students to be rewarded for good behavior or endure a consequence for poor behavior. Shayna said she always starts the year with strong whole class systems and slowly introduces individual strategies to reinforce the desired behavior. Erica added that in the beginning of the year, she teaches students to understand that everyone is different and therefore, “fair means everyone gets what they need”, so what happens for one student might look different for another, but that is how she and her class define fair. Eva reminds teachers that teaching children is not a one size fits all model. She said, “I think I
remember the first kind of plan that I made like that, I thought I could use it for the next student, and it was like that didn't work at all.” For example, Kayla talked about students with special needs or students who are on educational or behavioral plans and realizes that those students may require different interventions, services, or more frequent attention. Understanding that those students require more assistance, she said she is apt to give those students more chances or offer them other options since their needs are different than the rest of the students.

Some participants use self-monitoring as a strategy for differentiation. Kayla lets kids take a break when they feel they need it, which may look different for different kids. Creating an environment that allows students to have ownership is critical, according to several of the participants, for they believe they have a place and a purpose in the classroom. Something that encourages ownership is Eva’s classroom management where students rotate through various classroom jobs, such as Homework Helper or Paper Monitor. She thinks, “they have a role in the classroom. They feel like it's their community; they're contributing to it.” Regardless of how much proactive advice participants can provide, unfortunately it is unrealistic to think that misbehavior will be entirely prevented.

**Reactive Advice.** No matter how many preventions and proactive strategies are in effect, it is likely that teachers will still face students who misbehave. Therefore, participants shared their most important keys to success once misbehavior has begun. For many participants, that meant stay calm and in control. Kristen advocated patience, patience, patience. She advised:

Get to know your students and their misbehaviors and find strategies to help them get those misbehaviors in check, that will keep you calm, and keep you in control. Because the worst feeling in the world is letting a student misbehavior get to you.
Staying calm and being patient, Erica stressed, allows teachers to be consistent. She reminds teachers, “it may take some time to be able to figure out what's right for you and what's right for that student” and “it's how you meet them head-on that will be a defining factor of how that year goes.” Michelle encourages teachers to not “sweat the small stuff”. She said:

I think some teachers get into a battle of wills over small issues. Don't get into a battle of wills with a kid. It never ends well, nobody wins. There's only two outcomes, either the kid wins and you've lost face and control of your class or you’ve somehow beaten this kid down and you've lost good graces with the other kids because now you're just a bully.

Staying calm and in control helps teachers avoid getting into a battle with students. She explained that if a student is writing or passing notes, teachers should not make a big show of taking it and reading it because that places the teacher in a spot where s/he has to respond. She advised instead to, “Take it, toss it on your desk, keep moving and then come back to that kid and do what you need to do.” Kristen has learned from observing colleagues that staying calm and in control helps to handle low-level misbehaviors much better than engaging in a battle of wills. When she first started teaching, she said she used to challenge the students when they challenged her, as she put it, “It was like a fight for who's in charge here.” However, she has learned over time and through experience that picking her battles and keeping calm and in control is much more effective.

Conclusions. In general, participants noted many successful strategies and tips that future educators and new teachers can put into place to help prevent and respond to low-level misbehaviors in their classrooms. Evidence from participant interviews suggest that these participants use reactive strategies more often, even though they discussed their preference for proactive strategies and the importance of preventing misbehaviors. Also, the study revealed
that these participants find identifying and handling major misbehaviors easier than identifying and dealing with low-level misbehaviors because they are generally visible and large enough of an event that one must respond. In focusing on advising others, participants were able to engage in a reflective process, which helped them understand and make sense of their own experiences.

**Engaging in Reflective Practice**

Throughout the research process, the researcher noted how metacognitive the participants were throughout the interviews. The participants not only shared their own experiences with low-level misbehaviors in their classrooms, but also came to realizations through reflecting and questioning their own work. Through engaging in this reflective practice, participants were able to make sense of their experiences and think about their own classroom management skills, successful or unsuccessful behavior management strategies, and how their perspectives have shifted and developed over time. Additionally, while questioning their own practice, participants also made some unprecedented realizations. For instance, some teachers realized they do not prevent misbehaviors, which allowed them to question more about how they can start. Lastly, the participants reflected on the challenges that have held them back from having the best classroom management. When discussing the challenges, the participants evidenced signs of stress, dissatisfaction, and frustration. It was clear from the data that the participants willingly reflect on their own practice to improve and also spend a lot of time thinking about what impedes them from proceeding.

**Reflections**

One common reflective practice among the participants was questioning themselves or their own abilities. Teachers are always working without a script - there is no predicting how the
day will unfold. This can leave educators feeling worried and wondering if they made the best decisions in the moment. Alternatively, a few participants reflected that they love the idea that each day is unique and unpredictable. Kristen reflected, “Every day is kind of a surprise”, which she likes because “it's different, it's challenging, it's fun, it's not boring.” Eva also loves that every day is different. She says it makes “the day fly by.” Unfortunately, this also causes some participants to feel uneasy, often left questioning themselves after an interaction, or wondering if they could have handled things differently. Erica revealed frustration when she reflected on how she has handled some unusual low-level misbehaviors. She agonized, “I always worry that like I'm not doing the right thing.” Kristen also worries about how she can improve her management skills so her classroom can emulate more of what her colleagues are doing. She reflected:

> Something I always think about is that, I don't look at my classroom management as like, the best. I see other teachers and I think they do, and I look at them and I say, "Wow, they have great classroom management." I think over the years I've improved significantly, especially since I first started teaching.

While Kristen has noticed herself growing and developing each year, Eva also recognizes that with practice and experience comes improvement. She contemplated about how vastly different her comfort level is in the beginning of the year compared to the end. She said, “I also have a hard time in the beginning, standing up in front of them and really feeling like, ‘Oh my gosh, like I'm in charge.’ Like, ‘I'm the ruler in this classroom, they need to listen to me.’” Through interviewing, participants were able to truly reflect on their own experiences and analyze their own reflections and thoughts. Additionally, participants were also able to share questions that often cross their minds in the moment of a misbehavior or after work when they have more time to think.
Kristen revealed that in the moment of a low-level misbehavior, she catches herself asking the following in her head, “Do I stop and take care of it now? Do we address this right now? Do we wait? How do we handle that?” Similarly, Sue finds herself always reflecting outside of work on what she might have done poorly and how she can improve. She said she often asks herself, “What can I do? What didn't I do? Did I handle that situation properly?” Shayna remembers during her first two years of teaching referring to her mentor teacher for advice and “to talk about specific things that were going wrong in my classroom.” Now, she finds she relies less on her mentor teacher, but still seeks support and guidance from colleagues to continue developing as an educator. She reflected on a time this year she went to her principal and assistant principal and told them, "These are the things I'm doing, what else can I do differently? Do you have any suggestions? Do you see me doing something wrong? Can you come in and you know, just tell me, what do you observe?" Likewise, Eva said, “If I see a teacher, I’m like "Oh my gosh, I never thought to do it that way and I'll give that a try."

Kayla prefers to reflect on what does not work so she knows not to use the strategy or intervention again. To do this, she says she always tries “to make specific notes.” She remembers a time last year when she “made tons of notes” for herself, such as, "This did not work. Don't ever do that again." Kayla looks back on her failures as learning experiences. She noted, “I think the best way to do it was to fail first, actually. To try things and notice that they just weren't working.” Like the other participants, Erica also has learned from her mistakes and she has also noticed her own growth and development. She reflected that her initial classroom management was centered on being the best and most liked teacher, but she later realized that being liked was not the end goal. She said:
I was really concerned about making sure that I was like the favorite teacher in the beginning, and that was really important. That I wanted these little ones to like me, to love me. That I wanted this to be a great year where the parents were just all, oh I want my next child to have this person.

Over the years Erica has come to learn that with effective classroom management, these feelings still occur, and yet she can still run a classroom with rules, routines, and expectations. She wished there were more time in the day to reflect. She showed a want and a need to comprehend why misbehavior persists. She compared analyzing misbehaviors to puzzles. She questioned, “As a teacher, you're sitting there thinking okay what is it? If it's not this and it's not this and it's not this and it's not this, what could it be?” Just like her fellow participants, she showed uncertainty and eagerness to better understand what causes students to misbehave. Erica reflected that time is the most challenging factor in her reflective practice. Overall, it is clear from the participants’ reflections that they are teachers who are always looking to improve and foster a growth mindset not only for their students, but also for themselves. Through reflecting, participants also made pivotal realizations that they might not have thought about without taking the time to ponder.

**Realizations**

While describing their experiences with low-level misbehaviors, the participants were able to come to some realizations that they had yet to experience. Spending time making sense of their own experiences helped participants to understand areas in which they need improvement and areas which are beyond their control. At one point in Kristen’s interview, she struggled to think of more intervention strategies that she uses and as she talked more, she uncovered a strategy. She responded, “But I didn't think about it until right now. Making sure
that they're engaged by bringing them into the conversation. I didn't think of that before. I'm glad I did.” This realization was powerful for Kristen; she often exuded a lack of self-confidence throughout the interview, referring to other teachers doing things better than she does, but in this moment, she realized she was capable of more than she might have given herself credit. She said, “This is great. This is important. These are not things you think about on a daily basis.”

Alternatively, throughout the interview, Jackie showed evidence of disappointment; she said this year was especially challenging for her on the low-level misbehavior front and that she could have performed better. She revealed, “I realize that maybe I didn't make as much progress as I wanted to on the behavior aspect with them for whatever reason.” This seemed difficult for Jackie to admit, given that she views herself as a strong educator with high expectations. Michelle, like Jackie, gave off a sense of comfortableness with the classroom and teaching, but also was honest and upfront about her desire to improve. When asked what the most common low-level misbehavior in her classroom is, she immediately responded, “calling and the shouting out.” In contrast to the other participants, she took part of the blame. She realized part of the reason might be because of her style. She said:

And some of that is on me because I have a casual style. So I’ve worked over the years to create a clear expectation of how we can have that casual interaction and that immediate response without it being a shouting out or disruptive-type thing.

Michelle acknowledged that her classroom rules might vary from other teachers’. She said her “relaxed style” comes from her constructivist background. She wants students to achieve and so to do that well, she believes letting go of control might be part of the answer. She added, “I'm comfortable with them having more of a free-flowing way of interacting with the curriculum, whatever works for them to understand the work they're doing.” Similarly, Amy realized maybe
her style is also different from other teachers. In a sense, she believes that sometimes school or classroom rules and expectations can prevent her from handling low-level misbehaviors in a manner that would de-escalate the situation. She provided an example:

I'm just a laid back kind of person. Hats in school? I don't give a shit about that, at all, but other teachers do on my grade level team, so now I have to care about that. And cell phones. I use cell phones in my classroom. The kids use cell phones in their classroom, but for another teacher, that's an office, immediate, no questions asked.

Amy realized through the interview that the interpretation of rules is subjective and can vary from teacher to teacher, sometimes making her feel like it appears to others that she runs a chaotic class, but to her it is a classroom with more freedom and less restriction.

Interestingly, when the participants were asked how they learned to prevent misbehaviors in their classrooms, four of the nine participants laughed and responded something to the effect of “I don’t always prevent misbehaviors.” In fact, Jackie outright stated, “I need help with behavior plans. I've never been trained, and I need to have more tools for my tool box.” Two of the participants recalled that their training came from observing others and experience, but that they had no formal class on behavior management. Eva believes most teachers question, “Why isn't there a class on management?” She added on that she had a great student teaching experience and thus feels confident in her management abilities now, but wonders if that experience is enough for all pre-service teachers?

Also, some participants realized through analyzing their experiences that boys tend to misbehave more than girls. Shayna complained, “I have like six or seven boys this year that just kind of once one starts, it's a like a ping pong effect.” Jackie has dealt with the same issue this
year and claimed that her “experience has shown that the misbehaviors are boys, not girls.” Eva declared that being off-task and executing minor misbehaviors is “just their nature.” Whether or not boys are biologically more apt to misbehave, participants offered many thoughts as they reflected on their own experiences. For example, many of the upper elementary participants focused on their math classes when discussing minor misbehaviors. Michelle attested, “math will be one of those places where you might see a lot of off-task, distracting kind of behaviors.” Through conversation, Kristen realized she only focused on her math classes during the interview and attempted to justify why. She said:

Maybe math is really like challenging and really hard. I know I talked about like misbehaviors come out when things are challenging and hard, so maybe that's why. Huh. Math is something that you have to get more people to buy more into.

Regardless of any possible correlations, engaging in these reflective interviews allowed participants to come to realizations that they might not have noticed had they not spent ample time reflecting on their experiences. It also offered them time to think about challenges that are presented that prevent them from operating a smooth routine.

**Challenges**

Teachers face challenges daily with or without correlation to low-level misbehaviors, but during the course of interviews for this study it was clear that participants face many difficulties while trying to prevent and handle misbehaviors in their classrooms. One obvious challenge centers on the lack of training and experience. Of all the participants, only Jackie has had a full-time teaching position outside of the district, but it was only for her first year. This shows that the participants have not received a wide range of experience among varying districts and
expectations. Given that every school district is different, this lack of experience can very well affect the amount of professional development the participants have received. Erica put it well when she said, “So, really, [Names district] is all I know.” In fact, this is the case among all the other participants, since many of them also did their student teaching in the studied school district.

Additionally, another challenge participants face is that they have only taught at their current grade level. Few participants have taught two different grade levels, but the rest have only taught one specific grade level. Not having experience with children of different age levels can put limits on a teacher’s experience of child development and restrict the strategies one may have. Lack of experience also presented challenges for most participants during their first year of teaching. Many shared moments of regret, dissatisfaction, or pity for their first year class. Michelle reminisced of her first year’s classroom management and said:

   If I could have my first year’s class back, I would love to do that over. I cried everyday on my way home. I had a 45-minute drive home every day, I cried the whole way every day in my first year of teaching and wanted to quit everyday [Laughs] in my first year of teaching.

Not having proper training and experience caused teachers to learn through daily occurrences. When asked how she learned how to prevent misbehaviors, Shayna recalled, “I guess through trial and error. In my college classes, we never had a class on classroom management.” While participants felt as though they have improved and grown through experience and time, lack of experience has impacted and affected the way participants view their classroom management.
Unfortunately, some challenges are just out of the participants’ control, aiding in their frustration for adequately preventing and handling misbehaviors in their classrooms. One limiting factor is time. Participants stressed that there is just not enough time to teach the curriculum, and prevent and handle misbehaviors, all in a day’s work. Michelle faces this challenge daily. She realizes the importance of being able to manage behaviors well because “it’s really just even a function of just not having the time or capacity to do that. There’s so much to accomplish, you just have to keep them as with you as possible.” Kristen also acknowledges that lack of time presents challenges. She said, “I don’t have enough hours in a day for my students. I think the most frustrating thing about that is that I am losing time, because I am dealing with low level misbehaviors.” Not only is she dealing with misbehaviors, but she may not even be using the most successful strategies given that she works, like many other participants, on a trial-and-error basis, learning from unsuccessful attempts to limit the misbehaviors. Sue is in her first year of teaching, so not only is she challenged by the amount of curriculum she has to learn, but also all the trials and tribulations the other participants have mentioned. She said all aspects of teaching are so “time consuming” right now that learning how to prevent and handle misbehaviors is only a small factor. One thing she shares in common with other participants, including veteran teachers, is that teaching has so many important components that the participants find it challenging to focus solely on improving their behavior management.

Though one might presume that misbehaviors might be the most stressful part of teaching, participants often cited the mundane tasks outside of the actual teaching that causes the most stress. For example, Kristen shared that her greatest challenge right now is “everything else, besides the students. It’s the report cards and the meetings and the extra things that have to
be going on.” Erica shared similar feelings. She reflected that she does not remember in her beginning years of teaching these high levels of paperwork and extraneous work. She said:

    It's the extra time that is taken away, then, from me planning or organizing or getting ready for the next day or the next unit, or figuring out what it is that my student needs tomorrow when I have, you know, a bunch of different evaluations that I need to fill out.

The pressures and constraints of the district expectations, coupled with lack of time and experience, can create major challenges for teachers.

    In addition to these challenges, lack of support has also adversely affected the participants. Some participants have struggled to receive proper training in the social emotional program of which the district subscribes. Unfortunately, issues like this, are out of the participants’ control because as Shayna relayed, the course is “inconsistently offered.” She stated, “I have not been trained in the program, so that is a problem because I don't feel a hundred percent comfortable with it.” Michelle, on the other hand, was trained 16 years ago, but has not received any updated trainings, even though classroom dynamics and expectations have significantly changed in that time frame. A lack of support can be a large barrier to ensuring success. Participants seemed more frustrated and stifled by the lack of support from parents than the lack of support they shared regarding their administration or district. Shayna described how it feels to have the additional challenge of trying to convince parents to support her decisions regarding behavior. She vented, “it is frustrating when parents don't support you and so that makes me feel like I'm not a professional or that they don't value my opinion of their student's behavior in the classroom.” Jackie shared similar concerns when she discussed that she has experienced parents not following through on strategies that are supposed to be supported at home because “they don't want to be seen as the mean person” so instead, they “do things to
undermine it”, which encourages the misbehaviors to continue. Kayla said one of her challenges is getting parents to support following through at home with school rules. She explained, “things that they might get away with at home that they're not supposed to do at school” are things they do anyway “because they get away with it at home.” Considering one of the challenges is lack of time, it is understandable that teachers do not need the extra challenge of having to teach students how to behave in school versus home.

Conclusions. While engaging in reflective practice, the participants reflected, came to realizations, and also relayed challenges that act as barriers in their teaching. While reflecting, participants questioned their in-the-moment choices in response to low-level misbehaviors. Participants were not always certain when to intervene or how to respond to low-level misbehaviors, which caused them frustration and uncertainty about their own abilities as educators. In addition, many participants realized their lack of success or progress with improving student misbehavior. It was evident that participants know that current interventions and management strategies are only somewhat preventative, but they do not know why their strategies do not always work. Finally, participants pondered about the lack of professional development and training, coupled with the pressures and mandates from their district, and how these challenges limit the time they have to think about and reflect on low-level misbehaviors.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of nine elementary teachers who have experienced low-level disruptive behaviors in their classrooms and how they make meaning of these types of behaviors. This chapter presented the findings of how they answered the central research question for the study: How do elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom?
The researcher examined and analyzed the data, which resulted in three major themes: Understanding Low-Level Misbehaviors, Responding to Low-Level Misbehaviors, and Engaging in Reflective Practices. All participants were able to identify and provide examples of low-level misbehaviors that have occurred in their classrooms, along with share details of how these misbehaviors impact all aspects of a classroom. Finally, participants shared their perspectives of what may cause low-level misbehaviors. The researcher organized the data on how participants respond to low-level misbehaviors into three strands: proactive strategies, reactive strategies, and keys to success. Participants were all able to share both preventative and reactive strategies they use to prevent and handle misbehaviors in their classrooms. Participants also shared advice they would give to a new teacher. Lastly, the participants reflected on their own reflective practice and embarked on a metacognitive journey to share how they process and think about the behaviors in their classrooms and strategies they use, realizations that have arisen from these reflections, and challenges they face that stifle their success with preventing or handling misbehaviors.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

In this qualitative study, the researcher interviewed nine general education elementary classroom teachers of grades 1 to 5 at a large, northeastern public school district and explored their experiences with low-level misbehaviors. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research method allowed for participants to reflect upon their personal experiences in preventing and responding to low-level misbehaviors, giving a unique insight based upon the interviewees’ understanding of low-level misbehaviors (Smith et al., 2009). The study was guided by the central research question: How do elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom?

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) constructed by Bandura (1986) provided a lens through which to examine the experiences of the study participants to identify how low-level misbehaviors are identified, handled, and prevented. SCT, the theoretical framework for this research study, provided a helpful context for recognizing and highlighting the ways some use self-monitoring strategies to help students self-regulate their own low-level misbehaviors. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is limited research available on teacher perspectives of low-level misbehaviors in the elementary school classroom. Therefore, the findings of this study may be used to expand the existing research base. This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings related to each superordinate theme and its position within current literature. The implications of these findings for general elementary school teachers will be provided, along with suggestions for improving practice and recommendations for future research.

The three superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged through the analysis of the gathered data were (1) Understanding low-level misbehavior; (2) Responding to low-level misbehavior; and (3) Engaging in reflective practice. These themes answered the study’s
research question by suggesting that teachers explain and make sense of their experiences with low-level misbehaviors by discussing their understanding of misbehaviors and what causes them, identifying the various interventions and strategies they use to respond to low-level misbehaviors, and engaging in a metacognitive practice that allows them time to analyze both student and teacher choices. This chapter discusses the superordinate and subordinate themes in light of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as the theoretical framework and associations or enhancements to existing literature on this topic. The researcher then examines the significance of the study identifying suggestions for implementation. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research on teacher perspectives of low-level misbehavior.

Understanding Low-Level Misbehavior

In order to choose the most appropriate strategies and interventions to reduce the occurrence of low-level misbehaviors, educators must first be able to identify, define, and explain why these behaviors happen in the first place. In this research study, most participants reported that they encounter low-level misbehaviors daily. This indicates the majority of participants do not currently have successful interventions and behavior management strategies in place to prevent minor misbehaviors before they happen. Participants revealed that minor misbehaviors are the most common form of disruptive behavior at the elementary level, yet school-wide behavior management policies tend to focus on major misbehaviors, thus demonstrating that there should be a greater focus on low-level misbehaviors. Participants also described moments when their view of a behavior differs from that of a colleague, indicating that low-level misbehaviors are not all universally identified across educators. Moreover, participants shared their frustration regarding their lack of understanding as to why minor
misbehaviors repeatedly occur, indicating that these minor misbehaviors greatly impact teachers professionally.

All the descriptions provided by the participants led the researcher to determine two major findings that should be examined further. The first finding suggests that the participants’ descriptions of low-level misbehaviors vary according to their respective grade level and their personal and professional philosophies. Participants acknowledged that classroom management policies can be inconsistent from classroom to classroom, depending upon what the teacher finds acceptable or intolerable. Also, participants repeatedly demonstrated uncertainty in their understanding of what behaviors qualify as low-level misbehaviors versus what behaviors are just typical of child development. Additionally, participants shared how their personalities and perspectives sometimes influence the minor misbehaviors they witness. Essentially, the first finding of this study focuses on the inconsistency across participants’ definitions and explanations of low-level misbehaviors.

The second finding highlights participants struggle to explain the repeated occurrence of these behaviors. Even though participants discussed interventions and management systems that they utilize to limit problem behaviors, they simultaneously displayed frustration when describing the barriers that prevent them from reducing low-level misbehaviors. When asked to explain why particular intervention strategies are sometimes unsuccessful, participants struggled to find answers. Their uncertainty led the researcher to believe that participants need a better understanding of low-level misbehaviors in order to identify possible triggers to avoid them. Additionally, many participants joked that they do not prevent misbehaviors, while others more seriously indicated that they do not know how to avoid student misbehaviors, which implies that teachers need to take a deeper look into their own classroom management policies.
and analyze how they teach their expectations in the beginning of the school year. In this section, these findings will be explained with relation to the literature, the theoretical framework, and their implications for practice.

**Finding 1. Inconsistencies in Defining Low-Level Misbehaviors**

It was evident during this research study that participants’ interpretations of low-level misbehaviors differed greatly, which aligns to the existing literature that there are multiple perspectives of misbehaviors (Hollow & Hirn, 2015; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt 2010). Furthermore, identifying and defining low-level misbehavior in the elementary classroom was not an easy task for the participants. Each participant had her own interpretation of low-level misbehaviors based on her personal and professional experience. Therefore, participants struggled to form a consistent and agreeable definition for low-level misbehaviors. In line with the majority of literature, it is evident that there is no universal definition for student misbehavior and certainly no one size fits all definition of low-level misbehaviors (Aloe et al., 2014).

Ultimately, the inconsistency among perspectives can lead to teachers having differing views on how to effectively manage the misbehaviors (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010). Defining minor misbehaviors with more clarity should help teachers be more consistent with their responses to misbehaviors, which ultimately might lead to a reduction in low-level misbehaviors. Additionally, the more school administrators work with their teachers and students to create consistent definitions of and responses to low-level misbehaviors at a school-wide level, the less time teachers will need to spend teaching students how to behave. This will allow for more time on learning. The easiest way to discuss the findings is to look at
several different aspects that contribute to the inconsistency among teachers’ understanding of low-level misbehaviors.

**Identifying Low-Level Misbehavior.** Participants in this study were asked to identify examples of low-level misbehaviors. Without hesitation, participants rattled off behaviors, such as ‘talking out of turn’, ‘tapping pencils’, ‘out of seat without permission’, and many more. Identifying the behaviors in this manner diverges from the literature, since most studies suggest that teachers should be identifying behaviors by their function, not the way they look or sound (Martin & Pear, 2007; Barbeta, Leong Norona, & Bicard, 2005). In doing so, teachers would then be defining misbehaviors as ‘attention-seeking’, ‘avoidance’, ‘sensory stimulation’, and more (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). By identifying behaviors by their function, teachers can then look for appropriate interventions to cease the behaviors that directly correlate to the targeted behaviors.

Most research states that teachers should not identify misbehaviors as the product of other misbehaviors (Taylor, 2011), which most participants did. Instead of participants identifying ‘talking out of turn’ as a misbehavior, participants could have cited ‘impatience’, since talking out of turn, in the majority of instances discussed by participants, was the result of impulsivity. While some of the examples participants named were rooted in the origin of the misbehavior, the way in which the participants described them did not indicate to the researcher that the participants understood the functions of the behaviors.

According to Skinner (1953), behavior is an individual phenomenon which varies from person to person. Myers and Holland (2000) add that although children may exhibit the same misbehavior, the purpose could be very different. For instance, in looking at children who display tantrums, the functions could vary from obtaining attention, to getting something they
want, to escaping a demand (Myers & Holland, 2000). For this reason, much of the literature argues that teachers need more exposure to Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), an approach to understanding how and why behaviors occur, which supports Skinner’s theories on behavior. A major underpinning of ABA is the understanding of the individuality of behavior and that given the variance of functions and reactions of students, teachers must have a sound understanding before they can properly respond to misbehaviors (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). In addition to a deep understanding of behaviors, educators need to reflect upon how their experiences and biases could be a contributing factor for some misbehaviors that occur.

**Teacher Personality and Preferences.** This research study confirms and extends the findings of current literature, acknowledging that teachers’ tolerance levels for behaviors varies significantly from teacher to teacher (Short & Short, 1989). Personal beliefs, perceptions, and preferences all influence not only how teachers define low-level misbehaviors, but also how they handle them. In this research study, some participants discussed that their personal pet peeves or distractors can sometimes help them decide what is ‘disruptive’. For instance, one participant reported that noises distract her as she works, which leads her to wonder whether she projects that onto the students and if she identifies those behaviors the most because they personally affect her. Another participant referred most often to ‘off-task’ behaviors, perhaps due to her strong beliefs that the primary role of students is to learn and off-task behaviors may distract students from accomplishing their job. Personal factors such as personality and teaching experience can affect how teachers respond to misbehavior (Tsouloupas et al., 2014).

Disparities among teachers’ defining factors of low-level misbehaviors and more importantly the lack of uniformity among behavioral expectations can also cause variance in how teachers respond to misbehaviors (Lane, Pierson, Stang, & Carter, 2010). Research indicates that
when students are unaware of the variations in teacher expectations, transitions will be more challenging, leading to an increase in misbehaviors (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003). This inconsistency between teachers is especially difficult for students transitioning to upper grade levels, where they must understand and interpret multiple teachers’ expectations, not just one classroom teacher’s (Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006). Not only do teachers need to understand how their personality and preferences impact student behavior, but they must also acknowledge that the subjectivity of defining low-level misbehaviors and the differing tolerance levels can influence varying teacher perspectives of low-level misbehaviors.

**Subjectivity and Tolerance.** This sub-finding extends the current literature by adding a level of differentiation between major and minor misbehaviors. Participants explained that low-level misbehaviors are more challenging to define than major misbehaviors. Additionally, participants described major misbehaviors as visible and easily identifiable, but identified low-level misbehaviors as much more subjective. Consistent with the literature, this study supported the claim that teacher attitudes vary depending upon whether the misbehaviors are ‘acting out’ behaviors or ‘withdrawn’ behaviors (Kedar-Voivodas, 1983). Because withdrawn behaviors do not tend to disrupt the classroom as much as the acting out behaviors do, participants reported, in accordance with the literature, that they focus more on the behaviors that strongly disrupt the learning environment. In fact, several participants recognized that generalizing low-level misbehaviors is challenging purely because of the subjectivity. Participants explained that some behaviors are not as objective as others, since teachers have different levels of tolerance. In accordance with the literature, Stork and Sanders (2002) also experienced variations in teachers’ perspectives during their study on off-task versus incorrect behaviors. By not having a clear
behavioral policy for minor misbehaviors, teachers may have different responses causing confusion and visions of unfairness among students.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the first finding of this research study both confirms and extends the current literature on the inconsistency among educators in defining misbehaviors. It confirms what is present in the literature: that interpretations of misbehaviors vary, leading to difficulty in creating clear definitions. This research extends the literature by focusing solely on low-level misbehaviors, an area that has a gap in the literature. In the next section, the second finding of the repeated occurrences of these low-level misbehaviors will be discussed in relation to the literature.

**Finding 2. Repeated Occurrences of Low-Level Misbehaviors**

The second finding of this research study reveals that the participants struggled to explain and understand the persistence of student misbehaviors. This finding complements the literature, which consistently states that a major issue in education today is the repeated occurrence of problem behaviors (Gorton, 1977; Ratcliff, et al., 2010). Participants alluded frustration when they could not identify how to stop the misbehaviors from happening over and over again. When asked about interventions and strategies, participants often mentioned the same few, as supported by previous studies indicating that teachers have a limited scope of strategies that can help alleviate repeated occurrences of misbehaviors (Myers & Holland, 2000). Since low-level misbehaviors affect teacher-student relationships and are distractions to student learning, it is essential that teachers both develop an understanding of the functions of misbehavior and also
find strategies to decrease the occurrence of misbehavior (Morin & Battalio, 2004). Therefore, understanding why misbehavior persists can allow educators to adjust their practice.

**Unclear Expectations.** Before teachers can implement effective intervention strategies to decrease misbehaviors, they first need to recognize that behavior is both variable and dependent upon actions (Polirstok & Gottlieb, 2006). In particular, teachers' actions and words impact students' behaviors and vice versa. Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2003) suggest that it is possible that teachers’ expectations may be unclear to students, resulting in students not meeting the expectations. Diverging from the literature, participants in this study heavily reported that they set clear expectations and focus on building a safe and positive classroom climate at the beginning of every year. However, Englehart (2013) notes that teachers can often be unaware or in denial that their lack of or inconsistent classroom routines and expectations may contribute to student misbehaviors. Unfortunately, when teachers are inconsistent in both their emotional support and behavioral expectations, students can feel insecure and problem behaviors can increase (Brock & Curby, 2016). In addition, once students see or interpret inconsistency among a behavioral system, they are more apt to believe that the consequences will be variable, if even present (Polirstok, 2015). Effects of teachers’ mixed signals can entice frustration, perplexion, and the prolongation of student misbehaviors (Barbetta, Leong Norona, & Bicard, 2005).

Teacher inconsistency can also cause frustration among colleagues. Some participants in this study described situations in which their peers did not follow school-wide behavioral expectations or cases where they, themselves, did not agree with school set expectations and thus did not enforce those policies within their own classroom. This finding aligns with the literature and in particular, a study conducted in which Ofsted (2014) reported that only one-third of the 1,048 teachers surveyed claimed the behavioral routines and expectations were consistently
implemented across the classrooms in their schools, despite having a school-wide behavioral policy. Ineffective intervention plans can be an unfortunate outcome when classroom teachers are inconsistent with their implementations of expectations and reactions to misbehavior (Scott, Alter, Rosenberg, & Borgmeier, 2010). Research also shows that unclear expectations can cause teachers to spend more time attending to misbehavior, focus less on content, and generate frustration for themselves and future educators who have to fill in academic gaps (Ratcliff, et al., 2010). Clearly, consistency is the determining factor for successful classroom management and proper classroom management can lessen problematic behaviors.

**Classroom Management.** At the centrality of effective teaching exists classroom management (Emmer & Evertson, 1981). Effective classroom management involves teachers “preventing misbehavior, managing movement, and maintaining group focus” (Anguiano, 2001, p. 53). Correspondingly, research shows that teachers' classroom management skills are directly related to the prevention of misbehavior (Smith, 1990), indicating the significance of having strong management skills in order to reduce misbehaviors. In fact, the literature uncovers that educators who feel inadequately prepared to manage a classroom also tend to be less willing and likely to apply reinforcers, or incentives that increase expected behaviors, and individualized behavior support plans (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). The majority of literature also suggests that poor classroom structure can be a causing factor of mild misbehavior (Aloe et al., 2014).

While the literature discusses in depth the importance of strategic planning to increase active engagement (Freeman et al., 2014; Scott & Hirn, 2014), the majority of participants in this research study did not cite effective planning, differentiated instruction, or increased engagement as strategies to prevent low-level misbehaviors. Instead, they frequently resorted back to their district’s plan of implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), citing
positivity and praise as their most common strategies for attempting to avoid misbehaviors. The participants’ responses indicate that they need more training and development on the topic of understanding low-level misbehaviors and learning how to lessen the occurrence of problem behaviors.

Although participants struggled to identify ways in which they can put an end to the persistence of ongoing misbehaviors, the literature offers some suggestions. First, gaining a stronger understanding of the functions of misbehavior will allow educators to identify the most appropriate intervention strategies, rather than rely on trial and error (Young & Martinez, 2016), which some participants mentioned was a frequently used strategy of theirs. Having a strong understanding of behavioral analysis allows teachers to successfully identify behavior change strategies that encourage prevention of minor misbehaviors before they occur (Aloe et al., 2014). These behavior change strategies should coincide with the functions of behavior, acting as an antecedent intervention. For example, teachers should be able to analyze a behavior in the moment as either attention getting, access seeking, escaping, or sensory stimulation (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). In fact, Aloe et al. (2014) deem it most critical to apply antecedent techniques as the first part of creating an effective classroom management system.

Despite the fact that the majority of research supports focusing on the functions of misbehavior, other research states that responses to misbehaviors are actually more important than the antecedents when looking at persistence of misbehaviors (Gorton, 1977). In relation to the current study, one participant said she fears she reacts to misbehavior more than she prevents it, which made her wonder whether she is contributing to some of the perpetual misbehaviors. This concept directly aligns to Gorton’s (1977) theory of behavior modification. Gorton (1977) theorized that some misbehaviors can be prevented or encouraged
strictly by the reaction of others. Englehart (2013) suggests teachers focus on how their actions are influencing student behaviors. It is this reason that teachers must be very careful of their reactions so as to not negatively reinforce the misbehaviors.

**Differentiated Instruction and Engagement.** Participants shared two possible reasons for persistence: student boredom and too much unstructured time. According to Çoban (2015), teachers should be analyzing the classroom environment prior to focusing on students’ behaviors. Essentially, teachers should be looking for parts of their lessons where students can become bored, frustrated, inhibited, or if the actual physical set-up can encourage misbehaviors to exist. Lack of differentiation to meet the students’ learning needs can make tasks appear daunting, too hard, too easy, or boring, which may influence the persistence of misbehaviors (Stork & Sanders, 2002). In fact, research shows that boredom causes frustration, which can result in misbehavior (Kerr & Valenti, 2009).

This study confirms the findings in the literature, as participants frequently discussed that student engagement can influence behavior. The majority of literature suggests that teachers need to increase the opportunities for students to respond and engage with tasks, since research shows that task engagement is directly correlated to reduced misbehaviors (Kerr & Valenti, 2009; Scott & Hirn, 2014). By eliminating unstructured time and maximizing on student engagement, educators can prevent the recidivism of problem and disruptive behaviors (Yildiz, 2015).

**Conclusion**

In summation, this finding both confirms and extends the current literature regarding the repeated occurrences of low-level misbehaviors. Participants struggled to identify and understand why they experience repetitive low-level misbehaviors, yet in line with the literature,
reported inconsistencies among classroom expectations of behavioral policies, a lack of classroom management, and child developmental stages as potential reasons as to why misbehaviors continue to occur. This finding adds to the literature because it specifically focuses on low-level misbehaviors, whereas most literature discusses problem behaviors in general.

Students who exhibit low-level misbehaviors need more consistency in order to learn how to behave according to the expectations set forth by the classroom teacher. Ultimately, the more time students spend in the classroom the more they learn. Having a school-wide common understanding of examples of low-level misbehaviors and behavioral interventions that reduce those misbehaviors could help increase instructional time. Teachers need more professional development and training to help them better understand low-level misbehaviors. When teachers’ interpretations of low-level misbehaviors differ, their interventions will be inconsistent. With more support, teachers can then use alternative interventions that are targeted to address the functions of the misbehaviors, resulting in fewer occurrences. Thus, the two findings within this theme are interrelated; educators are not responding to misbehavior consistently and thus the misbehaviors repeat. Essentially, one begets the other. Therefore, teachers need to understand what causes misbehaviors in order to stop them (Taylor, 2011).

**Responding to Low-Level Misbehavior**

Despite the irritating, distracting, and disruptive nature of low-level misbehaviors, teachers are always in control of how they choose to respond or handle the misbehaviors presented before them (Polirstok, 2015). Evidence from this research study’s interviews suggests that the majority of participants spend more time responding to low-level misbehaviors than they do preventing them. This indicates that participants need better training and professional development in understanding low-level misbehaviors in order to successfully
prevent the behaviors from occurring. In this research study, the majority of participants reported that they respond to low-level misbehaviors daily, resulting in high rates of low-level misbehaviors at the elementary school level. Given that participants in this study described that preventing misbehavior is a major challenge, it is evident that the participants need a greater range of responsive strategies to help alleviate these misbehaviors within their classrooms.

A third finding presented in this section is that participants often described implementing reactive strategies more often than preventive ones, despite their stated preferences for proactive and preventative strategies. Participants also frequently named reactive strategies they use when responding to questions about their use of preventative strategies. This finding indicates that the participants need more support with understanding behavior modification and prevention and what differentiates strategies from being proactive and reactive. In addition, a fourth finding in the study revealed that these participants face daily challenges in handling low-level misbehaviors, as compared with major misbehaviors. This finding suggests that schools need to provide more professional development that focuses on responding to low-level misbehaviors so educators can feel less threatened about handling these problematic behaviors. In this section, these findings will be explained with relation to the literature, the theoretical framework, and their implications for practice.

**Finding 3. Consequence and Reinforcement-Based Interventions**

One of the most overlooked constructs of misbehavior in the educational realm is the notion that behavior can be changed when the person is given the right set of tools. Teachers need a strong understanding of how they can manipulate the antecedents (factors likely to increase the unwanted behaviors) and consequences (factors that maintain the unwanted behaviors) in order to modify the negative or increase the positive behavior patterns exhibited
among their students (Conroy et al., 2008). Participants in this research study explained mostly through reactive strategies how they try to modify unwanted behaviors. With a sufficient amount of preventative strategies in place, participants would not need to rely so much on reactive strategies to stop a misbehavior from occurring.

Reactive strategies are not long-term solutions, but rather immediate reflexes and responses that may end a behavior, but usually only temporarily, and typically do not teach the correct behavior. According to Clunies-Ross et al. (2008), reactive strategies occur following a student’s misbehavior and are rooted in the teacher’s responsive behavior. This indicates that the way in which a teacher responds to a misbehavior impacts whether or not the misbehavior continues. Interestingly, the researcher found that although participants often discussed the importance of developing a positive classroom climate that utilizes proactive strategies to prevent misbehaviors, they were generally more focused on the usage of reactive strategies even when discussing prevention. This finding corresponds directly to the literature, which states that while educators believe in a positive classroom environment, their actual implementation is generally based in the use of negative strategies (Thompson & Webber, 2010).

Studies show that teachers who use reactive strategies tend to respond more negatively (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008), which may be why participants used the terms reactive and negative interchangeably. In fact, evidence of student perspectives shows that when teachers respond to misbehaviors in a negative manner, students are more apt to reduce their on-task behavior and be less engaged (Beamon, 2006). While the participants in no way indicated that their classrooms are negative learning environments, their reliance on reactive strategies, specifically punitive strategies, indicates that they need a better understanding of the differences
between reinforcement and punishment. By better understanding the depth of reactive strategies, educators can then better understand the differences between preventative and reactive strategies.

**Reinforcement.** Reinforcement is a reactive strategy used by educators to strengthen the expected behaviors. There are two main types of reinforcement strategies. Negative reinforcement is the act of taking away or removing a stimulus in order to increase the target behavior (Bernier, Simpson, & Rose, 2012). Positive reinforcement differs from negative reinforcement in that positive reinforcement is the addition of a stimulus that encourages a student to continue exhibiting the behavior for which they are being recognized (Horner et al., 2004). Therefore, negative reinforcement removes a stimulus, while positive reinforcement adds a stimulus.

**Negative Reinforcement.** In the current research study, several participants described times when students would engage in conversation while instruction is occurring. As a result, the teacher would ask one of the children to temporarily move his or her seat. This showcases negative reinforcement by removing the distraction (stimulus) in order to regain focus (increasing targeted behavior). Several participants also noted that sometimes when a student who typically misbehaves is exhibiting positive behavior for an extended period of time, a strategy to reinforce the behavior might be to allow the student to take a break. This is another example of negative reinforcement, where avoiding classwork (stimulus) encourages the child to maintain the appropriate behavior. Converging with the literature, escape extinction is a strategy that often works well if it serves the appropriate function of misbehavior (Ingvarsson, Hanley, & Welter, 2009; Payne et al., 2005). It is important to note that while the literature offers definitions of negative reinforcement, there is a lack of research relevant to behavior modification in classrooms.
While teachers can choose certain strategies that negatively reinforce student behavior, there are many times when teachers implement punishments that actually negative reinforce the teacher. For example, after repeated attempts to stop a misbehavior, a teacher might remove a child from the classroom. This may cause the misbehavior to stop temporarily and allow for the classroom routine to continue. In this case, the teacher is negatively reinforced because the misbehavior was removed and the class was able to run successfully (the targeted behavior), making it more likely that the teacher will use removal from the classroom more. It is important to note here that participants in this study explained that removal from classroom was a last resort reactive strategy for a low-level misbehavior, though it was unclear to the researcher whether or not the participants recognized this strategy as a form of punishment or negative reinforcement. This indicated to the researcher that not only do educators need to understand the differences between negative reinforcement and punishment, but also gain a better understanding of positive reinforcement.

**Positive Reinforcement.** The most frequent use of positive reinforcement described by the participants was their use of praise and tangible rewards. Given that their district is invested in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), participants felt confident and strong regarding their use of positive reinforcement. For example, participants frequently discussed the use of a marble jar or ticket system as a positive reinforcer in their classrooms. The marble jar or ticket system act as both a proactive and reactive strategy in that the long term goal is prevention of misbehavior, but the feedback is given to students directly after a positive behavior has occurred. As participants described it, students exhibit behaviors that are expected, for example a table group sits quietly with eyes on the teacher waiting for a set of directions, and the teacher then acknowledges and provides contingent praise to that group of students. In addition to
praise, the teacher then deposits a marble or ticket into a jar that contributes to a larger reward. Once a class gets a specific number of marbles or tickets, the class earns an activity or tangible reinforcer, such as extra recess or stickers.

Research indicates that some educators confuse positive reinforcement with bribery. Educators need to be mindful of how they use positive reinforcers to increase wanted behaviors and not as a persuasive tactic. Therefore, it is essential that teachers understand that bribery occurs before a behavior occurs, while reinforcement is given after (Payne et al., 2005). Participants sometimes referred to positively reinforcing behaviors when they were in fact illustrating a form of bribery. For example, many participants acknowledged that they remind students that in order to earn more rewards (tickets, marbles, etc.) they must behave. By preceding any misbehaviors with reminders, participants are not teaching corrective behavior but rather asking students to behave for a reward. The focus should be on strengthening expected behaviors and as a result, students can observe that executing positive behavior results in rewards and positive consequences (Taylor, 2011). It is evident that some participants are not assuming responsibility for less than desirable classroom environments that encourage and support excitement and curiosity. Corresponding with the literature, it is significant that teachers understand the difference between negative reinforcement and punishment so they do not inadvertently reinforce behaviors when they believe they are punishing (Young & Martinez, 2016).

**Punishment.** The main difference between punishment and reinforcement is that the behavior is extinguished with successful punishment (Young & Martinez, 2016). While it is critical that teachers focus on strengthening the positive behaviors exhibited by students, at times, it may be necessary to utilize a punishment intervention in order to weaken or end a
negative behavior quickly (Taylor, 2011). Two forms of punishment that are the most commonly used in classrooms are negative and positive punishment. Negative punishment is the removal of a desired item after an undesired behavior is presented, while positive punishment is adding an undesired consequence after a behavior has occurred, such as extra work. Punishment is meant to lessen the occurrence of specific behaviors (Young & Martinez, 2016).

The majority of literature does not advocate the use of punishment, regardless of whether it is a form of positive or negative punishment since punishment does not teach students the correct behaviors (Taylor, 2011). However, Polirstok (2015) recognizes that most classrooms have classroom management systems that rely too heavily on punishment in place of positive behavior supports. In fact, Polirstok (2015) cites that far too often punishment is used as the first form of reactive strategy to handle a challenging behavior that has been presented.

In line with this research study, it is critical to return to the participants’ usage of a Clip Chart as a publically displayed behavior management system. Participants’ usage of the Clip Chart in the classroom is a good example of punishment. In their descriptions, participants explained that a Clip Chart is a behavior management system in which students’ behavior is acknowledged by students moving a clip with their name onto a positive or negative section of a poster based on the idea of a stoplight (green for good, yellow to slow down, red to stop). According to participants, when a student misbehaves, the teacher acknowledges the misbehavior and asks the student to go to the Clip Chart and move their clip with their name down to a color of warning in front of an entire class. In some cases, the child’s misbehavior will stop temporarily. This is an example of the Clip Chart being used as a form of punishment because the child’s placement in the “good zone” is taken away and the behavior has temporarily stopped.
While the participants’ intent is for students to recognize their misbehavior in order to stop, participants also noted that oftentimes students will roll their eyes, stomp their feet, increase a misbehavior or even produce a new misbehavior when asked to move their clip. In these cases, the Clip Chart is being used as a punishment, but is unsuccessful. While participants mainly discussed the Clip Chart use as a beginning step toward self-regulation, the reactive premise in which it was described does not indicate that it is being used as a tool for self-regulation. The manner in which the Clip Charts were described to be used indicated that the focus was on compliance and subordination, not the correction of behavior. Whether reinforcing or punishing behaviors, teaching children how to change their behaviors should take priority in order to see any long-term modifications in behavior.

**Conclusion**

Preventing misbehaviors before they occur is the best strategy for maintaining an orderly classroom. However, sometimes teachers need to employ reactive strategies when prevention has failed. Choosing a proper implementation will alleviate the behavior if it addresses the function of the misbehavior. It is comparable to taking medication when one is ill: If one takes an aspirin for a bacterial infection, the treatment is implemented, but because it is the wrong treatment, it will not work. In a sense, teachers need to pick the "medication" that is targeted for the specific cause of the behavior.

**Finding 4. Inconsistent Responses to Low-Level Misbehavior**

In line with participants' experiences, research shows that minor misbehaviors occur more often than major misbehaviors, forcing teachers to focus on the interruptions instead of the instruction (Allday, 2011; Taylor, 2011). However, since participants revealed their
inconsistencies in defining low-level misbehaviors, it is not surprising that they would also have varying responses to those misbehaviors, as well. Participants frequently discussed how much easier it is to handle aggressive behaviors than it is for them to manage minor ones. This implies that teachers need more training in understanding how to respond consistently to low-level misbehaviors. Participants also acknowledged the inconsistency in how they respond with consequences to minor behaviors, which points to the strong need for adequate training on being consistent with consequences. When teachers implement consequences or reactive strategies inconsistently, students learn when the undesirable behavior is effective, which will result in the behavior being maintained (Payne, Mancil, & Landers, 2005). To discuss these findings in greater detail, it will help to look deeper into the factors that influence the inconsistent responses to low-level misbehaviors.

**Easier to Handle Major Misbehaviors.** Participants in this study unanimously agreed that handling major misbehaviors is easier than handling minor misbehaviors - mainly because the behaviors are visible and clearly defined. Several participants explained that some misbehaviors are easily identified and are therefore addressed objectively as a major misbehavior by any teacher. For instance, if a student punches another student, participants easily defined that as “dangerous and destructive.” Since this is a major visible issue, an appropriate response, according to the participants, would be removal from classroom - a strategy that does not require much on the teacher’s part and allows the class to return to instruction quickly. While this works and makes sense as a response for a major issue, if teachers responded similarly to low-level misbehavior, then students would miss large amounts of instruction given the daily occurrence of these more minor behaviors.
Most participants in this study admitted that they can predict which children will exhibit low-level misbehaviors and the potential causes or factors that could influence those behaviors. While the research says they are "well on their way to preventing the problem behavior in question" (Landrum, Lingo, & Scott, 2011), this finding indicates a dire need for teachers to receive better training in understanding how to prevent misbehaviors and how to maintain consistency in responding to low-level misbehaviors. Otherwise, participants will continue giving inconsistent consequences as a result.

**Inconsistent Consequences.** In the current research study, participants often admitted to using trial and error as a method of confronting challenging behavior, however Taylor (2011) advises against this reactive technique as it often results in inconsistent consequences. Consequences are defined as the repercussions of misbehaviors, yet when inconsistently assigned to similar acts of behavior, students then observe the variability in decisions and can learn that their behavior might be met with different, if any, reactions (Barbetta, Leong Norona, & Bicard, 2005). It is critical that educators are aware that their behaviors and reactions can influence child misbehavior (Barbetta, Leong Norona, & Bicard, 2005). According to Brady et al. (2012), children learn about how to behave partly from watching how adults respond to other student misbehavior.

Participants struggled to identify consistent consequences when it came to discussing intolerable behaviors. Alternatively, praise and positive supports were consistently mentioned, but for unwanted behaviors there was no comparative consequence. These results fail to match with the responses from the original Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B) given to participants prior to beginning of the study, where 7 of the 9 participants responded that they had plenty of
strategies to handle minor misbehaviors, despite 6 of the 9 stating that low-level misbehavior occurred in their classrooms daily.

In a study conducted on student misbehaviors in kindergarten physical education classes, researchers found that the more structured a specific assignment was, the less opportunities there were for student variation of the tasks. However, the more open-ended the task, the more acceptable responses were honored by the teacher (Sanders & Graham, 1995). This implies that educators need to be careful and aware that their own behaviors can have a significant influence on whether or not misbehaviors will occur in their classrooms and even more so that their reactions can oftentimes be inconsistent. This range of reactions, noted as the ‘zone of acceptable responses’, is an unofficial range of behaviors at which point a teacher will not serve a consequence (Stork & Sanders, 2002).

Conclusion

Aggressive and destructive behaviors might be easier to handle than minor misbehaviors due to the perceived strict discipline routine in place school-wide, it is still critical that teachers have appropriate strategies to handle low-level misbehaviors. Responding to low-level misbehaviors is not as easy as looking at a checklist of strategies and checking them off until one works. The literature shows that teachers often respond to misbehaviors in a one-size fits all manner, despite the fact that misbehaviors vary (Tal, 2010). Keeping this in mind, teachers need to address the function of the behavior in order to choose the most appropriate response.

Engaging in Reflective Practice

While engaging in reflective practice, it was clear to the researcher that the participants exuded juxtapositions in their responses. Participants emphasized and stressed the importance of
focusing on the positives and of creating a positive classroom culture. However, in their reflections, the majority of participants reflected on what did not work, rather than considering the positives and things they do well. This implies that the participants know that current interventions and management strategies are only somewhat preventative, however it shows that participants are not fully aware why their strategies do not always work. Additionally, the majority of participants failed to reflect on their own practice to recognize that it is a possibility that their expectations may contribute to the misbehaviors.

Secondly, participants demonstrated uncertainty when deciding whether or not to intervene. Participants’ uncertainty illustrates a need for appropriate protocols for responding to low-level misbehaviors. In addition, participants showed evidence of frustration caused by their uncertainty, often leaving them to doubt their own abilities as educators. This finding points to a vast need for educators to receive reassurance and praise themselves in order to feel more confident when responding and handling misbehaviors. In this section, these findings will be explained with relation to the literature, the theoretical framework, and their implications for practice.

**Finding 5. Inconsistent Results from Disciplinary Strategies**

It is not surprising based on the other findings in this research study that participants shared experiences with inconsistent results from their varying disciplinary strategies. There are many factors that influenced their varying results. Participants often mentioned feeling unsure or uncertain if they were able to prevent misbehaviors. They also recognized that much of their work is done on a trial and error basis, meaning that they learn from their mistakes since professional development or time to research is not always available. Lastly, participants frequently reflected on what did not work rather than reflecting on what did work and
strengthening those strategies. By focusing on what did not work, participants found themselves in a cycle of maintaining a lack of confidence. All these factors combined influenced participants’ inconsistent results, leaving them confused and wondering why some of their interventions work while others do not.

**Lack of Confidence.** Lacking confidence is a major predictor of whether or not teachers will successfully manage classrooms (Baker, 2005). Many participants in this study revealed that they often question their decisions and worry about how greatly their decisions could impact others. Çoban (2015) cites that the majority of research indicates that teachers do not feel sufficient in handling the management of behaviors once they finish their pre-service requirements. In agreement with the literature, the majority of participants in this research study also concluded that there are not enough classroom management courses, or any at all, to support their understanding of misbehavior prior to entering the classroom. Not being armed with proper knowledge and experience can cause frustration and lower levels of confidence.

Several studies conducted indicate that the level of confidence, or self-efficacy as Bandura (1986) calls it, that teachers have is directly related to the amount of control they exude over their classroom (Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999). In fact, studies have shown that when teachers perceive themselves as successful, they are better equipped to manage misbehaviors (Baker, 2005). In order to increase teacher confidence, teachers need to receive consistent and relevant professional development that addresses the need of understanding behavioral analysis. Taylor (2011) suggests that teachers should be trained on how to define misbehavior as a function of the behavior so that when they collect data around the behavior, there is something to observe and measure. This in turn allows teachers to implement an
intervention that directly addresses the function of the behavior, rather than just choosing to ignore a behavior as a strategy or learning from their mistakes.

**Learning from Mistakes.** Participants reported that they tend to learn from experiencing, since most have not taken a classroom management course. Study after study confirm that the majority of teachers enter the field with inadequate behavioral training and a lack of classroom management courses (Freeman et al., 2014; Kelm & Mcintosh, 2012; Allday, 2011; Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008). Even worse, sustained professional development on classroom management is rarely, if at all, offered once teachers do enter the classroom.

Çoban (2015) acknowledges, however, that teachers’ responsive or preventative strategies should be based on scientific studies, as there is too significant a chance that a teacher employs a personally developed strategy that creates chaos in the classroom. The reality of this option, however, is not feasible without proper and adequate professional development. An elementary school teacher teaches at least four different subjects and is expected to be a ‘generalist’, or a content expert in every subject. In addition to content knowledge, an elementary school teacher must also teach students manners, social skills, anti-bullying strategies, and behavioral expectations. As was evidenced in the participant interviews, elementary school teachers are under a tremendous amount of pressure to do the best in all areas, leaving little room for researching, learning, and reflecting on their own.

**Conclusion**

Overall, studies have shown that educators who exude higher confidence levels also are better prepared to manage a classroom (Baker, 2005). When educators lack confidence, they will only be left questioning their abilities and doubting their successes. By increasing
confidence levels, teachers can feel comfortable making mistakes and using them as a learning experience. While making mistakes is an important component of learning, educators should also be given a sufficient amount of professional development on classroom management. Professional development should focus on an array of management tactics, such as substitution and effective pedagogy. For example, when participants described students tapping pencils as disruptive, one way to reduce the disruption is to provide a pad for the desk which lowers or eliminates the noise. Substitution strategies similar to this are examples of negative reinforcement. The noise (stimulus) was taken away and the result is a quieter classroom environment (increased targeted behavior). However, it is important to note that effective pedagogy does not always indicate a quiet learning environment and thus further professional development should provide training on effective pedagogical techniques to support excitement and enthusiasm for learning. By providing educators with an adequate amount of training, perhaps their results of disciplinary practices would be more consistent.

**Finding 6. Understanding Intervention**

According to Young and Martinez (2016), it is a teacher’s duty to know when and how to intervene and also when not to intervene in order to maintain the integrity of instructional time and order in the classroom. Appropriate interventions are corrective and focus on teaching suitable responses so that students eventually can self-regulate their behavior (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002). Additionally, interventions should be conducted with the understanding of the functions of behaviors and empirical data, not based on teachers’ beliefs (Young & Martinez, 2016). The participants in this research study revealed uncertainty with knowing when, how, and when not to intervene. Also, participants admitted they often choose interventions through trial and error, not based on the functions of the misbehaviors, which indicates that the
participants do not have a strong understanding of intervention enough to properly implement it in their classrooms. Knowing when, how, and when not to intervene is critical in preserving academic learning time.

**Knowing When to Intervene.** Knowing when to intervene, or become involved, when a student is misbehaving can be difficult to determine. Participants disclosed that they themselves are not always certain when to handle a misbehavior or ignore it, causing them frustration. This frustration ultimately leads many participants to become unsure about their own abilities as educators. The more teachers create explanations of misbehaviors based on their beliefs, the less they will be apt to employ behavior assessments or intervention strategies (Young & Martinez, 2016). Therefore, knowing when to ignore and when to address a misbehavior is key.

The majority of literature suggests that teachers should know when to intervene because they have identified the function of a student’s misbehavior and are able to identify a replacement, or alternative, behavior (Mitchem & Downing, 2005). When a different response is more effective in satisfying the same need, research shows that students are then likely to stop misbehaving (Gable & Hendrickson, 2000). For example, if the function of a student’s misbehavior is identified as needing to feel powerful, then Malmgren, Trezek, and Paul (2005) suggest that teachers should encourage that student to feel valued by determining alternative, productive ways that offer that student the same feeling. This in turn will result in the discontinuation of the misbehavior because the student has found a replacement behavior that fulfills the same yearning.

**Knowing How to Intervene.** Participants in this research study reported not being certain as to what the appropriate protocols are for responding to low-level misbehaviors. Frequently during interviews, participants mentioned repeatedly trying
interventions that have worked in the past as their go-to strategies for intervening when a misbehavior occurs. Unfortunately, as evidenced through this research study, using previously successful strategies in a trial and error manner does not target the function of the behavior and therefore does not reduce misbehavior. Likewise, Myers and Holland (2000) caution educators to ensure they choose interventions based on the function of the misbehavior to avoid wasting time on ineffective interventions and more importantly, to not reinforce and inadvertently strengthen the negative behavior.

Young and Martinez (2016) outline the following procedures for how to form a proper intervention. First, teachers should assess the misbehavior with a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) before they intervene. In doing so, teachers will identify potential antecedents that help them predict how and when the behavior will occur. Additionally, teachers should be looking at what consequences entice the behaviors or extinguish them from happening. Next, teachers hypothesize the reason for the behavior. This step is critical in that it is based on the data from the assessment, not personal beliefs. Finally, teachers take the gathered information and determine a function based intervention. After a hypothesis has been determined, Taylor (2011) suggests starting the intervention process by identifying a replacement behavior. Then, the teacher focuses on strengthening the replacement behavior and weakening the misbehavior (Taylor, 2011). Once an educator can identify when and how to intervene, recognizing when not to intervene makes more sense.

**Knowing When Not to Intervene.** Not bringing attention to some low-level misbehaviors can sometimes be more effective than intervening. One strategy that many teachers implement to avoid escalating minor misbehaviors is called planned ignoring. Planned ignoring is the act of withholding a stimulus when a student has displayed an undesirable
behavior (Payne, Mancil, & Landers, 2005). Essentially, teachers purposefully and appropriately disregard a misbehavior to avoid feeding negative reinforcement. However, it is critical that teachers know *when* it is appropriate to ignore misbehaviors and not just use it as a strategy of convenience.

Studies report that teachers often misuse the strategy of ignoring a misbehavior (Partin et al., 2010). Partin et al. (2010) report that teachers who lessen their interactions with students who misbehave in order to avoid a potential flare up of misbehavior are not effectively managing a classroom that promotes student success. Planned ignoring requires thought and preparation and when used appropriately, can be a successful strategy. According to Payne et al. (2005), sometimes the most appropriate way to address minor disruptive behaviors is through planned ignoring. However, they also caution that there will be situations in which planned ignoring is not the most effective strategy, which means teachers need a strong understanding of the functions of misbehavior in order to identify when to employ planned ignoring as the most effective strategy.

**Conclusion**

One of the most common complaints among participants in this research study was the lack of time to engage in a reflective practice. Taylor (2011) recognizes that lack of time limits the practicality of conducting official FBAs and thus offers that teachers can do a “quick analysis” by just noting on a piece of paper or sticky note what happened before and after the behavior occurred (p. 198). It is critical, however, that at the school-level, FBAs are included in the consultation and referral process to allow for discussion centered on data, not beliefs (Myers & Holland, 2000). Unfortunately, there is limited literature on specific examples of intervention strategies, resulting in educators struggling to determine appropriate function based
interventions. There is also limited literature about how to immediately lessen a student’s mild disruptive behavior when leading a whole-class lesson and completing a functional assessment is not an option at that moment. There appears to be a large gap between theoretical research and the practical application that needs to be addressed with future research.

Connections to the Theoretical Framework

Bandura (2001) identified in his research and development of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) that human agency, or the ability to self-regulate one's own cognitive processes in order to control one's own behavior, advanced prior behavioral learning theories by including the interconnectedness of cognition and behavior. One's agentic perspective, or being present in an experience, combines observational learning with behavioral learning theories to show that experience is a significant component of learning (Bandura, 1986). According to social learning theories, humans learn by observing and watching others and their reactions to experiences. Feedback to promote self-regulation enables SCT to integrate cognitive processes to behavioral learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007). In fact, Bandura (1991) argues that most human behavior involves some form of forethought. Because human behavior is controlled by both thoughts and external sources, teacher understanding of SCT is essential in order to optimally teach students how to control their behaviors.

A significant component of SCT is the notion of self-efficacy, or confidence. In the case of misbehaviors, studies have shown that teachers who are more confident in handling misbehaviors are more successful (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). Additionally, higher confidence is correlated with high adjustment to practice, meaning teachers who are more certain they can handle misbehaviors are also more flexible with trying new strategies if one is unsuccessful (Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999). Moreover, Bandura (1986) relates high
levels of self-efficacy with the ability to influence cognitive and emotional processes, which can affect or change how a teacher would respond to misbehavior.

Participants at no point shared ways in which they teach students about how humans control their behavior. Participants talked about management systems, pre-teaching expected behaviors, such as “sit quietly”, but not one participant shared if and how they teach students about behaving from a psychology or behavioral learning theory standpoint. Unfortunately, the literature confirms that students are often missing the instructional strategies needed in order to self-regulate and self-monitor their own misbehaviors (Anderson & Prawat, 1983) and therefore, an implication for practice would be that educators begin weaving theory with practice.

**Implications for Practice**

One way in which children learn how to misbehave is by watching other students misbehave and observing how teachers respond to those misbehaviors (Baker, 1985). Because of this, it is critical that teachers choose appropriate strategies when responding to student misbehavior. Students need to learn how to self-regulate and fix their misbehaviors yet most reactive strategies fail to teach the target behaviors (Polirstok, 2015). Thus, when responding to misbehavior, educators need to make sure their feedback is corrective, providing opportunities for students to learn and improve, not just a means to end a misbehavior temporarily.

Based on the research conducted in this study and the current literature available, it appears the majority of teachers are not provided ample training in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and therefore are currently diagnosing behavior issues based on personal beliefs about a student’s home life, personality, laziness, and more (Young & Martinez, 2016). It is critical that teachers are given effective professional development led by a psychologist or a scholar.
practitioner with an expertise in psychology and behavior in order to gain a better understanding of the triggers of misbehaviors.

Through learning more about how to use empirical data to understand the functions of behaviors, teachers will be able to address misbehaviors more specifically and with appropriate interventions to cease the behaviors. In addition, teachers will be better prepared to prevent minor misbehaviors from occurring in their classrooms, which will increase academic instructional time. By preventing misbehaviors from occurring in the classroom, student learning outcomes will increase (Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999).

Misbehavior and its effects can lessen a teacher's sense of efficacy. When teachers have a high sense of efficacy, they are more apt to employ practices that positively impact their students. Morin and Battalio (2004) believe that in order for an enduring change in behavior to occur, teachers must have high “personal teaching efficacy” (PTE; p. 252). They define teachers with high PTE as teachers who are willing to approach misbehavior interventions with an open mindset, one where they resist the urge to immediately dispose of those that appear to not work. Most, if not all, participants in this study exhibited high PTE, but their reflective practice did not always exude their confidence in their PTE. Schools need to provide teachers with adequate professional development in handling misbehavior to help them increase their PTE, which would result in fewer misbehaviors and more focused instruction. At a larger level, school psychologists and guidance counselors also need better training, as Myers and Holland (2000) report that the school psychology literature does not make any mention of how they choose their interventions. By providing all levels of educators (core teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and administrative staff) more professional development on
behavioral analysis, faculty can respond consistently to low-level misbehaviors and strategize ways to prevent low-level misbehavior from occurring.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study have many implications for future research. The data from this study revealed that understanding low-level misbehaviors has value in terms of responding to and preventing minor misbehaviors. The findings suggest that current intervention strategies and protocols in place are not enough to eradicate low-level misbehaviors within the elementary school classroom. A review of existing literature suggests that this study is foundational in articulating a detailed and developmental process that participants experience in their understanding of low-level misbehaviors. Additionally, this study fills a gap in the research; most studies on misbehavior have predominantly focused on major and aggressive misbehaviors. Most research has not focused on the teachers’ perspectives of low-level misbehaviors. This study contributes to the field in using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture and provide stakeholders’ rich, detailed accounts of their transformative experiences with low-level behaviors.

This study suggests the need for future research in four areas. First, because this study was limited to a small sample of stakeholders all from one school district in the northeastern region of the United States, the findings may not be transferable. Thus, it may be beneficial to repeat this study with other educators who represent other school districts from other regions of the United States. Additionally, this study only focused on grades 1-5 teachers; ergo more research should be conducted at the middle and secondary levels to see if there is continuity in the findings. Second, this study revealed that further research is needed on identifying a universally accepted and agreeable definition for behaviors which can appear subjective in a
classroom setting. Third, this study’s findings revealed that all educators need a stronger background in applied behavioral analysis (ABA) in order to develop a better understanding of the categorization of low-level misbehaviors according to their functions. Therefore, more research is needed on how to provide elementary educators with research-based professional development on ABA. Fourth, the findings suggest further research is needed at the larger level to better understand how schools ensure consistency of behavioral expectations across each classroom.

Conclusion

This research sought to add to the limited literature on teacher perspectives of low-level misbehaviors and ultimately identify how elementary school teachers understand and explain their experiences with low-level disruptive behavior in the classroom. Essentially, the elementary school teachers in this study engaged in a reflective practice to observe their own thoughts on low-level misbehaviors. While they understood the difference between minor and major misbehaviors, their lack of reference to functions of misbehaviors and preventative strategies ultimately revealed that they need a stronger understanding in order to respond more successfully to the misbehaviors they experience daily. This study also aimed to inform and improve elementary educators’ instructional practice with respect to preventing and handling low-level behaviors, as well as encourage further research.

Several implications for practice were revealed through the data analysis. The implications can be grouped into two categories: implications for students and implications for teachers. With regard to students, it was clear from the data that students need to be considered valuable members of the classroom, in which they are given some authority and voice as part of the community. Aloe et al. (2014) explain that students need more than to be taught rules and
the definitions of those rules. Students need to feel ownership of the rules and be a part of the collaborative process of developing the classroom rules (Smith & Misra, 1992). When rules are created together, all stakeholders become responsible for ownership.

Secondly, teachers need to provide students with a sufficient understanding of classroom and school rules. It is critical that students understand more than just what the rules sound like and look like, but also understand the rationale behind developing the rules. For example, students need to understand why we walk silently in the hallways. It is not enough to just be told to do it; providing an understanding might help students to see meaning in the rules. By being a part of the rulemaking process, students can feel a greater connection to the adherence of the rules. Lastly, students need to be engaged in the classroom. Any unstructured time allows for student misbehavior.

To make these implications for practice possible, teachers need to understand how to provide students the opportunities to be engaged members of the classroom and appropriate lessons that facilitate the understanding and reasoning behind the creation of rules. Three ways the teachers can do this is by role playing, creating norms with the students, and communicating and collaborating with their peers. With role playing, teachers need gain a better understanding of how role play connects with SCT. A stronger sense of cognitive theory will allow teachers to focus on the understanding component, not just the imitation piece of role-playing. In creating norms with the students, teachers need to ensure their classroom rules are consistent with the school rules. Lastly, teachers need to work as teams to consider the rationale behind behavioral rules to provide fewer inconsistencies across classrooms.
References


Dunlap, G., Strain, P. S., Fox, L., Carta, J. J., Conroy, M., Smith, B. J., Kern, L., ... Sowell, C.


Lane, K. L., Pierson, M., & Givner, C. C. (2003). Teacher expectations of student behavior:


teachers' skills to keep these children in class. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*, 207-234.


Appendix A: Letter of Intent to Participants

Date

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a doctoral student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program and I am currently working on my dissertation study: Making Sense of Low-Level Behaviors in the Elementary Classroom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. My goal is to make sense of teacher experiences with minor misbehaviors that occur in the classroom and inform future research on how to reduce problematic behaviors within the classroom. For this research, low-level misbehaviors are defined as non-threatening, non-destructive actions that cause teachers frustration and distract the classroom environment from proceeding with the intended lesson (such as distractibility, refusal to complete task, talking out of turn, wandering the classroom, etc.).

I have identified your school as a research site because your district is large and offers a wide range of diversity among both students and staff. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Should you choose to participate, we will meet for approximately one hour to talk about your experiences with students’ low-level misbehaviors. The interview will be audio-recorded and will take place toward the end of the school year at a time and place that is most convenient to you. Your interview and participation will in no way disrupt the education of students at your school and your confidentiality will be maintained at all times, as I will assign each participant a pseudonym and all interviews and documents will be referenced using only this pseudonym.

I intend to interview nine teachers who range in years of experience and grade levels. Therefore, I ask that all interested potential participants complete the attached demographic sheet and email it to me at kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu.

If you are selected to participate, I will e-mail you to discuss in greater depth the study, have you sign an informed consent form, and schedule a time for our interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions or concerns regarding my study, please contact me at kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Hilary Kreisberg, EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire for Participation

Name: _______________________________  Pseudonym: _________________
  (to be identified by the researcher)

Circle all that apply.

I am a general classroom teacher of grade: 1 2 3 4 5

My teaching experience ranges in years of: 0 – 3 4 – 7 8 +

Handling student misbehavior is a struggle: Always Sometimes Never

Rate of minor misbehaviors in my classroom: Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily

I have plenty of strategies to handle student misbehaviors: Yes No

Additional questions I have about the study: ________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

I understand that my participation in this study will not impact my teaching evaluation and will
always remain confidential. ___________

Initial here
Appendix C: Letter of Intent Forwarding from Principals

Dear Principals,

I sent two all-call emails through the Central Office Listserv over the past two weeks requesting grade 1-5 teachers participate in my doctoral study on *Making Sense of Low-Level Behaviors in the Elementary Classroom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. I need three more participants who have 0-3 years of experience teaching. I am requesting that you forward this email along to your grade 1-5 teachers who have 0-3 years of teaching experience. All interested participants should fill out the questionnaire (Appendix B). Should they have any questions about the study, they may respond directly to me at kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Hilary Kreisberg, EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix D: Participant Selection Email

Dear TEACHER,

This letter is to notify you that you have been selected to participate in my study *Making Sense of Low-Level Behaviors in the Elementary Classroom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. Thank you for agreeing to participate and for taking valuable time to assist me.

I would like to remind you that your participation in this study will help me contribute to two limited bodies of literature—how elementary school educators are impacted by low-level misbehaviors and how elementary educators make sense of low-level misbehaviors in their classrooms. Your participation in this study will allow you to share your experiences in handling minor misbehaviors, experiences with misbehavior, and suggestions for new educators. Furthermore, it will allow you to reflect on how low-level misbehaviors have impacted you as an educator.

I would like to schedule a time and place for our interview. Since I am working with 9 participants, would you please provide me with at least two 60-90 minute periods where you are available to be interviewed? Also, if other than the school, please provide a place for the interview.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Hilary Kreisberg, EdD Candidate  
Northeastern University  
Kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu
Appendix E: Member Check Email Template

Dear TEACHER,

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me on (date). I truly enjoyed learning about how low-level misbehavior impacts you as an educator. As we discussed, I am sending you this follow-up email so you can review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (please see attached). Please feel free edit the transcription as necessary, as well as to offer any additional thoughts, ideas, or reflections you may have had since our interview.

When you are finished, please send it back to me. If you have nothing to change or report, please send me a quick email to let me know. Again, thank you for your valuable time!

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Hilary Kreisberg, EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
Kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu
Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Kimberly Nolan (Principal Investigator) & Hilary Kreisberg (Student Researcher)

Title of Project: Making Sense of Low-Level Behaviors in the Elementary Classroom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher, Hilary Kreisberg, will explain it to you first. You may ask any questions that you may have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this doctoral thesis project is to gain an understanding of teacher experiences with low-level misbehavior. Student misbehavior in general is a consistent problem in elementary schools today. While major misbehaviors, such as violence, drugs, and fighting are part of the issue, low-level misbehaviors, or minor misbehaviors are more common. Typical low-level misbehaviors, such as tapping pencils, talking out of turn, wandering, and more, distract other students from learning, reduce teacher instructional time, hinder potential academic success of the student(s) who is misbehaving, and cause teacher frustration and stress. In interviewing teachers and analyzing their interviews, the researcher will gain better understanding into current teacher experiences with minor student misbehaviors.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a grade 1-5 teacher within the studied school district.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to describe your experiences of student misbehavior. The interview will be 60-90 minutes in length. The interview will be scheduled preferably face-to-face. If a face-to-face interview is not possible, interviews will be scheduled using a technology such as Skype, Google Chat, or Go-to-meetings. You retain the right to decline answering any questions at any time. With your permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder and saved as an MP3 file for later transcription by a confidential third party, Rev. Following the transcription, the transcription will be sent to you to check for accuracy and clarification.

How much of my time will it take?
The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and approximately 15 minutes for member checking via email.
Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is no foreseeable risk to you for taking part in this study. However, there may be discomfort as you reflect on the student misbehavior, experiences with misbehavior, or your strategies for handling the misbehaviors. Therefore, any question that may provide discomfort may be declined.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may assist future educators in classroom management. Additionally, it may help us understand how low-level misbehaviors impact the classroom, teacher, and student.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers of this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project. The researcher will take every precaution to keep all information confidential. Research data is used only for reporting of the findings. Pseudonyms will be used for interviewees to protect identity and school names will not be disclosed. The research will only describe characteristics of the school. Audiotapes, transcriptions and other identifying information will be kept in a personal locked cabinet and on a secure personal computer accessible only to the student researcher and her principal investigator, Dr. Kimberly Nolan. All recordings and transcripts will be maintained by the student researcher until the thesis has been approved. Afterwards, all transcripts, recordings, and data files will be destroyed. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation solely because of your participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. At any point in time, you may withdraw from this study without explanation, penalty or consequences of any kind. Your participation or nonparticipation will not affect your relationship with Northeastern University or any other organization.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Hilary Kreisberg by email at Kreisberg.hi@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kimberly Nolan, by email at k.nolan@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina,
Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will be given a $5 gift card as a token of gratitude for your participation in the study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There will be no cost to participate in this study.

I agree to take part in this research.

_______________________________________  ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

_______________________________________
Printed name of person above

_______________________________________  ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

Hilary Kreisberg
Printed name of person above
Appendix G: Interview Protocol

**Topic:** Making Sense of Low-Level Behaviors in the Elementary Classroom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Hilary Kreisberg
Interviewee #:
Ask permission to begin recording. *(Turn on recorder)*

**Introduction**
As you know, I am in my final phase of my doctoral program and your help today will aid me in completing this journey, so I want to thank you for your time. This research project focuses on the experiences of grades 1-5 teachers. Specifically, it explores how elementary educators describe their experience with low-level behaviors in the classroom. The hope is that this research can be used to help future teachers with classroom management and add to the limited research on minor misbehaviors.

First, I want to emphasize that all of my participants will remain anonymous, and that your participation is completely voluntary. If you don’t mind, I would like to review the consent form with you before we begin.

*[Review and sign NEU Consent Forms]*

Thank you. I have a few more administrative items to discuss before we begin. Since your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audiotape our conversation today so I can replay it after to analyze. Is that okay? Also, I will have a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionist will receive the audio labeled by a pseudonym, meaning they will never know your name to maintain confidentiality. Once the audio recording is transcribed, I will email you a copy for your review. Is that okay? Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections. How does that work for you?

I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 60-90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Therefore, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the line of questioning. Additionally, there may be times where I may prompt you to go deeper in your explanations. Do you have any questions before we start?

Awesome. Let’s begin.
Interview Questions
Prompts to be used during interview
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you provide an example?
- Can you provide any documentation I can take with me?

I am now going to ask you questions focused on the topic of the study, exploring your perspectives on low-level misbehavior in the classroom.

1. Can you tell me about your teaching experience?
   a. How many years have you been teaching?
   b. What grade levels have you taught?
   c. What was your major in your undergraduate and graduate programs?
   d. What is the best aspect of teaching?
   e. What is the most stressful aspect of teaching?

2. Can you tell me about your classroom management experience?
   a. How did you learn how to prevent misbehaviors?
   b. What are your views on your own classroom management?

3. For the purpose of this study, low-level misbehaviors are defined as: minor, challenging, noncompliant, surface-level disruptive behaviors that are non-threatening and non-destructive behaviors. These misbehaviors are disruptive to the learning environment, but not severe or dangerous. For example, talking out of turn, doodling, out of seat without permission, disobedience, refusal to work, and off-task behavior are a few of the many types of low-level misbehaviors.
   a. Think of some students you have currently or in the past that have exhibited low-level misbehaviors.
      i. What are the most common low-level misbehaviors you have experienced from students?
      ii. What are some of the misbehaviors that are most distracting to other students?
      iii. What are some of the misbehaviors that are most frustrating to handle?
      iv. Why are they frustrating?
      v. Can you describe for me whether the students who exhibit low-level misbehaviors are the same offenders, different offenders each time, or a mix?

4. Can you describe for me how low-level misbehaviors impact your instructional environment?

5. Can you describe for me how low-level misbehaviors impact your classroom culture?

6. Can you describe for me how low-level misbehaviors impact your personal life?

7. Can you describe for me how low-level misbehaviors impact the student who presents the misbehavior?
8. Can you tell me about some of the strategies you use to prevent low-level disruptive behaviors in your classroom?

9. Can you describe what you think causes children to exhibit low-level misbehaviors?

10. Social Cognitive Theory is a learning theory developed by Albert Bandura, a well renowned psychologist, in which he determined that three factors (cognitive, behavioral, and environmental) work together to encourage students to self-monitor their behavior. Basically, people learn through observation and experiences, which enable them to gain control of their own behavior. For example, a teacher might role-play directions rather than just write the directions on the board as a form of modeling so students can observe the expected behaviors.
   a. What experiences do you have with behavior interventions that use Social Cognitive Theory? (In other words, what behavior interventions do you use that offer modeling as a strategy?)
   b. What experiences do you have with behavior interventions that do not use SCT?

11. In light of the Social Cognitive Theory, can you describe your experiences with behavior interventions that help students self-monitor their own behavior?
   a. Can you describe these behavior interventions that encourage self-monitoring and how a teacher would use them?

12. Can you describe what additional interventions you have seen be successful / or not successful in preventing low-level misbehavior?

13. Can you explain how you would respond to behavior differently for different groups of students (for example, Special Education students, English Learners, etc.)?

14. How would you explain the persistence of low-level misbehaviors despite interventions that are in place?
   a. In your opinion, can children control their low-level misbehavior?

15. If I were a student teacher completing my practicum in your classroom, what advice would you give to me about preventing misbehaviors in the classroom?
   a. What advice would you give me in terms of best ways to handle student misbehavior once it has begun?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Just a reminder, your responses will be tied to a pseudonym and therefore your identity will be confidential.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification were needed in regard to one of your responses, would it be all right for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts. If you choose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback,
alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to?

As a token of my appreciation, please accept this gift card to Starbucks.

[Hand over gift card]

Finally, when this thesis study is complete, which will most likely be 3-6 months from now, would you like to receive an electronic copy of the document?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study!