

# **Teachers' Experiences with Disruptive Student Behaviour: A Grounded Theory Study**

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## Abstract

For both new and veteran teachers disruptive student behaviour is consistently reported as the most demanding aspect of the teaching experience and is often cited as one of the reasons teachers leave the profession. Using grounded theory as a guiding methodological framework in this study I explored the interview data from 13 general elementary teachers collected over a three-year period from Fall 2015 to Fall 2018 asking, “How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour? And what are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy and strategies?” This study took place, in British Columbia, Canada, at a time when the province underwent changes in class size legislation subsequently 10 of the 13 teachers interviewed provided data about these changes to their class size and their management of disruptive student behaviour. Findings from this study showed that teachers considered behaviour to be disruptive when they did not understand its underlying purpose, it was unexpected and it required the teacher to make substantial and unplanned changes involving the whole class. In this process, the teacher was found to consider and weigh the impact of the behaviour on the student and the other students in the class. Finally, the teachers considered the behaviour’s impact on their own ability to teach and meet the needs of all their students, and its impact on the other students’ ability to learn. Findings also showed that class size and composition influenced teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour. Overall smaller class sizes were viewed as beneficial, however, teachers noted that the loss of the Educational Assistant (EA) in the classroom to support all students was an unexpected consequence of the class size reduction. This loss of an additional trained adult was profound when dealing with one or several disruptive students. Overall findings from this study, including those on class size and composition, highlighted the importance of relationality and community building as part of what “good teachers” do to support positive learning behaviour. The findings suggest that disruptive student behaviour can be understood theoretically within a two petal relational model where tactical strategies integrated with relationship building can support positive behaviours and prevent a relational disconnect with students.

**Keywords:** disruptive behaviours; elementary teachers’ perceptions; classroom management; grounded theory.

## **Dedication**

To my parents, and Geoff with love and gratitude

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

How to manage disruptive student behaviour in Kindergarten to Grade 12 in the public education system has long been of interest to teachers, administrators and school districts in Canada and the United States. Most view the importance of well managed classrooms as fundamental to students' learning and academic success. Although effective interventions such as school-wide positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) (Horner; 2014; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2009) have been developed, public schools continue to have limited success in improving student behaviour (Westling, 2010). Teachers continue to report on the challenges and the lack of support when managing disruptive student behaviour and many attribute these behaviours to student characteristics, and/or the student's home environment rather than on teacher or school factors (Atici, 2007; Giallo & Little, 2003; Leflot, van Lier, Onghena, & Colpin, 2010; Maskan, 2007; Moffett, 2000; Smart & Igo, 2010). Interpreting these reports can be difficult because teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour are context-dependent and include the individual teacher and his or her teaching style and experience, as well as the classroom composition. As a result, more interpretative research is required to understand teachers' perspectives.

As a school psychologist, my professional interest is to support students and teachers who work with students who they perceive to be disruptive. In order to support students and teachers, deepening my understanding of teachers' perceptions of behaviour management is important. With the increasing demand on teachers to manage a variety of behaviours in inclusive and diverse classrooms, it is timely to investigate how teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour may contribute to current understandings of behaviour management.

Studies that have examined teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour have focused on defining disruptive behaviour (Beaman & Wheldall, 1997; Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988), attributions about student behaviour (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Atici, 2007; Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981; Kulina, 2007; Weiner, 1976) or on which disruptive behaviours are most prevalent and problematic quantitatively (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013; Split & Koomen, 2009). While these studies provide some generalizations about disruptive student behaviour, they do

not capture the emotional responses and evaluations made by teachers in real instances of disruptive student behaviour (Lucas, Collins, & Langdon, 2009; Wanless & Jahoda, 2002). On the other hand, in-depth qualitative studies that describe the experiences of individual teachers are better able to explain why certain behaviours may be perceived as problematic to the teacher. Teachers' perceptions and interpretations of disruptive student behaviour become especially important, in order to understand what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour may become a focal concern of a teacher's classroom management.

These factors led me to the present study where I set out to explore the following questions: How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour? And what are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy and strategies? I began with two intentions in my research: First, to conduct grounded theory research with experienced elementary teachers regarding disruptive student behaviour, recognizing they are experts in their classrooms; second, to allow for understandings of disruptive student behaviour to emerge from the data.

In chapter two, I discuss the current research on teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour, reviewing both the results and methodological limitations. In chapter three, I present the research design and the rationale for the present study. In chapter four, I present and discuss key findings from this study. To close, chapter five summarizes contributions, limitations, implications for practice, and a final reflection on how this research has impacted me personally as a school psychologist.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

### **2.1. Chapter Overview**

The present study explores how elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour, and the relationships among teachers' perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophies and strategies. My aim in this chapter is to review the literature on teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour. This review includes how teachers define disruptive behaviour or what behaviours teachers perceive as disruptive, what teachers attribute disruptive behaviours to, how teachers respond to disruptive behaviour, and what interventions are used for managing disruptive behaviour. I begin with a brief review of the common conceptual definitions of disruptive behaviour. I conclude the chapter with a rationale for this study and the questions that are addressed.

### **2.2. Teachers' Perceptions of Disruptive Student Behaviour**

Disruptive student behaviours are on the rise in schools in Canada (Kelm, McIntosh, & Cooley, 2014). Both general and special education teachers report dealing with students who exhibit aggression, defiance, and socially inappropriate behaviour (Westling, 2010). Research suggests teachers and administrators are concerned about the negative effects of these behaviours on instruction and learning outcomes (Kendziora & Osher, 2009; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010) because students with these behaviours are difficult to teach and often are handled through segregation from the rest of the class. These students are also unable to meet minimum academic requirements to graduate (Kauffman, 2001; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002). The continuum of disruptive behaviours displayed in school ranges from minor acts (e.g., fiddling with objects) to severe offences (e.g., fighting and harassment) and can occur with varying degrees of intensity (e.g., mild, moderate, intense).

Disruptive behaviours can have negative effects on the classroom environment. Some disruptive behaviours are typical during the elementary school and adolescent years (Last, Perrin, Hersen, & Kazdin, 1996) and are considered transient and expected. When left unchecked, however, milder and more common forms of disruptive student

behaviour can become increasingly severe and resistant to intervention (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004; Gresham, Cook, Crews, & Kern, 2004; Landrum et al., 2003; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). For some students, disruptive behaviours can become chronic and so severe they impair relationships with peers, teachers, and parents and significantly interfere with important intellectual and social functioning (Farrell, Smith, & Brownell, 1998; Walker et al., 2004). When disruptions occur, other students find it hard to focus and stay on task, thus reducing learning time for all students (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009; Fernandez-Balboa, 1991; Lewis, 2001). Disruptive behaviour negatively influences the classroom environment by creating a climate that discourages student social interactions and student participation and, ultimately, academic achievement (Ratcliff et al., 2010).

Teachers consider disruptive student behaviour to be one of the most demanding aspects of the teaching experience (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009; Dunn & Baker, 2002; Hastings & Bham, 2003). Merrett and Wheldall (1993) surveyed 176 secondary school teachers about training and practical experience in behaviour management. Teachers reported that they felt inadequately prepared and that schools should provide behaviour management training. They felt that reducing disruptive behaviours, would reduce their stress. However, it appears that the behaviour problems that are most concerning to teachers are not major infringements or violent behaviour, but rather they are minor infractions and repeated disruptions that are most problematic (Arbuckle & Little, 2004). The most common disruptive behaviours in classrooms include distraction from tasks, not following directions, talking without permission, frequent movement in the classroom and hindering the work of other students (Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2007; Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012). Teachers find these repetitive behaviours challenging and need the most support with them (Calderalla, Shatzer, Richardson, Shen, Zhang & Zhang, 2009; Reynolds, Stephenson, & Beaman, 2011). Similar studies have shown that teachers struggle to deal with relatively minor forms of problematic student behaviours and spend a considerable amount of time dealing with minor issues and the resulting stress (Atici, 2007; Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008; Giallo & Little, 2003; Houston & Williamson, 1993; Maskan, 2007; Smart & Igo, 2010).

Faced with disruptive behaviours, teachers report that they are not well supported through professional development to instruct and manage classrooms with varied and

diverse needs (Naylor, 2005; Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015). Teachers are able to respond more successfully to the needs of students and to sustain positive change when schools and districts have strong professional learning communities. However, those with weak professional learning communities are instructionally ineffective with students (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Moffett (2000) argued that teachers who struggled with managing disruptive behaviours often fell victim to high levels of stress and burnout. It is no surprise therefore that disruptive student behaviours are frequently cited as a source of stress and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Feitler & Tokar, 1992) and cited as a reason that teachers leave the profession (Patterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003).

There is no generally agreed upon terminology of “disruptive behaviour” in the literature. For instance, the terms “misbehavior, misconduct or discipline problem” refer to behaviours that violate explicit rules and regulations in the school and classroom (Stewart et al., 1998). Terms such as “problem behaviour” (Ho, 2004), “behaviour problems” (Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988) or “disruptive behaviour” (Leung & Ho, 2001; Ho & Leung, 2002) refer to behaviour that do not necessarily break rules but are inappropriate or disturbing in the classroom setting and/or cause stress for teachers by disrupting the learning process. Disruptive behaviour is also described as behaviour that is uncooperative and prevents the student and/or others from focusing on what they are doing (Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000). Sun and Shek (2012) described “problem behaviour” as an externalizing behaviour that violates explicit rules or implicit norms, disturbs the classroom order, and disrupts the process of teaching and learning. The various terms are problematic as well as confusing and make it difficult to compare studies.

Teachers too appear to define disruptive behaviour differently. Studies that examine teachers’ perceptions of disruptive behaviour employ questionnaires using a ranked scale to order what behaviours teachers perceive to be disruptive. For instance, in the United Kingdom, elementary teachers perceived 10 items namely eating, non-verbal noise, disobedience, talking out of turn, idleness/slowness, tardiness, hindering others, physical aggression, untidiness, and out of seat behaviour as disruptive (Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). Houghton et al. (1988) also used these behaviour descriptors to rank order what behaviours secondary school teachers may perceive to be disruptive, although they replaced eating with verbal abuse because teachers did not perceive

eating as disruptive behaviour among secondary school students whereas verbal abuse was perceived as disruptive. In addition, both studies relied on procedures with predetermined response categories that defined the behaviors (e.g., Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). Typical studies that utilize predetermined responses include surveys (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005), vignettes (Mavropoulou & Padelidiadu, 2002), and rating scales (Skinner & Hales, 1992). As such, teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour are not accurately reflected. Finally, the scales developed in these studies are limited to describing disruptive student behaviour in classrooms in the United Kingdom and not in Canada. The cultural relevance of such scales is limited because of differences in teaching and learning approaches between the two countries. This points to the need to carry out further Canadian research based on the views of local teachers.

Teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour emerge in different contexts. For example, teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour are influenced by differences in ethnicity. Teachers are more inclined to use labels such as "anti-social behaviour," or "challenging" or to describe behaviours as "disruptive" when the students' and teachers' cultural background differs (Watkins & Wagner, 2000). In these cases, the teacher creates a classroom culture that may be at odds with the values, experiences and expectations of the student (Babad, 1993; Davis, 2006). Moreover, when school cultures do not promote preventive and evidenced-based behaviour practices, teachers are more likely to perceive and experience behaviours as disruptive and opportunities for teaching and learning are not maximized (Scott & Barrett, 2004).

Teachers have different thresholds of tolerance for behavioural variations. Behaviours such as aggression or violence toward others, not completing tasks, talking incessantly, and annoying others are rightfully viewed as examples of disruptive behaviour in classroom settings; however, the degree of disruption will largely depend on when and how these behaviours are experienced by teachers (Emerson, 2001). The teacher's own understanding or tolerance of what they perceive as being a disruption determines the perceived severity of the behaviour. Teachers often provide descriptions of disruptive behaviour along with decisions regarding subsequent interventions that do not always reflect an understanding of the students' own reasons for the behaviour. It is well recognized in schools that a student may be perceived as disruptive by one teacher

and perceived as a typical student by another teacher (Emerson, 2001; Kaufman, Mostert, Trent, & Hallahan, 2002; Wheldall & Glynn, 1989).

Teachers also have difficulty gauging the seriousness of disruptive behaviour because behaviours may be misunderstood as a lack of effort from the student, or considered to be within the students' control (ability). For instance, the acute behaviour of a student undergoing the separation of his parents and who is temporarily acting out in the classroom may appear similar to a student who exhibits disruptive behaviour across different settings and for other reasons that are persistent over time. Although disruptive behaviour is a label for unacceptable conduct, it should be reiterated that while it may accompany a special education condition such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the 'disruptive behaviour' itself is not a diagnosis, nor a special education condition. In these ways, disruptive behaviour is a widely contested and problematic term. As shown in the discussion above, teachers' opinions of what constitutes disruptive student behaviour vary and are dependent on their perceptions of what is acceptable, within their own threshold of tolerance, and within their own cultural beliefs and understandings (Rogers, 2002). The importance of considering context is highlighted in these findings and suggests the lens through which teachers perceive behaviour may also express teachers' views of students.

For the purposes of this study I define disruptive behaviour as that behaviour which negatively impacts the learning of not only the student but others within the community. In the classroom, this would include the learning environment and all those within it.

### **2.3. Teachers' Attributions of Disruptive Student Behaviour**

Teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour are heavily influenced by what Weiner (1976) referred to as an "attribution." Attribution states that teachers respond to disruptive behaviour based largely on what they identify as the cause of the behaviour. Teachers tend to attribute disruptive behaviour to family problems, parental attitude, learning difficulties and the low self-esteem, and other causes (Mavropoulou & Padelidiadu, 2002). This finding is consistent with the literature that teachers often believe disruptive behaviour arises because of factors within the student or their family (Guttman, 1982; Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang & Algozzine, 1983; Soodak & Podell, 1994; Bibou-

Nanou, Kiosseoglou & Stogiannidou, 2000). In particular, elementary school teachers are more likely to attribute students' behaviors to poor learning habits, whereas middle and high school teachers tend to attribute students' behaviours to low effort (Ding, Li, Li, & Kulm, 2010).

Many teachers attribute disruptive behaviours to organic or innate factors within the student (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013; Bibou et al, 2000; Soodak & Powell, 1994) and conclude that it is difficult to influence these behaviours (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002; Wilson & Silverman, 1991). Soodak and Podell (1994) asked teachers to provide suggestions on how to help failing students and found teachers generally relied on other school professionals like school counsellors to meet the needs of these students. Teachers attributed serious school problems first to student variables such as learning problems, secondly to family/home factors such as parental attitude, and lastly to teaching variables such as a lack of classroom rules (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002; Medway, 1979). Some studies reveal teachers more readily accept credit for students' successes than blame for students' failures (Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang, & Algozzine, 1983; Guttman, 1982). In some instances, teachers feel students are beyond help (Andreou & Rapti, 2010).

Teachers also attribute disruptive behaviours to family problems and feel these behaviours are resistant to change (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Atici, 2007; Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009). In these cases, teachers disagree that school factors such as school demands, teachers' attitude and lack of classroom rules cause behaviour problems (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). Teachers tend to dismiss school-related factors in favour of attributing disruptive behaviour to students' characteristics and home situations when asked how much influence they have over students' behaviours, (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Atici, 2007; Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009; Irwin & Nucci, 2004; Kulina, 2007; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). Although teachers should be aware of and concerned about student characteristics and the family's influence on the student's conduct at school it is well documented that school experiences influence the increase or decrease of disruptive behaviour (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015). Teacher's perceptions that school factors do not play a role in the emergence of disruptive behaviour problems may indicate a lack of reflective thinking about disruptive behaviour or little awareness of the use of classroom rules to reduce the occurrence of behaviour problems (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002).

Teachers' explanations of disruptive student behaviour may reflect, in part, evidence about their challenges in managing behaviour, but they may also reflect skewed attributions for these behaviours, such as "it is their home life" or "she is not very bright" (Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Wagner & Cameto, 2004). When teachers blame students or family problems, they fall back on punishment as a way to control the class (Watkins & Wagner, 2000). As such, teachers create injustices for all students when they concentrate on student behaviour rather than process incidents with the student or the class (Balson, 1992). These perceived causes of disruptive behaviour also negatively impact student and teacher, class environment, relationships with peers and teachers and can negatively affect the school ethos regarding discipline (Rogers, 2002; Watkins & Wagner, 2000).

## **2.4. Teachers' Responses to Disruptive Student Behaviour**

Many effective interventions can be applied in general classroom environments for the majority of students who display disruptive behaviour (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Nelson, 1996). Teachers who perceive that students benefit from an intervention are more likely to support the implementation and sustainability of behavioural interventions (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015). The way teachers manage conflict with students is consistently related to a variety of students' social and academic outcomes in elementary school (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). One of the strongest correlates of teachers' perception of conflict is their level of students' disruptive behaviour (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Murray & Murray, 2004; Split, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Teachers experience higher degrees of conflict when they perceive disruptive behaviour to be continuous and difficult (Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2008). When teachers are in conflict with students, they perceive disruptive behaviours as an excessive amount of their time, energy, and emotions, undermining their feelings of competence and personal control (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981; Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Safran & Safran, 1987).

Teachers report it is a struggle to deal with disruptive behaviour when they have to present academic content at the same time as incorporating an increasing amount of co-curricular material (Mavropoulou & Padelidiu, 2002) because the management of disruptive behaviour requires attention and time. Providing personalized learning, and

promoting social-emotional learning have recently become part of the teacher's mandate (McGhie-Richmond, Underwood, & Jordan, 2007). In addition, researchers have identified factors such as a lack of resources, a lack of parent engagement, logistical barriers, competing priorities and a lack of administrator or staff support as barriers to implementing and/or sustaining evidence-based behaviour interventions (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015). Faced with these responsibilities and barriers, many teachers report feeling significant anxiety when managing behaviour (Bromfield, 2006). Although some teachers report feeling confident in their ability to manage classroom behaviour, they also express concern about distraction and aggressive behaviours and want more support to better handle these specific disruptions (Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000). Teachers report being stretched emotionally when dealing with disruptive student behaviour (Hakenen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

In general, when student behaviours are perceived as an interruption to the flow of teaching and classroom management, teachers are more focused on the disruption than resolving the behaviour problem. Teachers tend to respond by specifying what behaviour they will not tolerate rather than communicating the appropriate behaviour they would like to see (Butler & Amaya, 2016). Demir (2009) interviewed 18 elementary and high school teachers about how they determined, evaluated and managed problematic behaviour, such as coming to class unprepared, being distracted, speaking without permission and being disrespectful in the classroom. Although the teachers acknowledged these behaviours were problematic, they did not make adaptations in the classroom that could decrease these behaviours or try to engage and/or motivate the students. Instead, teachers did not change their existing practices because they perceived the behaviour to be beyond their control or felt that changes to their own practice was too time-consuming (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, & Stogiannidou, 2000; Kulina, 2007).

Teachers who perceive disruptive student behaviour as severe and problematic tend to focus on expedience and maintaining classroom order (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). The collective benefit of the classroom is seen as taking priority over the guidance of the individual (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Demir, 2009). They react by focusing on the disruptive behaviour, instead of addressing and remediating the underlying reasons that prompt the behaviour (Stoughton, 2007). As an aside, this

reaction overlooks more subtle student behaviour such as withdrawal, depression, and/or anxiety (Prochow & Bourke, 2001). It is possible that behaviour such as withdrawal and depression may not be perceived as problematic by some teachers because these students are not disruptive to classroom activities (Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2007). However, this reaction also shows teachers' perceptions as they miss equally important signs that students are struggling.

Teachers who perceive disruptive student behaviour as "that which disrupts others' learning" (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007, p. 47) may not be considering the cause of the behaviour and what may be triggering it. Teachers are often unaware of or not interested in the causes of behaviour because they are focused more explicitly on the behaviour itself and its impact on the classroom. Their reactions then become reactive rather than proactive. For example, when asking teachers about behaviours such as "refusing to work" or "background chatter," Bromfield (2006) found that teachers were worn down by these low level disruptive behaviours particularly when they are anxious to maintain control of the classroom. This was compounded by a trial and error approach when the teacher had a limited understanding of the reasons why a behaviour was taking place (Bromfield, 2006).

Other studies suggest classroom generalists tend to display little tolerance for student misbehaviour and do not change their instructional practices (Chazan, 1994; Muscott, 1996; Shores et al., 1993; Kulina, 2007; Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2000). Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, and Collins (2010) examined kindergarten and first-grade general education teachers' perceptions and use of behaviour intervention strategies (e.g., praise) and their knowledge about Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS). When addressing problematic behaviours, these teachers paid little attention to implementing effective behaviour management strategies, and despite being trained in PBIS, they were still not motivated to implement group or school-wide behavioural interventions. When variables regarding the implementation and sustainability of school-wide positive behavioural interventions and supports (SWPBIS) were examined (McIntosh et al., 2014; McIntosh, Doolittle, Vincent, Horner, & Ervin, 2009), the lack of 'staff buy-in' was the most significant barrier. Staff buy-in was defined as a commitment to the scientific principles of the intervention, such as explicit instruction, inclusion, or the use of positive behaviour discipline practices. Teachers who were not supportive of the intervention did not see the benefits of the

intervention nor did they revise their practice (Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015).

## **2.5. Teachers' Interventions to Manage Disruptive Student Behaviour**

According to the literature, relational and learner centered management are two approaches that are effective when dealing with disruptive behaviour (Noddings, 2002; Pianta, 1999; Garrett, 2008). First, the relational approach stresses the importance of reliable sources of supportive relationships, in which the child's positive development is encouraged (Noddings, 2002; Pianta, 1999). This approach focuses on teachers' ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with students (Bahad, 1993; Davis, 2003; Davis, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). For instance, when these teachers focus on the context of the student's experience and relate to the student as an individual, positive teacher-student interactions occur (Goodman & Burton, 2010). According to Le Mare and Reeves (2017). "The creation of such (supportive) relationships largely depends on the ability of the adults (teachers) to accurately read and respond to children's cues...this approach emphasizes the interpersonal skills of adults (teachers)" (p. 86). There is clear evidence for recognizing that the personal qualities of teachers alleviate behaviour difficulties in the learning context, and those with qualities of empathy and positivity create an environment that promotes student engagement (Cooper, 2011). Second, the learner-centered management approach stresses the importance of shared leadership, community building, and a balance between the needs of the teacher and students in the classroom (Garrett, 2008; Hart & Drummond, 2014). Instead of removing students from the classroom, these teachers provide positive feedback, provide multiple opportunities for improvement, defuse incidents, and continue with the planned flow of the lesson by conveying that unwanted behaviour has been noted but discussion about it will take place at a less contentious time. Teachers relinquish hierarchical power structures (Nichols, 1992) with students by eliciting student participation when generating classroom rules or having students complete classroom tasks such as taking attendance. When students misbehave, they are encouraged to take responsibility in regulating their own behaviour through conflict resolution, peer mediation programs and the development of their social skills through various strategies such as I-messages (Gordon, 1974),

classroom meetings (Bloom, Perlmutter, & Burrell, 1999), and community building activities.

Research shows that teachers direct and control the behaviour of students when they adopt a teacher-centered management approach (Dollard & Christensen, 1996). Many of the interactions these teachers have with students exhibiting disruptive behaviour are negative (e.g., reprimands) and the management strategies are often punitive (e.g., time out, restraint, removal of privileges) (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Rosen, Taylor, O'Leary, & Sanderson, 1990). In these classrooms, there is a system of clearly defined rules, routines and punishments that are mandated rather than developed with the students (Freiberg, 1999). Teachers may also rely on punishment and extrinsic motivation such as giving rewards to influence student behaviour (Demir, 2009; Faizah, 2008; Frey, Park, Browne-Ferrigno, & Korfhage, 2010; Tillery et al., 2010; Westling, 2010). These teachers are less likely to encourage students when they behave appropriately (Webster-Stratton & Herbert, 1994), call on children with aggressive behaviour less frequently, ask them fewer questions, and provide them with less information (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Studies suggest that when teachers respond with punitive methods to deal with disruptive student behaviour, where power and control are enforced, disruptive behaviours do not cease and can escalate (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Rosen, Taylor, O'Leary, & Sanderson, 1990). Because a variety of students' social and academic outcomes in elementary school are linked to how teachers manage conflicts with students (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004), tensions between teachers and students and have been identified by teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Pianta & Sternberg, 1992), students, (Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003), and observers (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Ladd, Birch, & Buhn, 1999) as a hindrance to positive student-teacher relationships.

Although the research shows that *both* preventive and intervention techniques should be used to address behaviour issues (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992; De Jong, 2005; Houghton, Wheldall, Jukes, & Sharpe, 1990; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, & Sugai, 2008), intervention techniques are often used independently. For instance, teachers tend to use strategies that correct disruptive behaviour rather than attempt to prevent it. In a survey of 336 Canadian teachers, Reupert and Woodcock (2010) found that teachers favoured initial corrective strategies (e.g., being physically close to the student) to

monitor and discourage problematic behaviour over preventive strategies (e.g., establishing regular routines). Teachers also lacked confidence in referring students to professionals such as school counsellors and using behavioural measures such as implementing time-outs and behavioural contracts, all of which were considered by the authors as necessary when dealing with violent and/or aggressive students. When teachers utilized positive strategies to reinforce appropriate behaviour and discouraged negative behaviour (e.g., daily behaviour report cards), they tended to apply them in a one-size-fits-all fashion (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & Sassu, 2006; Schottle & Peltier, 1991), thus limiting the effectiveness of these strategies. Additionally in a study of 309 teachers it was found that teachers preferred corrective strategies over preventive strategies and were most likely to use corrective strategies they were comfortable with (Reupert & Woodcock, 2011).

## **2.6. The Need for Further Research on Teachers' Perceptions of Disruptive Student Behaviour**

Qualitative investigations of teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and how these behaviours are managed is needed. A major problem in the research is that teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour and teachers' management of disruptive behaviour is addressed separately. The present study attempts to combine both research on teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and teachers' perceptions of behaviour management.

From the research, it is difficult to determine why teachers perceive certain behaviours to be disruptive in the classroom. Although some studies incorporate qualitative methods, the majority are quantitative (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Smart & Igo, 2010; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). These studies utilized predetermined item responses including surveys (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005) and vignettes using Likert scales (Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen, & Oats, 1998), and rating scales (Skinner & Hales, 1992) to make generalizations about behaviours that occur in the classroom and to elicit information about the types and frequencies of behaviours. However, the findings do not explain why certain behaviours are perceived to be disruptive and why teachers struggle with these behaviours. For example, Wheldall and Merrett (1988) asked teachers to identify behaviours that were most disruptive in the

classroom and caused the most inconvenience. Participants could have interpreted “most disruptive behaviours” to mean most serious behaviours or most frequent behaviours that occur in the classroom. Survey questions can be interpreted in a different way than intended. These predetermined items capture a snapshot of behaviours that occur in classrooms, but they do not reflect the actual behaviours teachers are managing. In the present study, I look specifically at the individual interpretations of disruptive behaviour and the classroom in which the disruption occurs as a way to explain why certain behaviours may be perceived as problematic to the teacher.

As shown, differences in the definition of what constitutes disruptive behaviours, both by researchers and respondents to the surveys, may be partially responsible for this variation. Judgements about a particular child also vary from teacher to teacher and across contexts. Problematic behaviours are essentially social constructs and thus are culturally determined. For example, Jones, Charlton and Witkin (1995) adapted Wheldall and Merrett’s (1988) questionnaire to investigate first and middle school teachers’ perceptions of classroom behaviour in St. Helena, an island in the South Atlantic. In this study, only 28% of the teachers claimed they spend too much time dealing with student behaviour compared to the 51% of the teachers in Wheldall and Merrett’s (1988) study. It was suggested that certain social and cultural factors, such as St. Helena’s relatively isolated and homogeneous population and community values might have attributed to teachers’ views of certain behaviours as problematic or non-problematic. A behaviour becomes problematic when it is troublesome to someone. As such, relevant information should be obtained by collecting information about the types of behaviour that teachers view as cause for concern, and for which they might require extra support to manage in their particular contexts. Accurate information reflecting the nature and prevalence of behaviours causing difficulties for teachers in classrooms is necessary before realistic efforts can be made to provide additional resources that may be required to deal with the problem. The importance of considering context is highlighted in these findings. To address this issue, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers.

While there is an abundance of research regarding the effectiveness of various classroom interventions (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman & Sassu, 2006; Stahr, Cushing, Lane & Fox, 2006; Westerund, Granuicc, Gamache, & Clark, 2006), teachers’ perceptions of classroom management do not match the research. There is a paucity of studies that have examined the reasoning behind the strategies and interventions teachers

implement to manage disruptive behaviour. For example, in Tillery, Varhas, Meyers, & Collins' study (2010), teachers did not consider behaviour or behaviour management in the context of the group or the entire school although they were trained in Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS), but the researchers did not investigate the reasons for this, which appeared beyond the scope of the study. Research suggests teachers tend to use strategies they feel most confident in, even though other strategies may be more successful in correcting behaviours (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). Teachers spend a considerable amount of time on behaviour management as students who are perceived to be disruptive demand individualized time and attention (Clunies-Ross, & Kienhuis, 2008). The frustration and tension expressed by teachers regarding meeting individual needs versus group needs in a classroom is common, although classroom management relies on establishing and maintaining order for groups of students (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Sugai & Horner, 2009). Further investigation is needed to understand the perceptions that underlie how teachers choose to manage behaviours. My research adds to the literature by examining in-depth elementary teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and how these teachers' perceptions relate to their preferences for using intervention strategies for students with behavioural problems.

Minor infractions, repeated disruptions and infrequent serious behaviours all impact the classroom. Existing research suggests it is these daily, high frequency, trivial classroom behaviours that are wearing for teachers over time (Arbuckle & Little, 2004). Depending on the methodology, several studies asked teachers about the kinds of behaviour they would find unacceptable, rather than asking teachers to report on behaviours of actual concern at the moment (Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000; Westling, 2010; Zackeria, Reupert, & Sharma, 2013). This distinction draws out different results in these studies. For example, primary teachers in Stephenson, Linfoot and Martin's study (2000) cited distractibility and/or attention span as unacceptable behaviours while primary teachers in Poulou and Norwich's study (2000) when asked what behaviours were of concern, cited "work avoidance," "depressive mood," "negativism," "school phobia," and "lack of concentration" (p. 184). Other studies focus on the most frequent troublesome behaviours (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Smart & Igo, 2010). If one asks a teacher what serious classroom behaviours they deal with, more dramatic, even dangerous, behaviours may be provided. The frequency of these types of

behaviours, however, may be extremely low. The everyday impact of such behaviours on “getting on with their job” might be quite small. However, this is not to say that incidents of serious classroom behaviour are not a cause for concern (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007). These studies highlight the lack of research on the impact of infrequent but serious problem behaviours along with trivial low intensity behaviours that do occur in elementary classrooms. Few studies have considered teachers’ perceptions of each behaviour occurring in classrooms and how teachers may perceive their role in managing each behaviour (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). In this study, I am interested in exploring how experiences of both types of behaviours (i.e., high frequency and relatively trivial as well as serious, dramatic or dangerous behaviours) may contribute to teachers’ perceptions and management of behaviours. Further, I am curious about how teachers’ perceptions of disruptive student behaviour influence their interactions with these students and how this knowledge may help to further our understanding of effective classroom management strategies.

Lastly, there is a lack of research on experienced teachers’ perceptions of disruptive behaviour (Zakaria, Reupert, & Sharma, 2013). It is clear that problematic behaviours are consistently reported and teachers may be unprepared to deal with these behaviours (Atici, 2007; Giallo & Little, 2003; Houston & Williamson, 1993; Maskan, 2007; Smart & Igo, 2010; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010; Westling, 2010). Students in training to be teachers and/or novice teachers are often used as participants (Smart & Igo, 2010; Zackaria, Reupert, & Sharma, 2013) with only a small number of studies conducted with experienced teachers who are having difficulty managing disruptive behaviour (Patterson, Roehrig & Luft, 2003; Zakaria, Reupert, & Sharma, 2013). In addition, teachers in training and/or novice teachers lack experience in managing disruptive behaviours. Moreover, some teacher preparation programs fall short when providing students with classroom management techniques and when teaching extensive skill sets to be able to solve behavioral problems (Meister & Melnick, 2003). In the present study, my purpose is to look specifically at experienced elementary teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour in a Canadian context.

The present study begins to respond to the previously discussed gaps in both teachers’ perceptions of disruptive behaviour and management of disruptive behaviour by investigating the following questions:

- (1) How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour?
- (2) What are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy and strategies?

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1. Chapter Overview**

This chapter describes my research methodology and protocol for conducting this study. My chosen methodology for this study is grounded theory, which is detailed here along with my process for collecting and analyzing data.

### **3.2. Grounded Theory Methodology**

Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that focuses on exploring and explaining the real world problems of participants in a specific context, in a way that reflects their perspective, makes sense to them, and can be applied by participants to address those problems (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is viewed as the qualitative approach most appropriate for use when an existing problem is poorly understood, and a solution to the problem is needed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because data collection in this methodology involves extensive contact with participants, it is an effective way to access and understand a participant's experience (Charmaz, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given that the focus of this study is on understanding how elementary teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour in the classroom, a grounded theory approach was used, as it emphasizes the processes in which participants engage as they attempt to manage a given problem (Charmaz, 2006). Although the problem of "managing disruptive behaviours" is a practical concern while the question of "what constitutes disruptive behaviours" is a conceptual problem they are related to one another and therefore are being studied together. How teachers perceive disruptive behaviours is part of the larger problem of managing such behaviours.

### **3.3. Procedures**

**Obtaining ethical approval.** Consent to carry out this study was obtained from the university's Office of Research Ethics and the school district prior to teacher recruitment. Pseudonyms were used for all teachers participating in the study to maintain confidentiality and informed consent was obtained by means of signed consent forms. I did not seek assent from students in this study for two main reasons: (1) they were not the focus of this study, and (2) no data were collected from students. In addition,

teachers were explicitly instructed not to reference students personally or identify them in any way during the interviews. If and when teachers mentioned specific students during interviews, they were reminded not to mention names or identify any specific students. In the event names of students were mentioned during the interview, the names were omitted in the transcripts. Although I have a collegial relationship with teachers and no managerial authority over them, the teachers were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that participating would not interfere in any way with our professional relationship or the services that I provide to teachers within the district. Further, as part of the informed consent process, the teachers were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, i.e., that their withdrawal or decision not to participate would not jeopardize our professional relationship. All information provided by participants was kept confidential, including their names, names of their schools, and names of any students referenced during interviews. To ensure the confidentiality of participant information, the list of all participants in this study was stored on my personal computer and was password protected. Printed copies of this list and any data collected were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. I was the only person who had access to the computer and its password, and the file cabinet. Neither the actual names of the participants nor the name of the school district were used in this study.

**Identifying the site for study.** My own school district was selected as the site for study not only because it was convenient for me to collect data there, but also because it is a particularly appropriate site for the following reasons: (1) there is an increasing number of disruptive student behaviour occurring in the elementary schools reflected in number of office referrals, and (2) elementary teachers want to learn how to better manage these behaviours as indicated by their requests for professional development activities. As a consequence of these features, teachers in this district were expected to have considerable experience managing students with disruptive behaviour and thus, would be able to talk about their perceptions of and management of such behaviours. Because the particulars of this context were important in the decision to select it as the study site, and because adequate description of a study's context is an essential precondition for judging transferability, the context is described in greater detail below.

**The region.** The Sunshine Coast is a region of the southern mainland coast of British Columbia, Canada, on the eastern shore of the Strait of Georgia, and just

northwest of Greater Vancouver. It has a population of approximately 30,000 and can only be reached by water taxi, barge, ferry, float plane or airplane. The principal economic influences include the retail trade, health care, education, the paper mill, forestry-related activities and tourism. The area is not culturally, ethnically nor linguistically diverse. Ninety-four per cent of inhabitants are of European heritage, with three percent of inhabitants of Aboriginal and visible minority heritage respectively. Most of the people living in this region say their mother tongue is English. The youth population (under 15) was 13.1% in 2014. The working age population supports a growing number of aging dependents and fewer children. As of 2014, there were 2.14 children (0-14) for every 10 people of working age. The median age of the population is 50.6 while the provincial median age is 41.9. Family types in this area include married couples (68%), common law couples (17%), female lone parent (11%) and male lone parent (4%). Household types include one family households with children (18%), one family households without children (34%), one person households (32%), and others (7%). Average family incomes include married couples (\$55,685), common-law (\$63,691), lone female parent (\$27,120), and lone male parent (\$32, 471) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a population-level research tool used by researchers at UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) to measure developmental change or trends in populations of children to track variations in children's vulnerability across time and location in British Columbia. The EDI is a questionnaire that has 104 questions and measures five core areas of early child development namely physical health and well-being, language and cognitive development, social competence, emotional maturity, communication skills and general knowledge. Across British Columbia and in the region where this study was conducted, there is an increased rate of children who are emotionally vulnerable compared to other areas in Canada, meaning they have greater difficulties paying attention, a harder time controlling their aggression and are susceptible to anxiety. These are children who are identified as vulnerable based on teacher reports indicating they do not meet the normative patterns of child development for that age period. The implications of the EDI data suggests many young students in British Columbia, including this school district, are starting school with social emotional vulnerabilities.

**Setting.** This study was conducted in a school district that employs approximately 140 full time teachers and 85 educational assistants. There are six elementary schools, one secondary school and one distributed learning school in the district and a total enrollment of approximately 2537 students. It is acceptable in this school district to enroll in an elementary school that is outside of the student’s residential catchment area. Each elementary school has less than 400 students. The class sizes in this school district for most grades are slightly higher than the provincial average for grades K-12 (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1. Class sizes 2016/2017 in the school district and province**

<b>District</b>	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>Grade 1-3</b>	<b>Grade 4-7</b>	<b>Grade 8-12</b>
Average class size	18.3	22.4	26.3	23.1
<b>Province</b>	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>Grade 1-3</b>	<b>Grade 4-7</b>	<b>Grade 8-12</b>
Average class size	19.1	20.4	24.5	22.9

The school district is home to an economically diverse student population. In fact, the participants in this study reported that while their elementary schools generally had a particular economic “profile,” there was some degree of diversity within each school. Most teachers believed this was a strength, that is, that their respective elementary schools were tolerant communities that offered “something for everyone” and promoted an environment of acceptance. In addition to economic diversity, elementary schools in this district were mixed in terms of student ability. That is, elementary schools in this district included students with a range of different learning profiles. Throughout the district, students in elementary schools have one teacher for all or most of their subjects. In this district there were no middle schools, but special provisions are made in the high school to provide a home classroom for the incoming Grade 8 students.

Finally, there is one last, very important dimension to this context that should be noted. During data collection (fall 2017), the B.C. Supreme Court legislated that the class

size, number of special needs of students in a class and the number of specialist teachers be restored to numbers consistent with clauses deleted from the teachers' contract in 2002. This is further discussed on page 63.

### **3.4. Participant Selection**

**Selection.** After approval by the Board of Ethics at Simon Fraser University and the School Board, I examined the list of teachers employed in the school district. As the first step in recruiting participants, I identified the group that would best meet the needs of the research, and in this case, it was elementary classroom teachers because many referrals for behaviour management were being made by this group of teachers. I approached teachers who met two conditions: (a) they have been teaching for a minimum of 5 years at the beginning of the Fall of 2015, and (b) they were assigned to classrooms in an elementary school. A time frame of five years of teaching experience was desired because it allowed time for a teacher to be sufficiently immersed in teaching. This time frame also helped ensure teachers had ample opportunity to experience and manage disruptive student behaviours. I sought out teachers individually at each elementary school and gave them a description of the study and a copy of the informed consent so that they would have full knowledge of the study, what their involvement would entail and their right to withdraw or decline to be in the study. After the initial contact, I followed up with an email to ascertain their interest in the project. When teachers agreed to participate, an interview was set up at a time and a location that worked best for the teacher. Of the twenty teachers I approached, a total of thirteen teachers from five elementary schools agreed to participate. These teachers represented every grade from kindergarten to Grade 5 and worked in a typical elementary classroom. As a starting point, I focused on a strength based approach beginning the interviews with a well-respected teacher to draw out her understanding of concepts like 'caring' for the interviews that followed. I continued my subsequent interviews in a similar way to gather new insights and/or refine the concepts gained from previous interviews.

**Sampling.** Different from purposeful sampling, where researchers select the participants based on a sampling criteria prior to conducting research, grounded theory uses theoretical sampling that occurs as the data collection progresses. This is done once the researcher identifies the research topic and question, and then identifies a small handful of people to interview who are best able to contribute to the researcher's

understandings based on the emerging focus and criteria. I used “theoretical sampling” throughout the study—looking specifically for teachers who could answer questions that emerged during the early stages of data collection, or who could fill gaps I perceived in my developing theory. For example, additional questions during interviews stemmed from participants’ response as well as from findings from previous cases—the purpose being to find out if I could confirm, modify, or reject my theoretical statements (hypotheses or propositions) and to decide what to do next. When a kindergarten teacher revealed that her view of her students’ abilities influences how she manages disruptive student behaviour, I followed up on this concept. This idea resonated with what I found in my interview with a Grade 5 teacher who felt that scaffolding, modelling and repetition were essential strategies to use with his students. To validate this proposition, I added the questions, “Various images have been used to describe children. How would you describe your students?” By asking the teachers how they would describe their students and providing some examples of how children are described (empty vessels, sponges, blank slates) I was trying to understand how images of children may relate to classroom management style. When I wanted to follow up on other propositions such as “images of teaching” or “transitions,” I approached a participant who struggled and a participant who had more success managing disruptive student behaviours in order to explore these concepts. Finally, I approached a teacher who sought external support from the district to deal with several students in her class, and asked her to participate in the study.

Thus, I did not seek to only interview teachers who struggled with disruptive student behaviours. Rather, my goal was to understand the “common” experience of elementary teaching, and to that end, as noted, newer teachers and experienced teachers were actively recruited in order to best understand what is common across the elementary teaching experience. Of course, the “common” experience should be thought of as a spectrum and as such, it was desirable that some teachers who were managing disruptive student behaviours well were also included. Among the teachers who answered the call for participants was one who is known in the district for excellent classroom management and as a “strong teacher”, and another who was specifically recommended by an administrator who was “great with kids.”

Another type of theoretical sampling that I used was returning to earlier data to revisit concepts that had arisen. In this case, I returned to the data to investigate the

teachers' comments around class size and composition. This theoretical sampling of class size and composition was made possible after the B.C. Supreme Court decision in November 2016 to restore clauses dealing with class size, including the number of special needs students who can be in a class and the number of specialist teachers required in schools. These provisions were deleted from the teachers' contract by the Liberal government in 2002. Once class size legislation was re-instated in the fall of 2017, the school district in which I conducted my research had smaller class sizes, hired more teachers to be in new positions, increased classroom space to accommodate the restored class size and composition rules prior to 2002, and consequently experienced a reduction in the number of Educational Assistants (EAs) in schools. After these changes were implemented, I was able to re-interview ten participants to examine if and how the Supreme Court decision impacted their perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours. This was fortunate and although unplanned became part of the theoretical sampling once this new contextual factor of class size emerged.

**Saturation.** Saturation in data collection is reached when no further insights, ideas, patterns, or concepts that inform conceptual categories and/or theory development are uncovered (Charmaz, 2006). I relied on my memos, the mind map and instruments such as the conditional relationship guide and reflective coding matrix to determine that saturation had been reached. Using these tools, I considered data saturation to have occurred after twenty-seven interviews. To be certain, I conducted three more additional interviews and felt that no new evidence was uncovered.

**Participants.** This study included thirteen participants from five elementary schools. They held current B.C. teaching certificates and were trained to deliver the B. C. curriculum. Ten participants received their teaching degrees from universities in British Columbia, Canada while three participants received their teaching degrees from other countries. Four participants indicated that they took a specific three month course that focused on classroom management while completing their teaching degree. All the participants expressed they had taken some professional development courses or workshops in social emotional development and/or behaviour management while teaching. Teachers in this district get six professional development days during the school year. Several participants read books and blogs for behaviour management ideas. All of the teachers spoke fluent English and communicated with the students exclusively in English. The teachers taught across a range of grades (K to Grade 5) and had a range

of teaching experience (10 to 30 years). Of the thirteen participants, there were nine women and four men. Three were aged 31-40 years, six were aged 41-50 and four participants were aged 51-60 (see Table 3.2). All held a Bachelor's degree, and two teachers also held a Masters degree. Three teachers had spent several years teaching in private and public schools abroad before entering the public system in B.C. All thirteen teachers I interviewed worked in small school settings, where the cohort of students entered in kindergarten and usually stayed in the same school until Grade 7. Each school is so small that every teacher knew most of the students in that school, had taught them and knew their siblings and/or family in the community.

**Table 3.2. Participants in In-depth Interviews**

<b>Interview Round 1 Fall 2015</b>	<b>Interview Round 2 Spring 2016</b>	<b>Interview Round 3 Fall 2017</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Alice	Alice	Alice	51-60	25-30 years	Kindergarten
Ben	Ben	Ben	31-40	10-15 years	Kindergarten
Maggie	---	Maggie	41-50	20-25 years	Kindergarten
Ida	----	Ida	41-50	25-30 years	Grade 1
Jan	----	Jan	41-50	15-20 years	Grade 1
Kerina	Kerina	Kerina	41-50	15-20 years	Grade 1/2
Fonda	Fonda	Fonda	31-40	8-10 years	Grade 2/3
Helen	---	---	41-50	8-10 years	Grade 3
Catherine	Catherine	Catherine	41-50	15-20 years	Grade 3/4
Gloria	Gloria	---	31-40	8-10 years	Grade 4
Daniel	----	Daniel	50-60	20-25 years	Grade 4
Ethan	----	----	50-60	20-25 years	Grade 4
Larry	Larry	Larry	50-60	20-25 years	Grade 5

During each interview, participants provided details about their experiences of disruptive student behaviour. Many of the teachers described their experiences in their current classes as well as in previous classes they taught.

### 3.5. Data Collection

**Classroom observations.** In the first round of interviews I observed each participant's classroom in the morning before the interviews. This was done to deepen my understanding of the context and the classroom and to help me place the teachers' comments within the classroom context that they were part of.

**Semi-structured interviews with teachers.** I developed the interview protocols (see Appendix A) primarily through a review of guides to conducting grounded theory research (Charmaz, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), discussions with my senior supervisor, reviews of the literature, and from participants' responses that generated additional questions during the interviews. Additionally, questions were reformulated as needed to align with my theoretical sampling approach and confirm saturation. This is because the interviews themselves evolved over time as I shaped the interviews more and more based upon the larger concerns touched on by previous participants. I found that the interviews became less structured as the research progressed because I had a better understanding of the concepts and categories emerging from the data and was more confident following the narrative of the interview. I also adapted my questions to make them more relevant to the participant's experience. The interviews usually took place in the teacher's classroom. I audio-recorded each interview and a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement transcribed the interviews. After each recording was transcribed, all participants were sent a copy of their interview transcripts for feedback (Creswell, 2007). I conducted separate one-hour face-to-face interviews with the teachers over three years (30 total interviews).

Over time, the interviews became more focused in order to delve into emerging themes and categories. Essentially, the interviews became more concept-based rather than using the same question every time in the same order. The interview protocols included the following questions and statements:

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- What do disruptive student behaviors look like in your classroom?
- Why is this disruptive for you?
- Please describe how you deal (action) with disruptive student behaviors in your classroom?

Focused interview questions allowed me to pursue issues of particular significance that were related to the research question, explore and clarify comments made by the participants, and to use prior knowledge during the interview process (Rose, 1994). Semi-structured interviews with the teachers provided crucial information for this study as multiple perceptions and experiences of disruptive student behaviour were elicited to address both research questions. Participants understood that disruptive behavior could include both general disruptive behaviours and behaviours of students with special needs. The interview data were integral to understanding the teachers' perceptions and management of students with disruptive behaviour, how they defined disruptive behaviour in their classroom, and the meaning they made of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). I asked about "facts"- for example, details regarding student's behaviour- as well as the teachers' opinions about incidents and insights on certain events. The interview protocols I prepared aimed to reveal: (1) the teachers' definition of disruptive student behaviour; (2) reflections on what was disruptive about the student's behaviour; (3) interpretations of reported events; and (4) more general reflections about concepts relevant to teachers' perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour.

I began interviews by providing an overview of why this topic is of interest to me and how I landed on this specific subject for my research. This opening was an opportunity for participants to ask any questions for their own clarification. Then I asked each participant to tell me about themselves, including a little bit about their teaching experience, how long they have been teaching, their class size and composition and how many students in their current class have individual education plans (IEP). From there, I used my interview questions and guide to lead the interviews, moving through the questions and making adjustments as needed based on the participants' responses. I did not offer participants any definitions for disruptive student behaviour, which allowed the participants to define the term in their own words and through their own understanding of my research topic. This approach to structuring the interview questions was intentional

because it helped me to capture these definitions as part of the data, while also allowing the participants to talk about these topics from their unique perspectives.

To uncover deeper data, I asked probing questions during each interview. For example, when a participant would tell me about the various strategies they use to manage disruptive student behaviours, I would ask why they chose those strategies. My objective in asking probing questions was to understand to the best possible extent the thinking and rationale behind participants' choices and behaviours. Asking probing questions often led to in-the-moment reflecting by the participant, which offered additional insights and richer data. Asking probing questions during these reflections also opened up conversations that explored the experiences of the participants in relation to teaching and learning in an open way that would allow for both positive and negative perceptions and strategies when managing disruptive student behaviours.

The first round of interviews occurred between October and December 2015 with thirteen participants. The second round of interviews was between February and April 2016 with seven participants selected through theoretical sampling based on the emerging themes that I had identified in previous interviews. The third round of interviews was between October 2017 and January 2018 after the B. C. Supreme Court decision was enforced because the classroom context had changed. Specifically, class size, the number of special needs students in a class and the number of specialist teachers required in classrooms was adjusted to comply with the new regulations in the school district. Ten of the thirteen participants were re-interviewed, as three participants retired or were not currently teaching in a classroom. This third round of interviews was done to explore how the changes in class size and composition affected the participants' perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour.

Throughout this research project, I continued to search the literature for background material against which to compare the findings from the data. By reviewing the relevant literature, I was able to establish a working knowledge of the topic being investigated, thus enhancing theoretical sensitivity. I did not use this literature review to compose any hypotheses but to carry out specific tasks as suggested in Table 3.3 (numbers 1-9) to compare and contrast concepts from the literature with my data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 48-52).

**Table 3.3. Illustration of the Use of Literature**

Task	Illustration
(1) compare properties and dimensions of concepts derived from the literature to data in order to differentiate and give specificity to the emergent concept;	I constantly compared concepts defined in behaviour management (e.g. Giallo & Little, 2003; Reupert & Dalgarno, 2011; Smart & Igo, 2010; Westling, 2010), and teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour literature (Atici, 2007; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collin, 2010; Zackeria, Reupert, & Sharma, 2013) with the collected data on teachers' perceptions of behaviour and their approaches to managing behaviour.
(2) identify significant concepts that are found over and over again in the literature and which also appear in the data;	The literature helped name codes during open-coding process and arrange them in axial coding. For example, "role", "discipline", "control" and "responsibility" etc. are found over and over again in the teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and management literature. In this study, these concepts fell into the category of "Supporting all learners".
(3) find clues as to what to look for in the data and to generate questions to ask respondents;	Repetition of codes under the "Supporting all learners" category alerted me that these concepts are important. Therefore, I had to dig further during analysis and asked participants questions around these concepts to find out if they are actually the same or different from the literature. I finally found out that the participants really talked about <i>outcomes</i> of these factors and their understanding of these concepts is very different from what is defined in the literature. This caused me to develop a new hypotheses.
(4) look for how properties and dimensions of documented concepts and relationships vary under a different set of conditions;	To examine the concept of "role boundaries", I focused on literature related to the <i>part</i> teachers play and their <i>involvement</i> when dealing with disruptive student behaviour (i.e. Butler, Monda, & Amaya, 2016; Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009; Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012) and the literature on the <i>position</i> teachers take when dealing with disruptive student behaviour (i.e. Bromfield, 2006; Kulina, 2007; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). This was done to find out how these descriptions compared to the experiences of the teachers in my study.
(5) check quoted materials from interviews and field notes as well as descriptive materials	The participants gave me information about the classroom context and explained how it influenced their behaviour management.

concerning events, actions, settings, and actors' perspectives;	Therefore, I read literature that covered behaviour management strategies they mentioned. I also read blogs and articles about class size and composition of classrooms in B.C. (BCTF, 2018). This allowed me to compare the type of influence this context had on behaviour management and the type of influence recorded in the literature.
(6) formulate questions that act as a stepping-off point before and after interviews;	The literature on teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and behaviour management (e.g. Demir, 2009; Reupert & Woodcock, 2011) provided me with a list of conceptual areas to investigate. Thus, it helped me make questions to ask participants and questions to ask myself during data analysis.
(7) stimulate questions during the analysis process;	When I saw differences between my data and findings reported in the literature, I had to ask myself if I overlooked anything and how the differences may be explained. This helped me to form new propositions that led to a new wave of data collection.
(8) provide insights into areas to theoretically sample;	The literature on teaching practice and inclusion (i.e. Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Erbas, Turan, Askan, & Dunlap, 2010; Glock, 2016; Stoughton, 2007) provided me with insights into the direction I should take regarding strategies, roles and approaches etc. and the possible influence of different educational philosophies exemplified in classrooms.
(9) confirm findings and/or illustrate where the literature is incorrect, is overly simplistic, or only partially explains phenomena	I constantly compared my data with definitions of disruptive student behaviour such as "behaviours that impact and influence the learning of the student and other students and disrupts teaching" (Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000; Wheldall & Beaman, 1994) and found where the definitions were incomplete in the literature (e.g. the impact on the teacher is an important factor to consider when understanding teacher's perceptions of disruptive student behaviour) and how my study can add to the current definition of disruptive student behaviour (e.g. my findings suggest disruptive student behaviour is a relationship and it also accounts for the type of teacher-student interactions). Showcasing this will highlight my study's contribution.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

Data analysis is a constant and ongoing process in grounded theory, which begins with the first interview. I constructed my analysis around the understanding that each of the steps of the process would lead to insights that would eventually inform theory development. This began with the interviews, then coding, and finally the analysis itself. Understanding that my analysis was a dynamic process led me to incorporate several measures to capture thoughts and insights during the process. These measures included writing memos during the interview and transcription processes, creating a mind map (a diagram used to visually organize information), and coding the data in three phases (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4. Overview of my data analysis process**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Memos</b></p> <p>Capture initial thoughts, ideas and patterns from interviews</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mind Map</b></p> <p>Visually capture key words, phrases and ideas</p> <p>Ability to see cluster of ideas</p> <p>Provided alternate format for organizing data</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Transcriptions</b></p> <p>Capture new ideas as they emerge</p> <p>Verify patterns, including identifying changes or new patterns</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Open Coding</b></p> <p>Start to crystalize data into codes that validate or negate ideas and patterns</p> <p>Identify new data that fills in gaps or generates new ideas and patterns</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Axial Coding</b></p> <p>Identify commonalities in initial codes that help form concepts</p> <p>Generate ideas that demonstrate deeper meaning of codes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Selective Coding</b></p> <p>Review codes, patterns and data holistically to identify themes and theoretical concepts</p> <p>Theory development and validation</p>

For this study, data analysis occurred after each interview. I analyzed the data through the use of memos and a mind map, during the readings of each interview, and finally, during the three stages of data coding. After each interview and transcription, I wrote a memo to capture a summary of key takeaways, themes that appeared, and questions that arose from the data. In conjunction with the memos, I created a mind map

that captured key terms and ideas. This approach allowed me to begin to identify categories and gather insights for informing subsequent interviews, and supported the coding process.

**Transcriptions.** While reading and rereading each transcribed interview, I continued to memo in order to capture questions and ideas that arose. I also took time to note key quotes from each participant who, I believed, conveyed a strong point and provided clarity: the quotes provided a supporting point to an argument the participant was making. Writing memos was another opportunity to see how each interview built upon the previous one and reinforced patterns I started to see in my initial memos and interview notes. These memos produced a series of questions that I used during the coding process because I felt there was something to be discovered. In this part of the process I asked:

- What are the “essential features” of disruptive behaviour?
- Can I map out the process each interviewee goes through and show how their perceptions of disruptive behaviour are established and sustained?
- How do the needs of the class and teacher change/improve/enhance the perceptions and management of disruptive behaviour?
- What role does caring (by the teacher) play?
- How much of teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive behaviour is influenced by their understanding of their role in teaching and learning and teacher beliefs (teaching philosophy)?
- How does class size and class composition influence teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive behaviour?

In reviewing the list, it became apparent that these questions were all sub-questions that supported my research question. The last question also became intriguing to me because of the change in class size legislation as discussed in Chapter 3.

**Bracketing.** I also recognized that I have particular biases because of my profession and that while this can be advantageous (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) these biases should also be recognized. To help me identify and limit bias, I used bracketing to set aside preconceived notions or assumptions. This included taking steps both before and during the research process, for example, I:

- wrote down what I knew about my topic and what I thought the issues were to make them evident to myself. I revisited this document throughout my research process to ensure my thoughts and opinions did not overshadow the information provided by participants.
- wrote memos throughout the research process to help note immediate insights, themes etc., as well as to explore develop ideas and codes. These memos allowed me to mine the data through comparison and analysis while exploring ideas. Writing memos also served as a reflective step to inform further data collection, including questions and structure of subsequent interviews.
- included my Senior Supervisor at key points throughout the process to provide feedback and check on my understandings of the data, and finally;
- verified my interpretation of the data with participants when needed (member checking) to ensure I had understood their meaning accurately by getting the participants to read and give feedback on their transcribed interviews, through email correspondence as well as through informal conversations.

**Open coding.** I coded my data in three stages during analysis. For the first stage of coding, I used open coding. Open coding identifies actions in each segment of data, and provides a close study of the data and allows ideas, themes, core categories, and sub-categories to emerge. During initial coding, I stayed close to the data by applying codes to individual lines or segments. In vivo codes, those that use direct participant language, also were used during initial coding to preserve participants' meaning and to identify common phrases and language used by all participants.

I began open coding after the first interview and continued to code the interviews as I completed them. I coded each transcript using a combination of line-by-line coding and coding by phrase or complete thought. After coding each interview, I wrote down what I thought were the key ideas and takeaways.

After coding my first interview, I met with my supervisor to review the coding to get a third-party opinion to verify if I was maintaining the participant's thoughts or if I had implied too much in my coding. I used the feedback from this meeting to guide the rest of my coding, including focusing on summarizing the thought or statement of the participant using simple, clear language, while maintaining the words or language used by the participant.

After I completed open coding for all interviews, I reviewed the data again and refined codes as needed for clarity and to remove any bias or assumptions I might impose on the data. As open coding includes labeling concepts that are abstract representations of events, objects, actions or interactions, this allowed me to group similar information to better understand the data (see Table. 3.5).

**Table 3.5. Concepts that arose during open coding**

Concepts	Open Codes
Disruptive Student Behaviour	Acceptable behaviours; Disruptive behaviours, Influences other students; interrupts teaching/curriculum; Impacts school environment; Impacts teacher; Safety; Connection
Impetus (for behaviour and management of behaviour)	Understanding function of behavior; Limiting behaviour; Reasons for behaviour; Loss of control; Lack of control; Concerns for safety of all in the class
Relationship	Bond, Humor; Being positive; Be proactive; Care for students; Fairness; Restore relationship; Authenticity; Share control; Promote social-emotional skills; Promote friendships in class; Get to know them; Share personal stories
Teaching philosophy (Images of children and images of teaching)	Beliefs about children’s potential; Beliefs about children’s behaviour; Beliefs about learning; Beliefs about the effect of the environment on behaviour; Teaching as performance; Question ability to manage; When teaching goes well (Rewards), Reflection and introspection; Not respected for expertise; Isolation; Sense of purpose; Beliefs about teaching; Self-care; Self-awareness
Roles	Motivating students; Ensuring fairness and equity; Approaches to behaviour; Discipline; Other professionals
Responsibility	Evaluation of students’ needs; meeting students’ needs; Balancing individual versus class needs; EA as a resource; EA not a resource; Parents; Other professionals

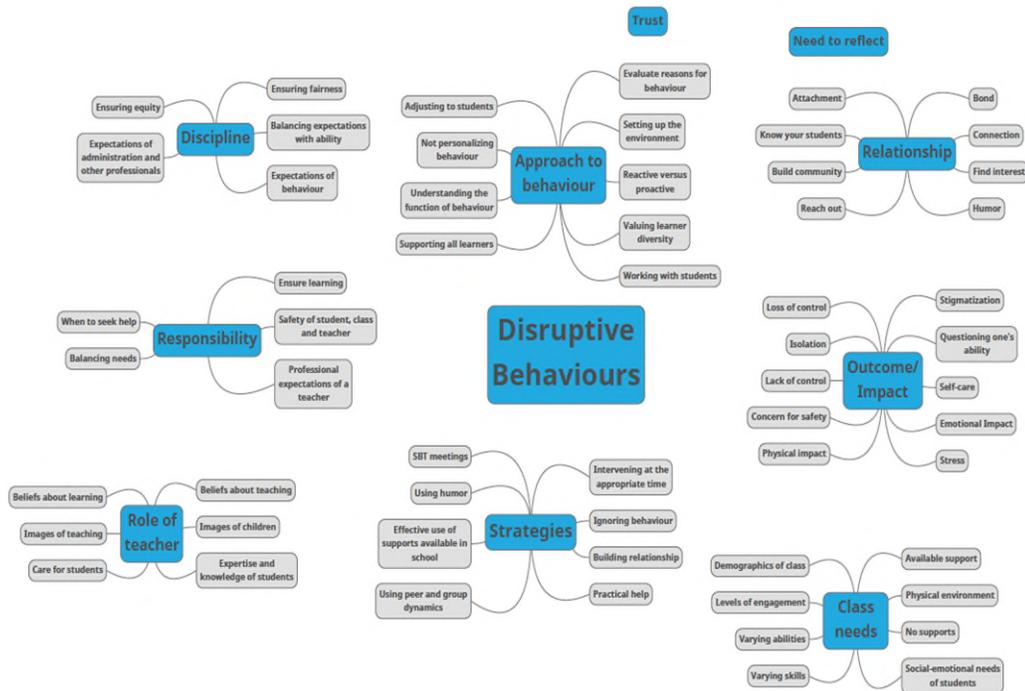
Discipline	School-based teams; At a loss; Help seeking, Questioning administrator's decisions; Types of support from district that is helpful; Lack of time; Being reactive versus proactive; Stigmatization of children
Student needs (class size and composition)	Classroom culture; Demographics of class; Number of IEPs; Support available/unavailable
Support (school and community factors)	School culture; Societal values; Change in student population in schools and district; Poverty; Parental involvement; Connection to the community

**Mind map.** A mind map is a diagram used to visually organize information (see Figure 3.1). Throughout the transcribing and coding process, I built a mind map to capture key words and phrases that appeared in the interviews in order to visually trace core ideas that arose from the data. This gave me a consistent place to evaluate my own thinking, as well as the ideas that I was gathering, in a visual way versus the linear format of the memos. I placed the concept of my research question- perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour- at the center of the map, and added core ideas and supporting words and phrase around the research question as they arose in the interviews, transcriptions, and data analysis.

I intentionally conducted the mind map exercise in addition to writing memos to help me bracket my biases and assumptions, and organize the ideas that emerged in a broader way to avoid locking myself in a particular way of thinking about my data. The mind map allowed me to visualize where data and ideas were starting to come together in clusters and potential relationships; it helped me to avoid forcing a hierarchy to the data that might have occurred by writing the ideas and phases that came out in list form.

By creating the mind map, I was able to begin grouping ideas together using the participant's language and to see connections. As I moved from one interview to the next during my coding, I started to see patterns or new connections emerge, and made note of these things in both my memos and on the mind map. Identifying these initial clusters

gave me a starting place for things to consider while doing my initial coding, as well as a way to see the gaps and ideas I missed if new ideas emerged.



**Figure 3.1. Mind map created showing initial linkages between data**

The mind map also provided another way to see if and when I reached saturation. Based on the mind map, I achieved saturation around interview 27. There were no new additional core ideas identified in interviews 28-30; however, I did add a few new phrases and key words.

From the mind map, I identified eight clusters of ideas, with connections between several of the clusters. For example, the idea of balancing needs of the individual and the class arose both when participants talked about managing disruptive student behaviours and as a part of the general idea of classroom management. Caring was another idea that appeared in eight idea clusters. The mind map gave me a place to refer back through the coding and analysis process and explore what ideas and concepts I thought were emerging based on what supported these ideas and what contradicted them. Overall however I took care not to allow the mind map to drive my data analysis, but rather used it as a tool to aid my thinking process.

**Memos.** Writing memos was an important part of my process, as it provided a method to capture immediate reactions, thoughts and ideas as the data collection took place. Memos also provided an opportunity to do data comparison and initial data analysis to inform my subsequent interviews and data collection. I wrote memos after each interview and while reading and rereading transcripts I noted key observations, ideas, questions, patterns, comparisons, key words or phrases, things I wanted to remember and come back to, and any general feelings I had at the time.

My memos consisted mainly of written notes, which I could easily read back as needed to locate key ideas I had previously encountered, or to revisit pertinent questions. My memos also served as a way to identify and bracket my personal feelings and bias through data collection and analysis.

**Coding.** Coding is the process of naming segments of data with a label that “categorizes, summarizes, accounts for each piece of data,” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). This allowed me to make sense of the experiences of participants through selection, separation, and sorting the data. In turn, this led to the creation of categories that shaped the collection of further data during the interview process. Careful and thorough coding allowed me to bracket my bias or personal thoughts and feelings. By staying close to the data and what it presented, I was able to focus on the data and meaning and not on my associations and assumptions.

Although all interviews were professionally transcribed, I read and reread the transcripts to aid in the coding and data mining process. This allowed me to stay close to the data and to analyze data as I went along. I wrote memos after each reading to capture thoughts and emerging themes and to support the first phase of coding. I also highlighted key quotes from participants that supported themes or patterns that were emerging. Lastly, I noted the language the participants used when describing students with disruptive behaviours, such as “feral creatures,” “don’t get it kids,” and “wild” which contributed to my analysis.

**Axial coding.** I used the paradigm of axial coding discussed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) to specifically interrogate the context and process of events, including (1) identifying the conditions in which teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour occur, (2) “inter/actions” and emotions, and (3) the consequences of

events (p. 89). Applying these elements involved focusing on certain conditions under which disruptive student behaviours occurred, particularly conditions related to teacher, student, class, and environmental or curricular “inter/actions.” Outcome was also important in terms of identifying the relative impact on teachers when managing disruptive student behaviour. Patterns emerged and were described in analytic memos. While analyzing events and identifying patterns, I used additional analytic tools to enhance my sensitivity to different interpretations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 67-85): (1) questioning data units to foster exploration and to help avoid making superficial or quick interpretations; (2) looking at the language the participants used in the interviews, as well as the language I used to transcribe running records and memos; (3) making comparisons between emerging concepts to concepts already entailed in the study’s focus (teachers’ perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviour); and (4) looking for negative cases. The use of these tools helped me scrutinize the derivation and integrity of my analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). My senior supervisor also regularly assisted me in further scrutinizing interpretations throughout the analytic process.

**Identification of core category.** As I worked through open coding and axial coding, concepts such as Disruptive Behaviours, Impetus, Relationship, Teaching Philosophy, Roles, Responsibility, Discipline, Student needs and lastly, Support were identified. From these concepts, five categories emerged that included Community of Learning, Valuing Learner Diversity, Supporting All Learners, Working with Students, and Relationship Building. I decided that the core category could be “Relationship” because it was the category that had the most numerous and strongest links to the other categories. Once “Relationship” was identified, I was then able to turn to selective coding, a more limited and more focused kind of coding. As the research progressed, selective coding dominated the process as it moved toward generation of theory.

**Selective coding.** To discover the central category and its relationship with other categories, I used two techniques: (a) diagrams, and (b) sorting and reviewing through memos. I started this process after some categories had been discovered in axial coding and continued with modification and refinement until I reached theoretical saturation. After each loop of coding (open-axial-selective), I could further develop the multiple layers of categorized theoretical statements that became hypotheses for testing during the next loop. This iterative process only stopped when no further modification could be done and the theory was validated.

By continually trimming off excess and filling in poorly developed categories until they were saturated through further theoretical sampling, I was able to come up with propositions for a theory on the perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours of elementary school teachers. To illustrate how theory is built from selective coding, I present some examples of how I developed theoretical statements related to relationship and trimmed off redundant concepts, categories, and hypotheses during the coding process.

From Maggie, I learned that she paid attention, listened, responded to students, treated her students as individuals and provided what she perceived was needed by her students when she was teaching. This indicated that teaching is not only about academics but also the caring aspects of teaching. Therefore, I hypothesized that “caring is fundamental in all teacher-student relationships.” This was confirmed throughout all subsequent cases so this proposition was never modified.

Daniel expressed his care for his students in his interviews but he could not answer my questions about how he could influence or improve on the relationships he had with the students in his class. Fortunately, Daniel’s interview gave me a clue to satisfy my curiosity in this matter. From his in vivo sayings such as “do not get it kids”, “longer leash”, and “feral creatures,” it seemed like Daniel struggled to understand his students. This not only opened up the concept of challenges to relationship building, it forced me to question the ability of some teachers to successfully enter relationships with some students— an idea frequently encountered in empirical literature on the teacher-student relationship (Schussler & Collins, 2006). This led me to suspect that some teachers did not know how to or could not relate to some students although they cared for their students’ well-being. The very phrase “do not get it kids” triggered me to hypothesize that “images of students influence relationship.” Analysis of other interviews confirmed that when teachers had a better understanding of their students, they engaged better with students. When teachers were challenged by students’ behaviour, the most common tactic was to divide and conquer by grouping students into small groups and/or getting these students to be with other adults outside of the classroom. In many of the cases, teachers experienced varied relationships depending on the teacher’s need for and success of including students with disruptive behaviours in their classrooms. When a chosen strategy was successful, they wanted to continue with it at a higher level of commitment as the strategy had been proven successful. In turn, the better the

relationship, the easier it was for the teacher to include students with disruptive behaviours when opportunities were provided. Therefore, at the end of the interviews, I came up with two propositions “perceptions of disruptive student behaviour is related to the management of disruptive student behaviour” and “management of disruptive student behaviour is related to relationship.”

By focusing on the core and other related categories, subsequent data collection went very quickly, with memos written, captured and analyzed. In this way, the selected categories that form the basis of the emerging theory saturated the selected categories without collecting a lot of additional material that had no relevance to the developing grounded theory. I continued with this selective data collection and analysis until I had sufficiently elaborated and integrated the core variable, its properties, and its theoretical connections to other relevant categories.

**Generating theory.** As the process of generating theory involves simultaneous data collection, coding, and data analysis, I had to be aware of the entire process from the beginning of data collection through the generation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding affected the next interview and led to a new approach toward analysis. Thus, the data collection progressed in the shape of a growing circle as I constantly underwent a repetition of analytical phases. Movement was inductive as I framed the analysis in ever more abstract terms: from minute details (indicators) to concepts to categories to saturation and a core category to hypotheses and tentative theories and finally to theory.

Generating conceptual categories and identifying the core category helped me to begin generating first hypotheses and then theory. Later modifications were mainly about clarifying the logic of the theory and integrating elaborating details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories. As I began to discover an underlying uniformity in the categories and properties, the theory was reformulated with a smaller set of higher-level concepts. This second level of delimiting the theory reduced the original list of categories for coding. As the theory developed and was reduced, I became more committed to it. This allowed for a delimiting of the original list of categories for subsequent collecting and selective coding of additional data, according to the newly established boundaries of the theory. By delimiting the focus to one category as the core variable, only those categories related to that core were included in the theory. This list of

categories, now delimited for additional selective coding, was subsequently (and continuously) delimited through theoretical saturation of each category.

**Negative case analysis.** In this study, I used negative case analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to explore the hypothesis that all teachers took part in a process of what I identified as tactical and relational interactions with the aim of supporting relationship and balancing needs of all learners in their classrooms. I found that while all teachers wanted to support relationship and balance needs of all learners in their classrooms, not all of them were able to use the process of tactical and relational interactions to achieve this. Moreover, those who were not engaging in this process effectively were those who were the most frustrated in their work, leading me to conclude that a continuous flow between tactical interactions that inform the perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours and relational interactions that inform trust and relationship building is *the* process in which satisfied teachers engage with students. This in turn allows them to achieve their goal of supporting the student teacher relationship and balancing needs of all learners.

### **3.7. Methods for Verification**

**Validation.** I presented the drafts of my theory to my senior supervisor, colleagues, and to the participants themselves. Engaging in this kind of dialogue, particularly with other researchers, was an important factor in my ability to remain detached and analytic enough to generate a theory, even while I was working to immerse myself in my participants' experience. By presenting my findings to participants, colleagues, and senior supervisor, and by critically examining those findings myself through memoing, I was able to engage in "persistent observation", an important means of ensuring that one's prolonged engagement in a site results in a meaningful and valid theory, instead of being simply a time of "mindless immersion" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). In particular, the feedback of my senior supervisor was also critical, as it was she who encouraged me to return to the literature and check my data against it – something all grounded theory researchers should do (Charmaz, 1990). In comparing the emerging theory to literature I utilized comparative analysis to ensure that the theoretical scheme was able to explain most of the cases. When presenting the results to my participants, I checked if they could recognize themselves in the theory. If they could not, I tried to apply larger concepts until they could.

**Credibility.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the best way for qualitative researchers to establish credibility is to make clear the steps they took to generate their theory. In the sections above I have explained the processes I used to generate the interview protocol and the ways that selective and theoretical sampling were used to recruit participants who would best contribute to the generation of a grounded theory. I have tried to provide adequate description of the context and the participants working in it, and have illustrated participants' views using their own words as much as possible in order to keep the theory truly grounded in the data. I have also used multiple sources of data – 30 participant interviews, member-checking with participants, and reviews of the literature – to check and validate my findings, all of which were examined through the constant comparative method, as well as extensive memoing.

### **3.8. Chapter Summary**

In summary, I conducted open coding to generate conceptual categories and determine how the categories vary along different identified dimensions. Next, I carried out axial coding (i.e. comparison of data observations) to find the relationships that existed between the different categories of conceptual properties and dimensions. Then I did selective coding to integrate the different categories in order to build a theory with theoretical statements. To validate the theoretical statements (propositions or hypotheses) of the emerging theory, I collected new data with theoretical sampling logic and went through the three coding processes again. The task was recursive and completed only when I reached theoretical saturation. Details of theory development are presented in Chapter 4.

# **Chapter 4 Results**

## **4.1. Chapter Overview**

The focus of this grounded theory study is to understand how teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviours. This chapter provides the findings of this study and ends with a developed theory to explain how teachers perceive and manage disruptive behaviours and the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive student behaviours, teaching philosophy and strategies.

## **4.2. An Overview of Findings**

The findings for this study emerged in three phases. The first phase illuminated how teachers define and manage disruptive student behaviours. In the second phase of analysis, with the teachers' definitions and management strategies in mind, I examined the context associated with the disruptions. In this second phase I identified six themes that were later collapsed to three main themes which include: 1) Relationships with students; 2) the Role of the teacher and 3) the importance of Community. During this point in the study there was also an extraordinary change within teaching and learning contexts, as a result of the Supreme Court ruling to restore class size and composition to 2002 standards. This phase of the analysis also examined how this sudden change in class size and composition impacted teachers' perceptions and management of disruptive behaviours. The three themes identified in the second phase of analysis were then further examined in a final third phase, resulting in five categories which revealed not only the process for which teachers perceived and managed disruptive student behaviours, but steps and considerations leading up to the action of management of behaviour, their individual philosophies influencing these actions, and within these actions, the participants' understanding of the teacher's role. These categories provided new ways to organize coded data that allowed a theoretical model to emerge. The remainder of this chapter presents the details in each phase of these findings.

## 4.3. Defining Disruptive Student Behaviour

### 4.3.1. Perceiving and Managing Disruptive Student Behavior

My first interview was with Maggie and it laid the groundwork for all subsequent interviews. In this interview, the flow of my interview protocol changed as a result of having Maggie provide some examples of times when disruptive behaviours presented themselves and when her management of behaviours did not go well. She was able to provide more context around how she perceived and managed disruptive behaviour and she expressed insights she gained from negative experiences she had while managing behaviours.

You are a circus act is what you are. Jumping around, trying to get him stopped, and him stopped, and this one stopped and teach and you are exhausted by the end of the day and you go home and vent to your husband who says, "I don't want to hear about it anymore." It is tiring. It is quite tiring because you are giving, I mean, how many lap snakes (light weighted blanket) can you have? Then they start throwing them up in the air. Then it is removal because...if it gets escalated to the point...I have had to evacuate this room. - Maggie

He doesn't want to be removed. He doesn't want to be, because he loves to be with us, so he usually gets himself organized but that has taken 30 seconds away from what I am doing and now I have to get them all back looking at me so I do and some other student acts up, "Oh, look at me!" Now I have to address that behaviour. I have a whole row of them at the front that are the wigglers. I give them something like a lap snake (weighted blanket) and that sometimes helps. Even something like this will solve that because the pressure on them and then they can play with this, right? Those are the types of things because I have to get through the day. The rest (of the class) are waiting and it is not fair. I only have a couple this year. One year I had 8 or 9 that were challenging. – Maggie

The emotions Maggie expressed and the reflective nature of her speech during the interview indicated that these were important experiences for her. Maggie's reflection also indicated a level of complexity around perceptions and management of disruptive behaviours and concern about the results of these experiences that I had not anticipated. There were genuine emotions involved in those experiences for her in regards to how behaviour affected the students and the teacher. Specifically because these examples of managing behaviour had not gone well or been done in a way she believed they should have, these were ongoing issues. She did not believe that as a teacher she had attended to the needs of her students. In my interview with Maggie we talked at length about the

process of perceiving and managing disruptive student behaviour while reflecting on her experiences. In my memo for this interview, I noted eight points she made about how she perceived and managed disruptive student behaviour, most of which reflected points also made (subsequently) by Ida. I focused on a list of what teachers look for, when disruptive behaviour occurred. For example:

1. Understanding possible motives of your students
2. Recognizing the features of the behaviour- transient or chronic; mild or intense; occasional or frequent
3. Gauging the seriousness of behavior and its impact on the individual student
4. Working towards buy-in (student re-direction and engagement)
5. Asking questions and being willing to change approach
6. Recognizing how the behaviour impacts other students
7. Being aware of how the behaviour impacts the teacher, specifically when behaviour hindered the teacher's goals
8. Limiting how the behaviour affects the learning environment of the class

Of significance, Maggie's list of eight considerations makes visible the complex nature of professional assessment and decision-making teachers engage in. It is important to note here that it could have been easy to skip over this list from Maggie as she was the only participant who listed them so clearly and because they were so specific to her experience. I focused on how she described the process because there were thoughts and sentiments that echoed my interview with Ida. Across all the interviews it was also apparent that there were some behaviours that elicited strong emotions. Most notably were those behaviours that related to the safety of the student, other members of the class or the teacher.

Many teachers talked about the strategies they used, with a few participants circling back to this topic later in the interview. Each participant identified several strategies to manage disruptive behaviour which I identified as either 'Proactive' or an 'Intervention' (see Table 4.1). All participants discussed their use of strategies within an accompanying vignette or story, indicating the complexity of the circumstances accompanying the behavior and the difficulty of isolating and interpreting what constitutes

'disruptive' behavior and the decision making around how to address it. Common across all the interviews was the identification of multiple strategies for managing disruptive student behaviours, again indicating the complexity of the teachers' responses to disruptive behaviours.

**Table 4.1. Strategies described by participants**

Preventive Strategies	Intervention Strategies
Planning/Preparation for lessons and organizing special material/tools.	Voice/ Tone of voice
Creating individual plans for students.	Using proximity to get students' attention
Visual cues/reminders and weighted pillows for students who have sensory needs.	Rules and routines
Different schedules	Group work
Different work output	Ignoring the behaviour
Watching time and being organized with activities (transitions)	Other professionals (i.e. EA, counselors)
Hands on learning/experiences	Referral to the principal's office
Embedding behavioural and relational approaches to engage students	Talking individually with student
Being open with students about feelings about behaviour	Natural consequences
Breaks and choices for students	Talking to parents
Paying close attention to the students	Writing SBT notes for referral
Checking in with students throughout the day	Sending students home
Token economy to reward students	Rewards and consequences
Buddy system	Threats
Using students' interests to engage them (i.e. technology)	Evacuating the classroom

<p>Explain clear expectations and consequences</p> <p>Reminders and reinforcing class rules/expectations often and regularly</p> <p>Encouragement and praise</p> <p>Using the same language (by teacher, EA, students) to describe expected behaviors in class</p> <p>Being dramatic to get students' attention (element of surprise)</p> <p>Giving jobs/responsibility to students</p> <p>Use of student role models</p> <p>Peer dynamics</p> <p>Sharing personal stories</p> <p>SEL programs (MIND-UP/Friends program)</p>	
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Ultimately the strategies used by these teachers were linked in their definitions of disruptive student behaviour. This involved not only the actions of a student but perceptions of the teachers. Teachers in this study identified a handful of “essential” features that must be a part of the behaviour to be considered ‘disruptive.’ What they identified most readily and most often as ‘disruptive’ were intensity and frequency of behaviours. It was the quality of their experiences with disruptive behavior rather than the quantity that determined how confident teachers were in dealing with the behaviour. Indeed, Giallo and Little (2003) found that it was the nature of these experiences that impact teachers’ confidence when managing behaviour. Teachers needed to use effective behaviour management strategies, or else, the activities and learning of all in the classroom would be disrupted. Consider, for example, some of the severe behaviours that Maggie had to manage:

I had to evacuate my classroom two different years because of two different students. We can’t learn because the child is violent, using derogatory language, ripped things off the walls, and threw things. I left him in the classroom with the educational assistant and we evacuated to the hallway

and I did the lessons in the hallway. I have had to do that a couple of years. So that is how it can get. But it was too much because it wasn't just him. There was a whole bunch of them! It wasn't just him. We had to evacuate because he would start ripping and destroying things and then either he goes or we go and if he isn't going to go then we had to go. It is hard to evacuate 20 people all of a sudden but we have had to do it and we advertise that to the parents. -Maggie

Several teachers spoke of disruptive behaviours as being potentially contagious in terms of evoking disruptive behaviour from typically well-behaved students. These teachers cited examples of other students misbehaving because of students with disruptive behaviours or dealing with students with disruptive behaviour more harshly and expediently because of complaints or disruptions in learning. Most teachers did not intervene when learning was not impacted. However when behaviours were perceived to be contagious, they were managed. Consider, for example,

If [the behavior] is not affecting the person beside them, person in front of them, person around them. I haven't figured out what it is yet as to why that person is doing that but there is a time when you have to leave that person to keep doing that and let that person do those behaviors if it is not bothering anybody. But you just haven't figured out why they are doing it. Have you totally abandoned them? No, but you just haven't made it your all-consuming issue to try and figure out what it is with them. - Larry

Teachers' definitions of disruptive behaviours also included the impact on the individual student and the impact on the entire class. Ben stated that, "disruptive behaviour is when their behaviour is hindering the behaviour of others and themselves." Another teacher, Catherine agreed:

It is disruptive depending on if it is noisy enough that it is distracting his classmates. That would be an example of disruptive behavior. I have two levels of disruptive behavior. One is if you are interfering with your own learning that is one level but if you are interfering with the learning of others that is a whole different ball game. He is bouncing around the room. That is taking it to a whole other level. It was very difficult on Thursday because he was literally throwing himself on the ground, hitting the wall, and hitting the door. I finally got him out of this door and then he said he wasn't leaving. So then he starts coming back in again so I put my hand across the door and he went straight through it. - Catherine

Teachers often looked for underlying meaning within the behaviour, to guide their responses. They wanted to ensure their strategies were contextualized to the specifics of the situation. As described below by Ida:

I don't think there is a cookie cutter answer for disruptive behaviour. I think you always have to look at the child. I would ask why his behaviour is disruptive. What is he achieving out of this? I will find out what the problems are and why is that child misbehaving? What is the function of his behaviour? There is no one solution to any of those disruptive behaviours. You can't just say, "Go to the office." Each child is different so I handle each child differently. - Ida

### **4.3.2. Behaviour that Threatens Safety**

When behaviours continued to persist in the classroom despite intervention, teachers often felt like they were sitting on a "ticking bomb." This was because these behaviours were potentially dangerous for not only the individual student but also others in the classroom. Teachers tried to preempt these behaviours by getting resources, planning, preparing and getting outside support. Consider, for example:

Oh, I know. I feel it. To me, I am always on edge. Even though I have been doing this for a long time, I am treading. I am walking on eggshells because I am always thinking about what will set that guy or girl off. Oh, you have to be watching those guys that are coming up, the new crop that is coming up. Just like you should probably be aware of some of those characters. You are tense. You are a little bit more not as relaxed as you sometimes are. It is not more of an effort I don't think. It is more you just have to be constantly aware. The other thing is, you have to have not just you but you have to have all these guys (students) aware. - Larry

Unsafe behaviours and/intense disruptive behaviours were often tipping points for teachers because they created a classroom atmosphere of heightened tension and stress for all the students and the teacher. Behaviours such as spouting vulgarities and outright defiance were also disruptive for teachers. Ida said:

For me it is if the child is having a real meltdown, kicking and I feel that the safety of the other children is important, I need to protect the other kids in the class. If I feel the behavior is disruptive enough that other kids in the class might copy that behavior I would send them to the office too. If the noise level starts going up and your stress level is starting to rise and you have just had enough. - Ida

Although some of these behaviours do not physically endanger other students or the teacher, it was offensive and when they persisted over a period of time, it affected the teacher and students in the class. These particular situations put teachers in a dilemma because they are often compelled to put the needs of the class over the individual. In these instances, teachers felt that another adult in the classroom and/or having the

student sent out of the classroom helped because learning could occur. However, these approaches did not improve the teacher-student relationship or classroom atmosphere. All the teachers in this study expressed they would not deal with behaviours that were considered unsafe to individual students, the class and/or the teacher. When safety was threatened and/or violated, teachers' threshold of responsibility and management of behaviour was reached.

In summary, during phase 1, I had developed an initial understanding that behaviour is disruptive when the teacher does not understand its underlying purpose, is unexpected and requires the teacher to make substantial and unpredicted changes for the whole class. Next, the teacher considers and weighs the impact of the behaviour on the student and the other students in the class. Finally, the teacher considers the behaviour's impact on their ability to perform their job, that is to teach and meet the needs of all students in the class, and the impact on the other students' ability to learn. For example, a teacher may evacuate a whole class when an individual student escalates behaviour by throwing objects at the teacher and/or other students. These insights highlighted the complex and multifaceted professional evaluation and decision making processes teachers undergo. Disruptive behaviours that occur may also be low incidence or high incidence. It was impossible to talk about managing behaviour without defining behavior.

## **4.4. Context Associated with Disruptive Student Behaviour**

### **4.4.1. Relationships with Students**

I now turn to phase 2 of the data analysis to examine the context associated with the disruptions, including interrelated themes of: 1) Relationships with students; 2) the Role of the teacher and; 3) the importance of Community.

With respect to the first theme of relationships I noted that teachers focused on the potential of students when building relationships and were trying to understand their students. Taking responsibility for their part in maintaining and/or escalating behaviours in their interactions with students helped teachers to repair and restore relationships. These efforts made the teacher-student relationship and student-to-student relationships qualitatively different. Consider, an example of student to student relationships:

We usually just talk it through. I will ask them to make it right. How do you make that right? Sometimes it can be a simple sorry to the person that you have offended or hurt in some way or it may be something more than that. It may be that you have to do something and I try to work it out. It is that restitution piece I try to get the kids to help me work out what it could be that will get them back into the circle. What is going to get you back into relationship with the other person? Usually it doesn't go a lot beyond that. I guess that relationship is important. That is the key thing. It is all about relationship and an attachment and giving kids control. Recognizing that they have needs and they need the control to have their needs met. That is usually why things fall apart is that needs are not being met and so if you can get a child to understand their needs and therefore why it is that things aren't working for them then they can work out how they are going to get their needs met. - Kerina

Kerina and Catherine both talked about the level of relationships they developed with students and discussed the need to have a connection with their students. However, both talked about different sensitivities that need to be taken into account in building these relationships. Kerina described the parameters she established in order to have a relationship with her students so they could feel acceptance and belonging in order to work together. Consider, for example:

I try to start off with relationship because I don't think you can teach without relationship. So each individual needs a relationship with you before you can manage a whole class to keep them together. So I think building that individual relationship is important. I listen to them. I look them in the eye and I take time to listen as they tell me about the stuffy and that long story that goes on forever when you really need to be doing something else and you have to steal yourself to listen to the whole story. Just be interested and the next day to remember to ask about the stuffy or whatever. - Kerina

Although Catherine cared about her students, she relied on outside support to manage students who were not responding to her. She saw other professionals as an extension of her relationship with the student because this approach allowed Catherine to redirect or minimize the behaviour while preserving her relationship with the student. She explained:

If it is a written activity in the classroom or a non-preferred activity in the classroom then as everybody settles, there will be one or another who is refusing to do it. That may just be a chronic problem or it may escalate.... I am not sure why I as the classroom teacher have to come up with these things [adaptations]. I don't really view it as something I should be doing. That is for an expert to look at my schedule and say, 'Okay, we do it like this. That is probably going to be more successful for the kid like a visual schedule which puts in a couple of movement breaks. - Catherine

A student's readiness for connection with a teacher or adult is essential in building relationship. Alice tried different strategies to connect with one of her students and explained:

I think you have to start with relationships. I think everything about teaching is the relationship. A thing that I have always said is, the class starts to congeal when you have like this love affair. You love the kids, they love you and so that is an emotional piece but that is how I see the primary thing. I think when you do not have that relationship then you do not have the bond. 10 months is a long time and so it is about the relationship to start with and not the academics to start with. - Alice

Trust and belief in students' abilities was also a large part of the conversations with participants about building relationships with students. Student trust in the teacher is a key part of building relationships and having authentic connections with students. Building trust as part of the relationship between teachers and students open up communication and can foster understanding. Additionally, trust is about teachers trusting students to be an active part in achieving learning and behaviour goals. Larry elaborated:

His computer was breaking down at home and his printer wasn't working. I said, "You don't need that stuff, you just draw it. You are the best artist in the class." So sure enough he is going home today. You wait until he brings this thing in. It will be a fantastic thing. So just finding out if you just say, "you do the same as everybody else" that is not maybe his game. I told him, "You have a gift, use your gift." It didn't take him long to figure out that is what he is doing. He is on it. - Larry

Larry's ability to be authentic and inviting also underlies his relationship with his student. He made himself available and believed in the capability of his students. He focused on invitations to building relationships. For example a hearty greeting, and an assurance of good will throughout the day and the school year. Consider, for example,

I found a way to love them. I stand at the front of the door every time they come in every morning and say 'good morning' all the days. It doesn't matter. So they will know that that is the first thing they will hear from me is 'Good morning'. No matter what happened the day before. No matter what I think might happen that day, it is still going to be that way. They have to know I believe in them in some way, truly or sometimes you have to act it until it is true. - Larry

From these interviews relationship is fundamental to the engagement of students within the learning environment. The teacher's ability to be open, caring, accepting but

firm is an invitation to the student to become actively engaged in the class and also a promise or commitment from the teacher to remain engaged with the student in the class. Larry demonstrated his refusal to be offended by his students' behaviour and saw each day as a new day to build on relationship. He was intentional in everything he did to build relationships with his students and it cut across disparate types of activities and aspects. By being authentic and inviting, students were encouraged to become actively engaged in the classroom- watching, listening, reading, interpreting and making meaning out of their experience with Larry. It was an invitation and expression of good will. In a deeper sense, Larry was conveying a commitment to remain engaged with his students.

Ethan, Jan and Helen said they were more engaged in knowing their students when they had a relationship with students but whether students were very engaged or less engaged within the learning environment depended also on factors of interest level and the student's need for connection. For example:

For some kids you never figure them out. That is true. There are kids you don't have a relationship with and they almost haunt you because you are like "why, what couldn't I get to that kid? To connect with that kid?" Even with a kid that is challenging sometimes you will connect even more with them to be honest because you are investing a lot into that child. Yah, you want to take that time to get to know them but there are just some that are not open to it. I don't know. It is a funny thing. They are the ones that you carry with you for years. - Jan

Apparently, some students are harder to engage with, preferring to observe until they are sure of the teacher's involvement and their own interest level. Teachers perceived that some students liked to size them up to learn expectations and in class, they learn what they can and cannot get away with. Jan also remarked that although she was "somewhat engaged" in reaching out to her disruptive students, she could be sidelined by the demands of other students in the class, lack of time and opportunity to deal with behaviours as they arose and the resistance to form a connection from these students. The relationship is an ongoing concern.

**Understanding student needs and generating buy-in.** Part of the process of developing positive relationships with students involved attending to and understanding their needs. Teachers were developing relationships with students explicitly because they wanted to ensure learning in a way that suited the students' interests, needs and abilities. In many of the interviews, participants emphasized the need to provide relevant

learning tasks according to student ability. Connecting learning tasks to the larger vision or goals of the teacher, as well as the student's ability to perform tasks, allows the students to see how they fit into the classroom and essentially 'buy in' to learning.

Consider, for example:

So my classroom management system is built on economy. So they all have a job in this classroom. We have a store that operates and they can buy things in the store and they get paid for their job every day. So at the end of the day they all have jobs. - Helen

When teachers emphasized either behaviour and/or curricular goals, they had less success with students with disruptive behaviour.

Fonda, a younger teacher, learned that she needed to know herself and her students and changed her approach after much reflection. She said:

I didn't know what to do and then as I figured out each student and what they needed or what they didn't need. Because they are coming to school with things that I, yes, I can deal with but sometimes it's hard...I think just figuring out what I can and can't deal with. Finding support for things I can't deal with and then finding things that work for these students so that they feel successful and I feel successful. That is all figuring out who they are and what they need and what works for them. - Fonda

It is not always clear to the teacher or easy to navigate student behaviour because of the ambiguity between meeting student needs and generating student buy-in. In the above example, Fonda is illustrating her confusion about student needs and generating buy-in as well as her efforts to build relationships.

Most of the teachers talked about ensuring routines, rules and expectations and clearly explaining these concepts to students. They felt without structure and routine, disruptive behaviours could be more difficult to manage and could further dampened student engagement. For instance, Fonda associated routines with predictability, and other participants shared this view. Hence, a well-organized and structured classroom is essential to managing disruptive student behaviours, and predictability is seen as an enhancement of that feature.

#### 4.4.2. Role of Teacher

Another theme that became clearer throughout the second half of my interviews was the role of the teacher. All of the teachers discussed their perceptions of what it means to be a good teacher by sharing thoughts about what a teacher does or should do. In these discussions, participants referred to how they acted as a teacher, as well as the behaviours they believe teachers in general should exhibit. They made a distinction between “good teachers” and “teachers.” This seemed to point to an interesting abstract concept and/or cultural expectation of what a good teacher would do. Essentially this goes beyond an easy description of the role of a teacher. For example, in most of the interviews, I observed that participants described their teaching roles as being a facilitator to guide students, as opposed to a dictator, who gives orders and expects students to follow orders. This perception appeared to influence their teaching style and how they interacted in general with students. For example below Ben illustrates his active modelling of appropriate behaviour as one of the strategies that he feels he should be doing:

What I have learned is when they know what to expect, what are the boundaries, they do well. Otherwise kids will push those boundaries. I spend a good part of the very beginning of the school year modeling and go over what you do when you finish eating your lunch. It is modeled over and over again, so they know what to do. - Ben

I also noticed that the experiences of the teachers in managing disruptive student behaviour often influenced how they perceived and managed these behaviours, as well as how they perceived their role as teachers. Drawing on another example from Ben, he describes how several students who refused to engage in any academic activity because they lacked the skills. In his words:

There is the refusal to engage. A lot of time, it is avoidance of work and then that behaviour and I think most often because they are feeling confronted by something they cannot do, or it is going to be very challenging and so they display behaviour that is a way of getting out of what they have to do. - Ben

Ben said he avoided power struggles by providing options and lots of time to his students but he also expected them to complete tasks. When his students refused to cooperate, he sent them to the hallway or the principal. In rare instances, he sent students home. In order, to prevent and minimize behaviours during class time,

Gloria spent time after school individualizing and preparing lessons for her students because class work was also a catalyst for behaviour in her class. She said:

I used to work 50 hours a week when I worked at school and everything was going well but I needed 50 hours to make it go well so it doesn't lend itself to any other time. It was a lot of prep. - Gloria

Gloria's preparation and efforts paid off because she reported that her class was functioning the way she hoped it would but it demanded a lot from her. As Gloria did not want behaviours to get in the way of the other students' learning, she was focused on expedience and maintaining classroom order. Her strategy was to reduce any potential conflict between her and her students to preserve their relationship. Teachers were willing to do what they felt was best for the student regardless of the behavior, however, they also felt that the administrator or the school's approach toward discipline set the tone in the management of disruptive student behaviours. Consider, for example:

There is no school-wide plan for behaviours. So you never know what consequence the student is going get for the behaviour. There needs to be some sort of consequence, some sort of restitution and if we are not going to give these kids consequences or restitution, they are not going to learn. We are just reinforcing the negative behaviour. - Catherine

Catherine felt unsupported because when she kept sending the same students to the principal for disciplinary action, there was no change in their behaviour. Catherine felt that it was important for students to know that the school expected appropriate behaviour and cared about how they behaved. The principal's approach also affected the teacher's relationship with students. When principals did not share the same approach to behaviour as teachers, it affected the teachers' confidence to effectively manage behaviours and continue to work with the student relationally. This was because teachers had expectations and consequences for behaviours that principals did not support. Another teacher, Jan, also felt that when students were sent to the principal for discipline, expectations of behaviour should be clear and specific to students. Consider, for example:

I do think that too often behaviour is being dealt with on a personal level and I don't feel like it is being dealt with consistently across the board. I think that creates in some kids that are wise enough to see what is happening, they pick up on that, and I don't think it is a good thing. – Jan

Many teachers felt that the subjective and random enforcement of discipline was not helpful in supporting their efforts to improve behaviour in their classrooms and/or in the school. It exasperated the conflict teachers had with their students. Kerina said:

We are working on getting it (school rule about not hitting) more established. It is a school rule but it has not been totally enforced so we are working back on getting that, like a really clear bottom line that we need to have those really clear. This is one here, you do not cross, no matter who you are, and what your needs are. - Kerina

When teachers struggled with disruptive student behaviour, these moments also served as a set of criteria and/or standards in which they judged their teaching practice, which in turn influenced their perceptions of disruptive student behaviour. In general, teachers did not like referring students to principals but when they did, it was because they needed help. When student behaviour did not improve after students returned to class, teachers felt isolated and unsupported in meeting the needs of the individual and the class. Thus, while the teachers in this study had expectations and disciplined their students, when they were unsuccessful and felt disempowered in their role they expected the principal to be the disciplinarian who would enforce school expectations and rules.

**Images of children.** Related to the discussion of teacher's role was the theme that emerged around images of children. By asking the teachers how they would describe their students and providing some examples of how children are described (empty vessels, sponges, interactive, powerful) I was trying to understand how images of children may relate to classroom management style. Teachers' expectations of their role are reflected in their images of children and these expectations can affect the behavior of the teacher as well as the performance of students and classroom dynamics (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Expectations affect teachers' moment-to-moment interactions with the children they teach in a thousand almost invisible ways. Teachers' expectations shape the quality of their relationships with students. Larry said:

Acknowledge that they [and their actions] have value. Anything that they have, in their eyes, is valuable. The fact that they went second (out of the classroom) instead of first, that is very valuable to them. But you will never figure it out exactly. You have to put your mind back when you were their age and try to think what would I be doing and thinking too. Value them and they will amaze you. I can see them at the door when they come in. If there is still something going through their bodies I will say, 'Have you made the

guarantee to come in here to learn?' If they cannot, they wait outside the classroom until they are calm and ready to learn. - Larry

Teachers in this study who had positive images of children and saw their role as facilitators of learning were better able to draw out the best in their students. For example, Larry gave his students more time to answer questions, more specific feedback, and more approval. He said he consistently touched, nodded and smiled at his students to make connections. The importance of these affirmations is discussed by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) and said to be significant in enhancing children's skill development. In contrast, teachers who had less positive images of children had more difficulty connecting with their students because they could not understand their students. For example, Daniel's in vivo sayings such as "do not get it kids" illustrates his struggle to relate and connect with his students.

#### **4.4.3. Community**

The third theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of community in a classroom. Many teachers in this study built communities in their classrooms and felt strongly that students acquire a sense of belonging and learn in relationships with others in a safe environment where they know what to expect and what to do. Consider, for example:

We spent a month and a half coming up with class rules. That was part of social studies. We talked about community and what it means that the class is a community. We talked about rights and responsibilities. We talked about all those kind of things. In the meantime I am establishing routines like "this is how we are going to collect books, this is how we are going to line up." It is like, "I am the teacher" and the kids go "well, that is a teachers' job" and we learn those routines. The actual underlying rules it is kind of like that is our philosophy. We talked about community and rights and responsibilities. – Ethan

Ethan involved his students in the creation of class rules because it allowed his students to practice the skills he wanted them to learn as well as to cultivate a sense of community. By following routines consistently, he provided a structure and a predictable atmosphere for the class to work within. When students adhered and collectively enforced class rules, they learned to share, get along with others and work out differences. By sharing his power as a teacher, Ethan engaged his students through established rules, expectations and routines while remaining impartial and fair. The

importance of directly teaching routines and establishing expectations also extended to teachers discussions of community building, for example:

When children come here, I want them first of all to feel welcome, to feel safe and comfortable and to get to know me and for me to get to know them because if we don't have that as our basis, we can't do anything. So what we have worked on here the first term is having our family be developed. Our community. That includes people with special needs and we have discussed that. First of all with teaching you have relationships. You have to know your students. You have to know your parents' names. You have to know something about them. You have to know what dog they have and cat they have and what their favorite color is and when their birthday is. You have to have a relationship otherwise what you are trying to do doesn't work. I guess my philosophy is that this becomes a family. - Maggie

Maggie saw part of her role as creating an environment where students feel loved and safe in order for learning to happen. Most teachers in this study regarded their classrooms as small communities that needed to work together for the collective good of all. Kerina, Ida and Maggie talked about making time to talk to each student daily, remembering details of the stories they shared and even provided snacks for students. They preferred to celebrate the successes of students than focus on negative behaviours. Ida, explained, "it is important to help the student and his classmates see that he can do well because he often already has a bad reputation with previous teachers and other students from past experiences." Kerina talked about the need to bring students "back into community" with the rest of the class when relationships are broken.

**Supporting all learners.** Teachers felt responsible to both support students with disruptive behaviour and to meet the needs of the class. With this responsibility and a lack of effective strategies, many teachers felt overwhelmed and powerlessness to create a harmonious classroom environment for all learners. Consider, for example,

I had a boy lying on this table today pretending to be a fish right when I am doing something. They are all looking at him and they tell him to stop doing that and he keeps doing it. So the whole class has gone from looking at me to looking at him and then they are yelling at him. So I went over and asked if he could go stand outside so I can go back to what I was doing. I don't have a temper, as you probably know but I do get frustrated. That gets frustrating because it is important to me, maybe not so much to them. - Daniel

The incident did not impede Daniel's efforts to work with this student. Daniel persisted by coming up with a reward system in hopes of changes in the student's behaviour. He said:

He didn't do the assignment (when he returned to the classroom). He sat in his desk but he didn't do the work that he was supposed to do. I have actually with that particular boy I have started to talk to his dad. I have check-mark system 4/4 at the end of the day so the dad will look at it and his son will get that many points and when he gets so many points he will get rewarded. We are trying to keep it a positive thing but if he fools around in school his points don't add up as quickly. - Daniel

Daniel saw that he not only had to intervene when disruptive behaviours occurred and to work with a parent, but also to work simultaneously with the student himself. When behaviour persisted, Daniel felt a profound responsibility to ensure learning for the student within the class given the importance he placed on community.

The teacher's work with all students to build classroom routines, structure, and rules as a way to form community made it possible to address disruptive behavior in relation to the expectations of the entire class. For example, teachers expressed a greater willingness to address behaviours that contradicted these rules and routines in a more direct way once a classroom community was starting to emerge. This was because disruptive behaviours were impacting both the individual and the continued formation of the classroom community. For example:

I would like to include them more and then when you have those behaviours that are taking away from everybody else's learning. I am thinking, maybe it's not the space for them...it makes it difficult to teach. - Ben

These teachers reiterated the importance of "nipping behaviours in the bud" before they escalated. This was because when behaviours were not prevented in a timely manner, the tension in the classroom was palpable and it influenced the climate of the classroom. Teachers were careful to protect the student and the interests of the class by intervening more directly. In the role of "advocate on the side," they sought to protect the well-being of the individual student within the classroom community and maintained an awareness of the quality of relationships, the classroom atmosphere and responded in a timely manner.

Fonda, another teacher, spoke of the gravity of the sense of responsibility that comes with ensuring learning when disruptive student behaviours presents in the classroom. She shared:

I was crying because I have 10 students who are not challenging. I will be in the midst of something with someone and they are like, "Don't worry, we just cleaned up the tables and wiped the floors and done your marking." I have these 10 students who are always on task, always following directions, never talking back and some days I don't even get to them because I am dealing with behaviors. So that was a huge concern at the beginning. How do I get to those students and make sure I am connecting with them and giving them what they need? - Fonda

Fonda also said disruptive behaviours were constant as "that game where you whack one thing and the other thing comes up and never stops." Fonda had to problem-solve frequently while on the job and often times, she was not pleased with her snap decisions. However, due to the demands of the class and the lack of time and resources, she often felt defeated or guilty. Given time, she would have dealt with the student in a different way. For Fonda, the inability to maintain a harmonious classroom environment and flow of lessons and activities for the students in the classroom was especially straining because she felt students need predictability to learn.

The teachers in this study often used the term "balancing" or "juggling" the needs of an individual and the needs of the class. Teachers often struggled with ensuring fairness and equity because students who behaved well in class often did not get the attention they also needed. The issue of ensuring fairness and equity while promoting inclusiveness is an important one, and the teachers have said that their ability to do so can be hindered by class size and class composition, in particular the type of behaviours presented and the amount of support available to deal with those behaviours. For instance, Ethan shared:

In my situation, when I try and hold that information about every kid in my head and then try and manage it like that. Being fair isn't being equal. When I let this student over here take that way way over there, and another kid might look at him and go, 'hey, you know what? That is not fair.' But it is. I am trying to give that kid the same opportunity to be in the classroom to learn to manage his behaviour and learn the academics and other things as this kid over there that I hardly ever have time to talk to. -Ethan

Maggie agreed with Ethan that it was difficult to manage expectations of fairness while trying to meet the needs of all the students in her class:

One student had autism but it was too much because it wasn't just him, there was a whole bunch of them. You can only watch so many students and when you have 8 or 9 students like that, it is a bit much. It is a lot. I think 17 or 18 students would be easier. Just that extra 5 students makes a difference. It just flows better. - Maggie

A common sentiment expressed by teachers was that it was unfair to the other students to have less instructional time, less harmonious learning environments and disruptive peer relationships.

#### **4.4.4. Managing Behaviour in Two Different Contexts.**

During data collection in the fall of 2017, the B.C. Supreme Court legislated that the class size, number of special needs of students in a class and the number of specialist teachers be restored to clauses deleted from the teachers' contract in 2002. Before 2002, the number of special needs students in a classroom could not exceed three students without special provisions, such as the presence of another adult in the classroom. Kindergarten class sizes were capped at twenty students while Grades 1 to 3 were capped at twenty-two. Class sizes for Grades 4 to 12 were negotiated by each school district. In other words, class sizes and class composition in Kindergarten changed from upward of twenty-two back to twenty and in Grades 1 to 3 classrooms upwards of twenty-four back to twenty-two respectively. For more than a decade, class sizes and the commensurate demands on teachers had been increasing. In an effort to better understand how student support affected teachers' perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours, I decided to focus on the changes experienced by re-interviewing 10 classroom teachers after this historic event and use it as a theoretical sample to see how student support affected the teachers' perceptions and approach when managing disruptive student behaviours. In the interviews the teachers noted that there was less adult support for students with disruptive behaviour in the classroom and felt that this change in structure made it difficult to form relationships and balance the needs within the class, even when the class was small.

**Providing assistance when needed.** Larry highlighted there is less conflict amongst students in smaller classes because there is more physical space in the classroom. However, one unexpected disadvantage was a reduction of Educational Assistants (EAs) in the classroom, consequently the teachers found it difficult to manage

the needs of the class without additional support from EAs. The teachers were disappointed and appalled that support was taken away from students. Maggie shared:

I mean that student would run into the field and he would run and not come back so he has to have somebody but other classes people that had one-on-one support suddenly had nobody and I was flabbergasted. Couldn't believe it because they can't function. And the teacher cannot teach unless that support is there so it was worse. It wasn't better, it was worse. Had we known that we would get behaviour teachers and counsellors at the cost of educational assistants, I don't know if teachers would gone for it because when that boy leaves, I can teach. If I have someone to work one-on-one with him, he remains calm because someone is telling him what to do. - Maggie

Daniel said:

They cut back on the educational assistants. I would personally rather have a bigger class with more educational assistant support than a small class with less support. It is so much easier to have a second adult in the room. If something is going on over there and I am over there, they can deal with that but when I am by myself, it is pretty hard to be on top of two or three things that go on at one time. Somebody will kick that person or this person will do something over there so I have to go there. In the meantime, this guy over here has done something else. I can't manage. - Daniel

**Attending to student support.** Another disadvantage was that in reality and in day-to-day dealings, the Supreme Court ruling seems to favor classes in the higher grades (Grade 4 and above) because by the time students reach these grades, many students have been designated and have individual education plans. In this way, teachers teaching grades 4 and up tend to receive more resources because they have designated students in their classes while teachers teaching the lower grades do not have as many designated students but may have students with disruptive behaviours who are waiting to be designated. Most teachers reported that although smaller classes are beneficial, they preferred to have another adult in the classroom because they could access the help of the adult immediately when dealing with disruptive behaviours. For example:

There is a difference in a smaller class, but this is the type of class where the dynamics play a big role ...they are all feeding into this negativity and it just sort of starts to spiral, and then they start literally poking and getting into each other's space... I have to really keep my finger on the pulse and yesterday I didn't. I completely had no control at all. - Jan

These examples highlighted the importance of attending to student support in addition to class size and the need to provide assistance where needed despite formal designations. All the teachers reported no positive change in disruptive student behaviours and the amount they had to deal with in smaller class sizes because the smaller number of students in class did not reduce the behaviour that occurred in classrooms. They argued that class composition played a critical factor in their ability to manage disruptive student behaviour particularly when there were more students with negative behaviours than positive behaviours and/or behaviours that threatened safety.

In summary, during phase 2, with the teachers' definitions of disruptive behaviour and management strategies in mind, I examined the context associated with the disruptions. I learned that it is a very challenging and complex task to support all learners when there are many needs in a classroom, even when class size was reduced. Notably however, teachers attended to their relationships with students, their roles as teachers and the needs of the community when managing disruptive behaviours. The importance of relationality and community building in terms of what "good teachers" do to support positive behaviours was a key feature found in phase 2. The data analysis during this phase also highlighted the critical difference student support makes in managing disruptive behaviours without access to a second adult.

#### **4.5. Supporting Relationships and Balancing Needs**

I used the conditional relationship guide and the reflective coding matrix (Scott & Howell, 2008) to understand and relate categories in order to identify the central phenomenon in my study. The conditional relationship guide was used specifically to identify the relationships and interactions of all categories, and how each category is understood. This is illustrated in the reflective coding matrix where the core category is shown as a central phenomenon, about which all other major and minor categories relate. Using these tools, five categories emerged namely Community of Learning, Valuing Learner Diversity, Supporting All Learners, Working with Students, and Relationship Building (see Appendix B).

Once the five categories emerged, I began scrutinizing the teachers' perceptions of disruptive student behaviour and behaviour management literature for models, frameworks, or theories that might be relevant to my findings and thus enhance the theoretical sensitivity of my study. The five categories were subsumed into a core

category: “Relationship,” which was the basis for the emergent theory. This core category concerns the set of found actions that teachers performed to support relationships and to balance the needs of the class in order to teach (see Appendix C).

As my analysis progressed, my initial research question also changed and became more focused. I realized that the data gathered were telling stories concerning not only the problems teachers faced when disruptive student behaviours presented or when dealing with disruptive student behaviour in their work, but also the teachers’ actions in building relationship with students with disruptive behaviour and in supporting the needs of the class. Thus my research problem shifted from how disruptive student behaviours were perceived and managed, to how teachers acted during the management of disruptive student behaviours.

I found that despite differences in teaching philosophies and responses to behaviour, the importance of relationship was brought up and emphasized by all the teachers in this study. These teachers wanted to help their students learn to solve problems relationally and academically. They even went as far as to say, that without relationships, they would not be able to teach. The teachers I interviewed said they were trying to give their students the skills they would need later in life, particularly the skills to function in relationships, to be happy, and to make positive contributions to the world. Not surprisingly, the participants in this study were concerned about the relationships they had with students with disruptive behaviours; thus, their primary concern was “how to teach” when disruptive student behaviours presented while considering the needs of the other students in the classroom. This concern involved their relationships with students with disruptive behaviours, as well as maintaining a positive environment for all students to learn. According to my participants, to teach meant supporting relationships with students and balancing the needs of all learners.

#### **4.5.1. Management of Disruptive Student Behaviour**

As I examined the actions of the teachers during the management of disruptive behaviours. I found there was a common belief among teachers that overwhelming student needs and a diverse student class composition hindered their ability to form relationships with students. Moreover, many of the teachers in this study found it challenging to include students with disruptive behaviours. From the onset when behaviours presented (even when the class size was reduced), the teachers in the study did not introduce immediate changes in their classroom management because they were

focused on getting to know and building connections with students. They saw behaviour as a reflection of the relationship, not their teaching practice. Moreover, some teachers disagreed with the discipline enacted by administrators or other professionals. They considered those disciplinary consequences differing from their in-class consequences.

Then teachers focused most on the relationship, diversifying practice and building a sense of community in the classroom. For instance, teachers would provide alternative ways of allowing students to present knowledge to feel successful and find ways to facilitate positive relationships with teachers and among students. However, although the teacher facilitated and provided these options, some students did not respond to these accommodations. Then the teacher made more changes, which included more preparation and time, to persuade students to cooperate. Teachers would also arrange for students to work in small groups and/or individually with another professional.

This approach allowed teachers to redirect or minimize the behaviour while preserving the relationship. However, when it did not work, students would be sent to professionals like the principal for a break and/or discipline. When the students' behaviour did not change after a break and/or disciplinary action after being sent to professionals, the teachers realized that they had to deal with the student's behaviour in the classroom. That meant, in some cases, teachers continued to struggle because they had difficulty forming relationships with these students. These teachers considered that although from the outset these students were their responsibility, they later realized it should have been different. In such cases, the teachers felt that these students should have more individualized support and they were the responsibility of all professionals in the school system.

A secondary consequence of the action taken by teachers was that they perceived the referral to other professionals as an extension of relationship where the needs of the student with disruptive behaviours could be better met. In addition, they felt they were better able to meet the needs of the rest of the class while the needs of student with behaviour was in the care of another professional.

In summary, during phase 3, I learned that teachers took steps and considerations leading up to the action of management of behaviour, their individual

philosophies influenced these actions, and within these actions, the participants' understanding of the teacher's role.

## 4.6. Emergent Theory

**Tactical vs. Relational management.** At this point, I took some time to think about all of the findings—the open codes, the categories and the narrative descriptors—to synthesize what it all meant. As I looked at all these pieces, I realized I needed to go back to my research question: How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviours? And what are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy and strategies? By framing the question with “how,” there was an implication that the answer would include some sort of process or steps for actually managing disruptive student behaviour.

To address my research question, I went back to my coding notes where I had tracked the various steps the participants described when they faced disruptive student behaviour (see Table 4.1). The processes participants described all contained tactical interactions based on strategy and purpose, usually from least to most intrusive to correct behaviour without disrupting the flow of the lesson, for example creating smaller groups, providing breaks, optimizing tone of voice, etc. (refer to Table 4.1). However, when I looked at the action taken by teachers compared to other data findings, there was a disconnect. The processes participants described were tactical actions. However, my analysis pointed to findings that emphasized relationships and relational connections to students. In other words, participants described tactical actions but in fact also engaged in relational actions. There was no obvious connection to these two sides of perceiving and managing disruptive student behaviour. This “disconnect” was puzzling.

At this point, I reflected on how I initially became interested in this topic and realized that I wanted to understand how teachers could take what appeared to be appropriate steps to manage students with disruptive behaviours but had not achieved those goals. I wanted to understand how this disconnect happened, where it happened, and how to prevent it.

**Theoretical model.** When analyzed together, two distinct sets of interactions can be seen. The first set is the tactical interactions, which represents the perceptions and management of disruptive behaviour. As noted above, the management of behaviour follows a defined process that is determined by the teacher who manages the student. The second set of interactions represents the relational activities that occur between the

teacher and students. The relational interactions include all activities that build relationships, trust, empathy, and engagement, such as asking questions, getting feedback, using humor, remembering personal details and checking in.

Initially, the data presented these two sets of interactions as operating independent of each other. In the interviews, participants would describe the process for perceiving and managing disruptive student behaviours as specific actions they took, listing of the various strategies they used such as clear expectations and classroom rules. As the interviews progressed and I prompted the participants to tell me more about the process and when strategies succeeded or failed and from this participants talked more in depth about how they interacted with students, which led to data around building relationships and connections with students. When teachers are able to maintain a continuous flow between tactical and relational interactions, teachers perceived more engagement from their students. This finding suggests relationality may mediate the success of behavioural strategies.

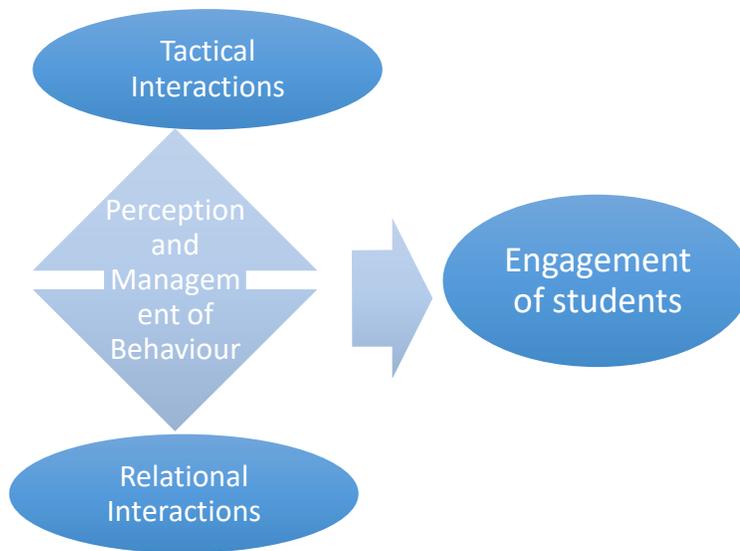
Viewed this way, the tactical and relational interactions operate as two separate aspects of managing behaviours in the classroom. Both aspects of interactions are cyclical within themselves. The tactical and relational aspects of interactions rarely intersected within the data set because teachers described their interactions with students using either tactical or relational aspects of interactions with students. Thus, teachers may try to satisfy the two types of interactions in isolation from each other when managing disruptive student behaviour. This lack of connection between tactical and relational aspects of interactions is where the “disconnect” happens when teachers perceive and manage students with disruptive behaviours. It should be noted that this disconnect was only evident at times when teachers were frustrated, suggesting that perhaps tactical and relational understandings and actions are integrated when they are operating optimally.

**Member checking.** During the development of the theoretical model, I shared my concepts with my senior supervisor and colleagues to gain their insights on understanding the emerging theory. These conversations gave me opportunity to talk through the themes and patterns I was seeing and confirm that I was allowing the data to tell the story. Additionally, I was able to clarify the elements of the model I was developing by responding to questions they asked.

To validate the findings of this study and the theoretical model, I conducted member checking with all thirteen study participants as well as others in my professional network in leadership positions with whom I had not previously discussed this research. A summary of the theoretical model along with all the findings presented in this chapter was sent to them in an email. They were asked to review the theoretical model and share whether it resonated with them, if they had any professional experiences that reflect this model, and if they had any questions or comments. Responses were requested within six days.

Within this time frame, seven people responded with their thoughts and feedback. All were study participants and they confirmed that the theory directly responds to the research question and resonated with their experiences dealing with students with disruptive behaviour. One respondent shared that this study was relevant to her work right now and that it is critical for teachers to remember to not lose sight of the importance of relationship, and find more balanced ways to maintain relationships when faced with students with disruptive behaviours.

By looking at the narratives, an interplay between tactical and relational interactions can be seen, which points to a new way of viewing how the two aspects of interactions could actually be interconnected versus independent of each other. Similar to a flower, the tactical and relational interactions actually operate as “petals” that are connected and grow out from the center- relationship with students. This connection between petals creates a system in which there is a continuous flow of interactions between the tactical and relational petals that transform perceptions and management of disruptive behaviour to engagement, forming a two-petal relational model (see Figure 4.1.).



**Figure 4.1. Two-petal relational model**

The two-petal relational model represents the interplay of the two sets of interactions that occur when teachers establish relationships with students that incorporate trust. In the two-petal relational model, teachers are able to prevent a “disconnect” by establishing relationships. They create an environment in which perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours can flow back and forth because elements such as building community, valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with students, and relationship building with students are present.

This model aligns with research participants’ descriptions of achieving more successful experiences with students with disruptive behaviours through relationships.

The analytic memo below captures the essence of the two-petal relational model:

Relationship is the starting point for connecting with students, and teachers’ success in including students with disruptive behaviours as part of the class community. It also subsequently informs teachers’ perceptions of disruptive student behaviours over the course of the year. In other words, relationship and inclusion are mutually supporting, and reinforcing. They are symbiotic. This process, of navigating interactions with students to meet the needs of individuals and the class, is at the core of this grounded theory. All the categories surround it. For instance, teachers are open, accepting, clear with their expectations with students primarily so that students will be willing to enter into relationship with their teachers; teachers deliberately use the relationship to then further their goal of “how to teach” as they strike a balance between the needs of the individual and the class. Moreover, this process is central to this grounded theory in that it was enacted by the teachers who were less frustrated with disruptive student behaviours, and not by teachers who struggled with disruptive student behaviours, leading me to believe that it is central to more positive perceptions and management of behaviours. (Analytic memo, February 2018)

## 4.7. Chapter Summary

The teachers interviewed in this study came from a group of economically diverse schools, and from across age groups and teaching experience. Despite these differences of context, there was much that these teachers had in common in terms of their definitions, experiences, and perceptions of disruptive student behaviour. For example, they spoke of their perceptions of disruptive student behaviour in terms of a “relationship”, or in some variation of that. These teachers emphasized relationship, going so far as to say that, “without relationship, they would not be able to teach.” Moreover, in their perceptions of disruptive student behaviour as a “relationship”, teachers had to think about the impact of disruptive behaviour on the student, other students and on themselves. That is, they felt they had to meet the needs of all students in the class by cultivating relationship, whether or not this happened.

The findings in this study show that different teachers have different experiences dealing with disruptive behaviours. There is no easy formula to determine if a teacher would be successful in managing behaviour because much of it depends on factors such as level of tolerance, experience, and self-awareness. However, when teachers are saturated with behaviour, they become especially frustrated if they do not have a connection with their students. Teachers typically find it challenging to have a relationship with students who are aggressive, violent or/and contemptuous. For example, a student who is belligerent whenever his teacher makes a request of him. This is when a relational disconnect happens and the importance of flowing and emergent use of relational and strategic actions in the two-petal model becomes especially important to support behavioural management in schools. In this study, I have identified that it is important for teachers to adjust their tactical interactions with their relational interactions.

# Chapter 5 Discussion

## 5.1. Chapter Overview

Teachers are constantly faced with the need to engage students in the learning environment. A core element of engaging students involves being able to manage behaviour so that students understand, participate, and can act upon the teacher's expectations in a harmonious environment. However, the management of disruptive student behaviours often fall short of these objectives. Instead, some students are disconnected, isolated, and struggle to cooperate with the teacher and other students. These are the students teachers typically have trouble entering into a relationship with. Teachers are often left feeling frustrated and confused as to why their efforts to manage behaviours are not effective, and they question how to improve their relationships with students.

When teachers are focused on using strategies to manage students, they are less proactive and less able to foster relationship with students before disruptions occur. These teachers tend to neglect relational activities that foster relationships with students. A disconnect between their actions relationally and tactically occurs. This chapter provides a summary of the study along with further discussion of major findings, areas for potential research, implications for practice, and a reflection of how this research impacted me personally as a school psychologist.

## 5.2. Summary

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory around the framework and logic used by teachers in determining what student behaviours were perceived to be disruptive. I set out to answer the questions: How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviours? And what are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy, and strategies? To answer these questions, I used grounded theory methodology and collected stories from thirteen participants about their experiences as elementary teachers managing disruptive student behaviours.

Throughout the study, I used a continuous process of collecting and analyzing data that kept me close to the data and allowed the concepts to emerge organically. This

intertwined process of data collection and data analysis allowed me to make connections between emerging concepts and a theoretical model that evolved as I moved from initial to theoretical coding. As a result, I generated a two-petal relational model, which demonstrates how a continuous flow between tactical interactions that inform the perceptions and management of disruptive student behaviours, and relational interactions that inform trust and relationship work together to build a foundation for managing disruptive student behaviours.

### 5.3. Discussion of Findings

**Two-petal relational model.** The first significant outcome of this study was a theoretical model- the two petal relational model- that demonstrates how to manage disruptive student behaviour by integrating tactical and relational interactions into one flow. This model is grounded in the research data and directly answers the research questions: How do experienced elementary school teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviours? And what are the relationships among their perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviour, teaching philosophy, and strategies? The two-petal relational model depicts both how to manage disruptive student behaviour by integrating tactical strategies with relationship building, to prevent a relational disconnect with students.

While having relationships with students is not a new concept, these findings point to the need to have these relationships to create an environment that allows students to receive corrections in behaviour and engage in a manner that allows students to take control. Additionally, the findings show that building these relationships is done through informal channels that allow different levels of connection between teachers and students, including getting feedback and the ability for students to make different choices that might not happen in other settings. Moreover, there is a division within the field in terms of behavioural strategies or relational pedagogies and these frameworks involve tactical or relational models but the petal model does not abandon strategic actions.

**Relational disconnect.** The second significant finding is the element of disconnect that can happen when managing disruptive student behaviour. This is a core part of the research question I aimed to understand. The data not only identified where the disconnect occurs when managing disruptive student behaviour, but also revealed how to overcome the disconnect. One may assume that a relational disconnect between

a teacher and student is a result of the information included or not included in the behaviour management strategy. However, this research demonstrated that a disconnect may actually be the result of lack of relationship between teachers and students, and that this lack of relationship affects the way messages are heard and understood.

**Role of relationships in behaviour management.** This study supports research on the topic of relationships between teachers and students. The building and maintenance of relationships, which is a key element in the two-petal relational model, is vital for providing an environment that not only fosters relationship, but also allows for a positive two-way discourse between teachers and students. By establishing authentic relationships with students, teachers are able to motivate and inspire them, which fulfills the teacher's role of working with students (Tjosvold & Wong, 2000). Relationships in schools can also be examined through research on teacher-student relationships, which can be defined as any communications and interactions among teachers and students in schools (Hattie, 2003). Communication is at the core of how people build relationships; communication and relationships form a directly correlated reactionary process. The more communication there is, the stronger the relationship. The stronger the relationship, the more communication there is.

When there is a lack of relationship in the behaviour management process, it affects two-way communication between teachers and students. The result is a behaviour management approach that students do not understand or value. This lack of relationship is evidenced in the data that pointed to a need for knowing students, understanding students, securing student buy-in and showing the relevance of the behaviour goals to the student's day-to-day behaviour. Buy-in and relevance are often direct outcomes of the level of relationship and trust that teachers have cultivated with students to make sure students understand how their daily behaviour fits into the larger picture of the classroom's culture and teacher's goals. Relationships are necessary for the more tactical approaches and direct strategies to be impactful.

**Desire to be a good teacher.** The participants in this study were not just teachers but people who wanted to be good teachers. They had expectations and ideals they aspired towards as teachers. They wanted their students to be happy, to feel engaged, and to be fulfilled. They cared about how their students felt and employed strategies to help them learn. This became evident as the participants shared their

perceptions on what teachers do or don't do, often stating, "a good teacher would..." An example of this is participants' discussions on the need to reach out and connect with students and how critical it is to their ability to be a good teacher. The connection here being that good teachers know their students well because they are actively taking the necessary actions to build relationships that allow them to manage students in a way that resonates and engages students.

**Class size and student support.** All of the participants stated that smaller class sizes were beneficial to behaviour management. However, they also reiterated that there can be more negative than positive behaviours and unsafe behaviours even in small classes, particularly when students did not have the support from educational assistants that they required. All the teachers in this study expressed they would not deal with behaviours that were considered unsafe to individual students, the class and/or the teacher. When safety was threatened and/or violated, teachers' threshold of responsibility and management of behaviour was reached. Also, teachers felt that larger class sizes with an additional adult were preferable to small class sizes without assistance. This work informs the conversation about class size and composition within B.C. and emphasizes the need for in class support over small class sizes.

Although aggressive and violent behaviour in students is low incidence, when it does happen, teachers are often left feeling shocked and vulnerable (Johnson et al., 2016). This study illustrates some of the extreme demands on teachers in their efforts to protect all students. These accounts can perhaps inform policy in terms of safety in the classroom and getting support into classrooms sooner even when there is not a formal designation.

**Role of community and inclusive cultures in behaviour management.** This study supports behaviour management practices that emphasize the need to understand and include students with disruptive behaviours as they relate to building classroom communities and an inclusive culture. In this study, several participants discussed how their approach to behaviour was connected to building a specific environment or culture that allowed them to more easily manage relationships with students. The importance of relationality and community building in terms of what "good teachers" do to support behaviour is highlighted.

The ability of teachers to understand the importance of community and an inclusive culture in schools is important for supporting positive behaviours because it creates an environment for relationships between teachers and students to exist. Many general education teachers feel the pressure to deliver the curriculum and to meet standards of academic achievement. Although there has been an emphasis on inclusive education in British Columbia Canada, the exploration of 'excellence' and 'equity' in the evolution of inclusion has emphasized the measurement of success mainly in terms of academic performance and it has had an inhibiting effect on moves towards increased inclusive practice (Naylor, 2005). This is because inclusion stresses equity and the academic and social development of all students in schools. The argument for 'excellence,' in contrast, has arguably focused on developing a meritocracy, where some students succeed while others fail. Accountability systems that promote 'excellence' may limit support for inclusion because many students with behaviour challenges may not reach the standards required (Lupart, 1999).

It may be argued that the pressure for academic achievement impedes inclusive attempts because it poses such a strain on teachers' time that it leads to the exclusion of students with disruptive behaviors from inclusive settings. The research shows that students with disruptive behaviors are six times more likely to be expelled than their peers (Hayden, 2000). Similarly, in the U.S., students with disruptive behaviors are at high risk of exclusion from general education settings (Crimmins & Berotti, 1996; National Centre for Educational Statistics, 1997; Riecher, 1990) due to the increase of discipline problems (Daniels, 1998). When teachers lose sight of students and an inclusive culture because they are too focused on achieving academic results and/or curricular goals, relational interactions break down and a culture of disconnect emerges.

**Behaviour management and professional decision making.** This finding makes visible what teachers attend to in terms of behavioural management and the sheer complexity of good professional decision-making. The examples provided in this study are helpful for teaching pre-service teachers and those struggling with behavioural management and can illuminate what teachers could pay attention to rather than a list of strategies. The critical importance of effective teaching, the importance of reflection, and relationship-building skills of teachers are highlighted. Teachers who possess these skills intuitively employ the two-petal relational model, creating classroom cultures and

environments where students are more engaged and better understand their role in achieving learning and behaviour goals. Teachers in this study who intuitively employed the two-petal model are self-aware, attentive to individual student needs, flexible, warm and caring as well as calm when dealing with behaviour.

This study also points to the dangers of having teachers who rely solely on managing behaviours without taking time to build rapport with students. Teachers who do not engage in building relationships with students are less likely to be effective and may struggle to secure student buy-in to learning as well as behaviour goals. Simply put, investing in students to build relationships will improve behaviour outcomes and engagement, resulting in better achievement and more harmonious environments.

**Implications for schools and teachers.** This study has several implications for schools and teachers. First, the study provides insights into the process that teachers may employ if they want to succeed in managing disruptive student behaviours or improve how they manage behaviours. The two-petal relational model provides a way for teachers to see what aspects of the model they currently use and what aspects they should consider. Using the model could be a way for teachers to reflect upon and analyze their approaches to find out what can be changed or improved.

Second, the two-petal relational model supports the need to develop interpersonal skills such as listening skills and the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions appropriately, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. The model demonstrates that integrating these skills to build relationships increases the effectiveness of behaviour management and improves the environment in which these behaviours occur. An environment that is conducive for relationships is also one in which two-way communication can occur between teachers and students. The communication should incorporate listening to and receiving feedback from students, which can lead to increased understanding and engagement by students.

## **5.4. Limitations**

The participants selected for this study had five or more years of teaching experience. The resulting findings are therefore restricted to teachers with similar in-service classroom experience. In addition, none of the participating teachers showed evidence of being consistently unsuccessful in managing disruptive behaviour. Although they may have had difficulty, overall they were managing their students' behaviour. It might be useful therefore to identify early career teachers who were having greater difficulty with student behaviours in order to better understand their perception and management of disruptive student behaviours.

This study also contains limitation of self-reported data. It is possible participants may exaggerate and/or feel embarrassed about their experience of managing disruptive behaviour. It might be useful to include observations of teachers in future studies to further verify reported experiences.

## **5.5. Suggestions for Future Research**

To address the limitations of this study, it would be valuable to replicate the study in a different environment(s) with a significantly diverse pool of participants. This would also address an additional limitation of the participants having a similar profile. Replicating the study in this way would allow testing of the two-petal model for applicability to a larger population, and could potentially validate, disprove, or add depth to the model. This study could also be replicated with teachers of different demographics, such as geographical area, grades taught etc. to understand if those factors would generate different results.

Future studies could also consider including students' perceptions of disruptive behavior to examine the results or influence on the teacher-student relationship when disruptive behaviour occurs.

Future research and analysis of evidence and non-evidence based strategies might also be useful to determine why and how teachers use strategies. This has the potential to 'debunk' strategies that are ineffective and to promote those which are evidence-based.

**Personal bias/Insights.** Throughout this study, I employed several steps to help avoid bias and bracket my preconceptions to avoid undue influence on my data collection and analysis. This began with identifying potential areas of bias in advance, including that I work in the field of education and have a role in which I assess behaviours of students. My current profession, role as a school psychologist and interest in behaviours provided a potential bias. While my experience helped me to gain insights into the perception and management of disruptive student behaviour, it also served as a potential hindrance to being open to how research participants expressed their experiences and processes. My professional expertise also assisted me during this research; I used my listening and comprehension skills to identify patterns and nuances in perceptions and management of disruptive behaviours.

Secondly, I used my memos and mind map to capture thoughts and concepts as they arose. Memos allowed me to identify and bracket potential biases and preconceptions as I worked through my research. The mind map gave me a way to capture my thoughts in a simple graphic format that limited the ability to infuse bias.

Lastly, throughout this study, I spoke with a variety of people about my research. This included casual conversations about being a graduate student to in-depth conversations about how student behaviours are perceived and managed, and other related topics. These conversations proved helpful as they aided my analysis and permitted me to see other perspectives that helped me to recognize when my bias crept in or when I made assumptions. However, I also had to be cautious with these conversations as they provided the opportunity to make assumptions or read things into the data that were not present.

**Final thoughts.** One of the most important things about this study was the reflective disposition of the participants. In my opinion, as a school psychologist, it is important to understand a teacher's position and professional background when looking at how teachers perceive and manage disruptive student behaviours. Throughout my interviews, one of the key traits among participants was the reference they made to learning from experience and reflecting back on previous experiences- both actions they had taken and those experienced while working with other teachers. In addition to reflecting on their own actions, all study participants told a story or presented an example

of things other teachers did that participants either admired or disliked. These examples and stories provided insights into how participants viewed their role as a teacher as it related to behaviour management, building relationships, and engaging students. The participants' reflections pointed to how they learned to be teachers either through observation or by trial and error. These observations helped shape participants' beliefs about what teachers should or should not do to be effective. Within these reflections I felt a deep sense of caring and also frustration on the part of the teachers. School psychologists could acknowledge this caring and frustration when consulting with teachers about disruptive behaviours.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

In this study, I aimed to understand the process teachers use to perceive and manage disruptive student behaviour through exploration of the personal experiences of thirteen elementary teachers. The results of the study produced a two-petal relational model that integrates both tactical actions of managing behaviour and relational actions for building relationships with students. By following these two "petals" of interactions, it is possible for teachers to create a continuous flow of interactions that fosters an environment conducive to understanding and managing behaviour. In this environment, students are more likely to understand, engage with, and respond to the teacher and his/her goals.

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# Appendix A.

## Teacher Interview Protocols

### October to December 2015

1. What is your teaching philosophy?
2. How would you describe the student population in this school? Why do parents choose this school?
3. What are the challenges of teaching at this school?
4. How effective would you say you and the teachers at this school generally are in meeting these challenges?
5. How would you describe the demographics of the students in your class?
6. How are students assigned and distributed in your class at the beginning of the school year?
7. How do you define behavior? Can you elaborate? Can you give an example?
8. How did your class behave today? A [If good] Why was it good? B [If some challenging] What aspects were challenging for you? Why?
9. What do disruptive student behaviors look like in your classroom? Why is this disruptive for you?
10. Choose one of these students. Why do you think s/he was struggling with behavior? What do you feel the student needs to become more successful?
11. Please describe how you deal (action) with disruptive student behaviors in your classroom? What do teachers usually do in these situations? Do most teachers use these strategies?
12. Please describe some common feelings you experience when dealing with disruptive behaviors? Are there any feelings that were surprising and/or alarming to you? How often do you experience these feelings?
13. Please describe some common thoughts you experience when dealing with disruptive behaviors? Please describe some common thoughts you have about the student? Please elaborate? Can you explain why?
14. Please describe how you deal (action) with these feelings and/or thoughts? Can you think of anything else you might do?

15. Do you ever ask for help? If yes, why do you feel you need help? If not, why not? Please describe situations when you decided you should seek help. Can you elaborate on that? What was it that made you finally ask for help? Please describe situations when you decided not to seek help. Can you elaborate on that? What was it that prevented or made you hesitate to ask for help?
16. Please describe dilemmas you face when you think about asking for help? Can you explain further? Why? What other dilemmas do you face?
17. Describe your experience to seek help to deal with disruptive behaviors in your classroom? Tell me more about your experience. Was it positive, negative, neutral? Was it easy, difficult or confusing to ask for help?
18. How do you feel when you have to ask for help to deal with disruptive behaviors? Can you describe the feelings you experienced?
19. Who do you ask? Where else do you turn to ask for help? Can you think of other supports you use or turn to?
20. Describe the kind of support/help are you looking for? Elaborate on what makes you think or/and feel a difference is going to be made?
21. How do you know you are being supported? How do you feel when you are supported? Can you elaborate on how or what that might look like?
22. Describe the characteristics of helpful and effective resources and/or people? What gave you the impression they will be helpful and effective?
23. How do you know they have been helpful/effective? How do you feel in these situations of support? Can you give some examples? Can you elaborate?
24. Describe what has been helpful and/or unhelping in managing disruptive behaviors? Can you think of more examples/incidents? Can you elaborate on that?
25. Please describe what happened when you asked for help? What did you do after you received help? Can you elaborate? What else did you do?
26. How did the experience of asking for help impact/influence you? Can you elaborate? Can you tell me more about how it changed the way you deal with disruptive behaviors?

## February to April 2016

1. In general do you feel that teachers can be very effective in dealing with many behavior and management issues? Do you feel that is happening in your class and with respect to your teaching?
2. Often teachers have very high ideal about their abilities to shape student behaviors, influence learning and improve the next generation, do you see yourself as a teacher who can do those things? What kind of image do you have of yourself as a teacher? (How much faith do they have in the teaching profession?)
3. Recall from interview: What does being a teacher and the profession of teaching mean to you? What brought you to teach? How is what you are currently experiencing different from that? How is that different or similar to what you are doing in your classroom?
4. Various images have been used to describe children, do you see them as empty vessels, sponges, interactive or powerful and capable? How would you describe your students? What are the images you have of your students? How does your image of children relate to your classroom management style?
5. From classroom observations, it seemed like there are behaviors in classes that are disruptive and teachers are struggling with those behaviors, why do you think this is happening? And who do you think “owns’ the problem”? (Question about disconnect between the scale and interview). Do you think you can teach these students or improve their behaviors despite their challenges (i.e. dysfunctional family, diagnosis, poverty)? How do you make sense of these challenges? What was the rationale for your decision? On the scale, you sounded positive about being able to meet the needs of your students and manage their behaviors, in the interview you said XXX. However, I observed many different behaviors that you were dealing with in your class. So do you see a tension between what you think you can do and what you are trying to do?

6. What does classroom management mean to you? Where did you learn about classroom management? How does your knowledge of classroom management help or hinder your ability to cope with behaviors in the classroom? Overall do you feel prepared to deal with student behaviors? Would you describe yourself as confident in that style? What goals do you have for yourself in this area?
7. What experiences help you feel you are more effective in managing your class? (practice, theory, workshops?) For example, do you find that your work in the practical (classroom) setting helps you to develop your own style of management rather than reading about it or having a program available? What do you find most useful? How did that evolve? Can you think of other things that would help you to manage your class?
8. Are there workplace experiences that help or hinder your ability to manage behaviors? What actions support you and what erodes your confidence?
9. Do you ever reach a point where you feel you could change the student's behaviors but you have given up managing behaviors? Or feel it is not worth it? Why and why not?
10. Recall from interview on dealing with stress. How were you affected personally?
11. A student in your classroom has been designated as "Students Requiring Intense Behavior Intervention/Students with Serious Mental Illness" or "Students requiring Behavior Support/Students with Mental Illness", what does that mean to you? How will manage this student? Are there student behaviors in the classroom that you consider beyond the scope of your job as a teacher? Why do you feel these student behaviors are beyond or within the scope of teaching?
12. How do you distinguish which are the students you can influence and who you cannot?
13. It seems like your ability to engage students and manage the classroom is impacted by how much parental support you receive. Can you elaborate on this?

14. From September to June, do you see changes in the behaviors of your classroom? Are these behaviors acute and taking place at only certain points or chronic? For example, do you see big changes in September-October where things start to settle down or are you dealing with disruptions the entire school year? What about transitions across the day? Do you see acute disruptions based on transitions from activity to activity and then settling in or are the disruptions chronic and unpredictable throughout the entire day?
15. Are there any pros and cons having a diverse classroom? How does the diverse classroom change your teaching or ways of managing the classroom?
16. Have you used any social emotional programs that strengthen students' socio-emotional development? Can you give some examples?

## **October 2017 to January 2018**

1. Can you describe your current class?
2. Have you noticed a difference in the types and frequency of disruptive behaviours in your classroom?
3. Has this Supreme Court decision affected your classroom situation? If so, how and in what way?
4. Are there any advantages and disadvantages of the new system/context?
5. How do you feel about these changes? How are you responding to these changes as it relates to managing disruptive behaviours? Have the changes affected your management style?
6. How is your school responding to these changes?
7. Can you describe how this may have impacted the most challenging times or transitions when disruptive behaviours seem to occur during the school day? Why is this so?
8. What are the issues that hinder or help how you manage disruptive student behaviours?
9. Are there supports in place to help you solve behaviour challenges? Is the referral system addressing your needs?
10. Can you describe a series of actions or steps (process) on how you deal with students with disruptive behaviours in the classroom?
11. In particular, what strategies, approach or process do you use to assess and evaluate what you need to do to deal with disruptive behaviours?
12. What are some thoughts, actions or feelings that occur when you are dealing with the disruptive behaviours in your class?
13. Can you elaborate on the strategies and approach you use to manage particularly disruptive behaviours in your classroom?
14. What are some thoughts, actions or feelings that occur when you do not see any improvements after you have changed your approach or tried some strategies?
15. What do you do to feel more in control of your classroom when disruptive behaviours are occurring or seem out of hand?
16. How do you balance your expectations as a teacher and needs of the class when dealing with disruptive student behaviours? For example, how important is it to meet curriculum expectations for the year?

17. Are there or have there been moments when you cannot figure out what is going on with a particularly disruptive student? What do you do in the moment to deal with the behaviour?
18. Given that the behaviours do not improve, what do you do to manage this issue for the rest of the year?
19. When you understand why a student may be disruptive, how does this help you in managing the behaviour? What changes do you make in managing the behaviour? How does this impact your teaching practice?
20. How do you evaluate your effectiveness in managing the disruptive behaviours that occur in class?

## Appendix B.

### Conditional Relationship Guide

Conditional Relationship Guide (Scott & Howell, 2008)		Contextual conditions and boundaries	Contextual conditions and boundaries	Contextual conditions and boundaries	Actions and interactions among categories	Overall meaning of the entire category
<b>Category</b>	<b>What</b> is the category?	<b>When</b> does the category occur?	<b>Where</b> does the category occur?	<b>Why</b> does the category occur?	<b>How</b> does the category occur?	<b>Consequences</b> (with what consequences does the category occur or is the category understood?)
Relationship Building	Interacting with students	Throughout the school year	<p>During incidents when student is misbehaving</p> <p>During interruptions in class activities</p> <p>When class is out of control</p> <p>When the teacher feels overwhelmed</p> <p>When there is no help</p>	<p>See changes in behaviour</p> <p>Foster change and learning</p> <p>Take control</p> <p>Ensure safety</p> <p>Meet diverse needs</p>	<p>By getting to know the student</p> <p>By establishing rules and expectations</p> <p>By getting parents and other professionals involved</p> <p>By focusing on the needs the class</p>	Choice

			During day-to-day interactions  Any time of the day/year		By watching student  By realizing there is no support  Providing successful experiences	
Community of Learners	Diverse student population requiring support	Throughout the school year	In the classroom	Identified students with specific needs  Unidentified students with a variety of needs	Lack of additional resources  Lack of knowledge  Class size & composition	Perception
Value Learner Diversity	Conflicts and demands in the classroom	Throughout the school year	In the classroom	Foster learning and appropriate behaviours  Responsibility	By focusing on the needs of the students  Building on student's strengths	Belief
Support all learners	Relying on yourself	Throughout the school year  When incidents occur	In the classroom	Diverse needs in the class  Safety of all	By finding and utilizing resources  Planning and/or preparing ahead	Belief

					Organizing smaller groups	
Work with students	Finding solutions	Throughout the school year	In the classroom	<p>Because there are no changes in students' behaviour over time</p> <p>Losing control/out of control</p>	<p>By observing little or no improvement in student behaviour</p> <p>By referring the student to another professional</p>	Outcome

# Appendix C.

Reflective Coding Matrix

<b>Reflective Coding Matrix</b>					
<p><b>Core Category</b></p> <p><b>(Concept: A pattern of behaviour; and in this pattern of behaviour, you see the general implications)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main concern of the population of your substantive area (<b>managing disruptive behaviours</b>) and</li> <li>how that concern is resolved or processed.</li> </ul> <p>What is this data a study of? Teachers' responses and actions/experiences with behavioural challenges in the classroom.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Relationship</b></p>				
<p><b>Properties (what)</b></p> <p>(characteristics of category)</p>	Position	Approach	Perception	Purpose	Outcome
<p><b>Processes (how)</b></p> <p>(actions/interaction)</p> <p><b>Strategic or routine tactics or the how by which persons handle situations, problems, and issues they encounter</b></p>	<p>Responding to the students (classroom)</p> <p>Response</p>	<p>Focus on teacher-student relationship</p> <p>Choice</p>	<p>Adapt and modify strategies and approach</p> <p>Belief</p>	<p>Directing the class</p> <p>Decision</p>	<p>Anticipate, plan, organize and prepare</p> <p>Development</p>
<p><b>Dimensions</b></p> <p>(property located on continuum)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Navigating needs</li> <li>▪ Class size</li> <li>▪ Class composition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationship</li> <li>▪ Engaging students (humor, recognize strengths,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Modify perceptions of behaviour</li> <li>▪ Adjust strategies used with students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflection on the teacher</li> <li>▪ Looking to the system for help</li> <li>▪ Having a framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Navigating behaviour</li> <li>▪ Self-care</li> <li>▪ Concern about student and teacher safety</li> <li>▪ Help seeking</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No. of IEPs</li> <li>▪ School culture</li> <li>▪ Community culture</li> <li>▪ Change in student population</li> <li>▪ Types, frequency and intensity of behaviours (acceptable and disruptive behaviours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>focus on positive)</li> <li>▪ Nipping behaviours</li> <li>▪ Approaching and working with parents to improve relationship</li> <li>▪ Evaluating reasons for behavior and learning</li> <li>▪ Images of children (beliefs of children)</li> <li>▪ Philosophy of teaching (image of teacher; beliefs about teaching)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting students' needs (academic, emotional and social)</li> <li>▪ Routines and structure</li> <li>▪ Balancing between individual versus class needs.</li> <li>▪ Fairness &amp; justice</li> <li>▪ Teacher as leader/model versus instructor</li> <li>▪ Celebrate successes to focusing on negative behaviours</li> <li>▪ Authoritative to authoritarian styles</li> <li>▪ Adapting to student or students adapt to teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to manage behaviours</li> <li>▪ Loss of control/lack of control</li> <li>▪ At a loss of what to do with persistent behaviours</li> <li>▪ Lack of understanding of students</li> <li>▪ Questioning administrator's decisions</li> <li>▪ Professional expectations from a teacher</li> <li>▪ Questioning or doubting one's own ability</li> <li>▪ Not acknowledged for expertise</li> <li>▪ Emotional versus objective</li> <li>▪ Support is lacking</li> <li>▪ Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Approaching friends/colleagues for help</li> <li>▪ Help that makes a difference</li> <li>▪ Behaviours are not a teacher's job.</li> <li>▪ Ownership of behaviours</li> <li>▪ Beliefs about teaching</li> <li>▪ Beliefs about children</li> <li>▪ Time</li> <li>▪ Fair rules and consequences</li> <li>▪ Being reactive versus protective</li> <li>▪ Being explicit with rules/expectations</li> <li>▪ Broad understanding and definition of classroom management</li> <li>▪ Restorative to isolating</li> </ul>
<b>Contexts (when &amp; where)</b>	When there are a diverse range of learners and abilities in the classroom	In everyday interactions in class	When behaviours persist	When deciding on what to do with persistent behaviours occurring in the classroom.	When dealing with disruptive behaviours

<b>Modes for understanding the consequences</b>	Pulled in different directions	"Being kind but firm"	Confidence	"Making a call"	"Tipping points"
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## Appendix D.

### Analytic Memo Example

March 2016

#### **Navigation with caution- Responsibility for behaviors**

Teachers have different thresholds or “tipping point” for disruptive behaviors in their classrooms. The most common boundary (across all 13 teachers) that cannot be crossed is safety of the student, other students and the teacher. When a student has hurt himself, others or the teacher, teachers tend to refuse to deal with the student’s misbehaviors as much as possible for the rest of the year. The teacher will make frequent referrals to the office (Principal) or call home after a serious incident or two. This is because they believe a student who harms himself, hurts other students or hurts the teacher is not “typical” and the type of teaching or caring the student requires is out of the scope of their teaching responsibility. This usually implies the student has “special needs” that cannot be met by the teacher and requires additional community support (i.e. psychiatrist, mental health therapist, social worker).

The other boundary/“tipping point” is frequency and type of disruptive behaviors (i.e. defiance, oppositional, talking back) and tends to be more variable. This boundary seems to depend on the philosophy, approach and perspective of the teacher. Teachers who seem to handle these behaviors better are proactive and preventive. They have a positive view of the students despite complex family backgrounds and student needs and find ways and play to the students’ strengths in the classroom. They are frequently connecting (i.e. remembering things that are important to the student) and attending to the student (i.e. more one-to-one time). They accommodate and modify work to be appropriate for student and give the student as many options as possible (i.e. breaks outside of the classroom, running up stairs, holding onto weighted objects, carrying heavy books to another class, not doing any writing but doing work orally, peers helping each other) to adjust and function in the classroom. The teachers who struggle are those who focus on the offence/incidents, dig their heels in and try to enforce rules. These teachers tend to get into a power struggle with the student, escalates the student and

often ends up sending the student to the office or home. Their relationship with these students tends to deteriorate and worsen.

Another boundary/"tipping point" is fairness to the other students. Teachers make decisions on where, what and who they want to spend their time and efforts on during class time. If they perceive a student to be wasting their time and energy and especially if their efforts will lead to nowhere (i.e. no improvements or results), teachers tend to refer the student to the office, send the student away with an educational assistant and/or focus their energy on the other students. This approach/reasoning seems to reiterate and justify the teacher's reasoning as to why they need to focus on the class and not the student with behaviours. This approach does not help the teacher build a stronger relationship with the student because the teacher is sending the message that the student is not wanted in the classroom.

Teachers are cognizant that parents and family values/environments have an influence on students and this influence can have an impact on the student's behaviors in the classroom. When teachers focus on how dysfunctional the student's family or how "dysfunctional" the student is, it seems like they perceive teaching these students to be more difficult than other students. When teachers focus on the student's strengths and current skill level, they find it easier to accommodate lessons for the students (i.e. treat them similarly to other students).

November 2017

### **Control and Care**

All the teachers agree that the Principal or the special education teacher is the go-to person when there is an emergency or crisis situation (i.e. a student throws a chair or table in the class, runs away from school, threatens another student verbally or physically, hits the teacher or educational assistant). From the teacher's perspective, the principal's role is to deal with the crisis situation because the teacher has to return to the classroom to teach the rest of the students. For many teachers, the Principal or special education teacher is also the go-to person when a student with frequent disruptive behaviors (i.e. swearing at the teacher, defiant & oppositional, punching doors and walls, disrupting other students) interrupts the class. It seems like teachers decide that they are no longer in control of the student when they refer a student to the Principal to be dealt

with. The question is why do these behaviors explode in some teachers' faces while some teachers can get their students to manage their behaviors? Also, after an altercation with the teacher, what is done to repair the relationship between the teacher and the student? What does the teacher do to repair and strengthen the relationship so that the behavior does not appear as frequently? How can the teacher work more collaboratively with the parents to help improve the behaviors? It seems obvious that the teacher is not motivating the student in an optimal manner but the teacher doesn't seem to realize that.

Often when a teacher goes to the Principal to ask for help with a student's behaviors, teachers are told to try "different strategies" and "to deal with it" on their own but they are not taught to repair and strengthen damaged relationships with students. The teacher continues the next day as if nothing happened and the student has either been scolded, suspended or a call went home. They start the next week with nothing changed, things worsen and the conflict deepens and escalates.

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**Relationship, Classroom culture and Teaching Practice versus Responsibility, Control and Care. How do they influence each other? What are the exceptionalities?**

Teachers feel relationship with students is crucial. They even suggest that without a relationship with students, teaching is nearly impossible. If teachers perceive they have a good relationship with students, they have more control or influence over the student's behaviors. Only when behaviors are positive or "under control", learning can happen. Teachers believe that behaviors arise from some type of difficulty/challenge the student is experiencing (i.e. cannot read or write, lack of attention at home, angry, hungry, neglected). When the difficulty/challenge is adapted or accommodated, the student is less frustrated and less behavior occurs in class. The issue is does the teacher think he/she can remedy the difficulty/challenge the student has (teaching practice)?

Teachers feel it is their responsibility to offer a relationship to students but teachers are not in control of whether students take up/accept the offer. The success of an offer depends on the classroom culture (i.e. number of students identified, class size, class composition, personality of students, family background), the type of relationship the

teacher is able to make/negotiate with the student and how the teacher makes sense of, daily interactions with the student and how he/she uses his/her teaching practice to meet the needs of the student (i.e. approach, beliefs about teaching and children).

Teachers feel they have a responsibility and need to have control over atmosphere or 'culture' of the classroom although they have no control over who joins their classes each year. Teachers are generally protective and have clear expectations of what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in their classes. Teachers often talk about "protecting" the other students from a disruptive student who may be violent or display threatening behaviors. Teachers feel very responsible for what happens to their students. Most teachers talk about building a community and compared the relationships in the classroom functioning like a family. Most of the teachers seem to try to influence and gain parental support but with little impact.

Teaching practice or the teacher's ability to adapt to different circumstances depends on how much responsibility they feel towards/for the student and in control (ability to exert influence) they feel about a certain student.

It seems like teachers who take the most responsibility (for the student and their teaching practice) need the least amount of control in their classroom to deal with disruptive behaviors more successfully.

## Appendix E.

### Interview Transcript Excerpt

MN: What is your teaching philosophy?

Subject: Teaching philosophy. When children come here I want them to feel love. That is why I have my love up there. I want them first of all to feel welcome, to feel safe and comfortable and to get to know me and for me to get to know them because if we don't have that as our basis, we can't do anything. So what we have worked on here the first term is having our kindergarten family be developed. Our community.

MN: Tell me more.

Subject: That includes people with special needs and we have discussed that. We have witnessed the one child I have in the class this year who struggles with language. When she was the special helper the other day the children were, because all she said was "umgh , umgh ... and there was a few words that made sense and then we discussed how would that be if you couldn't use language like that? They were filled with empathy towards her after that but before that they didn't understand why she screamed. They didn't understand.

MN: Why do you do that?

Subject: My teaching philosophy is first of all with teaching you have relationships. You have to know your students.

MN: How do you do that?

Subject: You have to know your parents' names. You have to know something about them. You have to know what dog they have and cat they have and what their favorite color is and when their birthday is. You have to have a relationship otherwise what you are trying to do doesn't work. I guess my philosophy is that this becomes a family and families fight, families get along, families you know, but they always make it right.

MN: You teach your students to get along with others?

Subject: Yes, there are people here that are annoying and that might have annoying tendencies but we have to work with them because that is life. This place prepares kids for life and in your work place there will be people that will annoy you and rather than moving work places you will learn strategies to get along. Really I am preparing these kids for the world outside these walls so what we do here each day reflects that I think and I see, I mean I am not filling up empty vessels, that is not my . . . we are discussing things and we are learning about the world but they come also with information and gifts so collectively we learn from each other. It is not just my job to “ok you sit and I will fill you up” right? Collectively we all have knowledge and we learn from each other. We are a family and that is how I see it.