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Preschool Teacher Perspectives on Challenging Behavior and Behavior Management in Teacher-Student Relationships

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2020

Abstract

Preschool Teacher Perspectives on Challenging Behavior and Behavior Management in

Teacher-Student Relationships

by

Elizabeth Uchegbu

BA Creative Arts, 1989

MA. Early Childhood Education, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Challenging behavior is an expected part of development among preschool children, but persistent disruptive behaviors can lead to teacher stress and burnout and negative student-teacher relationships. Challenging behaviors are disruptive behaviors that interfere with teaching and learning and can sometimes threaten the safety of children and teachers in the classroom. According to current research, students' academic success is contingent on the nature of the relationships they have with their teachers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behaviors and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect relationships with students who exhibit challenging behaviors. Research questions focused on teacher description of how challenging behavior and their response to this behavior affects their relationship with the child. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping served as this study's conceptual framework for this study. Data for this study were gathered from 10 Head Start teachers who were interviewed using the think-aloud interview method applied to scenarios depicting challenging behavior that were drawn from actual events. Thematic coding was applied to the resulting data to answer the study's research questions. Study findings showed that most teachers believed challenging behaviors and behavior management do not affect their teacher-student relationships, but some teachers felt threatened by children who exhibit challenging behavior. The findings of this study may support the inclusive perspective of Head Start teachers in response to challenging behaviors and may lead to increased support for teachers and the children they serve.

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Dedication

I dedicate this degree to my husband Chuka and my beautiful daughters Adebusola and Damilola. You were all there for me through the computer crashes, the tears, the early morning alarms and the long drives to my residencies. Thank you all for your subtle reminders when I sit at the computer for over nine hours straight on the weekends. I thank My sister Amaka for all her support, encouragements and prayers, I wish Nosike and Chike lived to see this dream come to past. I could not have started and completed this without you guys. I hope I have inspired my brilliant daughters to do it all, give it all, and to achieve their dreams.

Acknowledgments

I will start by thanking God for His mercy and grace without which I would not have ventured into this four-year-long adventure. I thank my Walden University faculty, Dr. Cale, Dr. Curtis and especially Dr. Anderson who guided me through this process, celebrated the little millstones along the way, and did not sugar coat the process when I stated that I could do it all in a term. My Walden experience has been like the birth of a new me, which has led me to start several initiatives in my workplace. Social change is now more than what I watch people do, I feel responsible for improving and making things better. My Walden education is more than just getting the degree, the entire experience has helped me grow academically and socially and I believe that there is still more I can do as an educator and child advocate.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Challenging behavior is typical among preschool-aged children (Knopf, 2016).

Challenging behaviors are disruptive behaviors that interfere with teaching and learning

and can sometimes threaten the safety of children and teachers in the classroom.

However, the strategies that teachers use to manage challenging behaviors can affect the

relationship between teachers and students (Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, &

Doolaard, 2016). In this study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding

challenging behavior and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could

affect relationships with students who exhibit such behaviors. This basic qualitative study

will add to existing literature regarding challenging behavior in preschool children. Zee,

de Jong, and Koomen (2017) stated that little is known about preschool teachers'

perspectives regarding how managing challenging behavior affects teacher-student

relationships. In this chapter, I present the background of the problem, problem

statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, scope and

limitation of the study, and significance of the study. I present a brief look at literature on

challenging behavior and the value of healthy teacher-student bonds in preschool

education.

Background

According to the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional

Children (2017), children from birth to the age of eight are still developing social-

emotional competence and their emerging skills can result in behaviors that adults and

peers may find challenging. According to Buettner, Jeon, Hur, and Garcia (2016), early

childhood education is critical to children's social and emotional growth. Although

challenging behaviors are an expected part of preschool children's development, Fettig

and Ostrosky (2014) said that most children only engage in such behaviors periodically,

while others become entirely dependent on using challenging behaviors to get their needs

met. Preschool teachers have the task of helping children develop not just academically,

but also socially and emotionally (Ocasio, Alst, Koivunen, Huang, & Allegra, 2015).

According to Allday (2018) managing challenging behaviors remains one of the biggest

trials for classroom teachers. Beaudoin, Mihic, and Loncaric (2018) found that managing

children's disruptive behavior is part of the teaching process that teachers constantly find

challenging. According to Kirkhaug et al. (2016), children who exhibit severe

challenging behaviors at school are at risk of poor outcomes, including substandard

performance in school, poor social competence, conflict with teachers, early school

leaving, future criminal behavior, and future unemployment. Miller, Smith-Bonahue, and

Kemple (2017) found that interventions can effectively reduce and in most cases

eliminate challenging behaviors. Zinsser, Christensen, and Torres (2016) noted that

teachers do not get enough support and coaching in behavior management and ways to

best teach social-emotional skills to children.

McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) found that the bond between teachers and

students has a significant influence on children's overall development. Trang and Hansen

(2020) found that children who have warm and supportive relationships with their

teachers participate more in class and are less likely to act out. Diaz et al. (2017) stated

that students' academic success is contingent on the quality of their relationships with

their teachers, how well they can keep from displaying challenging behaviors, and engagement in school. The educational and social advantages of a positive teacher-student relationship create the need for a study on preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships. According to Zee et al. (2017), more research is needed concerning preschool teachers' perspectives regarding managing challenging behavior and the effects of behavior management on their relationships with individual students. This study filled the knowledge gap that exists regarding the effects of challenging behavior from preschool teachers' perspectives.

Problem Statement

The problem of this basic qualitative study was that little is known about preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effect of children's challenging behaviors and teachers' responses to those behaviors on teacher-student relationships. According to Garrity, Longstreth, Linder, and Salcedo Potter (2019), finding a solution to the problem of challenging behavior in the early childhood classroom has become an urgent national priority in the United States. Finding a solution to this problem is even more urgent because a reported 10% to 21% of preschool children exhibit challenging behaviors (Garrity et al., 2019). Martin, Bosk, and Bailey (2018) reported that 6.7 preschoolers were expelled per 1000, a rate three times higher than K-12 expulsion. Challenging behavior in students causes nearly half of beginning teachers to leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years on the job (Latifoglu, 2016).

Occasional negative verbal and physical outbursts are expected as children grow and learn to solve problems. According to Graziano, Garb, Ros, Hart, and Garcia (2016), children who exhibit aggressive, impulsive, hyperactive, and inattentive behaviors typically lack school readiness skills and are more likely to find transitioning to formal school more difficult than other children. Miller et al. (2017) reported that the typical approach teachers have towards challenging behavior is reactive, and this in most cases results in exclusion of the child rather than remediating the behavior or its causes.

Sutherland et al. (2018) found that behavior problems that recur can result in teacher-child interactions and relationships that are adversarial, especially if teachers lack the skill and experience needed to reduce problem behavior and contribute to a hostile classroom climate. Behavior problems create unpleasant teacher-student interactions that eventually affect relationships. Zee et al. (2017) said that there is a reciprocal relationship between students' behaviors and teachers' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship, so that disharmonious relationships and escalating behavior problems create a negative feedback loop. Zee et al. (2017) reported that little is known about preschool teachers' perspectives regarding how managing challenging behavior affects teacher-student relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behaviors and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect relationships with students who exhibit such behaviors. I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews following the think-aloud interview

method, in which participants responded to written scenarios describing real life incidents involving challenging behaviors. As indicated in Chapter 3, these scenarios were provided by preschool teachers who were asked to describe challenging behavior events they experienced in their own classrooms. Participants using the think-aloud interview method tell what they are thinking as they consider a task, and the researcher records expressions of their thoughts, using as few prompts as possible. With the think-aloud interview, there are no interview questions. Using the think-aloud interview method in this study supported my discovery of teacher perspectives and decision-making in real time. This study filled the gap the literature concerning challenging behavior and the effect of behavior management strategies that teachers use with students. The study may add to the knowledge of challenging behavior from the perspective of preschool teachers.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe effects of challenging behaviors on relationships they have with students who exhibit such behaviors?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe effects of behavior management strategies they use to address such behaviors on relationships they have with students who exhibit them?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study was based on the Lazarus and Folkman transactional model of stress and coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) said that the way people react, feel, and behave is determined by their appraisal of a situation and their perceived position in relation to that situation. The Lazarus and

Folkman transactional model frames the study's research questions concerning the transactional nature of teacher-student relationships and the effects challenging behaviors might have on such relationships. The teacher-student relationship can be considered as a form of transaction. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1987), the terms transaction and relationship can be used interchangeably; while transactions emphasize the interplay between variables, relationships focus on the convergence of variables. The Lazarus and Folkman transactional model emphasizes the varied results of individual appraisals of situations and will guide the data collection method for this study. Based on this framework, the way teachers respond to children's behavior problems may depend on their appraisals of the situations.

Jennings and Greenberg's idea of the prosocial classroom could have served as the foundation for this study, because it emphasizes the need for teachers' social and psychological competence in developing and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship. The prosocial classroom framework can be used as a foundation for studying teacher-student relationships and teacher competence in managing challenging behaviors and developing effective behavior management strategies. However, this model does not address the reciprocal nature of the student-teacher relationship and the ways that teachers' self-appraisals may be affected by feedback they receive from children. This reciprocal component was provided by Lazarus and Folkman.

The Lazarus and Folkman transactional model on stress and coping guided me in exploring the gap in literature. A more in-depth analysis of the transactional model of stress and coping, including a description of previous studies based on this model, is

presented in Chapter 2. For this study, the Lazarus and Folkman transactional model was used to explore teachers' appraisal of the effect that challenging behaviors that children exhibit might affect their relationship with those children. Data collection for this study was done using interviews following the think-aloud interview method. This interviewing method permitted me to gather teachers' appraisals and thoughts in real time in consideration of hypothetical scenarios involving challenging behavior.

Nature of Study

This study was a basic qualitative design based on interviews. A basic qualitative method was the best fit for this research considering that the goal of the study was to understand the effect of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships, and the primary focus of the study was to explore teachers' perspectives. Displays of challenging behavior are expected as children grow. However, the intensity and frequency of the occurrence of these behaviors can become a cause for concern, and while teachers are responsible for managing students that display challenging behavior, this study sought to explore if the behaviors and the strategies that teachers use to manage them can affect their relationships with students.

I collected data for this study by using the think-aloud interview method to interview 10 teachers who teach three- and four-year-old preschoolers in Head Start centers in a large city in the Northeastern United States. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that the need for triangulation of data can be satisfied through interviews alone when participants provide thick, rich data. Burkholder, Cox, and Crawford (2016) said that even though triangulation can imply three data sources, it should be more than one

but not necessarily three. I further enhanced my study triangulation by keeping a research journal in which I documented research experiences, adjustments, and biases.

The think-aloud interview method relies on verbalization of participants' thoughts while engaged in the performance of a task (Guss, 2018). Study participants who are involved in a think-aloud interview are asked by the interviewer to say everything they are thinking in an impromptu manner while performing a task, without analyzing, editing, or interpreting their thoughts. To carry out the think-aloud interview method, I gave study participants scenarios drawn from real experiences of preschool teachers that describe challenging behavior, and asked for their spontaneous responses regarding how they imagined that the described behaviors would affect their relationship with the child and how their management of the behavior might affect their relationship with that child. The think-aloud interview method had the potential to yield rich data pertinent to issues involving dealing with challenging behavior. Exploring teachers' spontaneous reactions to study scenarios contributes to the validity of the study. I analyzed study interviews with a priori and open coding methods. I manually coded the study transcripts using Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word has some basic functions that do not require programming skills which researchers can use for qualitative coding.

Definitions

Appraisal: A constant evaluation of what is happening from the standpoint of the significance of the action or event to an individual's wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Burnout: In this study, burnout refers to burnout in the teaching profession. Burnout refers to the level of emotional and physical weakness and exhaustion teachers feel, especially about their work (De Stasio, Fiorilli, Benevene, Uusitalo-Malmivaara, & Di Chiacchio, 2017).

Challenging behavior: Behaviors that are typically seen in the classroom that interfere with instructional time and student learning (Young & Martinez, 2016)

Disruptive behaviors: Behaviors that hamper an educator's ability to teach and prevent other children from learning (McCormick, Turbeville, Barnes, & McClowry, 2014).

Think-aloud protocol interview: A method of research that requires study partakers to verbalize their thoughts when performing tasks. This method makes it possible for researchers to gain insights that are difficult to obtain from mere observations.

Assumptions

I assumed that the 10 teachers that I interviewed using the think-aloud interview method responded to the study scenarios with honest reflections and provided responses and assessments of each scenario that reflected their true beliefs and actions. I also assumed that the study scenarios are representative of incidents involving challenging behaviors that participating teachers might have experienced. The scenarios for this study were gathered from actual classroom experiences of preschool teachers, so this assumption is a reasonable one. I also assumed that the teachers who participated in this

study were representative of preschool teachers generally. Participants chosen from those who volunteered and did include teachers whom I know personally.

Finally, I acknowledge that I brought certain biases to the study because of my years of teaching preschool and experiences with challenging behavior. The think-aloud interview method limits the comments an interviewer may make, so my interviews did include leading and follow up questions that might betray my own point of view. I practiced being objective during the data collection and data analysis processes. I also kept a research journal to record knowledge I gained during the research process so that I was better able to identify and separate my thoughts, ideas, and perceptions from those presented in my data. Case (2017) suggested that keeping a research journal helps externalize a researcher's feelings, beliefs, and opinions, and leads to self-reflection.

Scope and Delimitations

This was a basic qualitative study that involved the think-aloud interview method to explore teachers' perspectives regarding the effect of preschool children's challenging behavior. I also explored how such behaviors and teachers' behavior management strategies might affect teacher-student relationships. The basis for data collection was real-life scenarios describing challenging preschool behavior, presented to participants as hypothetical events which they were asked to consider. In this study, I interviewed 10 preschool teachers who work for a large Head Start agency in a major metropolitan area in the Northeastern United States. These delimitations may limit transferability of study results to similar populations of Head Start teachers.

Limitations

One Limitation of this study that could hinder the transferability of the findings was the small sample size of 10 teachers. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), a sample of six to 12 participants is typically recommended for saturation in a qualitative study based on interviews. However, Mason (2010) stated that saturation is reached when researchers feel that they have enough data. Another limitation of this study was that it was conducted in a single geographic area, and the results may not be transferable to other locations. These two limitations were unavoidable, since proximity to the participants requires a small geographic area, and in-depth conversations were time-consuming and data-intensive, and so were suitable for a small number of participants.

Qualitative findings must be considered contextually, so that decisions regarding the generalizability of findings in a qualitative study lie in the mind of the consumer of the research. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described interviews as the backbone of qualitative data collection, and the method at the center of most qualitative studies because they add deep, rich, individualized, and contextualized data. Interviews help researchers understand other people's experiences. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that interview-based studies need thick descriptions and may involve contextualizing participants' responses to help readers understand contextual factors in which responses were presented and discussed and so determine the transferability of findings.

In addition, as the main instrument for data collection, my role in this study created the possibility of bias, which is a limitation of interview-based research. I minimized this researcher bias by keeping a journal where I kept a record of my personal

thoughts and opinions. Sutton and Austin (2015) suggested that researchers be conscious of their positions and prejudices to avoid inserting their biases into the study. I kept a journal of the data collection and analysis process which helped me maintain objectivity.

Significance

The problem that was the focus of this basic qualitative study is that little is known about preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of challenging behaviors and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships. This study filled the gap in knowledge regarding teachers' reflections on relationships that exist between teachers and the students they teach. Such a study could increase teachers' self-efficacy and positive perceptions of student-teacher relationships. The outcomes of this study may lead to social change, because the findings could cause teachers to reflect on how the strategies they use for managing challenging behavior might affect their relationships with students. The study could also lead to positive classroom climate because it might cause teachers to be more mindful of how they react to challenging behaviors. In this study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behavior and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect their relationships with the students who exhibit such behaviors.

Summary

In this basic qualitative study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behavior and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect their relationships with the students who exhibit such behaviors. Chapter 1 introduced the problem of challenging behavior in the classroom that can hinder both

teaching and learning and described a gap in the literature in terms of how teachers

perceive challenging behaviors and how behavior management strategies can affect their

relationships with students. The chapter contained background literature that showed

adverse outcomes of persistent challenging behavior and the importance of positive

teacher-student relationships. Chapter 1 also included the study purpose, significance,

limitations, and research questions. In Chapter 2, I present relevant literature to provide a

clear understanding of the study problem, introduce the transactional theory, which is the

foundational framework for this study, and explain how this theory applies to teacher-

student relationships.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem of this basic qualitative study was that little is known about preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effect of challenging behaviors and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships. The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behavior and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect their relationships with students who exhibit such behaviors. Challenging behaviors are behaviors that hamper an educator's teaching capabilities and hinder children's ability to learn (McCormick et al., 2014). According to Jeon, Buettner, Grant, and Lang (2019), preschool children's social and psychological functioning are important factors in their school readiness and later development. According to Lam and Wong (2017), a positive relationship with teachers and processes of social learning can help children develop social and emotional competence. This study explored challenging behavior, the strategies preschool teachers use to manage challenging behaviors, and teachers' perspectives regarding the effects such strategies and behaviors might have on relationships between teachers and students. This chapter includes a review of current literature, including a description of challenging behavior in preschool children, challenging behavior and teacher stress, and positive teacher-student relationships and students' social-emotional outcomes. Chapter 2 also includes a description of the study's conceptual framework and how I searched literature for relevant research.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for relevant literature using the Walden University Library and the following databases: PsycINFO, SAGE Articles, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, and ERIC. The search words and phrases that I used for my search were *aggressive behavior*, *challenging behavior*, *coping*, *disruptive behavior*, *early childhood education*, *emotions*, *externalized behavior*, *prosocial behavior*, *stress*, *stressors*, *perceived stress*, *stress level*, *predictors of stress*, *teacher stress theories*, *burn-out theory*, *anxiety*, *coping*, *stress*, *job stress,* and *occupational stress*.

Conceptual Framework

Challenging behaviors are an expected part of children's development. Ogundele (2018) defined challenging behaviors as behaviors that are above the expected normal behavior for the age and developmental level of a child. Teacher in early childhood classrooms across the country struggle with addressing challenging behavior. However, the intensity and frequency of challenging behaviors can be a source of stress. In this study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behaviors and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect their relationships with students who exhibit such behaviors.

Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory regarding appraisal, stress, and coping is the foundation for this study and base for exploring teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors and the possible effects of challenging behaviors on relationships teachers have with students. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) emphasized that the appraisal of an event is highly subjective and dependent on the perceived goals, values, and coping

ability of the individual. Lazarus and Folkman also explained individuals manage

stressors or adjust their behaviors and cognitions through coping. Teachers may need to

appraise the intensity of behaviors, their effects on both children and their peers, and the

effects of behaviors on teachers' perceived goals and values.

According to Sameroff (2009), the transactional model was central to the

understanding of the relationship between nature and nurture when describing positive

and negative outcomes in children's development. Sameroff explained that the

transactional model is useful in describing the process through which an individual is

influenced by events in context over time. According to Sameroff, the core of the

transactional model is the analytic significance the theory places on two-way reciprocal

effects, so that children and teachers influence each other. For instance, a teacher

managing aggressive and disruptive behaviors in the classroom must instantly assess the

danger of such behaviors to the child, their peers, and the teacher, and the effect of their

response to these behaviors on the child. This assessment begins with appraisal.

Appraisal

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) defined appraisal as a constant evaluation of what is

happening in terms of the significance of the action or event to an individual's wellbeing.

Appraisals can, therefore, be viewed as ongoing interactions between people and things,

other people, or the environment. For instance, a child on the first day of school may see

the school or teacher as the reason why their parent leaves them, and may perceive the

school and teacher as harmful, and this appraisal and perception could cause them to

react negatively towards school. Fontaine and Dodge (2009) posited that transactional

perspectives of social cognition and behaviors occur in real time. These social-cognitive operations, according to Fontaine and Dodge (2009), include an individual's interpretation of social cues and evaluative judgments of alternative behavioral options.

Jellesma, Zee, and Koomen (2015) observed that the way children appraise classroom situations predicted how they developed internalized behaviors. Jellesma et al. (2015) found that how children appraised situations can determine the relationship that they have with a teacher and the way they chose to cope with problems. While teachers may not find internalized behaviors such as anxiety, fear, and nonparticipation as challenging as externalized behaviors like aggression, internalized behaviors can make it challenging for children to learn and adapt to their environment. Children's appraisal of problems can also result in externalized behaviors. Thompson, Zalewski, and Lengua (2014) determined that the appraisal of threat mediates the effects of fear and effortful control on internalized and externalized problems. The Lazarus and Folkman model, therefore, becomes critical for studying not just children's behavior but also teachers' responses to challenging behavior and relationships between teachers and students.

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) observed that environmental conditions are harmless to interpersonal relationships until they become obstacles to goals. Assessment of environmental conditions contributes to the sometimes subjective nature of the behaviors that teachers consider to be challenging. For instance, while one teacher may consider tantrums to be a part of a child's developmental expectations, another teacher may appraise them as challenging and unacceptable. Teachers may regard some behaviors as challenging depending on the degree to which such behaviors obstruct the goals of the

child, their peers, and their teacher. How a person responds to such challenges Lazarus and Folkman called coping.

Coping

Coping is a range of behavioral and cognitive strategies individuals use to manage internal and external demands caused by stressful encounters (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Individuals cope by finding strategies to manage the effects of stress and stressors. According to Herman, Prewwett, Eddy, Salva, and Reinke (2020), when teachers perceive that the demands of their environment are beyond their coping capacity, they experience stress. An individual's ability to cope can therefore determine not just how well they manage stress, but also the effect stress such as managing challenging behavior may have on them. While it is worth noting that avoidance of stress is a coping style, teachers often cannot choose to avoid a stressful environment when it is their classroom.

Lazarus (1995) suggested that the ways that people cope with stress are problem-focused coping, which is when a person seeks information about ways to change their behavior or their environment, and emotion-focused coping, in which a person makes an effort to regulate emotional distress brought on by harm or threat. To understand how someone like a teacher manages the stress that develops in handling children's challenging behavior, Lazarus (1995) indicated it is helpful to consider which of these two ways of coping are used typically by different individuals in different situations. According to Lazarus (1995), coping approaches are contextual and process-oriented to a greater degree than they are broad personality traits or styles of relating to the world.

How a person evaluates the stressful situation contributes to the individual's choice of coping that is either emotion-focused or is problem focused.

Coping styles can determine if a teacher internalizes stress, lashes out at children, or seeks out support, a choice which could ultimately influence the teacher-student relationship. The coping strategies an individual use could ultimately affect their attitude towards problems. Lazarus (1995) wrote that people's adaptational outcomes are dependent on how they cope, while Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, and Reinke (2018) described stress and coping as distinct constructs that can help understand adaptation. They explained that it is possible for a person experiencing high stress to cope adequately. Children's coping skills can depend on their level of maturity. Wodzinski, Bendezú, and Wadsworth (2018) defined children's coping as voluntary emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses that help them manage acute or ongoing stress, predicts numerous health and psychosocial outcomes. A child's ability to control their emotions can affect the lens through which they appraise and cope with situations. Children learn to cope with stress and develop clearer appraisal of events as they progressively master self-regulation.

The transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman is relevant to this study of challenging behaviors and the teacher-student relationship. Transactional theory may help to highlight the relationship between the stress of managing challenging behavior and teachers' appraisals of how such stresses affect their relationship with children. The model provided a base from which to explore teacher perspectives brought on by managing behavior problems. Factors that may explicate this study of teacher

perspectives of the effect of behavior management strategies on the teacher-student bond

are described in the following literature review, which includes, challenging behavior in

preschool age children, teacher stress and challenging behavior, positive teacher-student

relationships, and student emotional and academic outcomes.

Literature Review

Challenging Behavior in Preschool-Age Children

Challenging behaviors are expected in children as they learn to articulate their

wants, needs, and feelings. According to Salcedo (2016), in the early years young

children lack the ability to articulate, or even understand, the motivations behind their

behaviors. Rose et al. (2014) observed that the lack of sophisticated verbal and social

skill necessary to meet their needs causes some students to resort to physical aggression.

Rose et al. (2014) reported that aggressive behaviors in children typically begins as early

as when they are about 12 months and starts to reduce after they reach the age of three

and four. Although the Division for Early Childhood (2017) stated that challenging

behavior can be expected in children between birth and about the age of eight, the period

is described by the author as the stage when children begin to develop social and

emotional confidence that others may find to be challenging. However, Fettig and

Ostrosky (2014), in a quantitative study, found that while challenging behavior is

developmentally appropriate, most children only engage in such behaviors periodically,

while others depend on such behaviors to get their needs met. Kirkhaug et al. (2016), in a

quantitative study, wrote that teachers of first to third grade students described behavior

problems such as inattentiveness, impulsiveness, failure to finish tasks, poor academic

work, rule-breaking, lying or cheating, running away from the classroom, a lack of feelings of guilt, meanness, argumentativeness, and physical aggression. Ocasio et al. (2015), in the qualitative study they conducted on how preschool-based mental health interventions affected three-and four-year-old children, reported that behavior problems that disrupt learning have become more common and have become a strong predictor of future delinquency, aggression, antisocial behaviors, and substance abuse. Holtz, Fox, and Meurer (2015), following a quantitative study, reported that behaviors such as refusing to follow directions, uncontrollable emotions, destruction of property, self-injury, and aggression are common in early childhood classrooms.

Ogundele (2018) described challenging behavior as an abnormal pattern of behavior that exceeds expected age-appropriate behavior in frequency or severity. Martin et al. (2018) reported that, despite the decline in the number of children with aggression and impulsivity problems, little is known about when challenging behaviors are viewed as typical and when they put children at risk for expulsion. According to Lorber, Del Vecchio, and Smith Slep (2018), defiant and aggressive behaviors such as those exhibited by children at and around the age of two are expected of that age group. In a study of the development of physical aggression in infants, Lorber et al. (2018) stated that the so-called "terrible twos" is the developmental stage in children which is exemplified by incidents of physical aggression. However, early display of aggression in these young children should not be dismissed merely because they are age appropriate. According to Lorber et al. (2018), children who displayed extreme challenging behaviors between the ages of two, and two-and-one-half are more likely to exhibit behavior problems by age

five. Graziano et al. (2016) reported that preschool children who show extreme behavior problems were less likely to develop appropriate school readiness skills and often have trouble adapting to formal school. Schwartz, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates (2018) found a connection between high rates of victimization and aggression in middle grades children and later arrests. In a study of oppositional defiance and disruptive behaviors, Christenson, Crane, Malloy, and Parker (2016) stated that there are significant emotional and financial burdens of childhood behavioral disorders on individuals, families, schools, agencies, and society at large.

In Lorber et al. (2018) found that aggressive behavior in the first two years of life predicted continuing aggression during later ages. Lorber et al. discovered that persistent and elevated physical aggression in later years can often be identified when children are as young as 17 to 24 months old. Brennan, Shaw, Dishion, and Wilson (2015) confirmed that children who exhibit high levels of aggressive behavior early were more likely to show extreme aggressive behavior at school age. Brennan et al. (2015) explained that frequent aggressive acts during toddlerhood are indicative of inadequate emotional behavioral regulation, and a better indicator of children's later social competence than challenging behavior alone.

Challenging behaviors affect the child, peers, and teachers (Division for Early Childhood, 2017). McCormick et al. (2014) described challenging behaviors as behaviors that hamper an educator's teaching abilities and children's learning. Actions as simple as complaining or crying, or acts such as hitting other children and yelling, are concerning because such behaviors disrupt learning for the child and their peers (McCormick et al,

2014). According to Perle (2018), when one student is disruptive and off-task, it not only affects their learning but also affects the other students in the class trying to learn. To develop an intervention that targets the function of the behavior, teachers need to understand why a student performs a specific behavior (Allday, 2018). However, Plueck et al. (2015) explained that because students who exhibit disruptive behaviors are often the focus of the teacher, their behavior ends up affecting the other students and the entire classroom atmosphere.

Challenging behaviors can create opportunities for caregivers to teach children acceptable behavior. Kurki, Järvenoja, Järvelä, and Mykkänen, (2017) reported that challenging situations provide direct opportunities for teachers to support children in learning acceptable behaviors. However, Wienen, Batstra, Thoutenhoofd, Bos, and de Jonge (2019) found that teachers judged children's behaviors more negatively when several children with challenging behaviors are in the classroom. While teachers are expected to deal with the stress of managing children with challenging behaviors, Buettner et al. (2016) found that the greater the levels of teachers' psychological load, the lower their levels of engagement in the profession. The stress of constantly having to manage challenging behaviors can cause teachers to leave the profession. Buettner et al. (2016) also reported that considering the high turnover rate in early childhood education, improving teachers' professional commitment by helping teachers manage psychological difficulties should be explored.

Challenging Behavior and Teacher Stress

Teachers serve several important roles within the classroom, including managing children's behavior (Perle, 2018). According to Witt, Elliott, and Martens (2017), teachers often focus on ways to control problem behaviors in their classroom. Wehby and Kern (2014) stated that teachers feel often feel unprepared to manage challenging behaviors in their classrooms and have expressed that they need reliable tools and strategies that will help. Wehby and Kern (2014) further discovered that both experienced and novice teachers admitted that they did not receive sufficient training on challenging behavior management. Allday (2018) found that teachers often feel underqualified to manage challenging behavior, especially when they are faced with the task of identifying the many possible reasons for the challenging behaviors students display. In addition, while some challenging behaviors may indicate psychological problems and may require professional interventions that teachers are unable to provide, professionals such as school psychologists, special education teachers and district-level consultants are often unavailable to offer immediate help because of their existing caseloads (Allday, 2018). While a lack of assistance for managing challenging behaviors can bring about teacher stress, Miller et al. (2017) found that preschool teachers often have little training and few resources for managing challenging behavior.

According to Zinsser, Zulaur, Das, and Callie Silver (2017), work related stress could reduce a teacher's ability give students dependable, emotionally sound, and supportive classrooms. Jeon et al. (2019) noted that there is a significant connection between teacher stress and children's anger and aggression. Teachers who report high

stress levels were more likely to express anger and frustration towards children and increase children's own level of anger and aggression (Jeon et al., 2019). In a study on special education students' social-emotional behavior and classroom adjustment Breeman et al. (2015) found an association between teacher stress and the prosocial behaviors social and emotional problems. Parents and teachers also reported increases in challenging behavior and decreases in the social skills of children who had depressed teachers. (Roberts, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre, & DeCoster, 2016). According to Jeon et al. (2018), increasing the psychological wellbeing of early childhood teachers could cause classroom environments to be more nurturing in early education and children's development.

Herman et al. (2018) found that persistent stress could result in professional burnout. De Stasio et al. (2017) defined burnout as work related exhaustion that teachers experience and the emotional and psychological fatigue they feel, especially towards their job. While burnout is common in professions that provide human services, teachers are especially susceptible to burnout because they have to manage students with learning difficulties and aggressive behaviors, deal with conflicts that may arise with their colleagues, and engage problematic parents, while dealing with large class sizes and time pressures (De Stasio et al., 2017). Newberry and Allsop (2017) stated that the teaching profession is one of the most emotionally taxing of professions.

Although teaching is not the only profession where workers experience stress, Haydon, Alter, Hawkins, and Kendall Theado (2019) stated that unlike in other professions where people can walk away from the stressor, teachers have to remain in the

classroom with events or persons causing them stress. According to Haydon et al. (2019), even though a strong support network and a few moments of solitude are great stress management strategies for teachers, such strategies are often not accessible during classroom learning time. According to Garwood, Werts, Varghese, and Gosey (2018), the primary cause of teacher stress is student misbehavior, and such behaviors are especially taxing to teachers because they interfere with the teacher's primary goal of providing knowledge. Newberry and Allsop (2017) observed that the stress of managing children with challenging behaviors can cause a teacher to quit teaching. According to Newberry and Allsop (2017), the timing and intensity of the challenges created by a teacher's workload and student misbehaviors are determining factors for teachers deciding to leave the profession or choosing to stay. Although challenging behavior is only one of the reasons for teacher turnover, Wells (2015) found that children's outcomes are affected by teacher turnover, because turnover affects the bond that children have formed with their teachers and can lead to anxiety and other emotional risks.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Student Social-Emotional Outcomes

Mejia and Hoglund (2016) noted that teacher are the main source of security and support for children when they are in school. Brock and Curby (2014) defined the teacher-student relationship as a relationship that develops from shared social interacts that accumulate over time. McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) stated that the relationship children build with their teachers can highly influence their experiences in school, and that this relationship can affect children's academic, social, and behavioral development. According to Hughes, Bullock, and Copeland (2014), the student-teacher relationship is

unique because teachers often serve as surrogate parents in their daily interaction with students. Mejia and Hoglund (2016) reported that when children's relationships with their teacher are warm and filled with open communications, those teachers become the secure base for children as they explore the classroom environment.

Educators have reported that strong teacher-student relationships can bring moderate changes in students' classroom behavior (Cook et al., 2018). Lee and Bierman (2018) stated that social learning theory and the attachment model both suggested that when children experience stable and predictable teacher-student relationships, they can gain emotional and behavioral benefits. Lee and Bierman (2018) suggested that when students change teachers yearly and possibly fluctuate between close and conflicting relationships with their teachers, this can increase aggression in students. When students changing teachers yearly, the unpredictability of what the next teacher will be like could cause a child to feel anxious, unsafe, helpless, and emotionally dysregulated, this could make a child lose their ability to trust future teachers even when the prospective teachers trying to be supportive and caring (Lee & Bierman, 2018). Hughes et al. (2014) found that children who form relationships that are characterized by conflicts and dependency are at a higher risk of socio-emotional problems in early childhood.

Teacher have special relationships with every child in their class, and these relationships can be close, dependent, or conflicting (Runions, 2014). Skalicka, Stenseng, and Wichstrom (2015) indicated that a child's social skills and level of externalized behavior cause a teacher to react ways that result in more conflicts in the relationship that the student has with the teacher. Teachers consider relationships as conflictual when a

child is hostile, refuses to follow directions, and causes the teacher to have a feeling of dread when they need to interact with the child. Such relationships are also marked with power struggles between the student and the teacher (Runions, 2014). According to Roorda, Verschueren, Vancraeyveldt, Van Craeyevelt, and Colpin (2014), high levels of conflict between a child and a teacher predicted more externalizing behavior over time. Lee and Bierman (2018) discovered that heightened aggression in elementary school can be a product of student-teacher relationships in earlier grades that were marked by high levels of conflict and low closeness.

Teacher-student relationship conflict can put a strain on the teacher. Zee et al. (2017) reported that teachers perceived themselves to be angrier and less efficacious about individual students with hyperactive, inattentive, and disruptive behavior than with the emotionally regulated students. Both beginning and veteran teachers can be stressed by disruptive children who do not follow classroom rules, as this negatively affects their themselves and their other students (Zee et al., 2017). Challenging behaviors can affect a teacher's feeling of efficacy because they lack sufficient training to effectively manage such behaviors. According to Webby and Kern (2014), teachers have reported that even though challenging behavior is a major concern, they have insufficient training regarding how to manage such behaviors.

Conflicts in teacher-student relationships can also affect children's school experience in multiple ways. Hughes and Im (2016) reported that independent of a child's interaction with their peers, the way a teacher feels and interacts with a disruptive child can affect the way the other children in the class feel about them. According to Hughes

and Im (2016), the teacher's interactions and classroom engagement with a disruptive

child can indirectly affect the child's reputation and likability by their peers. McGrath

and Van Bergen (2015) explained that the attitude students have towards school can be

can be influenced by the relationship that they have with their teacher; this is especially

so among students who are likely to develop negative relationships with the teacher for

reasons such as bad temperament, poor academic performance, or low socioeconomic

status. Mejia and Hoglund (2016) found that children's slow or lack of adjustment to

school could lead to negative teacher-student relationships, because teachers may find it

irritating that their efforts and support are not enough to help the child adjust and this

irritation could cause teachers to not provide support to the child.

Children's social, emotional, and intellectual development can be influenced by

the quality of their relationship with their teacher. According to Hatfield and Williford

(2017), children's academic and socioemotional success in early childhood benefits from

close and supportive student-teacher relationships. Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, and Jamil

(2014) found that teacher-student relationships that are both sensitive and supportive are

essential to children's academic and social development. Hatfield and Williford (2017)

reported that constant emotional interactions, teacher sensitivity, and low teacher-student

conflicts are the characteristics of effective student-teacher relationships, and that such

relationships are a particularly salient resource for children with externalized behavior

problems. However, Zee et al. (2017) suggested that more information is needed about

preschool teachers' perspectives regarding teacher-student relationships in the context of

their management of challenging behavior. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to

explore preschool teachers' perspectives on the effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on the teacher-student relationship.

Summary

In this literature review section, I presented the transactional theory of Lazarus and Folkman and its relevance to my study of challenging behaviors and the teacher-student relationship. In analyzing the framework, I showed how the transactional approach could help explore the relationship between the stress of managing challenging behavior and teachers' appraisals of how such stresses affect their relationship with children. I showed that Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model on appraisal, stress, and coping will provide a base from which to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on challenging behavior in the classroom, and how the actions and the strategies that teachers use to manage such behaviors are perceived to affect the relationship teachers have with students.

I explored challenging behavior and how while it is an expected stage of development, it becomes problematic when children rely on such behaviors to express all their needs. I discussed how challenging behavior affects the other children in the classroom and can lead to teacher stress. Next, I discussed how the inability to decipher the cause of these behaviors and insufficient training are some of the reasons why challenging behaviors are a source of stress for teachers. When teachers are emotionally exhausted, it can affect how they teach and interact with students who depend on them for social and emotional guidance. In the final section of the literature review, I looked at the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship and how this can affect how

students adjust to school, their relationship with their peers, and their social and educational outcomes. My literature search revealed a gap in information on preschool teachers' perspectives regarding teacher-student relationships in the context of their management of challenging behavior. In this study I have filled this gap and added to existing knowledge on challenging behavior by exploring the perspectives of 10 preschool teachers on the effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on their relationship with their students. In Chapter 3, I present how I plan to use the think-aloud interview method and scenarios of challenging behaviors as a data collection method and instrument for exploring teachers' perspectives.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships. To achieve this study's purpose, I conducted basic qualitative research using interviews following the think-aloud interview method based on hypothetical scenarios. The think-aloud interview method supports the discovery of decision-making in real time. In Chapter 3, I provide information regarding my study rationale, my role as the researcher, the method I used to select study participants, the instrument I used to conduct interviews, and my data analysis plan, as well as plans to ensure trustworthiness of the data and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe effects of challenging behaviors on relationships they have with students who exhibit such behaviors?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe effects of behavior management strategies they use to address such behaviors on relationships they have with students who exhibit them?

This study was a basic qualitative study based on interviews. A basic qualitative design was best suited for this study because the focus of the study was teachers' perspectives. According to Merriam (2002), researchers in qualitative studies seek to learn about the ways people understand and experience their world at various points in time and contexts. The study research questions helped explore the different perspectives

that teachers might have when presented with interview scenarios that depict instances of children's challenging behavior. Merriam (2002) stated that basic interpretative qualitative research involves using participants' experiences as data and exploring first-person accounts in a narrative form. Data for this type of research, according to Merriam (2002), are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers use interviews to gather data when it is impossible to observe reactions, feelings, and interpretations of study participants.

A focus group was a possible interview option for exploring teachers' perspectives regarding challenging behavior. Focus groups are especially useful for interviewing people who are not comfortable with one-on-one interactions or may be intimidated or terrified of face-to-face interviews (Patton, 2016). Using a focus group for this study would have added value by allowing teachers to share and exchange behavior management strategies. A focus group also might have had the advantage of giving teachers a forum for hearing and commenting on each other's ideas, perceptions, and views. However, while a focus group might have been less time-consuming than interviews, it would not have been ideal for my intention to hear teachers' individual authentic perspectives. With a focus group, there was the possibility of participants not being heard, agreeing with everyone else regardless of their own opinions, and choosing not to state their perspectives for fear of such perspectives being unpopular with the group they are in. According to Patton (2015), study participants who realize that their viewpoint is a minority perspective may not be inclined to speak up and risk negative reactions. The number of questions for focus groups are often less than the number of

those in other forms of interviews, because of time constraints and the need to make time for all group members to give their responses (Patton, 2015). Other interviewing methods, such as phone or email interviews, would not have worked for the think-aloud interview method, and so would not have delivered the real-time decision making that interviews using this method provided.

The study research questions could not be answered with a quantitative research method because the focus of this study is not to test hypotheses or examine relationships between variables. According to Patton (2015), the quantitative approach relies on determining relationships among dependent and independent variables and focuses on statistical covariances. This study does not involve any statistical analysis. Qualitative studies involve participant observation and interviewing. According to Patton (2015), qualitative inquiries are ways of studying how people and groups construct meaning, and this method of inquiry involves using data collection to find meaningful patterns and themes.

Although it would have been possible to base this study on observations of student-teacher interactions while teachers manage behaviors that are challenging, observations will not suffice in this study because the purpose is to explore teachers' perspectives. Interviews are a way of gathering other people's stories and finding out what is in their minds (Patton, 2015). The use of interviews was effective in exploring teacher perceptions in this study, better than observations or document examination, and I elected to use an interview for this study. Interviews are needed when a researcher cannot

observe behaviors, feelings, or people's interpretation of their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After a further appraisal of the research problem and various qualitative research methods, I remained convinced that the basic qualitative method was the most effective method for this study. Phenomenology was inappropriate for this study, because in phenomenology the researcher seeks to depict the meaning or the basic framework of reality and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although challenging behavior can be considered a human experience, the perspectives of teachers regarding challenging behavior is not a phenomenon. An ethnographical study will not serve the purpose of this study because in this study I was not looking at challenging behavior as a cultural expression, nor focusing on an in-depth history of challenging behavior. Ethnographic research is guided by the assumption that any individual group of people interacting together for some time will evolve as a culture (Patton, 2015). While grounded theories involve understanding of lived experiences, this study did not propose to develop a new theory about challenging behaviors or teacher perspectives. Burkholder et al. (2018) said that the purpose of grounded theory research is to develop practical theories about phenomena.

Basic qualitative research, which has the ultimate goal of extending knowledge, is inspired by scholarly interest in phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2018). Basic research fills a gap in knowledge. The audience for this study is researchers and intellectuals, and the study will also have relevance to preschool teachers and administrators. The basic

research approach is also suitable because the purpose of this research was not to solve a

problem as in applied research, but rather, the goal was to understand the problem.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of an observer because I conducted the interviews

but did not contribute responses as interview participants did. I have worked as a Head

Start teacher for over 15 years, and I have found that challenging behaviors affect both

teachers and children. To prevent personal assumptions, prejudices, and viewpoints from

filtering into a study, the researcher needs to explore and be aware of their own

experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I remained objective during the data collection

and analysis process and stayed open-minded when I was working with study

participants. I did this by maintaining a research journal where I wrote down my

thoughts, problems that I encountered during the study, and what I learned during the

research. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), to maintain reflexivity, researchers

have to reflect and state their positions and prejudices so that readers can have a better

understanding of the filters through which the research questions were asked, data were

gathered and analyzed, and study findings were reported.

The think-aloud interview method provided precise scripting of neutral researcher

responses to participant comments and this helped me to ensure a bias-free study. The

think-aloud interview method script is different from a traditional interview script where

an interviewer may ask follow-up questions to help clarify responses. Such follow-up

questions can unintentionally reveal that the interviewer agrees or disagrees with a

participant's response. The only prompt allowed when conducting a think-aloud interview

method is "Tell me more." Seemingly harmless comments, such as commending a participant's response or openly agreeing with their response, can render a think-aloud interview method invalid (van Someren et al., 1994). The think aloud interview method has set steps and procedures for collecting data and neglecting these steps can alter the validity of the data collected (van Someren et al., 1994). Following the think-aloud interview method, by keeping my comments and opinions out of the interviews, helped limit the intrusion of my biases into the interview process and the resulting data. Fonteyn, Kuipers, and Grobe (1993) suggested that during think-aloud interviews method, researchers conducting interviews should take notes on study participant's verbalizations, their thinking strategies, and points that need clarification. I used these field notes to document my thoughts and experiences.

I recruited study participants from a Head Start program that serves a major metropolitan area in the Northeastern United States, which agency is also my place of employment. Using participants from my place of work did not, however, result in any ethical concerns because the agency has over 400 teachers spread across 16 different locations in five different cities, and I do not know most of these teachers. According to Ravitch and Carl (201), because qualitative research depends on relationships between researcher and participants, it is important to recognize the ethical implications of those relationships. To guard against ethical problems that could have arisen because I recruited participants from the place I work, I did not recruit any teachers with whom I have a current or previous relationship for this study. I did not have any supervisory authority over any teachers within the agency. I excluded teacher assistants from the

study to ensure that no participant felt obligated to reflect the perspective of a lead

teacher with whom they worked. Participation in the study was voluntary. I also did not

conduct study interviews on the agency premises, to ensure that study participants were

not exposed to or subject to any form of intimidation for participating in the study. Study

interviews were conducted at the library and the reception area of a large movie theatre. I

assured all participants that I will maintain the confidentiality of our conversations, that I

will protect and secure all data collected, and that their information would not be shared

with school administrators. Ravitch and Carl (2016), reported that confidentiality is

related to ways to protect an individual's privacy, and entails decisions about how and

what data related to participants will be disseminated. I safeguarded participants'

confidentiality by using pseudonyms to identify participant throughout the study and

made sure that all research documents were secure and protected.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I recruited study participants from the Head Start agency where I work, which

serves a major metropolitan area in the Northeastern United States. Although there were

other Head Start programs within my community from which I could have selected

teachers, I elected to gather my study participants from this agency because it serves a

diverse population of children, it is the oldest Head Start program in the inner city, and it

has twice as many centers as the other Head Start programs within the city. This agency

has 16 locations spread over five cities and has opened ten of these centers since I was

hired by this agency 15 years ago; many of these locations and staff members are

unfamiliar to me. I recruited from 10 agency locations within and near the city in which I live, I did not recruit any teachers with whom I have a current or previous relationship. I do not have any supervisory authority over any teachers within the agency. I excluded assistant teachers from the study to ensure that no participant felt obligated to reflect the point of view of the lead teacher with whom they worked. Participation in the study was voluntary. I also did not carry out study interviews within the agency premises, but used neutral locations, to ensure that study participants were not exposed to or subject to, any form of intimidation for participating in the study.

I interviewed 10 teachers for this study. Guest et al. (2006) stated that a sample size of six to 12 participants is typically recommended for saturation in a study based on individual perspectives. Through a method of purposeful random sampling, I selected participants for my interview pool by including the first teacher to respond and agree to participate in the interview from one of 10 sites. I invited teachers by placing invitation flyers in teacher mailboxes.

The participants for this study were Head Start teachers of students in pre-K 3, children who, in most cases, were in school for the first time, and pre-K 4 students, who were in their second year of preschool and preparing for kindergarten. Although Head Start programs enroll infants and toddlers, this study did not include teachers of infants and toddlers. The physical, social, and emotional developmental gap that exists between infants and preschool age children would have made it impossible to compare behavior management the two groups. Gloeckler and Niemeyer (2010) observed that while toddlers can display challenging behaviors, they are often not verbal and need constant

teacher contact, comfort, and assistance; although children are gaining autonomy at this age, they are completely dependent on their caregivers to feel secure and do not wander too far from their caregiver. Only the lead teachers in the classrooms were included in this study, because, though assistant teachers have relationships with children that can be affected by challenging behaviors, lead teachers are most often responsible for managing behavior problems and developing strategies that may help curb such behaviors in the classroom.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I was the first instrument of data collection for this study. Patton (2015) found that the interpretative perception of the researcher is important in qualitative research, the researcher plans, gathers data, analyzes data, and writes up the study. To manage my interpretative perceptions and keep my biases out of the study, I maintained a research journal where I kept a record of my personal thoughts and opinions.

The second instrument I used for data collection was interviews conducted using the think aloud interview method. According to Guss (2018), the think-aloud interview method is a verbalization of one's thoughts while engaged in the performance of a task. Study participants who are involved in a think-aloud interview method are asked by the interviewer to say every thought that goes through their mind as they perform a study task, without analyzing, editing, or interpreting their thoughts (van Someren et al., 1994). The difference between this interviewing method and a structured or unstructured qualitative interviewing method, is that the interviewer in a think-aloud interview method

does not ask probing questions to get a participant to delve deeper into a topic, as is typical in a conventional interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The think-aloud interviewing method instead seeks to get a participant's authentic perception and personal views on a question, task, event, or prompt, by capturing the participant's thoughts and decision-making process in response in the moment to a specific situation (van Someren et al., 1994).

To conduct these interviews, I used three scenarios of classroom challenging behaviors of preschool children for participants to consider as they think aloud. The study's scenarios (Appendix B) that I used were developed by asking every lead teacher from each of the six preschool classrooms at the site where I work to share incidents of challenging behaviors they have experienced in the classroom with preschool children. The teachers were a combination of two pre-K 4 teachers, one teacher whose class is a mix of three and four-year-old children, and three pre-K 3 teachers. All these teachers gave me hand-written scenarios. I received two scenarios from each of the pre-K 4 teachers and one scenario each from the other teachers, which gave me a total of seven handwritten scenarios. The content validity of these scenarios was established by the fact that they were provided by preschool teachers, who were field experts, and the teachers verified that the situations they described were actual events that occurred in their classrooms. None of these teachers were included as participants in the data collection.

I sorted the scenarios by the time of the preschool day in which the incident they described occurred and by the age of the children. I picked three that reflected different portions of a preschooler's day and ensured that the scenarios I chose represented both

three- and four-year-old preschoolers. The scenarios were also edited to eliminate the

children's names and gender. After gathering the study scenarios, I carried out practice

interviews study to test them and to verify my use of the think aloud interview method. I

conducted practice interviews with two teachers, one administrator, and two associate

teachers, none of whom were included as participants in data collection. These practice

interviews contributed to the content validity of the scenarios, in that they confirmed that

the scenarios were understandable as written and plausible representations of children's

challenging behavior. The three scenarios, along with a fourth scenario I used as a warm-

up exercise before beginning the recorded think aloud process, are all presented in

Appendix B.

The think aloud interview method was supported by an interview guide (see

Appendix D) in the form of a script to begin and end the interview, a recording app on

my phone to record the think-aloud interview method, blank sheets of paper on a

clipboard and a pen for recording field notes during the interviews. I used the notes to

record participants' reactions, hesitations, facial expressions, and body languages that I

observed during the interview. I also used a research journal where I wrote about the

interview experiences, my thoughts, and new things I learned from the participants and

the interviewing process. I used a password protected computer to store the recorded

interviews and interview transcripts. I had planned to use a professional transcribing

agency to transcribe interview audio recording to ensure that data is transcribed

accurately, and without bias. Instead of using a transcription service, as I had planned, I

transcribed interviews using an application called Otter. Transcribing interviews in this

way, and reviewing the transcriptions for accuracy, helped me understand what the

participants said during the interviews.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After I received the Walden's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval (#07-

31-19-0705883), I sought the cooperation and permission of the education department to

recruit teachers from the agency for the research portion of my dissertation. After I

received the signed permission to proceed with the recruitment of study participants, I

contacted the site supervisors of the 13 target Head Start sites, informed them of the

permission that I had to proceed with recruiting staff for my study, and that I planned to

select one teacher randomly from each site. Although I only needed one participant from

each site, all lead teachers at the sites were invited to take part in the study. Inviting all

teachers but picking one helped create confidentiality for the chosen participant and

ensured that the site supervisors did not know which teacher I selected from their sites.

I used a study invitation flyer to invite teachers to participate in a research

interview on challenging behavior and its effect on teacher-student relationships. The

flyers were placed in the mailboxes of every lead teacher of pre-K 3 and pre-K 4

classrooms in the selected centers. The first teacher to respond and agree to participate in

the study from each site was placed in the study interview pool. By selecting one teacher

from different preschool sites, participants were less likely to discuss the study scenarios

with each other, and this helped prevent them from havening pre-formed responses to the

scenarios. Picking one participant per site also reduced the possibility of outside

influence on teachers' decision-making process during the interview; teachers could not,

for instance, discuss with other participants the strategies that they suggested for managing the behaviors in the study scenarios, or how the behaviors in the study scenarios might affect their relationships with students. I had hoped that by sending the interview invitations to teachers at 13 sites, that I would receive responses from at least one teacher from each site for a total of 13 participants, with no fewer than eight. I, however, did not receive the eight responses from the target sites, and this prompted me to invite the sites in nearby cities by placing the same flyer in mailboxes of lead teachers of preschool children at those sites. I included the three teachers that volunteered from these sites in the study and had a total of 10 participants. I would have continued recruiting if I did not reach my target. However, I reached saturation and after the eighth participant there were no new information in teacher responses.

After selecting participants for the study, I contacted the selected study participants via phone to set up location and times for the interviews and email them a copy of the consent form to go over before the interviews. I met with each lead teacher individually at neutral locations and time that they chose outside of school hours. Interviews were conducted at a quiet room in a public library, the reception room of a local movie theatre and one interview at a participant's home. During interviews I explained to each participant the purpose of my study and had them sign a consent form, confirming that they were willingly participating in the study. I assured participants that to maintain confidentiality the study will not reveal their real names but, represent them in study documents only by the letter T for teacher and a numeral. I guaranteed study participants that I would keep the records and data from the interviews safe and locked in

a secure cabinet in my home-study room, and the computer I used for the study will always be password protected. I informed the study participants that they would have an opportunity to view the study to ensure that they were correctly represented before it is published. During the interviews, study participants were not kept longer than the allotted time, and I let them know that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any point at which they no longer wished to continue. Before I proceeded, I asked participants for their permission to record the interview. To ensure that I gave every participant the same introduction, purpose of the study, confidentiality information, the think-aloud interview method process, and closing message, I used an interview guide (Appendix D). According to Jacob and Furgeson (2012), interview scripts prompt researchers to share critical details about a study, helps them remember to discuss informed consent, and directs them to get participants signature on the consent form. Interview guides enables the researcher to properly articulate confidentiality information that could help lessen participant's fears and concerns. The interview guides helped remind me to give participants my email address at the end of the interview and tell them that they can reach out to me if they have any questions about the interview. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. I recorded the interview with a recording App on my phone and used field notes to sum up the interviews, write down non-verbal responses, and note comments that stood out.

The think aloud interview method has steps and procedures for collecting data; neglecting these steps can affect the validity of the of the data collected (van Someren et al., 1994). The first thing I did was to make sure that the setting made my study

participant feel at ease, settled, and comfortable. I had bottles of water handy, folders with the interview guide, study scenarios (Appendix A), consent forms, and a recording device on a table in front of the interviewee. I also had a clipboard for taking notes, and to minimize distractions, I held the clipboard through the interview; the clipboard also contained my interview guide (Appendix B). When participants were seated, I began each interview session by thanking participants for their time, told them the purpose of the interview, explained the think aloud interview method, and informed them of their right to stop the interview at any point at which they no longer wish to continue. I asked if the participant had any questions before I proceeded. Next, I explained the reason why I needed to record the session and asked for participants verbal consent to record the interview.

I asked study participants to read each study scenario twice. For the first reading, participants were directed to consider the behavior in the scenario, the child, and how the behavior might affect their relationship with the child. Participants were prompted to say out loud everything they are thinking as they read the scenario and think about the behavior and their relationship with the child. When they had completed the first task, participants were asked to read the scenario again and this time to think about how they might manage the scenario behavior and how they think the strategy they choose to use to manage the behavior might affect their relationship with the child. As in the first reading, participants were tasked to say out loud everything they are thinking as they read this scenario a second time. The scenario tasks (Appendix A) were written on separate sheets

of paper, to ensure that participants addressed each task, and to help them focus on just one scenario at a time.

Before study participants began the study scenarios, I gave participants an opportunity to respond to a practice scenario (Appendix A), using the think-aloud interview method. According to Eccles and Arsal (2017), saying out aloud everything one thinks about is not natural, especially in the presence of others. Eccles and Arsal stated that participants should not be instructed to think aloud without a warm-up exercise that will train them how to do it. Besides the prompts at the beginning, which were also pre-written for participants, I did not interrupt participants while they are involved in the scenarios. The only prompt I gave interviewees, as advised by van Someren et al. (1994), was to ask them to keep talking whenever there was a long pause. There were questions or follow-up questions.

After the practice scenario, I informed the participant that the next three scenarios (see Appendix B), were the study scenarios and reminded them again that they were expected to verbalize the thoughts that came to their minds about the scenario as they read. I presented study participants with one scenario at a time and began recording when the participants started to read the scenarios and express their thoughts concerning what they were reading. As the participants' spoke, I took notes in my researcher journal of their reactions as they processed the material they have read and prompted them to verbalize their thoughts only when they stop speaking and there was long periods of silence, I prompted participants by saying "tell me more" or "keep talking." These were the only prompts recommended when conducting a think-aloud interview method (van

Someren et al.,1994). I listened as they spoke and periodically checked to make sure that my recording device was working. I repeated these steps for each of the three scenarios. At the end of the sessions, I thanked participants for their time and told them that they will receive a summary page of the study result via email to help them see the study findings. I repeated this for all study participants.

I used an audio recording application on my phone to record the interviews and saved each interview to a password protected computer using participants' pseudonyms; keeping study data secured ensured study confidentiality. I took notes during the interviews. I used these field notes to record participants' reactions, hesitations, facial expressions, and body language observed during the interview to provide data that may not be captured by participants' words. I also used the note to write my reactions to the responses and my assessment of how the interviews went. Patton (2015) recommended the use of field notes for everything that an observer believes to be worth noting and warned against trusting anything to future recall. To avoid any biases that I may have as a teacher from affecting any part of the research, I kept a research journal where I wrote my views, problems I encountered, concerns and new knowledge that I gained during the research process. This journal was different from the field notes that I used to document my interview experiences

After all study participants have been interviewed, I had planned to have my study recordings from the think-aloud interview method professionally transcribed for added validity but ended up transcribing it myself with the help of my recording application, which transcribed as it recorded. I reviewed the recording and transcription to correct

words that were mis transcribed. Though van Someren et al. (1994) stated that immediately reviewing the interview with participants after the interview session is critical to the process because participants might have additional comments and clarifications they want to make during the review, I did not need to contact study participants. van Someren et al. (1994) however, warned against giving these additional comments the same value as the original statements, these comments are to be reported separately.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative content analysis refers to the reduction of qualitative data, it is a sense-making effort that attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings from volumes of qualitative material and data (Patton, 2015). Analyzing study data helps to find the answers to study research questions. After I transcribed the study interviews, I typed and save the notes that I took during the interview and save all these documents as Word documents and on a removable disc as a back-up in case of computer failure, I also printed paper copies of these documents. Next, I began data analysis using a digital process for coding, as described next.

According to Saldaña (2016), codes in qualitative data analysis are constructs generated by researchers to symbolize or decipher data. I manually coded the study transcripts with Microsoft Word. La Pelle (2004) found that some Microsoft Word functions which do not involve programming skills can be used effectively for research. La Pelle used Microsoft Word to complete projects that ranged in size from short simple tasks to projects that involved more than 2000 pages of text and over 200 codes. Coding

on a Microsoft Word facilitated cutting and pasting text with accuracy while retaining the integrity of the text, and could include numbering, paragraphs, and lines within the transcript. Coding on a Word document also facilitated color-coding text with in-built highlighter and text color features in Microsoft Word for further transcript comparison and analysis (La Pelle, 2004). I also used the Word's comment function to make notes during the coding process. I conducted the coding within a three-column table, using the right side of the table for codes, the middle for the transcript, and the left column to write notes as I progressed. Tables for coding in a Word document are typically divided into three columns; however, more columns can be added to accommodate the iterative process of coding (La Pelle, 2004). In the section on manually coding data, Saldaña (2016) confirmed that some of Microsoft Word's basic functions can code data. Saldaña suggested such possibilities as assigning the same color of fonts to responses that belong to the same category, selecting a passage of text and inserting comments that contain the code for the data, and inserting a vertical text box running along the right-hand margin with the codes aligned with the data. Using Microsoft Word for coding had the added advantage of making it possible to copy and paste codes from all study participants to create one table later in the coding process. I prepared for coding by closely following the steps to coding on a Word document as explained by Hahn (2008), which includes saving study transcripts as Word documents, creating a table with three columns, inserting the transcript into the center column of the table, and ensuring that each row represents a paragraph. I labeled the right-side column as level one codes and labeled the left column as notes and comments.

To begin the coding process, I read study transcripts several times to find and copy sentences, and paragraphs of responses which were relevant to answering my research questions into the coding table that I created in a Word document. At this point, I eliminated from the transcript filler sounds, like "um" and "ah," and any off-topic comments participants might make, leaving a clean transcript ready for coding. Hahn (2008) stated that the researcher's goal when reading through study transcripts the first few times is to identify sections of the document that are directly relevant to the categorization of ideas related to their research topic. I read the transcripts and identified portions of the transcript that were directly related to how teachers felt about challenging behaviors, the strategies they used to manage the behaviors, and their thoughts on how those strategies could affect their relationship with their students. Once those sections were identified, the next step I took was to create level one codes along with code memos. The process of copying relevant portions of the transcripts into the coding table also included organizing interview responses by paragraphs and numbering the paragraphs. Next, I highlighted sentences and paragraphs with different color codes, using one color to highlight all the sentences within the transcripts that had similar meanings or described the same views and perceptions. I also highlighted pertinent information, views, and sentences which were not reoccurring through the transcript or shared by multiple participants; such information was highlighted with unique colors. I represented these with code words and phrases and discussed them in detail when I reported the study findings. This preliminary step of compartmentalizing and comparing data is referred to as initial coding. Researchers use this first cycle coding to fragment

qualitative data into distinct parts, thoroughly study them, and compare them for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). I completed the processes listed above for each participant's transcript and saved the file. The initial coding resulted in a column with multiple highlighted paragraphs and sentences, and another with repeating sentences and coded phrases that represent them.

Next, I gathered and looked through the resulting coded sentences and paragraphs as I continued the coding. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), coding is the process of organizing qualitative data by identifying patterns in the data, creating categories for these patterns, determining interconnectedness among the categories, and then synthesizing the interconnected categories into a cohesive understanding of the unit of analysis in relation to the phenomenon. I looked through the resulting codes, synthesized them, and organize them into categories. I then looked through the categories for emerging themes. I looked at the resulting categories within the categories for interrelatedness, and they will be analyzed and blended to create more concise themes. The final themes will finally be analyzed for answers to the research questions.

<div align="center">**Trustworthiness**</div>

Credibility

Maintaining study credibility helped me add to the trustworthiness of my study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), credibility is a measure of how accurate and truthful a study is regarding reality. I increased study credibility with the use of scenarios from the experiences of real-life teachers and by interviewing teachers who have experienced challenging behavior gives credibility to the study. In addition, I established

study credibility by using triangulation, which I achieved by using multiple participants with unique perspectives, drawn from multiple work sites. I reached study saturation by with a sample size of ten teachers. According to Guest et al. (2006), a sample size of six to twelve participants is typically recommended for saturation in a study based on individual perspectives. Finally, I kept my biases from affecting any part of the research, by maintaining a research journal where I wrote my views, problems I encountered, concerns, and new knowledge that I gained during the research process. Patton (2015) stated that reflexivity leads both to understanding one's perspectives and to owning those perspectives. Although maintaining a research journal was good for reflexivity, combining it with the study interviews added triangulation to the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described triangulation as a combination of multiple data collection methods to achieve greater rigor and validity.

Transferability

To ensure study transferability, I conducted a rigorous study and gave a detailed report of my findings. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), study transferability entails having detailed descriptions of the data and full explanations that will enable study readers, other researchers, and other audiences to make comparisons to other contexts based on study information. I presented a detailed step by step explanation of the study procedure and analysis and not just the study results. I also defined the boundaries of my study to enhance the transferability possibilities.

Dependability

Qualitative studies need to meet the standard of dependability. Burkholder et al. (2016) noted that dependability is the evidence of consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting. I attained study dependability by using interviews and conducting a qualitative study, because these constitute the most suitable design for my research purpose. I selected study participants who were capable of reporting on the problem at hand, given their roles and experiences as lead teachers of preschool children. I followed ethical interview protocols such as getting participants' consent to record them, informing them of their right to stop the interview whenever they no longer felt comfortable with proceeding, and adhered to the stipulated time agreed on for the interview. I also followed stipulated steps for conducting the think-aloud interview method. In addition, I conducted a trial think-aloud interview with a sample scenario before the actual study think-aloud interview method, so that I was certain to only prompt interviewees to continue talking when there was long silences and otherwise did not interfere with the participant as they engage in the exercise. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), triangulation, sequencing of methods, and creating a well-articulated rationale for these choices are methods for achieving dependability. By giving a detailed account of my study procedure and following the procedure precisely, I created dependability in my study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the creation of an appropriate data collection plan that will answer research questions adds to study dependability.

Finally, I took steps to mitigate against my biases, by keeping rigorous field notes of procedures and discussing their possible influences when reporting study findings. My

field notes created an audit trail, that showed the rigor of my study fieldwork and the

confirmability of the data collected. Cameron (2018) stated that audit trail enables

researchers to examine and uphold the 'accuracy' of the research. Researchers could

adopt audit trails approach to add to the transparency of the research process and provide

a record of when and where, to which the researcher could later (Gibbs, 2018).

Qualitative studies are a series of iterative processes that include data collection and

analysis; records of study processes are necessary to help in the later justification of the

actions taken during the study. Patton (2016) suggested the use of audit trails to verify the

rigor of fieldwork and confirmability to minimize bias and increase study accuracy.

Confirmability

According to Patton (2015), confirmability is equivalent to objectivity. Ravitch

and Carl (2016) stated that the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative studies

is the researcher, therefore, it is critical that a researcher keeps their views and biases

from tainting the research process. To ensure that my views and biases did not affect

participants' responses or my data analysis, Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested a

systematic assessment of a researcher's identity, personality, and subjectivities through

the research process. To ensure that my biases did not taint any aspect of the study, I kept

a researcher journal through the research process. In the journal I wrote my thoughts and

assumptions; I kept my journal notes close as I analyze data to help identify and keep my

assumptions separate from participants actual responses. Patton (2015) recommended

keeping a journal during data analysis to record how the researcher made decisions

during analysis, track ideas that emerged in the process of analysis, and memorialize

ideas and breakthroughs as they happen. A journal helped me separate my participants'

thoughts from mine. Ravitch and Carl (2016) found that researchers must locate

themselves socially, emotionally, and intellectually to clarify the boundary between the

data and interpretation of the data.

Ethical Procedures

Ensuring that I had the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was the

first measure I took to confirm that all aspects of my study were ethical. The ethical

considerations that I took to protect study participants included ensuring that no harm

came to them by protecting their confidentiality and by making sure that they gave their

consent to be a part of the study. According to Yin (2009), protecting the subjects of a

study involves gaining consent, shielding the participants from harm, and protecting the

participants' privacy and confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality, participants' real

names will not be used in the study. I represented each participant with the letter T for

teacher. I labeled the first teacher that I recruited as T1 and the next T2 to the last teacher,

T13. I conducted the study interviews outside of participants' workplace and I used

random sampling for participant selection, so that school administrators did not know the

identity of the teachers involved in the study.

I obtained permission from the head of the education department of the agency for

which study participants work. I recruited study participants from the Head Start agency

where I work, but I took care to not include in the study any participants whom I already

knew. Teachers were not be given any incentives nor coaxed into participating in the

study. Participants were informed verbally and through the consent form that there will

be no penalty or repercussions if they decided at any point to withdraw their participation in the study. I kept study materials in a password protected computer at my home-office and away from the school, where they might be seen. I was the only person handling study data and I treated all study materials safely; all study scenarios and transcribed files were locked in a drawer in my home office to ensure that no one has access to them. Audio files were kept securely on my computer with a password-protected login. To ensure confidentiality for study participants, I will store study data for five years after which they will be destroyed. The study transcripts will be shredded, the audio recordings will be deleted, and study documents in my computer will also be deleted.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the study design, discussed the role of the researcher, research questions, including participant selection and instrumentation. I provided a detailed data analysis plan which included my coding process. I also described procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection procedures, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures and considerations for the study. In Chapter 4, I present my data collection, processing, and analyzing process, and present my study findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers'

perspectives regarding the effects of challenging behavior and how the strategies they use

to manage such behaviors could affect their relationships with students who exhibit such

behaviors. To achieve this, I recruited 10 preschool teachers from Head Start centers in a

large city in the Northeastern United States. I conducted a basic qualitative study using

the think-aloud interview method. I was guided by two research questions about how

preschool teachers describe the effect of challenging behavior on relationships they might

have with students who exhibit such behavior, and the effects of behavior management

strategies they might use to address such behaviors on those relationships. In this chapter,

I updated how the study was conducted, how I analyzed my data, and the results of the

study.

Setting

Several of my planned processes were changed to meet circumstances. First,

although the cooperating agency had written that they would provide me with teachers'

email addresses, they declined to give me the email list when I asked for it, citing privacy

reasons. Instead of emailing prospective participants the study invitations, I had to travel

to individual sites to post and hand out the flyers. Second, the process of scheduling and

conducting interviews took longer than the 4 weeks that I had expected, because teachers

were busy setting up their classrooms and getting to know their students and parents at

the beginning of the year when I first approached them. Although I received IRB

approval and started reaching out to teachers at the beginning of September, my first

interview did not happen until November 7th. I also faced the problem of some prospective participants leaving the agency after they had accepted my invitation to participate in the study, as well as one prospective participant going on disability after scheduling a date, place, and time for the interview.

Demographics

Nine of the 10 study participants were female and one was male. The fact that there was a single male participant was a fair representation of the male population at the agency, which currently has only four male teachers and 376 female teachers. All study participants worked with three- and four-year-old preschool children, and they all stated that they have dealt with challenging behaviors in the classroom. The homogeneity of participant demographics made it possible to attain saturation with 10 participants.

Data Collection

After I received IRB approval, I visited the sites within and near the city where I live and placed my invitation to participate in the study, which included my contact information, in teacher's mailboxes. I followed up with the teachers who declared interest in my study and arranged times and places for the interviews. Study interviews took place between November 2019 and February 2020. Thirteen teachers declared interest in participating in the study and scheduled interviews, but one participant declined to participate, one changed jobs, and another went on disability. The remaining 10 participants met the predetermined criterion of being lead teachers working in a preschool classroom.

All study participants responded to a warmup scenario to familiarize them with the think-aloud method, and then responded to three scenarios depicting challenging behaviors. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. I recorded and transcribed the interviews using the Otter application on both my phone and iPad instead of using a transcription service, as I had originally planned. All audio data and Otter transcriptions were electronically stored in a password-protected computer.

The only unusual circumstance I encountered during the data collection process was one participant who said she could only be available for the interview on a Saturday, and the only location she could do the interview was at her home. I reached out to my chairperson to see if there were any ethical pitfalls involved. My chairperson said that if I was comfortable doing the interview at the participant's home, I could proceed. I conducted the interview. I conducted all other interviews at locations chosen by the study participants, which included the children's section of the public library and the reception area of a movie theater. Overall, six interviews were done in the library, three in the movie theatre reception area, and one in a participant's home.

The study interviews were recorded and transcribed with the help of the Otter application on my phone and iPad. After each interview, I exported both the audio and transcribed documents to my computer and saved the transcripts as Microsoft Word documents. I saved the interviews coded as T for teacher and the number (T1-T10) according to the order in which I conducted the interviews. Table 1 shows the dates and locations of the interviews. I played back the audio and compared it carefully to the transcriptions and corrected the transcript as needed. I read the interview transcripts

several times, removed the application timestamps, participants' filler words, laughter, and other sounds that were not part of the study.

Table 1

Interview Schedule

Teacher	Interview date	Location
T1	November7, 2019	Public Library 1
T2	November12, 2019	Public Library 2
T3	November15, 2019	Public Library 2
T4	November16, 2019	Participant's Home
T5	November19, 2019	Movie theatre lobby
T6	November26, 2019	Public Library 2
T7	December10, 2019	Public Library 2
T8	December 12, 2019	Movie theatre lobby
T9	January 21, 2020	Movie theatre lobby
T10	February 28, 2020	Public Library 2

I manually coded the study data. Although I cleaned and saved study transcripts after each interview, I started the coding process after the ninth interview was transcribed, cleaned, and exported into the three-column table. I inserted the cleaned transcripts into the center column, labeled the center column transcript, the left column notes, and the right column initial codes.

Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed by coding, which I did manually using Microsoft Word. After I cleaned and inserted the transcripts into the center column of the three column table, I read through the transcripts multiple times to help me get familiar with them, understand the views participants expressed, find similarities in opinions, and identify common words study participants used as they were engaged in thinking out loud. The think-aloud interview method allows for participants to speak their thoughts in

real time, and this may cause participants to change their views as they consider different scenarios.

I started the analysis process by reading through transcripts and identifying information that was relevant to answering my research questions. I identified patterns in participants' responses. I also looked for patterns and similarities in participants' responses and assigned them summative words or code words that fit the responses. I highlighted reoccurring words, sentences, and paragraphs along with their assigned codes in color codes that made them easy to locate when analyzing for findings. This process of condensing and coding the study data led to 37 codes which reoccurred in different frequencies through the 170 pages of interview transcripts. Next, I looked through the coded transcript to see how often each of the codes appeared in the transcripts, as shown in Table 2. The code that was repeated the most was considering possible reasons for behavior, which came up 87 times through the transcripts, and the codes that occurred the least were: behavior as a challenge to tackle, considering quitting, behavior that causes teacher to be less sympathetic to children, and positive relationships, each of which came up three times in the transcripts. One pattern that emerged from code frequencies is that, in general, the most frequent codes were expressions of ways teachers planned to address behavior problems, while the least frequent codes were expressions of teacher feelings.

Table 2

Codes in Order of Frequency of Their Occurrence

Codes (frequency)
Considering possible reasons for behavior (87)
Proactive intervention (59)
Calming support (52)
Involve the parents (47)
Provide an alternative activity (38)
Seek help/support (37)
Exploring various social emotional building/developmental tools (31)
Rules and acceptable behaviors (26)
Child is seeking attention (20)
Annoying (18)
Consideration for the feelings of other children (18)
Concern for safety (16)
Positive reinforcement (16)
Empathy (14)
Getting to know child (14)
Behavior is a hinderance to teaching /takes time away from the other students (13)
Stress (13)
Engage child in conversation (12)
Redirect the child (12)
Build/Positive relationship (11)
I don't like this kid (10)
Negative effect (9)
Automatic reaction (8)
Verbal expression of feelings (8)
Other children may begin to copy the challenging behavior (7)
Behavior won't change our relationship (6)
Fear factor (6)
Knowing the reason for the behavior might draw me and the child closer (6)
It shouldn't but it can affect my relationship with the child (5)
No effect (4)
Behavior will cause teacher to be less sympathetic to child (3)
Consider quitting teaching (3)
Teacher considers behavior as a challenge to tackle (3)
The relationship will eventually become positive (3)

Next, I read through these initial codes. I looked at the data again and this time

grouped patterns with similar meanings into categories. The 37 codes were grouped into

seven categories which include strong expressions of feelings, mild expressions of

feelings with consideration, effect of behavior on other children, no effect, behavior

management strategies, build/positive relationship, and negative effects. I then looked at

the codes and categories to find the overarching themes that will sum up the participant's

responses and help in answering the research questions. The two resulting themes were

effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies. Table 3 shows the

codes, categories, and themes.

Table 3

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes (frequency of occurrence)	Categories	Themes
Consider quitting teaching (3)	Strong	Effects of
Behavior causes teacher to be less sympathetic to child (3)	expressions	challenging
Stress (13)	of feelings	behavior
I don't like this kid (10)		
Annoying (18)		
Considering possible reasons for behavior (87)		
Child is seeking attention (20)	Mild	
It shouldn't but it can affect my relationship with child (5)	expressions	
Knowing the reason might draw me and child closer (6)	of feelings	
Fear factor (6)	with	
Consideration for the feelings of other children (18)	consideration	
Concern for safety (16)	Effect of	
Other children may copy the challenging behavior (7)	behavior on	
Behavior is a hinderance to teaching /takes time away from the other students (13)	other children	
Verbal expression of feelings (8)		
No effect (4)		

(table continues)

Behavior won't change our relationship (6)	Effect of behavior on teacher	
Teacher considers behavior as a challenge to tackle (3)		
Negative effect (9)		
The relationship will eventually become positive (3)		
Build/Positive relationship (11)		
Calming support (52)	Behavior management strategies	Behavior management strategies
Redirect the child (12)		
Proactive intervention (59)		
Automatic reaction (8)		
Seek help/support (37)		
Rules and acceptable behaviors (26)		
Empathy (14)		
Positive reinforcement (16)		
Getting to know child (14)		
Provide an alternative activity (38)		
Involve the parents (47)		
Exploring various social emotional tools (31)		
Engage child in conversation (12)		

I will discuss the study findings according to the research questions, using these two themes as a base as I explore the research questions that guided this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Researchers can achieve credibility in part by presenting thick descriptions and discussing negative cases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My interview method encouraged participants to express their views without restrictions. One of the key objectives of using the think-aloud method was to give participants the opportunity to say everything they were thinking; this method yielded data that I will describe in detail. I also achieved credibility in this study by recruiting participants who are informed about the research problem and are knowledgeable about the topic. All my study participants were teachers with at least five years of teaching experience and had dealt with challenging behavior in

the classroom. Though my study participants were from different sites, the cohesion of their views and strategies lend credibility to the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which a study and its findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings with different respondents. While the goal of qualitative studies is not to produce true statements that are generalizable, with transferability studies can be made applicable to broader contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability of a study can be achieved through rich descriptions. One of the ways that I ensured transferability in my study was by giving detailed descriptions of my data collection method, data analysis and a rich and description of my findings. In this chapter, I endeavored to describe participants' responses fully so that a reader could assess the transferability of my study findings.

Dependability

Dependability includes describing the steps taken through the study from the beginning to the findings. To achieve dependability, researchers need to make a reasoned argument for how they collect data and ensure that the data and research method can answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure the dependability of this study, I gave a detailed description of my research process. I also kept a reflexive journal during my interviews, where I recorded my own opinions and thinking, this helped to ensure that my biases did not interfere with transcription and data analysis. During the coding process I maintained a column where I described why certain conversations were coded and the reasons for choosing certain codes.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which study findings can be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability includes recognizing the ways a researcher's biases and preconceptions can factor into their interpretation of data and mediating against this through reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Since all study participants brought their own perspectives to the study, I contributed reflexivity by being open to receive the information, tried to ensure that their perspectives were documented without bias.

Results

Data revealed that study participants had different feelings about how the behaviors in the study scenarios might affect their relationship with students. While some stated that the behaviors would cause them to be stressed, others stated that the behavior might cause them to become overly concerned about their safety and the safety of the other children. Most participants considered the behaviors to be annoying, while others stated that challenging behaviors are a hindrance to teaching. One participant read the scenarios and admitted that they did not like 'this child' while another confessed the scenarios would cause them to consider quitting teaching. There were, however, participants who accepted the challenging behaviors as part of the job, stating that it was their job to teach the child the appropriate ways to behave. Interestingly most of the teachers interviewed said that the study scenarios were problems they previously dealt with in the classroom. Some admitted to currently dealing with some of the scenario behavior in the classroom.

Results for RQ1

RQ1:, How do preschool teachers describe the effects of challenging behavior on relationships they might have with students who exhibit such behaviors? In general, teachers said that the behavior would be overwhelming, and some even stated that it might cause them to be afraid. According to TI, "it will make me afraid to work with the child because you don't know when you say clean up weather or not the child will have a tantrum." T2 said, I think it's such a bad behavior because of the hitting the spitting. It makes you want to leave your job. It really does." Some teachers said that the behavior would lead to a stressful relationship. T7 said "This could be very frustrating for the teacher, and even sometimes lead to stress." T1 said:

> Yeah it will really stress me out. Yes, because it becomes overwhelming because you have for my class, we have 20 kids, and you have one child doing this and you're trying to get the other 19 kids involved and into the activity. When the child does that it puts you in a, not a good space.

T7, stated "This could be very frustrating for the teacher, and even sometimes leads to stress. But, as a teacher, you always have to take a step back, the child interest is what is at hand here, not the teacher's feelings."

Eight of the 10 teachers stated that challenging behaviors would not change the relationship they have with the student. The teachers, however, gave different reasons for why they felt that way. According to T7, "It would not have a negative effect on me. Because, definitely, I would see that the child is looking for affection. Maybe the child is not getting affection at home." T4 said, "I think this child is going through a problem

with his mom leaving, going away, leaving him going to work." T4 said, "The thing about it is that it's the behavior we don't like. It's the behaviors that's not acceptable, but the child is a human being, and we gotta treat the child with love and care."

T3's approach was "I'm just really really interested in what makes this child tick" T3 said "I really want to figure out this child. It just encourages me to really try harder to find something that I can do to help them but at the same time, there are days when I'm overwhelmed." T5 who also focused on the reason behind the behavior, said "I don't think it will have a negative effect on me and the child's relationship. I feel like I just want to understand why this child is acting like that." T5 however, admitted to finding scenario three, about a child who disrupts group meeting time, annoying. T5 said, "When this happens, it irritates me. Because this is the time of the day where learning happens in group meeting and they're disrupting the other kids from learning; when they do that the other kids just simply join in." But T5 maintained that, "It doesn't really affect my relationship it's just that. What it does is, as a teacher, I would have to be on alert every time throughout the whole day." T10 stated that the behavior could affect peer-relationships but not her relationship with the child. T10 said "my concern is why is he doing that. If I know why. Then maybe, you know, because it's gonna affect his relationship with his peers, but I don't think with me per se, because I'm here to support him." T8, who also said the behavior would not affect her relationship with the child, cited knowing they were children as her reason. T8 said, "I will try my best to not to let that affect my relationship with a kid because they are children, even though it could be, extreme and you can get upset and frustrated." While T8 admitted that the behavior will

cause her to feel frustrated, T8 added, "I wouldn't want the child to see me, really angry and upset because they can play on that too, they can play on your anger and you getting upset" Similar to T8's statement, T7 pointed out that the teacher showing any form of negative feelings or reactions could make the behavior worse. According to T7:

> So, the teacher cannot have a negative feeling towards the child. If the teacher has a negative feeling and effect towards the child, it's not going to help the child's behavior. The child's behavior is only going to manifest itself to a higher level.

T7, accepting that the behavior may be frustrating, said "Even though the teacher might feel frustrated the teacher has to stay calm and let the child see that the teacher is calm, and the teacher can deal with the child's behavior and help the child to stay calm." T5, also agreed with the teacher remaining calm. T5 said, "Even though the teacher might feel frustrated, the teacher has to stay calm and let the child see that the teacher is calm, and the teacher can deal with the child's behavior and help the child to stay calm." T9, who was one of the two teachers who believed challenging behavior can create a negative relationship, agreed with the teacher not letting the student see them stressed. T9 said, "I would have to walk outside, so that the child does not feel my frustration. And I can calm myself down before being able to help him regulate his behavior."

Two out of the 10 teachers interviewed for this study stated that the challenging behavior in the study scenarios would cause the relationship between them and the student to be negative. According to T2, "It would affect negatively but that doesn't mean that I would treat the child negatively." While considered challenging behaviors as a

hinderances to teaching, T2 also said "I'm trying to impart this knowledge to these other children and this child just won't let me finish or just won't let me do my work, I find it very aggravating." T2 went further to say, "I think sometimes I will feel like I failed and that I think could strain the relationship."

T9 said the challenging behaviors will create a negative relationship. T9 said "I believe this affects our relationship because I know that I would be frustrated with a child being so aggressive to me every day." T9 said the behavior will create conflict, she said

This behavior will affect the relationship because the child is disruptive in the classroom. I feel that we have to constantly go over the rules while the child doesn't want to hear about the rules and just wants to play. So, we would be bumping heads.

T9 said, "So, this would probably affect my relationship with him because he knows that at the time, he's slamming into other children that it will cause the other children to be upset."

Some participants expressed contrary reactions in their answers for RQ1. For example, some stated that the behavior would not affect their relationship with the child but later stated that the behavior would lead to a negative relationship. On closer analysis of the data, I discovered that the severity of the behavior was a factor in how most teachers judged how they will feel about the situation and their relationship with the child. For instance, T5, who had previously stated the behavior would be a welcome challenge in responding to first scenario, describing a child knocking down other children and laughing, changed his response when he read the second scenario with the child who

hit, spat, and destroyed property. T5 said, "this behavior might affect my relationship with the child. Because, I mean, I'm a human being. Nobody likes when somebody … I don't know anywhere nor any person who would like when somebody spits at them." Although T5 appeared to struggle with finding the proper words, T5, in reading this scenario, said that the behavior would cause a negative relationship between the teacher and the student.

Another participant who changed their response according to the scenario was T6. T6's response to the first scenario, about the child who knocked others down and laughed, was that the behavior would not affect the teacher's relationship with the child. T6 stated, "I don't think it will have an effect. Like a negative effect on me and the child's relationship. I feel like I just want to understand why the child acts like that." However, similar to T5, T6 said that the behavior described in the second scenario might, "create like a negative effect on the relationship with the child because no one wants to be hit, spat at, pushed around. And I feel like the teacher will not see the child the same." For the third scenario, about disrupting group meeting time, T6 stated that the behavior will have no effect on the teacher student relationship. According to T6, "I feel like, you know, it just might be, not that it will have a negative effect or positive effect. I feel like the teacher just will be like a little bit annoyed and fed up."

Some of the teachers stated that having to deal with the student without help and support would affect the effect the behavior has on the relationship they have with the child. According to T8,

> You know I'm not really sure how it will affect me because I've dealt with
> this. I think you just need support like in a classroom where you have a
> child doing all this and you work with a co teacher, you need an extra
> hand in the classroom. The support. because one child can affect the other
> children.

T6, however, stated that the lack of parent support could affect the teacher's outlook on the situation. T6 said, "And also because the mother is not, helping the teachers so the teacher also has a negative effect on that outlook." In general, teacher responses to the scenarios seemed to be more negative if they felt physically threatened by the child, as they seemed to feel in response to the second scenario. Teachers also anticipated feeling more challenged if they lacked administrative and parental support for managing the behavior.

Results for RQ2

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe the effects of behavior management strategies they might use to address such behaviors on relationships they might have with students who exhibit such behaviors? There were minimal variations in terms of strategies all the participants suggested that they would use to manage and correct the challenging behaviors in the study scenarios. Depending on the behavior, participants stated that they would engage the child in conversation, provide calming support, explore various social-emotional building tools, provide alternative activities, restate acceptable behaviors and rules, redirect the child, provide positive reinforcement, consider possible reasons for the behavior, and seek parent involvement. These can be grouped into three

general strategies of addressing the child's emotions, addressing the child's actions, and addressing over-arching factors.

Addressing the child's emotions. T4, speaking in response scenario two, about the child who ruined displays and spat, said "The two of us can work together, and we clean it up. while we cleanup we could have a nice conversation going." For the same scenario, T2 suggested being proactive and talking to the child. T2 said that they would tell the child, "Remember, we're going to the circle. When we get in circle, we need you to sit on your spot and, keep your hands and your body still, and we need to, focus our looking eyes listening ears." Some teachers said they would provide calming support, by sitting with the child, talking to them, reading to them, or taking the child for a walk. TI said "I will try to …me or my coworker, one of us will sit with the student, and try to console the child, and try to be a listening ear," while T3 said, "I like to tie in a book, somewhere along the line to try to talk to the children about bullies and that type of thing." Others, like T10, suggested a more hands-on approach. T10 said, "if you could bring that child close to you, and just find out what he likes to do or have him sit beside your leg and just rub him on his back."

Most participants brought up exploring various social-emotional skill building tools. This strategy is worth mentioning because teachers admitted to having and using curricular-based strategies. T5 stated, "I will use a solutions kit. Solutions kit is pictures that's depict different solutions with different problems where it might be a child that's not sharing." T5 explained using pictures from this kit to tackle the various social problems that students are dealing with. T7 however said, "I would show them the

feelings chart. What can we do, to make the situation easier? How do we greet our friends? We do not greet our friends by throwing our bodies on them."

Addressing the child's actions. Most of the teachers, when giving strategies for scenario 1, about the child who runs into other children, suggested providing the child with alternative activities. T9 said, "Give him jobs to do in the classroom. So that he'll have a task to do instead of being aggressive towards others." T4, for the same scenario, suggested, "if you are observing this child and you notice certain things the child like to do, and you offer that to that child 'come help me to…' 'come do this for me."

A strategy a few teachers stated that they would use to address the challenging behavior was redirecting the child. According to T6, "I feel like child K (in scenario 3 about disrupting group meeting time) needs a lot of redirecting; he or she needs a lot of redirection. They may also need some one on one time with the teacher." T2 suggested redirecting the child before they start the unacceptable behavior. T2 said, "I will try to redirect from the door. As soon as the child is dropped off." Other teachers suggested praise as a strategy to encourage good behaviors.

One strategy all the teachers said that they would use was restating the acceptable behaviors and rules to the child. T8 said, "I will be very stern, go over the classroom rules and what's appropriate and not appropriate, and in different ways that we can make sure that we're safe in the classroom." T3 suggested using the rules in a more proactive way; she said, "I think before even mom leaves (in scenario one, about the child who knocks others down after the other departs), I probably would say right in front of mom, "listen, we're getting ready for breakfast. This is what we're going to do. So, I would review the

rules right in front of mom." T6 was more direct in involving the parents when suggesting the use of stating acceptable behaviors as a strategy. T6 said "it's time to clean up at this time, it's time to go to bed, it's time to do this, so he understands that there are rules in school and at home." T10 said she would have peers help in reminding the child of the acceptable behaviors. T10 said, "Remind him again about our expectations in the classroom. And we go through the rules every day so he could remember, and remind his peers, you know, when you see your friend doing that, you know, always remind him."

Some teachers said they will use positive reinforcement as a strategy. According to T2, "If he likes a specific toy one little small toy. It's there for him. Once he completes his cleanup." T7 said, "So, as an educator, it's my job to work with the child to the best of my knowledge or my best ability to help that child to reinforce more positive behavior with that child not hurting the child's feelings."

Addressing overarching factors. All the teachers interviewed, while suggesting the strategies for managing challenging behaviors, considered the possible reasons for the behavior. According to T2:

I think it might draw you closer to the child, if you find out there is some

reason for the behavior. Like if you find out the child is going through a

difficult time or has experienced a different, a difficult time like a loss or

so.

Possible reasons included, "This behavior might come from a child that might be the only child at home," as suggested by T5. T4 looked at the behavior from an emotional perspective and said, "it could be a separation thing that he is going through, with himself,

separated from the mom." Others, including T9 and T2, considered the child's life at home as a possible factor. T2 said, "I wonder what's going on at home. What is the child seeing? what is the child, around? are the parents just letting the child do whatever they want to? is the child running the home?." and T9 said, "it's not completely, a child's fault, maybe there's other situations going on at home or within his life, that have changed. And that's the reason why he's behaving in such manner."

Parent involvement was a strategy that came up in every interview in talking about all the scenarios. Teachers talked about this strategy with different tones. T10 believed it helps children be successful: "Normally children become more successful when the parents are involved so if that parent is showing some involvement in this, I think that the child will know that 'my mom wants me to do this." T8 saw parent involvement as a big part of the solution. T8 said "Ask Mom and Dad, what's going on at home? what's new? Is it the child's first time in school?" While T6 stated that the child needs more structure and home. According to T6,

> I feel like he needs more structure at home when it comes to clean up time
> and rules. I feel like the parent needs to be more involved. Instead of saying,
> well, he doesn't show this behavior at home, there needs to be that
> connection between home and school.

In response to RQ2, some teachers believed their actions in response to children's behavior would have a positive effect or no effect at all on their relationship with the child. T7 did not believe that the strategies used to manage the challenging behavior would affect the relationship with the child. According to T7, "It will not affect the

relationship at all. I think the child would love this when you make things as a game for children. Children love games. They love things that are fun, you make it fun for them." T5 stated that implementing and coming up with new strategies will be a challenge but that the strategies will not affect the relationship with the child but will cause this teacher to remain alert. T5 added "It doesn't really affect my relationship, it's just that. What it does is, as a teacher, I would have to be on alert every time throughout the whole day" T3 said that the strategies might cause the child not to like the teacher at first because T3 is creating boundaries that the child does not want. T3 however agreed that the strategies would cause the teacher and the child to get closer eventually. According to T3

> Oh, it's probably going to take a while and probably in the beginning,
> they're going to hate me. Which is definitely a real thing. You're not gonna
> like the fact that I'm asking them to clean up and it's going to be
> challenging for a while, but then eventually, I am sure it will get to the
> easier and the child will be able to follow the rules.

T5, who stated that in the scenarios that the child is seeking attention, said "I think. Since I'm not ignoring them, it will build the relationship. Because even though they are children, they still know when they get ignored." T9, in agreement that the time spent with the child produces a positive effect stated,

> So, in fact I believe it would have would be a positive effect because I'm
> spending time with him, and he's able to get that one on one attention that
> I think he's seeking. So, it wouldn't be in a negative sense, all the time.
> He'll want to come in to do positive behavior, because he knows he'll have

a special task for him or a special activity for him in the morning, so

maybe I'll reduce the behavior.

T8 took a more cautious approach and described hope that the strategies would improve

the teacher's relationship with the child. T8 said, "I will hope that the strategies will

improve my relationship with the child, so that I have a better understanding of his

triggers, so that I'm able to probably prevent them from happening." T10 echoed the

same sentiments when stating the effects that the strategies might have on a relationship

with the child. T10 said, "hopefully it will bring us closer. He knows that the teacher

cares about him and the teacher wants him to learn, I will be expressing that which I

always do. We're here to learn." For scenario two, about the child who is destroying

things, hitting, and spitting, T6 said, "Like it will build on the relationship with the child

because you're trying to help the child improve, we come up with new strategies new

ideas. And you really thinking about the child as a person."

Only two teachers said that implementing behavior management strategies

would create a negative effect on their relationship with the child. T2 said," But

having to do the extra work I think it puts a strain on the relationship because it

puts another stressor out although it's part of the job. It really stresses what you

already have to do." T1 said that because of the large class size, it would be

overwhelming to give attention to the other children while focusing on creating

strategies for the child. According to T1,

It could leave you feeling as though you do not want to deal with the child

that the child is taking all of your energy, it's taking a lot of time. Valuable

time from the other children and to redirect this child. So, I think it can have

a negative effect on the relationship with the child.

Although teachers view on the effect of challenging behavior on their relationship

depended on the severity of the behavior, data in this study shows that in general eight of

the 10 teachers interviewed in response to RQ2 believed that the strategies they used to

manage children's behavior will either have no effect on their relationship with the

student or draw them closer to the student.

Additional Finding

Although the study scenarios the teachers worked with were gender neutral, most

of the participants unconsciously assigned the male gender to the misbehaving child. In

the results section described above, teachers used pronouns such as *he*, *him* and *his,* nine

times in responding to RQ1, about teachers' perceived effect of behavior on their

relationship with a child, and 27 times in responding to RQ2, about the effect of behavior

management strategies on their relationship with a child. There was no mention of a

female gender in referring to a child in any of the quotations presented above.

For instance, T10, when stating that they would support the child, said, "my

concern is why is he doing that. If I know why. Then maybe, you know, because it's

gonna affect his relationship with his peers, but I don't think with me per se, because I'm

here to support him." T9, when discussing leaving the room to de-stress, said "I would

have to walk outside, so that the child does not feel my frustration. And I can calm

myself down before being able to help him regulate his behavior." Again, hinting at the

assumption that the child that needs regulation is a boy. T2, while suggesting positive

reinforcement, said "If he likes a specific toy … It's there for him. Once he completes his cleanup." Even when discussing how the child's home could be a factor in the child's behavior, T6 said "I feel like he needs more structure at home when it comes to clean up time and rules. I feel like the parent needs to be more involved. Instead of saying, well, he doesn't show this behavior at home," And T8 said "I will hope that the strategies will improve my relationship with the child, so that I have a better understanding of his triggers."

Gender bias in teacher perception of child behavior has been described in literature. The biases educators have when it comes to sex and race can influence their perception of behaviors over time and exacerbate inequalities (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). The influence of gender bias on teacher perspectives of the effect of challenging behavior and their responses to it on their relationship with the child was not a part of this study, yet the apparent assumption of male misbehavior over female misbehavior is worth noting. According to Gilliam et al. (2016), preconceived ideas about the gendered basis for behavior may influence teacher expectations for different children and may cause them to notice boys' behavior more than they notice similar behavior in girls. Teachers may admit to having biases, however, data from this study shows that such biases possibly tainted teachers' expectations in deciding the sex of the child in the scenarios.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on the effects of challenging behavior and behavior management strategies on the teacher-

student relationship. To achieve this purpose, I interviewed10 preschool teachers using

the think-aloud interview method and scenarios drawn from the real experiences of

preschool teachers. I transcribed the interviews, and analyzed them for codes, categories,

and themes. I presented the results of the data analysis which were that teachers believed

challenging behavior does not affect their teacher-student relationships and they believed

that the strategies they use to manage challenging behaviors do not have negative effects

on the teacher-student relationships. I will report the implications of these results in the

next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the effects of challenging behaviors and behavior management strategies on teacher-student relationships. To achieve this, I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews involving the think-aloud method and scenarios drawn from the real experiences of preschool teachers. This study was conducted to fill a gap in literature regarding teachers' perspectives of the effects of children's challenging behavior and teachers' behavior management strategies on relationships they have with children exhibiting challenging behaviors. I found that eight of the 10 teachers interviewed stated that challenging behavior such as that portrayed in the scenarios would not affect their relationships with children. Two teachers stated that implementing behavior management would create negative effects on their relationships with children.

Interpretation of the Findings

Evans et al. (2019) found that the teacher-student relationship is protected against the affective components of conflict with challenging students. In this present study, I found that even with the aggression and disruptive behaviors depicted in the scenarios, most teachers maintained that challenging behavior would not affect their relationships with children. Garwood et al. (2018) found that the primary cause of teacher stress is student misbehavior. Newberry and Allsop (2017) observed that the stress of managing children with challenging behaviors can cause teachers to quit teaching. The reactions that teachers have towards challenging behavior and the relationships they have with misbehaving students depend on their coping skills and attitudes towards dealing with

stress. According to Hind, Larkin, and Dunn (2019), a teacher's attitude is a strong predictor of their willingness to work with students with socioemotional behavior disorders. Teachers' individual attitudes, commitment to their jobs, and willingness to help children with challenging behaviors can therefore be considered as possible factors. Other possible factors include teachers' years of experience and efficacy, preservice and in-service training, and the level of assistance or coaching that teachers receive for managing challenging behavior.

Mejia and Hoglund (2016), found that the irritation caused by children who are slow to adjust to school could cause teachers not to provide support to the child. Findings in the current study revealed that, even with disruptive behaviors, participants were more inclined to find out reason for the behavior than to react automatically to it. No participant indicated that they would provide deny support to the child for having behaviors that are challenging. Study data revealed that while the code *considering reasons for behavior was mentioned* 87 times, the code that ranked next in the number of times it came up was *proactive intervention* which was mentioned 57 times. Teachers found the depicted behavior annoying 18 times. These codes and their occurrence patterns show that while study participants found challenging behaviors annoying, they were inclined to find the causes of the behavior and ways to keep such behaviors from happening rather than being reactive. Miller et al. (2017) reported that the typical approach teachers have towards challenging behavior is reactive, which in most cases results in the exclusion of the child rather than the remediation of the behavior or its causes.

Most participants did not believe that the strategies that they use to manage challenging behaviors would not affect their relationships with students displaying challenging behavior. Valente, Monteiro, and Lourenço (2019) stated that the strategies teachers use for classroom discipline play an effective role in creating positive teacher-student relationships. The effect of behavior management strategies on the teacher-student relationship is important, especially because such relationships are beneficial to children's emotional and academic development. Relationship building plays a positive role in students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Anyon et al., 2018). While it was not a part of the present study's inquiry, it may be equally important to learn students' perceptions of how the strategies their teachers use to manage disruptive behaviors affect their relationships with their teachers. Mejia and Hoglund (2016) reported that over time, negative interactions caused by the strategies a teacher uses to manage behavior may leave a child feeling anger toward their teacher and result in conflicts in relationships over time.

Lazarus (1995) said coping affects reactions to stress in two central ways: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In this study, teachers considered the reason for the child's misbehavior 87 times, a problem-focused coping style, and applied an emotional-focused coping style such as considering quitting only three times in the study data. Also, participants' appraisal of the behaviors was subjective and differed. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) said that individuals engage in appraisal of a situation in terms of the significance of the action or event to situational wellbeing. Study

data revealed that when faced with aggressive and disruptive behavior in the classroom, participants assessed dangers to the child, their peers, and themselves.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is that there was only one male participant. This limitation was likely unavoidable because there are only four male teachers in the agency. According to Davis and Hay (2018), there is critical lack of male teachers in primary education. Van Polanen, Colonnesi, Tavecchio, Blokhuis, and Fukkink (2017) reported that 3% of teachers in preprimary education worldwide are men. Nevertheless, Sak, Şahin Sak, and Yerlikaya (2015) found no significant difference in terms of beliefs of male and female respondents regarding the use of behavior management strategies or the frequency with which they used such strategies. However, because participants in this study seemed to assume the scenarios depicted challenging behaviors of male and not female students, a greater number of male study participants may have resulted in more varied perspectives regarding challenging behavior.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include using a structured interviewing method with questions and followup questions about the effects of challenging behavior. Such a study might elicit different data from participants and encourage them to explain and give reasons for their behavior management strategies as well as reasons why they feel behaviors and strategies will have a positive, negative, or no effect on their relationships with children.

While this study revealed that most teachers do not believe that the strategies they use to manage challenging behaviors affect their relationship with the child, two of the 10 teachers in this study did believe their relationship with the child would be affected. Future studies might explore why these teachers hold this belief and how it affects their interactions in the classroom when faced with challenging behaviors. It would also be helpful to study behavior management strategies from the student perspective. This might be difficult with young children, because of the ability to apply metacognitive skills develops later than preschool years, but findings from such a study could help teachers be more reflective in choosing strategies for managing behaviors.

This study's additional finding was that although teachers were confronted with gender-neutral scenarios, most of them assigned the male gender to the misbehaving child. A future study could explore teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors as they relate to gender. Such a study could investigate if teachers have biases regarding children whom they consider most likely to misbehave. Having preconceptions that a male or female will misbehave could influence how teachers report challenging behavior. Teachers might be blind to the misbehavior of a gender because of their beliefs.

Latifoglu (2016) reported that challenging behavior in students causes about half of beginning teachers to leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years on the job. Future studies could focus on exploring factors that help some teachers maintain positive relationships with students with challenging behaviors. Sutherland et al. (2018) suggested that continuing problems with children's behavior and teachers' inability to successfully reduce problem behavior can lead to negative interactions and relationships between

teachers and children and a negative atmosphere in the classroom. Such studies on factors

that determine how challenging behaviors affect teachers could help administrators focus

and plan for ways to mitigate against such factors.

Implications

The findings indicate that while dealing with challenging behavior may be the

most challenging task educators have, most teachers in this study maintained that they

would have a close relationship with students with behavior problems. The implication of

this finding is that, even with the misbehavior, teachers include and educate all childing

including those with challenging behaviors. Heightened aggression in elementary school

is often a product of student-teacher relationships in earlier grades that were marked by

high levels of conflict and low closeness (Lee & Bierman, 2018). Providing teachers,

especially early childhood teachers, with training on maintaining close relationships with

students is necessary to ensure students continue to have positive relationships with their

teachers in the higher grades. Such training would create awareness and maybe cause

teachers to be more mindful of the strategies that they use when managing challenging

behaviors.

This study will also benefit administrators because it allows them to see

challenging behavior from the teacher's perspective. By reading this research along with

participant's words and reactions, administrators might better understand some of the

behaviors that teachers deal with, their thoughts as they go through these situations, and

how the behavior affects their relationship with the children. Administrators might also

find it worth considering that the *Seek help and support* code came up less than half as

many times as *Consider possible reasons* for behavior. Seeking help and support was not at the top of the teachers' list of strategies. This could be due to preconditioning, if teachers already know that help is not available, or to the possibility that teachers are more confident in their own behavior management skills than they are of the advice they might get from administrators. Whichever the case may be, administrators might pay attention to teacher willingness to seek or accept help with an especially challenging child.

Study findings could support positive social change because they show that teachers strive to maintain a positive classroom climate and are mindful of the strategies, they use in managing challenging behavior and the possible effect of those strategies on their relationship with children. The findings may affect positive social change because they could create stronger teacher-family relationships, especially with the families of children who misbehave, such families will be comforted in knowing that their child is not treated differently because of their behavior. This study may contribute to increased supports for teachers, given their current belief in the importance of positive teacher-child relationships, and their inclination to help, instead of punishing the challenging child. Any action that supports positive teacher-student relationships may also lead to a positive learning environment, and increased school success.

Conclusion

Challenging behaviors are expected from children as they learn socially appropriate behaviors and learn ways to express their feelings. However, the intensity and frequency of many of these behaviors can create a negative classroom environment,

endanger the student, their peers, and the teacher. The relationship between a teacher and a child displaying challenging, aggressive, and sometimes dangerous behavior is vital in curbing and possibly eliminating the behavior. This basic qualitative study explored preschool teachers' perspectives on challenging behavior and how the strategies they use to manage such behaviors could affect their relationship with the students who exhibit such behaviors. I interviewed 10 teachers for this study and found that most teachers believed that they would maintain a positive relationship with the child.

The findings of this study showed that most teachers did not believe challenging behaviors, nor the strategies that they use to manage behaviors, affect the relationship they have with children. This finding implies that teachers maintain a positive relationship with students, and this presents a hope that early childhood classroom environments are safe learning environments for both the misbehaving child and their peers. The study findings imply that most teachers are mindful of how they manage behavior problems. This mindfulness of reaction to challenging behavior could lead to better relationships between teachers and children that exhibit challenging behaviors, and this will be beneficial to students who require more time to learn acceptable behaviors. These findings could provide more peace of mind for parents and administrators because, while teachers may report that a child is misbehaving, it does not affect the teacher-student relationship with the child.

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Appendix A: Think Aloud Scenarios

Warm up Scenario

It is nap time and as usual Child S (three-years-old) gets off their cot and continues to jump on the cots of the other children when the teacher goes to get Child S, Child S runs around the classroom and has been known to run out of the classroom at nap time when there is only one teacher present. The teacher offers Child S a book, and a stuffed animal to play with quietly on their cot but Child S starts to throw the objects. When Child S is told that they are disturbing the other children, Child S responds by screaming and jumping on their cot.

Scenario 1

Child Y is five-years-old. Child Y comes in with their mother, Child Y gives their mother a hug goodbye and waits till she leaves. As soon as Child Y'S mother leaves, Child Y begins to run into other children and does this till they fall. When they fall, Child Y throws their body on the child that falls and starts to laugh even when the child cries. Child Y repeats this behavior every day as soon as their mother leaves and does this to one child after the other.

Scenario 2

Child T is four-years-old. Child T has a good day until it is cleanup time. When the teacher gives the warning that it will soon be clean up time, Child T makes a fist and begins to scream "no clean up." When the teacher repeats the words "clean up," Child T raises their fist as if to hit the teacher. Child T often hits teachers and friends, throws tantrums, and pushes down storage bins and library shelves at the mention of the words

"cleanup.' When the teacher tries to hold Child T and keep Child T from ripping the charts on the wall, Child T begins to spit at the teacher. Child T's mother says that Child T does not behave that way at home.

Scenario 3

Child K is three-years-old. Child K disrupts group meeting by joining the meeting but doing everything the teacher says not to do. Child T rolls around the carpet and makes the other children laugh. Child K knocks down the blocks so that group meeting becomes a block cleaning activity. When the teacher can get the other children to ignore Child K's behavior, Child K walks around the circle randomly stepping on other children's knees and feet. Holding group meetings with Child K in the class is a challenge.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction and welcome

Thank you for taking the time to come in and do this interview. I appreciate your time

and your expertise. My name is Elizabeth Uchegbu, I am a Ph.D. at Walden University,

and the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives on challenging behavior

and how the strategies they use to manage such behavior might affect the teacher-student

relationship.

Confidentiality and consent

Data from this interview and everything you say today will be used for this research only

and will be treated with confidentiality. You can stop this interview at any point if you no

longer feel comfortable to continue. With your consent, this interview will be recorded to

ensure that I do not miss any relevant information. A transcript of the interview will be

emailed to you to ensure you are represented correctly. Do you have any questions so far?

Please read and sign this consent form, and we can begin.

The think-aloud interview method

For today's interview I will give you three actual scenarios of challenging behaviors

which were given to me by preschool teachers who are my colleagues. I will like you to

read each scenario, one at a time, and say out loud everything that think about as you read

these scenarios. This method of saying what you think as it goes through your mind is

called the think aloud method. I understand that thinking and saying out loud what you

are thinking is not natural or easy and may take some practice. We will do a warm-up

scenario to get you comfortable with thinking out loud.

Warm-up scenario

I would like you to read this scenario and as you read, consider the behavior in the scenario, the child, and how the behavior might affect your relationship with the child. (Please say out loud, everything you are thinking as you read the scenario).

Present the Warm-Up Scenario on a single sheet of paper, printed exactly as written in Appendix A.

Thank you. Now please read the scenario again, but this time I will like you to think about how you might manage the scenario behavior and how you think what you do to manage the behavior might affect your relationship with the child. (Please say out loud, everything you are thinking as you read the scenario).

Study scenarios

Thank you. The next three scenarios which I will give you are the study scenarios. I will hand them to you one at a time, and we will go over them just like did with the warm-up scenario. Do I have your consent to record as you think aloud?

This is scenario one (process followed for the warm-up scenario will be repeated)

Closing

Thank you for participating in my interview. Here are my email and phone number in case you have any questions about the process you did not ask today and need to reach me. The next step will be to show you a copy of the study before it is published to ensure that you were represented correctly.