2023

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives on their Responses to Children's Challenging Behaviors

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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M.Ed, Wayland University, 2015

BSOE, Wayland University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2023

Abstract

The problem that was the focus of this study was the high rate of suspensions and expulsions of preschool children enrolled in independently funded childcare centers in Texas, and the lack of understanding of preschool teachers' response to children's challenging behavior. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers' perspective on how they handle children's challenging behaviors, and what inclines teachers toward suspending or expelling children from independently funded childcare centers. Liu's theory of children's externalizing behavior provided the conceptual framework for the study. Ten preschool teachers from urban, independently funded childcare centers in Texas were interviewed via Zoom, and data were analyzed using open coding. Results indicated children and teachers experienced frustration that inspired teachers to recommend suspension or expulsion for challenging students. Teachers characterized challenging children as hungry for attention and beset by difficulties at home, teachers recognized students' inability to regulate feelings causing their disruptive behavior, and teachers needed training in managing children's challenging behaviors. Recommendations for future research include interviewing teachers who work with toddlers 1 to 2 years old and replicating this study in a different region of the United States. Positive social change may result from this study if childcare centers become encouraged to provide preschool teachers with resources to address children's challenging behaviors and to recognize the role of frustration in teachers' and children's behavior.

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Dedication

Through the attempts of fulfilling my goal to achieve my doctoral degree, there are many I wish to dedicate this achievement to beginning with God first and foremost. He has been my inspiration to achieve this goal, and this could not have happened without Him. I would be nothing. My family, beginning with my husband, Willie, of 36 years; my mother, George Ann Brown; and stepfather, Frank Brown. My three children Keyston, Willie III, and Deonte'; and their wives, Kristen, Mariah, and Danisha. Lastly, I want to dedicate this work to my grand boys. They hold a special place in my heart: Zavien, Adrien, Messiah, and Makai. These young men are going to be something great. I would also like to dedicate this to my brothers and their families, Thomas Carson and Gerald Carson. I love that you supported me throughout this journey and always shared with me how proud you were of me. I love you guys.

Acknowledgments

Jehovah God gets all of the glory and honor for allowing me to achieve this milestone. He provided me with wings to spread the seed of hope among children who have fallen through the cracks. I take nothing for granted, and I am thankful to have Him as my armor of protection. In addition, I would like to thank the following people who were pivotal in my life as my torch, rock, and spear.

My mother and children have been my torch; they have stayed lit even in the dark and have fueled me to keep moving. Being a teen parent taught me many life lessons that have been monumental in my life: They were to never stop loving myself, know my value, and know my worth. You all have held me and believed in me, and the light is still shining. I love you Mama, Keyston, Willie III, and Deonté.

As for my husband of 36 years, you have been my rock; your strength, resilience, and stability have taught me how to weather the storms. We have both seen the doors of death, and God has spared us to provide hope and continue to plant seeds; our purpose is still evolving. I love you, Big Sexy, and I would do this all over again just to do it with you. Thanks, honey, for never giving up on me.

To my professor, Dr. Patricia Anderson, you have been my spear. You supported, guided, and provided direction when I wanted to throw the towel in. You pierced through everything that tried to come against me. You stood patiently and steadily, and aimed straight to remove anything that was not good. I love you, Doc.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

I explored the perspectives of early childhood lead teachers and how they respond to children's behaviors that might be worthy of suspension or expulsion. Sutherland et al. (2018) found that a teacher's inability to understand and manage challenging behavior can lead to negative social interactions that may result in suspension or expulsion of a disruptive child. I begin this chapter by presenting background information and by describing the research problem and purpose of the study. A brief description of the conceptual framework of the study and research questions follows, along with an introduction to the method by which I conducted the study.

Background

In recent years, preschool expulsion and discipline practices have received attention throughout the United States (Giordano et al., 2021). According to Zeng et al. (2019), preschoolers are expelled at a significantly higher rate than are children in Grades K–12. Recent data collected by American Progress indicated 50,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once, and it was estimated another 17,000 have been expelled (Giordano et al., 2021). According to Zeng et al., children who have been suspended and expelled early in their academic careers are more likely to face grade retention and academic failure than other children. Zeng et al. also found that early suspension and expulsion creates in children a negative attitude about school that can result in dropping out of high school and juvenile delinquency.

Giordano et al. (2021) indicated that instead of changing unwanted behavior, expulsion has negative effects when there is no behavioral support and the children are

kept at home until they can be enrolled in another childcare setting; this increases the child's risk of being expelled again. Stegelin (2019) reported that 8,700 children age 3–4 years are expelled each year from preschool classrooms. In early childhood centers, expulsion means dismissal from enrollment, but suspension may include sending a child home early (out-of-school suspension) or sending a child to the director's office; these actions reduce the child's access to instruction (Novoa & Malik, 2018).

Stegelin (2019) noted racial and gender disparity in the incidence of school expulsion, indicating that African American boys have the highest incidence of preschool expulsion, constituting at least 42% of children who are expelled, even though African American students make up only 12% of the population. Both racial and gender disparities have been shown in the incidence of out-of-school suspension, with Black students suspended at a rate 3.6 times that of their White classmates (Stegelin, 2019). In addition, Gilliam and Shabar (2006) suggested that African American, Asian, and Latino children and children with disabilities are most affected by expulsion policies enforced by independent childcare centers, a finding confirmed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2015). These facts suggest that teacher perspectives may be a driving force behind preschool suspension and expulsion. However, the Workforce Commission in Texas, the state that was the focus of the current study, has no policies in place to reduce preschool suspension or expulsion, leaving independently funded childcare centers free to remove children as they see fit. Independent childcare centers in Texas are required to write in their policies how they

will address suspension and expulsion but are not mandated to refrain from suspending or expelling preschool children (Texas Health and Human Services Commission, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of the current study was the high rate of preschool suspensions and expulsions in Texas. Zelinski (2019) found that although Texas has banned suspensions for preschool to second grade for most young children, 566 preschoolers were expelled from childcare in one Texas city in 2017. A second Texas city detained 75 of every 100 preschool children through in-school suspension during the 2017–2018 school year (Texans Care for Children, 2019). Although rules prevent Head Start teachers and teachers in other tax-funded facilities from resorting to suspension or expulsion (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services , 2016), such rules do not apply to teachers in independently funded centers. According to O'Grady and Ostrosky (2021), there is evidence that challenging behaviors and a lack of teacher–child interaction in urban independent childcare centers result in children being suspended or expelled from care. A gap in practice was evidenced by the fact that preschool suspensions and expulsions continue to happen in Texas despite efforts to eliminate them as a behavior management tool.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of early childhood lead teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban settings in Texas, concerning children with challenging behaviors whom teachers may recommend be suspended or expelled from their classrooms or the center. I

conducted a basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews, as described by Caelli et al. (2003). According to Caelli et al., interviews provide a useful way to explore a phenomenon through the informants who have experience with the phenomenon. The phenomenon under study was preschool suspensions and expulsions used to manage or eliminate challenging behavior that teachers characterize as hyperactive, aggressive, or delinquent (see Liu, 2004). Data were gathered through interviews of teachers of children age 3 to 5 who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban areas of Texas.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this basic qualitative study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences with children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe characteristics of children that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ3: What resources or training do preschool teachers describe would be helpful to them in managing children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was Liu's (2004) theory of childhood externalizing behavior. Liu identified hyperactive, aggressive, and delinquent activity as indicators of childhood externalizing behaviors. Externalizing behaviors contrast with internalizing behaviors, which are associated with expressions of anxiety, inhibition, withdrawal, and depressed affect (Liu, 2004). Liu described hyperactive behavior as

inclusive of inattention and excess motor activity, aggressive behavior such as that which harms or threatens harm to others, and delinquent behavior including theft, destructiveness, and other antisocial activities. According to Liu, externalizing behaviors in early childhood are strong predictors of later juvenile delinquency and adult crimes and violence. Liu indicated that the quality of caregiver relationships and early intervention in redirecting externalizing impulses are important factors in reducing the problem of challenging behavior in children and later antisocial behavior. Therefore, Liu's work provided an appropriate framework for the current study. I describe Liu's theory in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative design with interviews was used to answer the research questions. Qualitative researchers examine actions, values, and human feelings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), a qualitative study is concerned with the frame of reference of the informant as a means of understanding behaviors. Additionally, Stake (2010) said that qualitative research reflects the interaction among the phenomena in a natural context and the embeddedness of the context within the complexity of the study. For those reasons, a qualitative study in which teachers would be able to freely describe their experiences and feelings in dealing with challenging children was more appropriate than a quantitative study that might have limited my ability to explore teachers' perceptions. I recruited 10 teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban areas of Texas with children age 3 to 5.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms that were used in this study:

Challenging behavior: Disruptive or destructive behavior that causes a child to be disengaged from classroom instruction, that may be distracting to peers and teachers, and that could cause harm to themselves and others (Winchester et al., 2022).

Expulsion: Removing a child permanently from school or from a school program (An & Horn, 2022). This is similar to the definition of expulsion applied in childcare centers (Giordano et al., 2021).

Independently funded childcare: Facilities that are privately operated for profit by corporations or individual owners or are operated by a nonprofit agency (ChildCare.gov, 2022). Often teachers in independently funded childcare centers are paid less than teachers in tax-supported centers (Slot, 2018).

Lead teacher: In an early childhood classroom, the adult who has primary responsibility for curriculum, daily planning, and behavior management, including recommendations regarding child suspension and expulsion (Bassok et al., 2021).

Suspension: Temporarily removing a student from the classroom to another location in the same building or campus as an in-school suspension, or to the custody of a parent as an out-of-school suspension (An & Horn, 2022).

Assumptions

I assumed that teachers who participated in this study would be open, honest, and accurate in responding to the interview questions. I also assumed the teachers I spoke to would be representative of preschool teachers in general and would have responsibility

for children's conduct in the classroom and responsibility for their own responses to children's behavior. Such assumptions are typical in a qualitative study that relies on the veracity of informants and is set in naturalistic contexts (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was early childhood lead teachers' perspectives of children's challenging behaviors and their responses to those behaviors. The study was delimited to 10 lead teachers of children age 3 to 5 who worked in independently funded childcare centers located in urban areas in Texas. Excluded from the study were teachers who worked in publicly funded childcare centers, such as Head Start centers and state prekindergarten programs, and teachers who were not the lead teacher in their classrooms. Also excluded were teachers of children of different ages than the preschool ages of 3 to 5 years.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was my reliance on teachers' recollection of their responses and feelings regarding children's challenging behavior; some teachers may have been unable to recall challenging instances with pertinent details if those events happened over a period of time. None of the teachers seemed reluctant to share their true feelings about children's challenging behavior and their responses to it, even if those responses fell outside of what was established following the 2016 Head Start directive as best practice in centers that are publicly funded. In addition, because this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted childcare in many different ways, children's behavior may have been affected by these disruptions and teachers'

practices in observing and managing these behaviors may have been different from practices they otherwise would have followed. To control for some of these factors, I worked hard to keep my biases in check and ask only the questions pertinent to the study without my judgment clouded what was being shared. I tried to mitigate the intrusion of my biases, and I limited any conflicts of interest by interviewing teachers I did not know or have influence over.

Significance

The study provided information regarding teacher interactions with preschool students following children's challenging behavior. As reported by Schwartz (2018), teacher enlightenment on the importance of cultural differences, values, and belief systems of students tends to strengthen positive teacher–child interactions and minimize children's aggressive behaviors, including biting, hitting, punching, kicking, and other offensive outbursts. Findings from the current study may inspire teacher training and policy changes leading to more positive teacher–child interactions and less inclination to resort to suspension or expulsion as a means of eliminating challenging behavior. A more positive learning environment may lead to better behavior and increased student success.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the importance of exploring early childhood lead teachers' perspectives regarding children's challenging behaviors. I outlined the work of Liu (2004) as the conceptual framework for this study and provided background about the problem of preschool suspension and expulsion in Texas and the United States. I briefly described the method by which I conducted this study, using interviews of 10 lead

teachers of children age 3 to 5. In the next chapter, I present a review of the recent literature regarding this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was the focus of this study was the high rate of preschool suspensions and expulsions in Texas. In this literature review, I present studies related to teacher interactions and student behaviors in independent childcare centers. The themes in my literature review include the multiple roles preschool teachers play in their everyday work, teacher–child interaction responsibilities, evidence of preschool teacher strain and stress, challenging behaviors as a source of teacher stress, and teachers' responses to children with challenging behaviors. I begin this chapter with a description of how the literature was searched and the conceptual framework of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

The resources used for this literature search strategy included Google Scholar and databases in the Walden Library. Search terms I used included *behavior problems*, *challenging behaviors*, *classroom management*, *interactional support*, *managing challenging behaviors*, *role strain*, *social and emotional development*, and *teacher burnout*. My search was limited to studies published since 2018, although earlier foundational work was also included in this review.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study of the phenomenon of preschool suspensions and expulsions used to manage or eliminate challenging behavior was Liu's (2004) theory of childhood externalizing behavior. Liu examined the risk factors and behavioral problems that later lead to delinquency as a juvenile, perpetration of violence, and adult crimes. Liu suggested that although factors intractable for early childhood

teachers, such as poverty and family dysfunction, may be the heart of childhood externalizing behaviors, caregivers can ameliorate these behaviors with sensitive and supportive interactions.

Liu (2004) described externalizing behavior as an outward display of hyperactive, aggressive, or delinquent behaviors, in contrast to internalizing behaviors, which appear to be directed inward to the self instead of to others and things in the environment. Aggression includes verbal and physical behavior that threatens or harms others, including adults, animals, and other children. Liu suggested that aggression can be self-protecting and appropriate under some conditions, or destructive to others and self under different circumstances, indicating that discerning the appropriateness of aggression requires evaluative skill. According to Liu, boys are more likely to be physically aggressive than girls, but girls exhibit relational aggression through slander and social exclusion. Relational aggression is less likely than physical aggression to cause suspension or expulsion from school. Delinquency is observed in both girls and boys, and includes theft or destruction of property, lying, and cheating. Hyperactivity, according to Liu, encompasses two different behavior patterns: lack of attention as directed or expected, and high levels of motor activity. These expressions of externalizing behavior may occur in combination, so a child who is aggressive may also be hyperactive or delinquent (Liu, 2004).

Liu (2004) identified several factors associated with childhood externalizing behavior. These include various biological risk factors, such as parental history of externalizing behavior; maternal malnutrition or substance abuse during pregnancy,

including alcohol or tobacco use; and birth complications. In addition, various psychosocial factors, such as family poverty, contribute to childhood externalizing behavior. Liu suggested that combinations of biological and psychosocial factors have an interaction effect such that children affected by multiple factors are significantly more likely to demonstrate externalizing behavior than they would with one of these factors alone. Furthermore, mediating effects, such as low intellectual capacity, may compound the influence of a biological or psychosocial variable. At the same time, competent and positive caregiving results in fewer and less intense behavior challenges in children (Liu, 2004).

Liu's ideas about children's externalizing behavior have been confirmed by other authors. For example, Miller et al. (2017) described challenging behavior as an interference of adult and peer engagement or learning that creates a pattern of behavior. Russell (2017) described challenges in the classroom, including children's disruptive motor and vocal behaviors, prolonged tantrums, verbal and physical aggression, and the inability to follow teacher guidance. DuPaul and Cleminshaw (2020) noted that challenging behavior is associated with the lack of academic and early social skills. Zeng et al. (2019) found that preschool children were significantly more likely than other children to be suspended or expelled from their childcare center if they experienced domestic violence in the home, an adult living with mental illness, or adult substance abuse; were a victim of violence; lived in high poverty; had divorced parents; or had a parent who was incarcerated.

Liu (2004) depicted a clear picture of the problem posed for preschool teachers by children's externalizing behaviors. Liu's work informed the research questions in the current study by helping me identify the structural components of the problem. Liu's work was also reflected in the themes that were derived from the data. In the following sections, literature related to elements of Liu's work and to the problem of preschool suspension and expulsion is reviewed.

Literature Related to Key Concepts and Variables

In this section, I describe recent literature relevant to the problem of the high rate of preschool suspension and expulsion in independently funded childcare centers in Texas. I begin by describing the role of the lead teacher in a preschool classroom. I then review literature addressing preschool teacher reactions to challenging behavior, behavior management resources, and training typically available to preschool teachers.

Lead Teacher Roles in the Preschool Classroom

A preschool lead teacher has an enormous responsibility to maximize a child's learning potential. This responsibility includes tasks such as preparing lesson plans, organizing the day-to-day work of an assistant, sustaining a partnership with parents, and maintaining a safe, healthy, and sanitary environment (Shewark et al., 2018). In this section, I describe the teacher's roles that affect their interactions with the children, including organizing the classroom and planning for instruction, creating a positive interpersonal relationship with each child, and supporting positive interactions among children.

Organizing the Classroom and Planning for Instruction

A key task of the preschool lead teacher is to work with their teacher assistant to organize the physical space of the classroom and to plan for and implement instruction (Bowles et al., 2018). According to Nores et al. (2022), successful classroom management begins with creating a physical environment in which children can learn and have their personal and developmental needs met. Nores et al. described a preschool classroom as an environment that is set up with learning centers that allow small- and large-group participation. Price (2018) suggested the room should be aesthetically pleasing and suggestive of home, with color, flowers, and various learning centers that promote a sense of belonging. Tonge et al. (2019) noted that the environment should be designed with modifications, equipment resources, and safety measures designed to be inclusive of diverse learners.

Often the preschool classroom is organized with tables or desks, shelves, manipulatives, individual cubbies, empty spaces for play, and posters that communicate the subject matter related to each learning area (Fardlillah & Suryono, 2019). In addition, the classroom should include interest centers that involve problem-solving activities; stories and books; materials for dramatic play; music activities; opportunities for block building; and sensory, nature, and science activities for engagement (Texas Health and Human Services Commission, 2021). To cultivate a climate of autonomy, teachers should make sure children have the opportunity to engage in different interest areas, and these areas should be labeled in words and symbols to explain how to play with the materials and treat the materials with respect. The teacher interacts by actively participating in the

play space. The careful design of the classroom, along with guidance from the teacher, minimizes the risk of behavior problems (Erturk Kara, 2018). Goble et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of the lead teacher's role as creator of and guide through the classroom environment, and they stated that children's interaction with their environment supports their highest cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

Once the lead teacher has the room in order and the attention of the students, the instruction for learning can begin. The teacher facilitates the day's lesson in a meaningful way to enhance the children's knowledge and reasoning abilities by asking open-ended questions and explaining the behavior expectations of the class (Wang et al., 2021). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2018), the lead teacher provides developmentally appropriate activities and materials that recognize the diverse cultural needs of children in a nonstereotypical way. In addition, NAEYC stated that instruction must include mathematics and the symbols and relationship to quantities, measurement, and everyday conversions. Moreover, teachers are accountable to promote activities such as arts and crafts, games, storytelling, and field trips that enhance children's early childhood experience (Humphries et al., 2018). Additionally, Goble et al. (2019) found that sensitive teacher–child interaction during learning activities promotes the child's self-esteem, improves their emotional and peer relationships, and helps the child adjust to school. As the teacher takes on the obligation of an instructional leader, they help the child to process social information to gain social competence through emotional understanding, self-regulatory skills, and enhanced communication skills (Alzahrani et al., 2019).

Creating Positive Teacher Interpersonal Relationships

Hume et al. (2019) stated that cultivating a relational and instructional approach helps to stimulate children's respectful relationship with peers and results in positive teacher–child engagement. Being supportive includes a sense of care and an awareness of a child so that the child's needs are met through teacher-directed and child-initiative activities. The lead teacher's role is to create a strong social connection with the child, mindful of the fact that the teacher may be the child's first adult–child relationship outside of the family (Alzahrani et al., 2019). There should be a positive emotional climate that fosters affection and joint laughter and that embodies respect and social conversation (NAEYC, 2018). When a teacher shows warmth, sensitivity, and respect when managing a group, it provides a level of social interaction and social depth with peers that cultivates a healthy emotional climate (Hume et al., 2019). Lippard et al. (2018) noted that positive interaction with teachers increases children's cognitive ability and reduces behavioral problems.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (2021) stated that children must have opportunities to express their feelings appropriately and be provided with individual attention. Lippard et al. (2018) indicated, however, that children with lower language abilities have a higher chance of having conflict with the teacher compared to children with a high language level; teachers may have to work harder with preverbal and low-language children to develop cooperative relationships. Moreover, the regulatory agency in the study state of Texas indicated that caregivers must treat all children equally and be cognizant of their gender, religion, ethnicity, and cultures. The child learns

socialization through their interaction with their peers and teacher, and this is accomplished through allowing the child to express what they feel and their self-awareness through diversified relationships with the teacher and peers (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Trigg and Keyes (2019) stated that when a child lacks the support of secure attachments and interaction from a caregiver, this can lead to difficulty in managing their emotions, lack of positive interaction with peers, and the inability to effectively communicate their needs. This lack of a secure teacher–child relationship can result in strained relationships among children (Harmsen et al., 2018).

These tasks require the teacher to be courteous, respectful, and competent; have sound judgment; maintain order within their classrooms with each child; and share information with all incoming staff (Texas Health and Human Services Commission, 2021). The necessity to develop children's preacademic abilities ahead of kindergarten entrance means that the interpersonal work of the teacher must be part of instructional support, provide time on task to ensure achievement outcomes, and include a focus on specific learning activities (Kubat & Dedebali, 2018). Preschool teachers, through communication with the child's parent, director, and child-development specialist, can identify children who have health-related, developmental, or emotional problems (Humphries et al., 2018). To ensure success for all children, teachers should cultivate a climate that is safe, supportive, and inviting to stimulate learning and development through teaching practices that are direct and indirect (Vallberg Roth, 2018). According to Goble et al. (2019), the preschool teacher must establish three important elements: instructional support, emotional support, and classroom organization.

Supporting Positive Interactions Among Children

Hume et al. (2019) suggested that peer interactions play a vital role in how the child develops appropriate problem-solving skills, gains peer acceptance, and establishes friendships. Alzahrani et al. (2019) found that positive interactions among preschool peers increases children's self-regulation skills, cognitive abilities, spatial reasoning, learning, and social and emotional development. To maintain a stable peer environment, the preschool teacher relies on active engagement while allowing children opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills as they play and share their experiences with peers (Vallberg Roth, 2018).

Children under the age of 6 spontaneously connect with their peers during play time. Preschoolers learn through experiential activities by engaging in role-play, music and movement, story time, and large didactic instruction (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018). Their activities extend children's mathematical and scientific concepts, vocabulary skills, appreciation for concepts included in social studies, and aesthetic understanding (Nores et al. 2022). Haslip et al. (2019) stated that through cooperative peer interaction children learn prosocial skills such as the ability to exhibit empathy toward others and engage in shared symbolic play to enhance their cognitive development.

Smidt and Embacher (2020) found that although the school is a place where the child can have a healthy, secure environment, it can also be a place of peer victimization and peer rejection if a teacher is not proactive in limiting negative interactions. The teacher's focus is on developing social skills so children can interact positively with other children; when there is a conflict between two children, the teacher helps them resolve

their conflict through guidance, problem solving, and coming up with a workable solution (Alzahrani et al., 2019). According to Syrjämäki et al. (2019), it is important that the teacher establish and enforce rules for peer interactions, deal with negative interaction, and manage challenging behaviors; this is done by the teacher shaping the learning environment through social ecology.

The role of the lead preschool teacher in direct contact with children is complex, including organizing the room, planning for and delivering instruction, developing a secure relationship with each child, and helping each child grow in their social and emotional skills so they can get along with others. Lead teachers hold other roles that indirectly affect children, such as interacting with parents, conducting assessments, guiding assistant teachers, and continuing their own professional development. The multifaceted life of a lead preschool teacher can be stressful, and this stress is affected by the children themselves. The roles and responsibilities of an early childhood teacher involve offering reflective learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate for children's age, documenting and assessing children's abilities through careful observation, and advocating for reciprocal and equitable treatment that meets the needs of children and their families (NAEYC, 2018).

Preschool Teacher Responses to Challenging Behavior

Preschool teachers' responses to challenging behaviors range from child-focused support to more punitive zero-tolerance for challenging behavior (Gansen, 2020). Aksoy (2020) described child-focused support as based on positive affect, effective communication, and a differentiated instructional approach. Effective communication

involves being consistent, reminding the students calmly of the established rules and expectations, and applying consequences fairly (Aksoy, 2020). According to Aksoy (2020), child-focused support includes a positive approach and building a good rapport with children.

Praise is a classroom management strategy that helps communicate expectations (Owens et al., 2018), but often is unequally distributed among students in a class, creating a perception of favoritism and feelings of discouragement (Ding & Rubie-Davies, 2019). Rewards-based systems of classroom management are popular among elementary school teachers and sometimes are used by preschool teachers, however they are susceptible to bias, as demonstrated by Allen et al. (2018). Kowalski and Froiland (2020) found that rewards systems created anxiety in elementary grade children and reduced their intrinsic motivation to learn. According to Weeland et al. (2022), praise seems to have little effect on preschool children's externalizing behavior.

Exclusionary discipline practices range from timeout in the classroom, to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and ultimately to expulsion (Gansen, 2020). Three- and 4-year-olds are expelled from childcare at a rate three times higher than the rate for K-12 expulsion (Martin et al., 2018). Zeng et al. (2019) estimated the weekly rate of suspension from preschool is 4,842 children and that 479 children are expelled in a typical week. Zeng et al. (2019) found that African American children are twice as likely to be expelled as a White or Latino child. Silver and Zinsser (2020) wrote that teachers' response and interpretations of children challenging behaviors might be influenced by teachers' unconscious stereotypes and implicit bias.

Aksoy (2020) suggested that engaging instruction is a preventive strategy to lessen challenging behaviors by keeping the active children positively involved. However, given the multiple roles and responsibilities of the preschool lead teacher described above, many teachers may focus less on creative instruction than on tasks of custodial care and behavior management (Wang et al., 2021). The low pay typically offered teachers in independent childcare centers suggests that the most accomplished and capable teachers may work elsewhere *(Slot, 2018)*. Children's challenging behavior may itself be a barrier to the teachers' ability to keep and use instruction as a tool for student engagement.

Factors That Limit Management of Challenging Behavior

Several factors may interfere with early childhood lead teachers' effective management of children's challenging behavior. For example, the complex roles of the lead preschool teacher may result in feelings of role strain and stress. Fitchett et al. (2018) found that beginning teachers in their first year of work are susceptible to experiencing job related stress. Teachers' stress has been associated with time pressure with little recovery time, hectic workdays, feelings of overload, poor working conditions, and long hours worked (Kim et al., 2020). McGee et al. (2019) defined role strain as the inability to balance the demanding requirements or conflicting decisions that arise, and the quality of life feels threaten. Because preschool teachers fill many functions in their work but also in their personal lives, teachers may feel role conflict if one aspect of their work as a teacher is hindered by or hinders another aspect, or conflicts with another personal role, such as their role as a parent (McGee et al., 2019). A teacher's perception

of their inability to properly nurture and support a favorable classroom climate may result in emotional exhaustion and increase to their stress level (Reaves & Cozzens, 2018). Additional strains on a teacher are the inability to handle the externalizing children's behavior when they are intensified in a large setting by other children with externalizing behaviors. Kim et al. (2020) found that when the group size is large, children who exhibit externalizing behaviors are at higher risk of being handled punitively by their teachers. The stress that accompanies role strain may contribute to teacher burnout.

Burnout is another factor that may limit teacher effectiveness in responding to children's challenging behavior. Burnout is characterized by three primary components: a feeling of incompetence in work, a feeling of low personal accomplishment, and feelings of emotional exhaustion (Schaack et al., 2020). Burnout often results in a teacher having a cynical attitude towards children and depersonalizing them; by depersonalizing and detaching from them (Schaack et al., 2022). Schaack et al. (2020) stated that high levels of stress among teachers are associated with a chaotic environment, including high noise level, lack of structure and routines, unpredictability, crowding, and disorganization. For other teachers, burnout caused by role strain and stress may affect their emotional well-being and ability to cope with everyday situations (Jeon et al., 2018). Seo and Yuh (2021) suggested that depression caused by or resulting in burnout may cause a decrease in the quality of care offered by childcare providers. Burnout may lead to a decision to leave the profession. In the United States the average teacher turnover rate in childcare centers is 30% per year, due to high level of stress in dealing with challenging behaviors, the lack of training and needing low levels of education (Eadie et al., 2021). Preschool teachers

face many situations in their daily work; some are fulfilling and inspiring while others lead to dissatisfaction and stress (Ansari et al., 2022). When the teacher becomes less motivated by the demands of the job, and compassion fatigue is present, stress and burnout become more prevalent (Singh et al., 2018).

There are many factors in the preschool setting that may cause preschool teachers to feel overwhelmed and pulled in various directions. These factors include the socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects within the school setting; low pay; job status; and poor work environments (Kim et al., 2020). The job demands and the responsibilities of a preschool teachers affect their cognitive, emotional, and motivational mind-set, and add to the day-to-day stress in the classroom (Kim et al., 2020). The stress preschool teachers face when managing challenging behaviors is demonstrated by their inability to provide an organized learning environment, with positive interactions, and instructional support to all children, when they are distracted by the need to manage behavior (Lawson et al., 2019).

Behavior Management Resources and Training

Kelsey et al. (2021) found that many preschool teachers feel underprepared to handle a child's challenging behaviors. Some teachers have also shown a lack of positive strategies, insufficient training, and a lack of resources to handle challenging situations, which lead to punitive measures, including the child's' exclusion from childcare (Kelsey et al., 2021). Moreover, disciplinary actions can vary on a case by case basis within the same childcare center, depending on each teachers' expectations when addressing challenging behavior (Silver & Zinsser, 2020). Even among those with bachelor's

degrees, many teachers described a gap in training regarding challenging behaviors, effective discipline methods, and supports for social-emotional learning (Silver & Zinsser, 2020). Many early care education programs do not have the necessary resources to manage challenging behaviors in developmentally appropriate ways, nor do they have the mental health services to intervene when the support is necessary (Bowman et al., 2018).

Fuentes-Abeledo et al. (2020) suggested that teachers struggle to transfer knowledge from their pre-service training to the classroom. Torbeyns et al. (2020) found that the primary focus of pre-service and in-service training is to equip teachers to guide children's academic and social development but leave the teacher ill-equipped to address challenging behaviors, or to handle their resulting feelings of stress. Stressed teachers feel a lack of self-efficacy in the work environment (Buettner & Grant, 2018), leading to biased feelings about preschoolers whose behavior has shown minimal improvement and causing teachers to relieve their stress by suspending or expelling these students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019).

Independently funded childcare centers are supported largely from parent fees in the private market (Malik et al., 2018). Children who live in middle and lower neighborhoods typically have access to fewer educational resources than do children who live in higher-income areas (Malik et al., 2020). Hooper and Schweiker (2020) mentioned that insufficient resources cause teachers to use reactive practices and punitive measures, sometimes leading to expulsions. Teachers in Head Start programs undergo formal training and use a structured curriculum to improve school readiness, but teachers in

independently funded centers may lack formal training and may have fewer curriculum supports (Larose et al., 2020). This study has added to the research base by focusing on teachers and students in independently funded childcare centers.

Summary and Conclusions

The conceptual framework for this study of the phenomenon of preschool suspensions and expulsions used to manage or eliminate challenging behavior was Liu's (2004) theory of childhood externalizing behavior. Liu examined the risk factors and behavioral problems that later lead to delinquency as a juvenile, violence, and adult crimes. Current literature described lead preschool teachers' work responsibilities, which include managing children's challenging behavior, and described how lack of behavior management resources and training may incline teachers to suspend or expel children who exhibit challenging behavior. Additionally, Goble et al. (2019) found that sensitive teacher child interaction during learning activities helps build child self-esteem, improves children's emotional and peer relationships, and helps the child adjust to school. To ensure the success with their peers, it is important to cultivate a climate that is safe, supportive, inviting, and stimulating of learning and development, through teaching practices that are direct and indirect (Vallberg Roth, 2018). Zeng et al. (2019) found that African American children were twice as likely to be expelled as White or Latino children. Silver and Zinsser (2020) wrote that teachers' response to and interpretations of children's challenging behaviors might be influenced by teachers' unconscious stereotypes and implicit bias. The stress preschool teachers face when managing challenging behaviors is demonstrated by their inability to provide an organized learning

environment, with positive interactions, and instructional support to all children, when they are distracted by the need to manage behavior (Lawson et al., 2019). Teachers in Head Start programs undergo formal training and use a structured curriculum to improve school readiness, but teachers in independently funded centers may lack formal training and may have fewer curriculum supports (Larose et al., 2020). The gap in practice explored in this study is described by the high rate of preschool suspension and expulsion among children in independently funded childcare settings in Texas. Results of this study contribute to the literature by focusing on teachers and students in independently funded childcare centers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore perspectives of early childhood lead teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban settings in Texas, concerning children with challenging behaviors whom teachers may recommend be suspended or expelled from their classrooms or the center. In this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale and my role as the researcher. I present the methodology I used in this study, including how the participants were selected, the instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and my plan for data collection and analysis. I also discuss trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

Three research questions guided this basic qualitative study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences with children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe characteristics of children that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ3: What resources or training do preschool teachers describe would be helpful to them in managing children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

The central concept of this study was childcare teachers' perspectives concerning children with challenging behaviors that may incline teachers toward recommending children's expulsion from their classrooms or the childcare center. I used a basic qualitative design with interviews to gather in-depth information following a naturalistic

tradition (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019) to understand childcare teachers' perspectives concerning children with challenging behaviors that may incline teachers toward recommend children's expulsion from their classrooms or the childcare center. A basic qualitative research design allowed me to explore preschool teachers' perspectives by examining their actions, values, and human feelings about children's challenging behavior, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007).

Role of the Researcher

The role I took in this research was that of an observer. An observer has to have the ability to detach and remain objective to maintain the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An observer records factual notes of what they see or hear without involving themselves with the subject, to record the phenomenon without bias (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Merriam (2009) explained that an observer is one who can use the interactions in the participants' social world to construct their reality. The researcher is open to the participant's involvement and objective in interpreting the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

I have over 36 years of experience in the education arena and have for 14 years owned and operated training and consulting agency serving early childhood and elementary grade teachers. I had no supervisory or managerial role in my work at the time of the study. I have held positions and as an administrator, coach, mentor, director, and preschool teacher in charter schools and independent childcare settings. I was aware that I would come to this study with biases derived from my roles and experiences. Therefore, I strove to set aside my preconceived notions and remain objective and

document the facts of what was said. Both the researcher and participants bring their beliefs, biases, opinions, and values that stem from their personal history and learned experiences (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that the researcher must consider the studied culture to be mindful of the status and personal characteristics that can affect the fieldwork relationships with the participants interviewed. Also, a researcher should be cognizant of biases that can impact the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative researcher has to be mindful of the contextual values in phrases, words, and events that can be perceived differently for the participant and the researcher based on their prior experiences (Stake, 2010). I mitigated my personal and professional biases by maintaining professionalism, journaling my thoughts and ideas, and using audio recordings to create an accurate account of what was said.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population of interest in this study was preschool teachers who teach 3- to 5-year-old children in public independent childcare centers. I used purposeful sampling to recruit 10 preschool teachers who worked in independent childcare centers in one state in the southwestern United States. Purposeful sampling involves finding the appropriate participants who can provide relevant information regarding the targeted phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The criteria for participant selection in the current study included lead teachers in general education classrooms serving 3- to 5-year-old children in an independently funded childcare center. I identified prospective participants with the

help of my database of consulting clients who had connections to various childcare centers. I emailed my clients a flier to pass along to someone who would be interested in the study and who had experience working as a lead teacher with 3- to 5-year-old children. I waited for the participants to respond by email or phone regarding their interest in the study. Prospective participants learned of participant selection criteria from the flier and from the consent form, which I emailed to them when they responded to the flier.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection in the study was a set of eight open-ended questions to be asked of each participant (see Appendix). The interview questions were based on the conceptual framework and addressed teachers' experience with children who exhibit challenging behavior intense enough that the teacher considered suspending or expelling them, how teachers' characterized these children's attributes and abilities, how the children made the teacher feel with regard to the teacher's physical safety, professional capability as perceived by other teachers, and feelings of stress. Questions 1 and 3, which asked participants to describe a time when they considered suspending or expelling a child and also their reasons for considering suspension or expulsion, were associated with RQ1. Question 2, which asked participants to describe characteristics and abilities that seem to typify children who engage in intensely challenging behavior, was associated with RQ2. Questions 4, 5, and 6 asked participants about resources and training they have used or would like to be offered to help them manage children's challenging behavior. These questions were associated with RQ3. Questions 7 and 8

asked participants for a summary opinion of suspension and expulsion and to add anything more that had come to mind over the course of the interview. Answers to those questions informed any of the three RQs. The interview questions were reviewed by a doctoral-level professional who made suggestions regarding possible follow-up probing questions and a final question that solicited any additional information not already asked of the participant.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (07-08-22-0604779), I recruited participants by asking professionals in my database of consulting clients to share a flier that described my study to people they knew who taught 3- to 5-year-old children in an independently funded childcare center in Texas. As teachers responded to the flier, I emailed them the consent form. Teachers who replied with the words "I consent" were scheduled for an interview through Zoom at their convenience and outside of school hours. During the recruitment process, I reached out to my clients and had them assist me in finding participants for the study. I sent each client a flier describing the study, and they sent out the fliers to preschool teachers who worked with children age 3 to 5 years old. The teachers emailed me with the words "I consent," and I responded to their email and informed them that they qualified for the study. Each participant was asked for their phone number and confirmed their email address to ensure I could reach them to do a transcript review once their transcripts were typed up. The 10 participants agreed, and the interviews began. I recruited 10 preschool teachers that taught 3- to 5-year-old children. Participants attended the interviews from the privacy of

their homes once they got off work. To protect participants' identities, I created code names for each participant (e.g., T1, T2) and kept the document that linked actual names to code names separate from other study files. I conducted the interviews by Zoom from a room in my home, and I encouraged participants to find a quiet, private location for the interview. I recorded interviews using the recording function of Zoom, and I retained only the audio file, deleting the video recording. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participant and informed them that I would email them a transcript of the interview in a few days so they could review the transcript for accuracy. I labeled each audio file with the participant's code name and uploaded the audio files to the digital transcription service Otter.ai. When I received transcripts from Otter.ai, I reviewed each while listening to the audio file to correct errors and omissions in the transcript. I then emailed the transcripts to the participants for their review. There were no changes requested.

Data Analysis Plan

Following the advice of Miles et al. (2018) and Saldana (2016), I began analyzing transcript data by reading all of the transcripts carefully, attending to ideas and feelings that seemed significant. I then separated each transcript into meaningful units (individual phrases, sentences, and narratives) and pasted them into a single column of an Excel spreadsheet, using one row for each meaningful unit. In an adjacent column, I inserted the code name for the participant who contributed each meaningful unit so that each row included both a meaningful unit of data and an attribution. Organizing data was a key step in data analysis (see Miles et al., 2018; Saldana, 2016). Through this process, all in

vivo codes were in one column of the spreadsheet, and each code was identified by its participant.

After I identified relevant codes through open coding of in vivo material, I applied axial coding to group similar codes. I then moved rows on the Excel spreadsheet, containing codes and participant identifiers, so similar codes followed each other. According to Miles et al. (2018), groups of similar codes form categories of data. I inserted a category label for each of these groups of similar codes in a new Excel column. Subsequent to this, I used the same process to move entire categories, including their associated codes and participant identifiers, so that similar categories followed each other on the spreadsheet. These groups of similar categories represented themes that emerged from the data (see Saldana, 2016). I then determined the association of themes with the study RQs.

Discrepant cases include materials that are unlike the general tenor of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The possibility of discrepant data arose when the transcription tool failed to accurately report portions of two audio files of participants who spoke with a strong accent. Many of their words were either omitted or obscured. When I realized the transcripts of these participants were inaccurate, I replayed the original audio file and edited the transcripts to better reflect what was stated. I further verified and validated these transcripts by sending the finished transcript to two participants with a specific request that they confirm their transcripts or make any necessary changes. Neither participant made any changes to what was sent to them, and I did not encounter any other discrepancies.

Trustworthiness

Credibility is defined as the confidence a reader can have in the truth of the study findings, which can be established by various methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To help establish credibility in the current study, I solicited advice from a doctoral-level professional regarding the fitness of the interview questions. This person validated the ability of the interview questions to elicit the data needed to answer the RQs. Secondly, I used transcript reviews to validate the accuracy of interview transcripts and to avoid errors or misinterpretation of what was shared by phone or email, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Transferability is defined as the ability to apply qualitative results to other settings and contexts (Daniel, 2019). Because of limitations of sample size and geographic region typical in qualitative studies, the determination of transferability can be made only by the reader based on information provided by the researcher (Peterson, 2019). I helped readers establish transferability by providing deep, rich data from a specified sample drawn from a clearly described context. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the importance of providing sufficient descriptive details to enable transferability.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability is defined as the ability to verify the study processes so they can be duplicated by another researcher following the same protocol. To support dependability, I employed an audit trail, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I also used a journal to track my actions and thoughts throughout the study process.

Confirmability is defined as providing sufficient information to corroborate what has been shared (Lichtman, 2014). To support confirmability, I relied on a process of reflexivity, which enabled me to monitor and manage my opinions so they did not interfere with objective data collection and analysis. To keep my personal experiences in check, I wrote exactly what I heard the participants say and did not record my interpretations of what I thought they may have meant. The journal served as a diary in the sense of allowing me to keep my thoughts, biases, and opinions in order. Because I was a novice researcher, I piloted my interview questions and my process for recording an interview with doctoral colleagues who were not participants in the study. These practice sessions helped me feel confident delivering the questions from a neutral, unbiased position to gather credible data from participants.

Ethical Procedures

I applied for approval to conduct this study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, and proceeded with my study only after my application was approved. I recruited individuals who were not previously known to me by enlisting the help of my consulting clients in sharing my invitation flier with preschool teachers whom they knew. As individuals volunteered, I secured their informed consent by emailing them a consent form and taking no further action with them unless and until they replied with "I consent." Interviews were then conducted in private locations outside of work hours. Participants were able to choose their own location and participate by Zoom. I audio recorded interviews using the Zoom recording feature. Audio files were uploaded to Otter.ai for transcription. Otter.ai did not retain the audio or transcript files after I

retrieved transcripts from the cloud. No one but I knew who chose to participate in the study, and the document that links participant names to their code names was kept separate from other study documents. All files generated by the study that referenced participants used the code names only.

Study documents were kept in a locked cabinet in my home office, and electronic files were kept on my personal computer under password protection. I will shred written documents and delete electronic files after 5 years. I will also wipe digital files from my computer using a tool such as Eraser.

Summary

In this chapter, I described what took place during the study. I shared my role as a researcher and what I did to keep my personal and professional biases in check. I detailed how I selected participants from among the population of teachers of preschool children age 3 to 5, and how I interviewed participants, created transcripts of the interviews, and analyzed the data. I also discussed issues of trustworthiness and ethical protections. In Chapter 4, I share the research results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore perspectives of early childhood lead teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban settings in Texas concerning children with challenging behaviors whom teachers may recommend be suspended or expelled from their classrooms or the center. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences with children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe characteristics of children that may require suspension or expulsion?

RQ3: What resources or training do preschool teachers describe would be helpful to them in managing children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion?

In this chapter, I share the results and themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcript data. I begin by describing the setting at the time of data collection and relevant participant demographics. I then describe how data were collected and the outcome of the initial data analysis. I next present the results of the study pertaining to each research question, using verbatim evidence provided by participants in the interviews. The chapter concludes with evidence of trustworthiness and a summary of key points.

Setting

During the study, there appeared to be no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants and affected the results. Ten preschool lead teachers from 10 different independent childcare centers participated in this study. All participants were women; their tenure in the industry varied from 3 years to 17 years. There were two teachers from childcare centers located in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, six from centers located in middle income areas, and two teachers from childcare centers located in high socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I began the recruitment process. There were no difficulties finding participants, and my target number of 10 teachers was reached within 2 weeks of the start of recruitment. I retained two additional preschool teachers on a list in case one of the 10 withdrew from the study. When one of the original volunteers was unable to participate because a vacation made her inaccessible during data collection, I substituted one of these two reserved teachers. I conducted each interview from my home office, and each participant was also in their home after work hours. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. Each participant was interviewed only once. All interviews were completed within 2 weeks.

All 10 interviews were conducted over Zoom. At times there were small freezes of the Zoom platform; when that happened, I asked the participant to restate what they had said to ensure the information was not lost or misconstrued. During one of the

interviews, the connection was lost entirely, and we had to pause until it was brought back up. Of course, I apologized for the setback, but the participant said she was familiar with Zoom and was used to dealing with intermittent transmission. We continued from where the connection was lost. I used the recording function of Zoom to create audio files of each interview. After the audio files were downloaded, the videos were deleted and the audio was transcribed through Otter.ai. To strengthen the validity of the study, I asked that the participants review their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of their transcription. I followed up by thanking each participant for the transparency of their experience, their willingness to review the transcript, and their consent to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed with the participants, the audio files were uploaded to Otter.ai, a digital transcribing tool that processed information with minimal downtime. The resulting transcriptions were then converted into Microsoft Word documents. I listened to each audio recording while reviewing the transcripts and made small corrections as necessary regarding enunciation inaccuracies and misinterpretations of the audio. After I reviewed the audio transcript and made the necessary changes, I emailed each interview to the respective participant for their review to ensure that the information used in the data analysis was accurate. All of the participants confirmed their transcripts were accurate, and no changes were necessary.

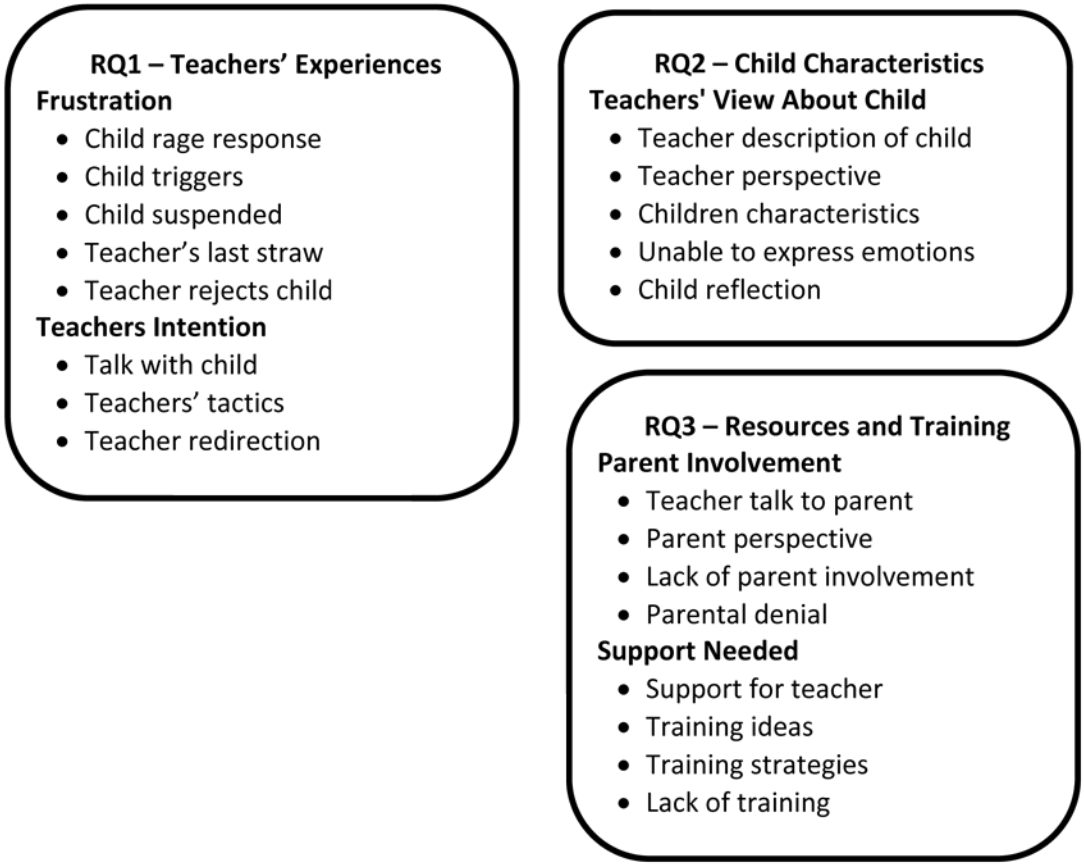
I assigned a pseudonym to each participant (T1 through T10) and uploaded the transcripts into a single column of an Excel spreadsheet. I then separated each row of data into separate thought units so that individual ideas occupied unique rows and each was

labeled with the pseudonym of the person who reported it. During this process, I looked for phrases that were repeated across participants, action words, metaphors, similar nouns, and explanatory descriptions. The resulting rows represented 801 codes that emerged from the data analysis.

These codes were then reviewed for similarity and grouped into categories. I moved code rows in Excel so similar ideas followed each other on the spreadsheet. This process resulted in 21 categories: child rage response, child reflection, child suspended, child triggers, children characteristics, lack of parent involvement, lack of training, parent perspective, parental denial, support for teacher, talk with child, teacher description of child, teacher perspective, teacher redirection, teacher reject child, teacher talk to parent, teacher's last straw, teacher's tactic, training ideas, training strategies, and unable to express emotions. These categories were then organized into themes. Five themes emerge from the data: frustration, parent involvement, support needed, teachers' intention, and teachers' view about child. These themes were associated with the three RQs, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

RQs With Associated Themes and Categories



I was alert to the possibility of discrepant cases as I reviewed the data. I looked for instances in which ideas offered by a participant contradicted other statements on a factual point during their interview or were opposed to my expectations based on the study's conceptual framework of Liu's (2004) theory of childhood externalizing behavior. This process of searching for discrepant cases followed the recommendation of Lincoln and Guba (1985). No discrepancies were found.

Results

Three RQs guided this study. The results are organized by RQ.

Results for RQ1

RQ1 asked how preschool teachers describe their experiences with children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion. Two themes were associated with this question: frustration and teachers' intention. I present results for each of these themes.

Frustration

The preschool teachers shared key insights into what causes frustration for both the child and the teacher that led to suspension and expulsions. When considering frustration from the child's perspective, the teachers shared how the child struggled with any lack of attention, and the approach of the teacher that triggered their behaviors. For example, T6 shared the thought of the child saying "I'm going to act out now or you know, I want everybody to see me." The child's need for attention seemingly triggered aggressive behavior, as T9 described this way: "If we were doing activities or anything like that she would do things to cause disruption, specifically, like during circle time, things like that." When the teacher does address aggressive behavior with a verbal response, that response can cause unwanted behavior in other children. For example, T6 stated "when they see that another teacher's mad, they say 'oh, she scared me' because that teacher was mad not specifically at that child, but it takes a toll on everyone."

In addition, the teachers also described what caused their frustration, which could have led to the child being suspended. T4 explained that "the boundaries of respect are

being crossed." T10 described "my most challenging student, where it didn't go from just hitting and kicking and pulling your hair. It went from like bodily fluids being thrown at you. And it was definitely like a breaking point." Most of the teachers saw children's rage response as their last straw and their own trigger for frustration. T1 explained the child would "begin to kick the walls, throw things even at the teacher, it doesn't matter who it is." These behaviors caused rejection toward the child. T6 said she told her director "I don't feel like fooling with them today, or I don't have time for [the child], I don't have time for them today." T6 continued, saying "the most that we've done is say, hey, your child may need to take a break for a few days, try keeping them home, or is there somewhere that they can go for one or two days?"

Suspension seemed to be a result of teacher frustration with child behavior and a result of the child's frustration that triggered the behavior. Some teachers described suspension as a matter of policy. For example, T7 noted

> there's an anti-biting policy. So for you know, so for bite, if they bite and they break the skin they do get sent home immediately. Even if it's the first bite, if it breaks the skin and makes them bleed, you know, then that's a biting policy. That's all in our policies. If they do three more bites, which is nine bites, they get suspended for 14 days. We went to a training and in that training, they told us that it takes 14 days to break a habit.

T6 said "[if] nothing's changed, no matter what we tried to work out with the parents and with the student as well, then that's when it'll lead up to expulsion or suspension."

Teachers' Intentions

The second theme relevant to RQ1 was teachers' intentions for dealing with children's aggressive behavior. Teachers described talking with the child, using different tactics to change the child's behavior, and trying redirection techniques to bring about change. Most of the teachers tried talking with their students, even warning of the possibility of suspension. T1 explained how she

> takes him off, you know, to another side and I talked to him. I'm like, I want the best for you. I want you to be able to stay here with us. I don't want you going home. And being that you know what, we'll send you home? Can't you just try not to do that? Can't we just find the right thing for you, so you won't have to go home?

T7 stated "I gave him a warning, about calling their parent if he runs out of the room." Talking to a child could also backfire, however, if the child feels exposed in front of their peers. T1 said

> he could be a great kid. He really can he could be a great kid. But he just don't want to feel that you've embarrassed him and you are talking to him, in front of his friends where he always got to be right. It doesn't matter what it is. He has to be right.

T3 noted that talking with the child is what behavior specialists do: "In the beginning, like they would take the child. You know, take him for a walk, talk to him." T9 related

> if it was really bad, the directors would come and take her into their office and try to talk to her, give her space away from the other kids, like maybe she was overstimulated or something was really bothering her.

T2 suggested that talk must come without anger: "You have to turn it down a little bit, or you have to talk calmly to him." Given the frustration teachers described feeling, talking calmly might not be an easy thing to do.

T3 described her use of redirection as a method to stop a child's aggressive behavior:

> So he would try to hit, and I'm like, okay, we're not gonna do that we don't hit. I said, I'm not hitting you. You don't hit me. And so I would give him, you know, his little benefit, of course, and I send him to do something else.

When trying to redirect children, T2 shared how "I will try to give them something to calm them down, like, over here, to sit down and play something so I could get their mind off of it so they won't be upset." T3 described a variety of redirection methods she learned in a training session, saying

> the trainings were helpful, because I would follow like what they would say like, you know, breathing techniques, counting techniques, sometimes they would tell you tell them to blow raspberries, you know, doing that number, just to get their attention and maybe like, sit them down, give them something to do, or maybe getting them to do things to help me out for the class. And that seemed to help too, because he, he was a very good helper.

T4 described telling a child who is hitting others: “No, we don’t do that. Like we use our hands to like do this and I try to get them to go build something or play with the playdough or like something to get his hands moving.”

Teachers described using a diverse set of tactics to manage children’s aggressive behavior. T4 described using

> a calming box in my room. It has like a whole bunch of items fidget spinners or like these pop beads that the kids use. I have playdough, I have books, I have a whole bunch of little stuffed animals and little action bears.

T6 suggested “showing or modeling or practicing good behavior. Because it’s not just about the children regulating their emotions, it’s about the teacher as well.” T2 described being flexible and creative:

> It’s kind of rough sometimes. But sometimes, like, you really have to have the mental capacity to be like, okay, let me try something different with him to see if he will comply or see if he likes it this way.

T6 agreed, saying “it’s like, okay, what can I do different, you know, to sort of change that child’s behavior or change the classroom?” In the end, though, it could come back to removing the child from the classroom. T10 explained “if I had used all my resources, and I couldn’t find anything else, it would come to ‘okay, well, now we need to consider suspension or expulsion.’ I always felt like I failed my student.”

The purpose of RQ1 was to explore preschool teachers’ experiences with children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion. From the data analysis it was apparent that both child and teacher experience levels of frustration.

Teachers used talking to the child, redirection techniques, and a diverse range of other tactics to change a child's behavior. It was apparent that the teachers felt frustration when their efforts did not change the child's behavior, and this led them recommend suspension and expulsion.

Results for RQ2

RQ2 asked how preschool teachers describe characteristics of children that may require suspension or expulsion. One theme was associated with this question: Teacher's view about the child. I will present results associated with this theme, beginning with teachers' views of the characteristics aggressive children share. One characteristic that stood out for participants was a need for attention. T6 shared "they need people around them or, they need a crowd to look at them, or to acknowledge what they're doing when no one's paying attention to them." T8 echoed this, saying "I think it's attention. They just want attention from somebody, and that person's not giving it to them. That's what it is, okay? They all have it in common." Being disruptive is part of attention-seeking. As T9 said

> if we were doing activities or anything like that she would do things to cause disruption, specifically, like during circle time she would just stand up and walk around in front of the kids so they couldn't participate or they couldn't see what was going on.

T4 linked attention-seeking directly to aggressive behavior: "But then he started doing it to me. He started doing it to me because I wasn't giving him my full attention anymore."

Another characteristic of aggressive children is their intelligence. T7 described a particular incident this way:

> They're smart, very smart. I mean, this particular little boy, so we have a line. So he decided to take off the tape, just a little piece of the tape. He took it off, and I didn't put it back on that same day he did it. So the next day, he crossed the line and I said, Hey, your toes are over the line. And he said, Okay, so he came back. Then he went through the spot that didn't have the line. And he said, there's no line there. Yeah, so he's smart. And he does know what he's doing.

T3 described another child, saying

> he was smart. He was bright. I mean, you just like to talk to him. And he had like the cutest voice and he would make you smile, but it's just I think it was just the fact that he was following someone [who acted badly]. And that's why he did what he did. But other than that, when that other person was not there, he was sweet.

This confusing combination of charm and aggression was mentioned by T10:

> They're honestly, the students that have either been considered for [suspension] or led to it are super smart, they are so intelligent, they are loving children, they are some of the kindest kids, but they also have what can be considered, I guess, like a switch, because they can go from being the nicest children, the most friendliest to all, [to] being, not the kindest, but also, when they do [become aggressive], it's kind of like, they're being malicious, you know?

Intelligence seemed to teachers to open children to feelings of boredom, and boredom led to aggressive behavior. T3 said “if I would keep him busy, he would stay busy. But then he would get bored. And there he goes, jumping around again.”

A third characteristic teachers associated with aggressive children was low social-emotional skills. T3 noted “when they were angry, they lacked the ability to express their emotions, and regulate their behavior.” T4 agreed, saying “I think that they would like to express their emotions, [but] some of them don’t know how to express their emotions, they know how to talk, but expressing emotions is one that they don’t really know how to do.” Lack of the ability to express emotions seemed to cause some aggressive children to turn their aggression on themselves, in the form of self -inflicted injuries. T6 said

> it’s not acceptable to sit there and pull your hair, when you’re having a tantrum, you know, we have to learn some self-control, and how to get our emotions in check when we’re sitting there, but sometimes those emotions just escalate for some children.

T4 noted “some of them like to bang their head like either on the floor on the wall. They like when they’re starting to hurt themselves.” T4 felt self-harm warranted expulsion: “What makes me feel like they need to get expelled is like when they’re really like hurting themselves, like when they throw themselves back and they’ll hit their heads.”

Some aggressive children are reacting to difficult home experiences, according to teachers in this study. T9 said “so this one little boy had lost his father to the year prior to a suicide. And he had a lot of anger, crying, sometimes violent. And of course, that’s him trying to work this out.” T3 described an incident of abuse from a father, saying “one

time when he painted the walls and stuff, the dad took the child out in the parking lot and whacked him. They had to go out there and tell him not to do that." T4 described her speculation about aggressive children's home experiences: "Sometimes I feel like something is going on at home. Maybe they're just not being treated correctly, or they're not being paid the full attention that they need." T6 echoed this thought, saying "is there something going on at home in that moment where, you know, maybe they heard somebody fighting in their household?" T3 added

> there's a lot of kids like that just they don't have, to me what I feel is like, they don't have attention at home. They're lacking some of that attention. Because now these days, it's all about social media. And so everybody's either on their computers or their cell phones, or tablets.

T3 summed things up this way, with reference to children's aggression: "So I mean, to me, I mean, it really it starts off at home."

Teachers expressed understanding and concern for the aggressive children in their classrooms. T6 remarked "of course, they want all of their friends to like them, they want everybody to play with them, they want everybody to think they're funny, you know." T8 added "they just they want somebody to talk to." T9 noted "I think you have to be very careful [with suspension and expulsion], because it's a rejection to the child. It can definitely leave an imprint on them."

The purpose of RQ2 was to explore how preschool teachers describe characteristics of children that may be recommended for suspension or expulsion. Teachers were largely sympathetic to the needs and motivations of these children, noting

their hunger for attention, their lively intellect and frequent charm, and their struggle with difficulties at home. Many of the teachers agreed that the inability to regulate or express what they were feeling causes disruptive behavior that was difficult for teachers to contain. Teachers expressed understanding and also concern for the lasting effect the rejection that is suspension or expulsion could have on these young children.

Results for RQ3

RQ3 asked what resources or training preschool teachers say would be helpful to them in managing children with challenging behaviors that may require suspension or expulsion. Two themes were associated with this question: Parent involvement and resources and training. I will present results for each of these themes, in turn.

Parent Involvement

Teachers in this study indicated that there were many layers when it came to parent involvement. These layers included the parents' perspective, parents' denial, lack of involvement from single parent households, and using discipline practices that are not effective in changing the child's behavior. T8 explained: "Let's say like their parents have not given them enough attention." T4 said "that's what I've noticed, that some of the kids are missing either mom or dad." T5 suggested single-parent families were a problem, saying "if the family member is just one person, you know, some families are formed like that, that foundation is not strong enough to deal and help with the behavior." T4 described denials from parents:

> It's like parents don't believe their children act the way they act. Parents say, Oh, my child's not bad. But then when you tell them how their child is, being in the

> room, they're all like, my child is never like, never acted like that. Parents don't ever believe you, until you like show them proof.

T3 explained the parents perspective of working with the behaviors:

> His dad came in telling me one time, " I want to apologize to you. Last year, when you kept calling us to come get him because of the stuff that he was doing, I kind of thought y'all just didn't want him here. But I'm gonna tell you something: in the summer, this kid would jump off my banister, to like, a few stairs down. He was literally trying to climb on the wall.

Resources and Training

The key insights that emerged regarding the theme of resources and training included support for the teacher and families when addressing challenging behaviors. The majority of the teachers felt collaboration of resources and training was needed when working with challenging behaviors. T6 shared going outside of the classroom for support, saying "we use all the other teachers around here as resources, [because] some children are more responsive to other teachers." T4 said:

> I'll call somebody from like the office like my boss or somebody else from in the office, and they'll come in, and either they'll talk to that child or, they'll talk to that child and I go watch my class. So I could try to see what's going on with the child, me myself.

In addition, some teachers feel that specific training could benefit them as well as children's parents. T5 explained "we're always learning and I tried to suggest this to the families, give them opportunities for learning as well. So that way, they're strong,

moving forward with the behaviors." Many teachers described being proactive in finding the help they need to deal with children's behavior. For example, T7 said "I'll go on [websites], and I'll look for things, and for ideas, you know, just to try to help with challenging behaviors, like how to handle the challenging behaviors." T10 indicated that she too seeks out online resources, in addition to what is offered by the district:

> We ourselves go out and look for things like I look on YouTube or on the internet, to try to find different things. And they also have trainings throughout the year that we do. So those kinds of also helped us.

T4 shared "it's been a lot of like, the online trainings. And they just always mentioned like the box, have a calming box and to have like a calming corner." T9 also mentioned specific training ideas gathered from training, saying "so I think having a toolbox of ideas and things that to try. And like maybe levels like, 'try this first, and then start to progress through this. Don't give up at this part of it.'"

The results of RQ3 pointed out the importance of having a support system in place whether it be the directors, their colleagues, or the parents. It was apparent that both teachers and parents struggled with receiving adequate support prior to the child's outburst, but received it when they were dealing with the child's behavior. In addition, teachers felt that there was a lack of parent involvement in the work of changing the child's behavior. Teachers described wanting more training in working with challenging behaviors with specific strategies on how to de-escalate the behaviors, and described seeking such training on their own.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility is defined as the confidence one can have in the truth of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which can be established by various methods. I used the teachers' own words in describing preschool children's challenging behaviors that may lead to recommending suspension or expulsion. I used member checking of the data to ensure accuracy and to avoid misinterpretations. I had a doctoral-level professional review the interview questions to ensure they were reliable and had the ability to get valid information for the study.

Peterson (2019) mentioned that transferability can only be made by the reader based on information provided by the researcher. The deep rich data that were captured from the preschool teachers were specific and detailed, and provided a clear picture of what they were experiencing within their classroom settings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the importance of providing sufficient descriptive details to enable transferability. I gathered information from various participants in the study region of the central United States, which supports transferability within that region.

One of the strategies used for dependability was to use an audit trail. According to Nguyen et. al (2021), in a qualitative study the researcher can establish confirmability by providing a description of their actions so the reader can follow the process and steps the researchers undertook. During the interviews I took notes in a journal to keep up with my thoughts and follow my actions during this process. Before the data were analyzed, a member check was conducted so participants could verify their transcripts for accuracy and make any needed clarifications to ensure there were no misinterpretations.

According to Lichtman (2014), confirmability is having the ability to corroborate and confirm what the participant shares. When establishing confirmability, the strategies I used were reflexivity, corroboration, and piloting the research questions prior to interviewing the participants. To support confirmability, I used research journaling to stay focused on the participants' thoughts. I asked the interview questions that were formulated and listened attentively to the participants as they shared their experiences. I also piloted the questions with a colleague before using them in an interview, to help fine tune the questions and increase their understandability for each participant. In addition, I paused between interviews so prevent me from comparing, judging, or conflating different participants' experiences. The Zoom interview process helped me focus on each participant because the task of taking notes was supported by the audio file, and using Otter.ai. helped me create accurate transcriptions. All of these processes support the credibility of the data.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the results of my study, following interviews with preschool teachers in central United States. Included were the logistics of collecting, transcribing, and coding the data. I used an Excel file to compartmentalize the 21 categories that developed into five themes: frustration from both the child and teacher perspective, teachers' intention, teachers' view about child, parents' perspective, and support needed. This section was concluded with the findings of the data analysis associated to the research questions. A key finding in this study was that both child and teacher experienced levels of frustration which could lead teachers to recommend

suspension or expulsion for challenging students. Another key finding was that teachers characterized challenging children as hungry for attention, often possessing of a lively intellect and frequent charm, and also frequently beset by difficulties at home. Teachers recognized that students' inability to regulate or express what they were feeling causes their disruptive behavior, and expressed understanding and sympathy for these students and also concern for the lasting effect on them of the rejection that is part of suspension or expulsion. A final key findings was that teachers need more training on how to work with children with challenging behaviors, and on specific strategies on how to de-escalate these behaviors. In Chapter 5, I offer an interpretation of these findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice, including the potential for positive social change that may arise from this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of early childhood lead teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban settings in Texas, concerning children with challenging behaviors whom teachers may recommend be suspended or expelled from their classrooms or the center. This basic qualitative study was conducted in response to the gap in practice evident in the high rate of preschool suspension and expulsion among children in independently funded childcare settings in the study state. Key findings included the suggestion that both child and teacher experienced frustrations, and teachers' frustration led them to recommend suspension or expulsion; the characterization of challenging children as hungry for attention, typically possessing a lively intellect and frequent charm, and struggling with difficulties at home; and a need for more training on working with challenging behaviors, with specific strategies on how to reduce these behaviors. Teachers in this study acknowledged the impact suspension and expulsion can have on the child and expressed concern for children's feelings of rejection.

Interpretation of the Findings

A key finding in this study was that both children and teachers experienced levels of frustration in the classroom, which triggered teachers' decision to recommend suspension or expulsion of the child. The participants revealed that their frustrations set in when they ran out of strategies and resources to address the child's needs, and they believed a child posed a danger to themselves, to other children, and to the teacher. These findings confirm the findings of Kim et al. (2020) that externalizing behavior by children

in a group setting causes strain on the teacher when they are unable to handle the behavior. These findings also align with the study's conceptual framework in that teachers' frustration develops from children's aggressive verbal or physical behavior that is threatening or harmful to others (see Liu, 2004). Smidt and Embacher (2020) suggested that if a teacher is not proactive in minimizing negative interactions, a climate characterized by peer rejection and victimization can develop. Teachers' sense of responsibility for a negative and threatening classroom climate (Hume et al., 2019) contributes to their feeling of frustration and may lead them to a decision to suspend or expel a troublesome student.

Other key findings of this study were the children's hunger for attention, their lively intellect and frequent charm, and their struggles with difficulties at home. In addition, the children showed a lack of ability to regulate or express what they were feeling, causing disruptive behavior. Alzahrani et al. (2019) shared that children's self-regulation improved when their spatial reasoning and cognitive ability increased as a result of positive peer interaction. Furthermore, Smidt and Embacher (2020) shared two perspectives on how the school can be a place of peer victimization and peer rejection if the teacher lacks the inability to proactively secure a healthy environment. In the current study, this finding emphasized teachers' concern for the enduring message of rejection when a child is suspended or expelled. Teachers reported trying different tactics, such as redirecting behaviors and talking with the child, to minimize aggressive acts in the classroom and avoid needing to remove the child. Liu (2004) shared that girls' aggression is exhibited through relation means such as slander and social exclusion, whereas boys'

aggression is more physical than girls'. Teachers in this study frequently indicated that challenging behavior came from boys, not from girls.

Teachers in this study attributed children's inability to regulate their behavior or express their feelings to their struggle with difficulties at home and their lack of age-appropriate social and emotional development. This finding aligns with the work of Zeng et al. (2019) who reported that suspension and expulsion of preschool children is more likely if they experienced a variety of dysfunctions occurring in the home, including domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, crime, violence, poverty, parental divorce, and incarceration of a family member. Alzahrani et al. (2019) suggested that teachers must deal with these problems to the extent they are able on behalf of the child.

Finally, teachers in the current study suggested a need for more training on working with challenging behaviors and specific strategies on how to de-escalate the behaviors. This finding confirms those of Kelsey et al. (2021) that some teachers lack positive strategies, resources, and training to deal with challenging behaviors. This finding also confirms the gap in training reported by Silver and Zinsser (2020) regarding support needed for children's social and emotional learning and teachers' effective discipline methods. Bowman et al. (2018) noted that the resources to manage challenging behaviors that are developmentally appropriate are not available in early care education programs, and teachers do not have the means to elicit support from mental health services.

This study informs the conceptual framework described by Liu (2004). Liu suggested that externalizing behavior such as an outward display of hyperactive,

aggressive, or delinquent behavior negatively affects others in the environment and poses dangers for the child. The current study findings confirm these ideas in that the children whom teachers suggested were or could be suspended or expelled demonstrated frequent displays of aggressive behaviors, both verbal and physical, that harmed other children, teachers, and themselves. The frustration teachers in this study described in their efforts to manage and redirect externalizing behavior confirms Liu's contention that externalizing behavior creates a charged atmosphere and is upsetting to adults. It is no surprise that externalizing behavior as described by Liu and by teachers in this study might lead to removal of the child as a way to reestablish calm.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation was that two interviews needed additional clarifying because the participants' heavy accents made automated transcription difficult. Because it was not clear what these participants meant, once their interviews were transcribed through Otter.ai., I retranscribed the audio files and asked these participants to read over their transcript to clarify and validate their interviews; this process took 3 weeks. In addition, all of the interviews were conducted through Zoom teleconferencing but at times interviews were disrupted due to lapses in the Wi-Fi connection. The interviews still went forward; the participant and I waited for Zoom to reconnect if we were disconnected. This happened twice, and the participants restated what they had said prior to the disconnection to ensure no data were lost.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future research is to expand the age group of children with whom participants work to include teachers who work with children of an earlier age, such as 1 to 2 years. Separate from this study, it has come to my attention that some teachers recommend suspension or expulsion of toddlers, especially toddlers who bite. The challenges childcare teachers encounter may begin earlier than age 3, which was the starting point of the current study.

Another recommendation for future research is to replicate this study using teachers of the 3- to 5-year-old age group but with a larger sample or in a different region of the United States. Local customs and expectations may contribute to teachers' expectations for prosocial behavior that may not be the same in other areas of the United States (Memmott-Elison et al., 2020). A larger sample, including teachers from diverse settings, may extend the findings of the current study and contribute to understanding the problem of preschool suspension and expulsion. Further research could also be conducted quantitatively using a survey based on the factors that emerged in the current study as the basis of inquiry.

Implications

An implication for practice arising from this study is a need to address frustration felt by both children and teachers. Children may feel frustration if the tasks they are expected to complete or the social norms they are expected to follow are not appropriate to their developmental level and skills. Teachers and their administrators may need guidance in implementing child-centered practices that reduce children's frustration and

allow them to experience success. An examination of the curriculum, classroom rules, and level of support offered all children, especially those with underdeveloped intellectual or social skills, may lead to practices that reduce frustration, increase success, and contribute to a more positive classroom climate. In addition, current study findings suggest that teachers also feel frustration when they are unsuccessful in maintaining children's good behavior. To the extent that this frustration is compounded by administrative expectations for achievement of kindergarten readiness and for behavior that teachers feel children are unable to achieve, a negative classroom climate may result. Therefore, an implication of this study is that attention should be paid to factors that contribute to frustration, and steps should be taken to resolve those factors.

Second, teachers in this study expressed a need for more training in techniques to manage children's behavior. Teachers described feeling sympathy for children who demonstrate challenging behaviors and described understanding that suspension and expulsion cause children to feel rejected. Teachers seemed eager for more child-friendly options and indicated an openness to learning how to better manage challenging behavior. Intensive professional development might provide teachers with a useful toolkit of techniques, and guidance in the classroom from a coach or behavior specialist might also be helpful. Administrators might consider creating a community of practice among teachers so they can exchange ideas, support each other, and feel less frustrated. There is a need for creative solutions to the problem of children's challenging behavior, and support should be offered in seeking those solutions.

A final implication of this study is the need for greater parent involvement, training, and resources for child guidance. Challenging behavior often has its roots in children's home life. Current study findings suggest that parents may be in denial about their child's behavior issues, may lack effective discipline practices, or may engage in harsh or abusive parenting. If parents can receive guidance and resources for managing challenging behaviors at home and for encouraging positive behaviors, children may feel more capable of meeting the challenges of the classroom. In addition, programs of family support might strengthen the collaboration of teachers and parents so they can work together to support children's development. Programs should be implemented at individual childcare centers, through home visiting programs, and across the community to enlighten and support parents of challenging children.

Current study findings may effect positive social change if the concerns expressed by teachers in this study are taken seriously and suggested supports are implemented. Teachers and the children in their care must be helped to reduce their feelings of frustration. Teachers need to be supported through training and coaching programs regarding positive discipline techniques, and parents need to be supported in their role as children's first teachers, not only regarding academic matters but also about children's social and behavioral development. Such initiatives could reduce the number of preschoolers suspended or expelled from childcare, could increase the satisfaction and success of preschool teachers, and could lead to greater school success.

Conclusion

I explored the perspectives of early childhood lead teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers in urban settings in Texas concerning children with challenging behaviors whom teachers may recommend be suspended or expelled. Results of this study indicated both children and teachers experience frustration in the preschool classroom, and teachers' frustration leads them to recommend suspension or expulsion. Results also indicated that children who present strong externalizing behavior are hungry for attention, often exhibit a lively intellect and charm, and struggle with difficulties at home. Results suggest that preschool teachers need more training on working with challenging behaviors, greater cooperation from parents, and support from behavior specialists. Teachers in this study acknowledged the impact suspension and expulsion can have on the child and expressed concern for children's feelings of rejection.

To cultivate positive social change, childcare center administrators should build strong alignment between home and school and should support preschool teachers and parents by providing appropriate training and resources to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. Adults must recognize the role of emotions, particularly frustration, in children's behavior but also in their own response to that behavior, and find new ways to appreciate and resolve the emotional struggles that trigger unruly behaviors. Teachers in this study expressed the belief that when children feel accepted, acknowledged, and valued, they are more compliant and generate positive relationships. The results of this study could reduce teacher turnover by minimizing teacher stress level and frustration,

increasing job satisfaction through training and resources that improve relationships in their classrooms, and helping teachers succeed in providing a positive and safe environment for all children. Teachers in this study were committed to helping their most challenging children excel socially, emotionally, and academically. Childcare centers should commit to helping teachers succeed in doing that.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a time a child's behavior was so challenging, you considered suspending the child or expelling them.
    a. What ultimately happened?
    b. How often has this sort of thing come up, a child so challenging you think about suspending or expelling them?
2. How would you describe the children you've recommended be suspended or expelled?
    a. What sort of the characteristics do these children have in common, do you think?
    b. How would you describe the abilities these children seem to share?
3. When children are this challenging, so you are thinking about suspension or expulsion, what are the reasons you have for thinking suspension or expulsion might be a good idea?
4. What resources do you have access to that are helpful in managing really challenging behavior? [For example, more experienced teachers, children's parents, administrative support, outside specialists, curriculum methods…]
5. What sort of training have you had in dealing with children who exhibit very challenging behavior?
6. What resources or training that you haven't been able to access yet would be helpful to you?

7. Overall, what do you think of suspending or expelling children who are very challenging?
8. What else would you like to tell me about your experience with children with this sort of extremely challenging behavior?