

The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher

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Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education

Faculty of Education

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO, NORWAY

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Publisher: Representralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

Children displaying high levels of externalizing problems (like aggression) have been found to be prone to a large number of school adjustment difficulties. It has been argued that children's problem behavior do not only negatively impact upon their own developmental outcomes, but can also have negative consequences for the teacher (Hammarberg, 2003). These consequences leads to an inability of teachers to manage behavior problems in the classroom, which is rated the most serious problem facing teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) and the quality of teachers' interactions with students in the classroom is increasingly acknowledged as a major importance for students' success in school.

Based on the international research about the serious consequences challenging behavior can have for children's learning and development, this study was planned to exam, analyze, and discuss teachers' approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior in Honduras. Both, what appeared to influence the way that teachers relate to a child with challenging behavior, and how teachers' actions affect their students' emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances were examined.

A broad perspective of central theoretical perspectives for understanding students' challenging behavior within school settings was chosen in analyzing the research questions (Schokoff & Phillips, 2000; Hallahan & Kaufman, 2005; Befring, 2001). The etiology of challenging behavior was examined from biological and environmental perspectives (Dodge, 1991). Social-learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was, especially, emphasized because of its relevance for understanding learning and behavior modification. The importance of relations and interaction with regards to children's development and learning was also focused upon (Ajzen, 2002).

The research study was conducted in two schools and four classrooms in the city of San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Qualitative methods consisting of two months of observations of both teacher and students' behaviors inside the classroom setting and interviews with teachers was used to investigate the research questions. Four teachers and four students participated in the study. The children were from age 9-12. They had multiple social and emotional problems of both externalizing and internalizing character. In addition they had disorders as Tourette syndrome, ADHD, OC, epilepsy and specific learning disabilities. The teachers (one male/

three females) varied in their educational background and experience; only one teacher was fully qualified.

From the interviews with the teachers, it became evident the teachers felt distressed, knowing that their students have problems, but feeling unable to do little about them. Trying to teach children who are chronically unhappy or driven to aggressive, antisocial behavior was disturbing to them. The results, further, indicated that when challenging behavior appeared in the classroom, the teachers' feelings of inadequacy, frustrations, negative attitudes and assumptions towards their students emerged. These phenomena and other external factors (as cultural expectations for acceptable behavior, lack of teachers' insight and lack of support and counseling) influenced the way teachers saw the student and therefore, the way they behaved towards them. The two students with behavior considered very negative by their teacher maintained consistent challenging behavior, attention problems and learning difficulties. They showed low frustration tolerance, and unconstructive work habits. On the other hand, the two students with behavior that was understood by their teachers performed better academically, had better social skills, exerted more control over emotions and had a better relationship with the teacher and classmates. These students were given adapted curriculums and teaching. The behavioral modification methods (reinforcing positive behavior, using token economy and time out in a secure setting) were perceived as positive by these two students.

In school, children with challenging behavior are at risk for developing academic problems as increasing classroom disengagement and underachievement (Ladd & Burgess, 2001) as well as social difficulties (Ladd, 2003). This study, however, indicates that the teachers that were able to maintain harmonious relationships with their students and adapt their teaching were somewhat able to minimize the risks and maximize learning for their students (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006).

Acknowledgements

My most heartfelt appreciation goes to God whose strength and wisdom together with my family's encouragement and patience gave me the energy to follow through on a task that consumed countless hours. The loving support of my close friends was inspiring and energizing throughout the revision process. The perspectives of my advisor, Liv Lassen, helped keep before me the goal of writing in a way that would appeal interested to the readers. With thoughtfulness, Liv provided me with recommendations that enhance the text in many ways.

Very special thanks to all the participants, including the schools that made this research possible by participating in this journey with me.

Linda M. Aguirre

*By its very nature, a challenge is difficult,
but once conquered it brings incredible rewards.*

Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction 1**
 - 1.1 Children with challenging behavior 1
 - 1.2 What influences the way the teachers relate to a child with challenging behavior? 2
 - 1.3 How teachers’ actions affect their student’s emotional and behavioral reactions and
academic performances positive or negatively? 2
 - 1.4 Honduras as research setting 3
 - 1.5 Disposition of thesis 3

- 2 Theoretical perspectives 5**
 - 2.1 What is challenging behavior? 5
 - 2.1.1 Theoretical perspectives on the etiology of challenging behavior and aggression ... 6
 - 2.2 Biological based perspectives 7
 - 2.3 Environmental based perspectives 7
 - 2.3.1 A social information processing model 8
 - 2.4 Developmental aspects 10
 - 2.4.1 Morality, empathy and aggression 10
 - 2.4.2 Interaction and relational development 10
 - 2.5 Cultural aspects with regards to students’ challenging behavior 12
 - 2.5.1 Education ethics in Honduras 15

- 3 Research Methods and Design 16**
 - 3.1 Advantages of using Qualitative Methods 16
 - 3.2 Descriptive and Exploratory Methods 17

3.3 Triangulation of Methods	18
3.3.1 Interviews	18
3.3.2 Observation & Content Analysis	19
3.3.3 Reflective Journal	19
3.3.4 Student Referral Process	19
3.4 Participants	20
3.5 Data Processing and Analysis	21
3.6 Validity & Reliability	22
3.7 Ethical Considerations	22
4 Research Results	24
4.1 Schools and Informants' Background	24
4.2 General aspects concerning interviews and observations	25
4.2.1 Teacher interviews	25
4.2.2 Observation in the classroom settings	27
4.3 Four case scenarios	28
4.3.1 Case Scenario 1	28
4.3.2 Case Scenario 2	32
4.3.3 Case Scenario 3	34
4.3.4 Case Scenario 4	37
4.4 Summary of results	40
4.4.1 Highlights from the individual case studies	40
4.4.2 Similarities between the cases	42
4.4.3 Differences between the cases	43

4.4.4 Short Reflection	43
5 Discussion and conclusion	44
5.1 What appears to influence the way teachers relate to their students?	45
5.1.1 Cultural aspects affecting teaching children with challenging behavior in Honduras	45
5.1.2 Teachers' support and counseling	47
5.1.3 Teachers' perceived control over child behavior	47
5.2 How do teachers' actions affect their students' emotional, behavioral and academic performances?	48
5.2.1 Understanding the students' challenging behavior patterns	48
5.2.2 The effect of the student-teacher relationship	50
5.2.3 The effect of teachers' adapted teaching	52
5.2.4 Effect of teachers' behavior modification practices	53
5.3 Methodological critique of the study	55
5.3.1 Limitations	55
5.3.2 Future research	56
5.4 Applications of the research findings	56
5.4.1 For: teacher education and teacher support and development through special education units and counseling possibilities in Honduras	56
5.5 Summary and Conclusion	58
Appendix A	63
Appendix B	64
Appendix C	66

Appendix D	68
Bibliography	70

1 Introduction

“The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher: What are teachers’ approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior?”

Few experiences are as disturbing to teachers as trying to teach children who are chronically unhappy or driven to aggressive, antisocial behavior. The teachers feel distressed, knowing there’s a problem but feeling unable to do anything about it. The inability of teachers to manage behavior problems in the classroom is rated the most serious problem facing teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Children displaying high levels of externalizing problems (like aggression) have been found to be prone to a large number of school adjustment difficulties. These children are at risk for developing academic problems such as increasing classroom disengagement and underachievement (Ladd & Burgess, 2001) as well as social difficulties (Ladd, 2003; Ladd & Burgess, 1999). Because of the high relevance of helping both the behavioral challenging child and its teacher, this thesis will investigate teachers’ approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior. Focus will be both on identifying: 1. what appears to influence the way the teachers relate to a child with challenging behavior; and 2. how teachers’ actions affect their student’s emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances. The research study is conducted in schools/classrooms in Honduras. It has a qualitative design based on observation of both teacher and students’ behaviors inside the classroom and interviews with teachers. Since one of the most important tasks young children face is to form a close and harmonious relationship with the teacher, the aim of this study is to observe, analyze, and discuss the relationship as well as the quality of teacher-student interactions within classrooms in Honduras

1.1 Children with challenging behavior

Children with behavior problems carry a burden that children with other disabilities do not. We do not blame children who have intellectual and developmental disabilities or who have cerebral palsy for their deviant behavior. But many people assume that children with behavior disorders can control their actions and could stop their disturbing behavior if they wanted to. The sense that they are somehow responsible for their disability colors these

children's interactions with those around them: their families, their age mates, their teachers (Gresham, 2007).

1.2 What influences the way the teachers relate to a child with challenging behavior?

When a student with challenging behavior comes on the scene, all kinds of feelings, attitudes, and assumptions appear (Lassen, 2005). Whether a school district is rich or poor, rural or urban, it is likely to enroll its reasonable share of students with challenging behavior. Just one child can turn even the most experienced teacher's classroom upside down. Along with the internal dispositions, there are also external factors like—a class with a large number of students, different legislations such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), high risks testing, too much material to cover in too short time—among many others, play a role in the way teachers react when a child with challenging behavior enters their classroom. These barriers and/or obstacles influence the way the teacher see the students, altering their expectations of them, affecting the way they see themselves and the way they behave.

1.3 How teachers' actions affect their student's emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances positive or negatively?

A relationship with a supportive adult can play a key role in building children's resilience (Rutter, 1987; Werner, 2000). A close relationship with a teacher brings a child other "strong and persistent" benefits (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). With the teacher's warm support, children adjust better to school—they like it more (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), participate more actively in the classroom (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), and perform better academically (Birch and Ladd, 1998). When they get along well with their teacher, children get along better with their classmates, are more gregarious and flexible, have better social skills, and can exert more control over their emotions (Howes and Ritchie, 2002). But above all, their behavior is less challenging and aggressive and all of this protects them from risk.

On the other hand, a combative relationship with a teacher increases a child's risks. It makes school an unpleasant place (Birch and Ladd, 1998), and he is more likely to have attention and learning problems (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), low frustration tolerance, and faulty work habits (Pianta, 1994). When conflict with their teachers is chronic, children may have disturbed thinking patterns (and perhaps problems with social information processing), as they obsess about others' motives and see threats everywhere (Ladd and Burgess, 2001). Even children who aren't at risk may develop behavior problems when they have an antagonistic relationship with a teacher (Ladd and Burgess, 2001).

1.4 Honduras as research setting

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and the 2nd poorest in Central America (CIA—The World Fact Book). Nearly two thirds of its 8.1 million people live in rural areas. A combination of military rule, natural disasters and rampant crime, among other factors, turned Honduras into one of the poorest countries in the region. About half of the population lives below the poverty line. Though economy is growing slowly, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Unemployment, urban violence, poor housing, malnutrition, and a lack of good education continue to blight the lives of many economically and socially disadvantaged citizens—United Nations Development Program (UNDP). One of the indexes used to measure the educational level of a population is the average amount of years of formal schooling. In Honduras, that index is 11, that is, the average Honduran has 11 years of formal schooling (CIA—The World Fact Book). I believe that culture is a basic part of who people are. In this research, the Honduran culture is an essential part of who children are and how they behave. It is also a central part of the teachers' training and professional role. In this thesis, I try to make my research culturally sensitive. However, since I am Honduran/Latin American and the research was conducted in Honduras, it is important for readers and myself (as a researcher) to be aware and consider any possible bias.

1.5 Disposition of thesis

The thesis is organized in 5 chapters and an appendix. Chapter one is the introduction to the research project. Chapter two is a theoretical overview of the research topic. Chapter three addresses methodological issues and design. In chapter 4 the research findings are presented. In chapter 5 the research findings and its highlights will be discussed in relation to

educational improvements. Highlight these behaviors and conclude with ways to help the teachers' improve their approaches towards the behavioral challenged student in order to develop a more successful relation between them—consequently, better behavioral and academic achievement among the challenged child. The appendix includes application to and permission from the Norwegian Ethics Committee, copy of the interview questionnaire, letter of permission to proceed with research; addressed to the Education Ministry, teachers' consent for interviewing and observe them, and parents' authorizations to evaluate, observe, and interpret their child disability.

This thesis will hopefully bring together relevant information about some of the theory and research that underlie effective practice in student-teacher interaction. It may uncover some strategies for preventing and managing challenging behavior. More specifically it presents the most basic strategy of all: building a relationship with the child, which can make or break any other strategy the teacher can use, by exploring how teachers' beliefs, expectations, values, and experience influence their teaching style and their ability to handle their students' challenging behavior.

2 Theoretical perspectives

This chapter presents an overview of theoretical perspectives which are central to the understanding and investigation of students' challenging behavior within the school setting. First, a global definition of challenging behavior is presented. Thereafter, the etiology of such behavior is examined from biological and environmental perspectives. Social-learning theory is, especially, emphasized because of its relevance for learning and behavior modification. The importance of relations and interaction is presented with regards to children's development and learning. Finally, aspects within the Latino culture are discussed.

2.1 What is challenging behavior?

Challenging behavior is any behavior that interferes with a child's cognitive, social, or emotional development. As such challenging behavior may be harmful to a child, his peers, or adults and puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure (Chandler and Dahlquist, 1997; Klass, Guskin, and Thomas, 1995; Ritchie and Pohl, 1995). Some experts' estimate that up to 20 percent of children have emotional and behavior disorders (Costello et al., 1996), but just a small fraction receive special education services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) *emotional disturbance* designation (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Boys are affected six to nine times as often as girls (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

There are two broad classes of emotional and behavior disorders:

1. *Externalizing disorders*

In this group are students who acts out or directs their feelings outwards. The group includes *oppositional defiant disorder*, where children behave in negative, hostile ways, losing their temper, arguing, defying, and refusing to comply; and conduct disorders, where students persistently break rules, bully others, and act aggressively (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

2. *Internalizing disorders*

In this group are students who withdraw or turn their feelings inward. Included here are *eating disorders*; *anxiety disorders*, such as *obsessive compulsive disorder*, *posttraumatic stress*

disorder, and *phobias*; and *mood disorders*, such as *depression*, *bipolar illness*, and *schizophrenia* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Hallahan and Kaufman (2005) propose a third classification of behavioral disorders. They found some children to be immature or underdeveloped in their social and behavioral skills. These children may utilize both or either externalizing and internalizing forms of behavior. The major characteristic is that the behavior is not age appropriate causing problems for the student to function with peers and teachers in the school setting.

Students with emotional and behavior problems often have other co-morbid disorders as ADHD, a learning disability, or difficulty with language (Benner, Nelson, and Epstein, 2002). As a result, they have great trouble in the academic area and problems with social skills and friendships. Such problems can lead to scholastic troubles, because their social skills, emotional control, and language development are often below par. Many students with challenging behavior are unprepared for the most basic tasks of early schoolings (Coie, 1996). Hyperactivity, inattentiveness, and inability to concentrate also influence their learning ability. As a result, many children with challenging behavior struggle with almost all academic challenges.

2.1.1 Theoretical perspectives on the etiology of challenging behavior and aggression

The vast outpouring of research in both neuroscience and child development in recent years has made this interesting question of “*What causes challenging behavior?*” more difficult than ever to answer. People used to ask, “Which is more important, nature or nurture?” But today’s experts say that this argument is “scientifically obsolete” (Schokoff and Phillips, 2006m p. 6). They have discovered that nature and nurture are attached and work together in every aspect of human development. Briefly, the risk factors for challenging behavior fall into two broad categories, biological and environmental. I defined *biological* as anything that inflicts on the child from conception to birth. And anything that influences a child after birth I’ve considered it as *environmental*, whether it acts on him directly (such as physical punishment) or indirectly (such as poverty). Everything in a child’s environment—his family, peers, school, neighborhood, even his exposure to violence, television, and the state of mind of the greater society—presents potential risks factors for challenging behavior. All these factors continually overlap and interact with each other.

2.2 Biological based perspectives

For centuries, scientists, philosophers, and other serious thinkers have been arguing about the human capacity for aggression. Some are convinced that aggression is an inborn, instinctive human trait. Others are just as certain that aggressive behavior must be learned (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 1998). Some, like Seneca and the Stoics in ancient times and Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century, assert that aggression and anger are uncontrollable biological instincts that must be retrained by external force. Others, like the English philosopher John Locke, believe that a child comes into the world as a blank slate—*tabula rasa*—and experience makes him who he is (Dodge, 1991). All these views exist today.

The frustration-aggression theory holds that when people are frustrated—when they can't reach their goals—they become angry and hostile and act aggressively (Dodge, 1991).

2.3 Environmental based perspectives

Social Learning theory (Bandura, 1977) has been a dominant perspective in investigating aggression for the last three decades. Based on principles of conditioning, reinforcement and modeling, it maintains that people learn aggressive behavior from responses in the environment and use it to achieve their goals. These processes are difficult to observe in practice. Pepler and Slaby indicate that it is impossible to attribute all aggression to frustration, stating that the way a person responds to frustration probably depends on what he's learned (Pepler and Slaby, 1994).

Psychologist Albert Bandura, contends that children learn aggressive behavior primarily by observing it. Children are great imitators, and they copy the models around them—family, teachers, peers, neighbors, television, and so on. At the same time, they observe and experience the rewards, punishments, and emotional situations associated with aggressive and anti-social behavior. When they see that a behavior is reinforced, they're likely to try it for themselves; when they experience the reinforcement directly, they're likely to repeat it (Bandura, 1977). In his theory of *self-efficacy* Bandura emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality. According to Bandura, a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as the self-system. This system plays a major role in how we

perceive situations and how we behave in response to different situations. In the role of self-efficacy, virtually all people can identify goals they want to accomplish, things they would like to change, and things they would like to achieve. However, most people also realize that putting these plans into action is not quite so simple. Bandura and others have found that an individual's self-efficacy plays a major role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached. Therefore, how the teacher relates to the child depends on what he sees when he looks at him—and what he sees depends on who he is. Whether the teacher is aware of it or not, everything about his teaching—how he approach and respond to students, arrange his room, choose and present lessons and activities, even his knowledge of child development and theory sorts through the spectrum of his own beliefs, values, and culture, his own temperament, emotions, education, and experience. A teacher, says William Ayers (1989), is “the perceiver, the selector, and the interpreter of a child's behavior” (p.137).

The quality of teachers' interactions with students in the classroom is increasingly acknowledged as of major importance for student success in school. Recent research has revealed that student learning outcomes improve when they attend classrooms in which the teachers are warm and respond to student needs, organize the environment in predictable patterns, stimulate student analysis and reasoning, and monitor and provide feedback focused on the process of learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Child Care Research Network,2002,2004; Perry, Donohue & Weinstein, 2007; van de Grift, 2007; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). A close relationship with a teacher brings a child other “strong and persistent” benefits (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). With the teacher's warm support, children adjust better to school—they like it more (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), participate more actively in the classroom (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Ladd and Burgess, 2001), and perform better academically (Birch and Ladd, 1998). At least one study found that among children at high risk for grade retention or referral to special education, those who had a positive relationship with their teacher were less likely to be held back or referred (Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollings, 1995).

2.3.1 A social information processing model

Social learning theory has generated several other theories that place more emphasis on cognition. According to the *cognitive script model*, proposed by L. Rowell Huesmann and Leonard D. Eron, children learn scripts for aggressive behavior—when to expect it, what to

do, what it feel like, what its results will be—and lay them down in their memory banks. The more they rehearse these scripts through observation, fantasy, and behavior, the more readily they spring to mind and govern behavior when the occasion arises (Coie and Dodge, 1998; Pepler and Slaby, 1994). Psychologist Kenneth A. Dodge has proposed a *social information processing model* for aggressive and anti-social behavior. In every single social interaction, there is lots of information to be instantly processed and turned into a response. As each social cue comes in, the child must encode it, interpret it, think of possible responses, evaluate them, and choose a response to enact. A child with every challenging behavior often lacks one or more of the skills required to process this information properly, and he tends to see the world with a skeptical eye. When another child bumps into him in a situation that most children regard as neutral, he thinks the bump was intentional—that the other child wanted to hurt him or be mean to him. Dodge calls this having a *hostile attributional bias*. Furthermore, the child doesn't look for information that might help to solve a problem, and he has trouble thinking of alternative solutions. And because he doesn't anticipate what will happen if he responds aggressively, he often ends up choosing passive or aggressive solutions that don't work (Dodge, 1980; Dodge and Frame, 1982). This pattern (which becomes stable in middle childhood) develops with experience. Children who are consistently maltreated at home or rejected by their peers feel angry and alienated, alone in a hostile environment. They learn to defend themselves by becoming extra vigilant and quickly resorting to force (Dodge, 2003).

Like the philosophers—Seneca, Stoics, Thomas Hobbes, J. Locke, Dodges makes a distinction between two kinds of aggression. Children use *proactive aggression* as a tool to achieve a goal, such as obtaining a desired object or dominating a peer. Proactive aggression is more common among very young children because they don't yet have the words they need to ask for the ball or the teacher's attention. They aren't angry or emotional; they are just using the means available to get what they want. Interestingly, young children who use proactive aggression don't necessarily earn the rejection of their peers. In fact, they often show leadership qualities. But by the time they reach the primary grades, the other students are no longer willing to tolerate this behavior and will reject a child who uses it (Dodge, 1991). *Reactive aggression* appears in the heat of the moment in reaction to some frustration or perceived provocation. Angry, volatile, and not at all controlled, it is often aimed at hurting someone. Children who are prone to reactive aggression are invariably disliked, and they also make errors in social information processing, attributing hostile intentions to others in ambiguous or neutral situations (Dodge and Frame, 1982).

2.4 Developmental aspects

2.4.1 Morality, empathy and aggression

Children who behave in an aggressive or anti-social manner may also be behind in moral understanding (Befring, 2001). They can't see things from another person's perspective, insist on having their own way, blame others when things go wrong, and continue to attack even when their target is clearly in pain. They may also increase their self-esteem by overestimating their own popularity and social competence (Hughes, Cavell, and Grossman, 1997). If they are rejected, students with aggressive behavior experience more stress and record much higher levels of stress hormones than other children in the classroom (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Aggressive or anti-social behavior is more likely to occur if the environment considers it normal and acceptable and if it is part of a child's usual collection of responses (Guerra, 1997). When the environment devalues aggressive behavior and children have competent, effective, nonaggressive responses at their disposal, they have a far better chance of solving their problems harmoniously. Children's problem behaviors do not only negatively impact upon their own developmental outcomes, but can also have negative consequences for the teacher (Lassen. 2005).

2.4.2 Interaction and relational development

Research about the brain and resiliency tells us that consistent, nurturing relationships are a child's best protection against risk—including the risk of developing challenging behavior. One of the most important items that any student carries with him is his relationship with his primary caregiver from the moment he is born. This person is usually his mother, but may also be his father, grandmother, or someone else. This very first relationship—a relationship as important in childhood and adolescence as it is in infancy (Marvin and Britner, 1999) lays the groundwork for his relationship with the teacher. While families have the first place in creating relationships, teachers spend so much time with a child that they, too, have the opportunity to build a strong, positive relationship and boost resilience. This role is particularly important when family relationships are unstable. When the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health looked at the factors associated with a healthy outcome for youth, having a supportive relationship with an adult—most often a teacher—topped the list (Resnick et al., 1997).

Children who engage in disruptive and aggressive behaviors are likely to upset classroom order, break rules, and provoke confrontations with the teacher (Ladd et al, 2006). The relationship with the teacher may, therefore, be hampered and unsupportive. Teacher's reactions to these behavior problems seem to depend on the type of problem behavior (e.g. aggressive vs. inattentive/hyperactive behavior), as well as on teacher beliefs and attitudes towards the management of these behavior (Poulou & Norwich, 2002): Teachers report more negative affect and see punishment as more appropriate for aggressive than for inattentive/hyperactive child behavior (Lovejoy, 1996). Moreover, they perceived children's aggressive behaviors to be more under control of the child than inattentive/hyperactive behavior (Lovejoy, 1996).

Teachers sometimes exacerbate the problem. One study showed that teachers are more likely to punish students with challenging behavior and less likely to encourage them when they behave appropriately (Walker and Buckley, 1973). Teachers also call on children with aggressive behavior less frequently, ask them fewer questions, and provide them with less information (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Not surprisingly, these students soon fall behind, and they're more likely to be held back, placed in a special class, or even expelled (Kazdin, 1987; Pepler and Rubin, 1991; Webster Stratton and Herbert, 1994).

These findings may have consequences for teachers' beliefs about their ability to cope with children's externalizing behavior and their aggressive behavior in particular. According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2002), a person's perceived control to perform an intended behavior or action depends on past experiences as well as an evaluation of anticipated impediments and obstacles. The concept of perceived control over an action does not only refer to Bandura's (1989) concept of self-efficacy (the perceived ease or difficulty of performing an action), but also includes a person's view on the controllability of an action (beliefs about the degree to which performing the action/behavior is up to the actor; Ajzen, 2002). Therefore, applied to a teacher's work context, and specifically their classroom management, teachers' perceived ease or difficulty of coping with the aggressive behavior of that particular child, as well as teachers' beliefs about the extent to which children's aggressive behavior is controllable by the teacher. Given that teachers may attribute much of the control of children's aggressive behavior to the child itself (Lovejoy, 1996) and given that children's aggressive behavior is relatively stable within a school year and may be perceived

by teachers as a salient behavioral style of the child (Ladd & Burgess, 1999), children's repeated engagement in aggressive behavior may deteriorate teacher's perceived control over this child's behavior—consequently, experience a multitude of negative feelings which are without question the most prominent barrier between the teacher and a student with challenging behavior (Lassen 2005). All kinds of attitudes and assumptions as—“He shouldn't be in this classroom. I'm not trained to work with children like this. That child is out to get me. He never listens to me.” – may also emerge. Such negative attitudes and behaviors may influence the relationship between the teacher and the student, and detrimental to the child's development of constructive behavior. By empowering the teachers to perceive the students' behavior as clearly as possible, the teacher may be better able to adapt the teaching situations in the inclusive setting. By making the inclusive settings better for specific students' the educational experiences within the classroom often appear to become more enriching for all the students (Befring, 2001).

2.5 Cultural aspects with regards to students' challenging behavior

Creating a relationship with children and families is particularly challenging and important. Perhaps, one of the greatest obstacles and the hardest to see is the 'personal' culture difference. Culture influences everyone's values and expectations. When the school's values and goals resemble those at home, a child experiences less stress and home values are reinforced. When school is different from home, there is discontinuity—consequently more risk. As soon as they are born, children start to acquire the skills they need to become competent adults in their own culture, and by the time they enter school they are already well on their way. In the new environment, a lot of what they have learned so far in their home culture simply doesn't apply. They must start again from scratch, feeling much less competent. Students who find themselves in a strange environment may experience feelings of confusion, isolation, alienation, and conflict (Chud and Fahlman, 1995). The curriculum, instruction, and discipline may not recognize or support their culture; and their teachers may not notice or appreciate the talents, skills, and abilities they developed in their own community. As a result, they don't feel accepted, respected, or valued; their self-concept and academic achievement may suffer and they may act out. Experts often blame discontinuity for the high rate of school failure and dropout among children from diverse cultures and poor

families (Gay, 2000). Given such discontinuity, it is easy to see how a cultural conflict, visible or invisible, can cause or contribute to challenging behavior. What was perfectly acceptable at home may be suddenly and inexplicably inappropriate at school. Like students from diverse cultures, students who live in poverty have a culture—they have learned what they need to survive in their world. But many of their competencies, skills, and values don't apply in school. Teachers frequently interpret a student's inappropriate behavior personally, thinking that is directed at them, but the student may not know any other way to react. In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005), Ruby K. Payne writes, "An understanding of the culture and values of poverty will lessen the anger and frustration that educators may periodically feel when dealing with [low income] students" (p.45).

Researchers have identified some cultural traits among the Latino/Hispanic culture that can help explain different behavioral expectations and outcomes. Although, it is important to note that, however, they are generalizations about characteristics that are often, but not always, found. Also people from different places with similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds may have more in common with each other than with some members of their own culture. Ultimately, each child is unique. In 2003, the number of Latinos in the United States surpassed the number of African Americans to become the largest community of color in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Latinos, who are also known as Hispanics, come from several different Spanish-speaking areas—most notably Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and South and Central America (Guzman, 2001). These groups have a lot in common and—depending on the country of origin, education, and socioeconomic status of the family—a lot of differences. In the collectivist, high context Latino culture, both respect for authority and group harmony are important values (Shade et al., 1997). Children receive directives to follow, and they are expected to respect and obey their elders (including their teachers). It is considered rude to question adults, to argue, or to express negative feelings. They may participate more actively and function better when they work collaboratively with a group of their peers and have a warm, informal relationship with the teacher (Gay, 2000) It is extremely important to value their culture and language in the classroom (Gay, 2000). Family comes first in the Latino culture, and parents want their children to succeed in school so that they can help other members of the extended family both economically and emotionally (Taylor, 2004). At the same time, children's family responsibilities may include caring for younger siblings, making meals, and working after school, even if they sometimes miss class or can't finish their homework as a

result. Courtesy indicates caring, and discipline at home is strict but polite and affectionate (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Children are sensitive to social cues and the nonverbal expression of emotion. Because direct criticism is a sign of disrespect, it's important for discipline in school to be indirect and polite, too (Shade et al., 1997). When a teacher reprimands or corrects them, students may become upset, and although they won't respond, they may lower their eyes as their culture dictates. Because belonging to the groups is so vital, being singled out in any way—positive or negative can be especially disconcerting and humiliating. Humor, jokes, and verbal play are important because they help relieve tension and avoid disagreement (Shade et al., 1997).

In the interdependent Latino culture, it's common for mothers to make sure their children have everything they need. When the teacher expects a student to function independently and do things she's never done before, she may feel unsure of herself, but an offer of assistance will usually reassure her (B. Burton, personal communication, July 2006). Because they're often in large groups, Latino children are accustomed to noise and may speak loudly without realizing it (B. Burton, personal communication, July 2006). They may also touch each other and sit and stand close together. A teacher who keeps her distance may lead a student to think she isn't sincere, and the child may withdraw or be less likely to cooperate (B. Burton, personal communication, July 2006). It is extremely important for the teacher to understand the cultural assumptions on both sides—on the one hand why he expects a student to behave in a particular way, and on the other hand why for some students his demands seems strange. Delpit (1995) writes:

“In any discussion of education and culture, it is important to remember that children are individuals and cannot be made to fit into any preconceived mold of how they are “supposed” to act. The question is not necessarily how to create the perfect “culturally matched” learning situation for each ethnic group, but rather how to recognize when there is a problem for a particular child and how to seek its cause in the most broadly conceived fashion. Knowledge about culture is but one tool that educators may make use of when devising solutions for a [teacher’s] difficulty in educating diverse children. “ (Delpit, 1995, p. 167).

It is understandable that the teacher will have cultural expectations of his own, and that he will also encounter behavior that confuses him. All too often, unexamined attitudes and assumptions influence the way teacher interacts with children. When teachers understand

themselves and their students, they have a far better chance of seeing children clearly, establishing warm and trusting relationships with them, maintaining self-control, and identifying alternative solutions to problems (Hattie, 2009).

2.5.1 Education ethics in Honduras

The Honduran educational system follows the European American model of centralized control through the Ministry of Public Education. According to law, education is free and, at the primary level, compulsory for all children. Efforts have been made to combat illiteracy, which affects more than one-fourth of the population over age 15 and is especially prevalent among older people. Data from the Program for the Development of the Organization of the United Nations (PNUD) reveal today, moreover, that 51% of the matriculates finish primary school, in an average of 9.4 years, and that number of dropouts increases each year. The acutest problem is that the basic educational system only covers 86.5% of school-age children, while the remaining 13.5% cannot get access to an education. Although, the Honduran Constitution formally stipulates that minors have to have their educations taken care of, many arrive at adulthood without learning to read or write, while the state tries to justify this by the insufficiency of resources at its command. Illiteracy encompasses more than half a million people in this country, which is the equivalent of the entire population between 15 and 40 years old. Sources add that the problem is becoming more acute to the scarcity of public resources and an insufficient and slightly equitable offer in the educational order, both in quantity and in quality. Also, the necessity of increasing the family earnings forces many children to leave school for work, usually permanently. For similar reasons, this connects the low level of education reached by many parents with the precarious living conditions for more than 80% of Hondurans. In 10 of the 18 departments in which Honduras is divided, the second poorest of Central America, more than ninety percent of the students need to repeat grades.

3 Research Methods and Design

The study entitled “The Behavioral Challenge Child & Its Teacher” is a qualitative research project. It attempts to accumulate existing information and data regarding to the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards troubled students through observation of the relationship between the student-teacher-student and interviewing teachers’ about their experiences. The focus is on behavior inside the classroom. The study can be perceived as an embedded case design (Befring, 2004; Gall, Gall, Borg & Walter 2007) of elementary teacher’s practices in interacting with students who have behavior that is challenging for them.

3.1 Advantages of using Qualitative Methods

Contrary to the quantitative method, qualitative approach generates verbal information rather than numerical values (Polgar & Thomas, 1995). The main point of the quantitative research method is that measurement is valid, reliable and can be generalized with its clear anticipation of cause and effect (Cassell & Symon, 1994). Instead of using statistical analysis, the qualitative approach utilizes content or holistic analysis to explain and comprehend the research findings, inductive and not deductive reasoning is used.

The research question in this study entails capturing and understanding the interaction between teachers and their students. This is a dynamic process that loses much meaning if it is quantified. As the researcher, I opted to implement a qualitative approach in this study due to its significant advantages of flexibility in conducting data gathering, research analysis and interpretation of gathered information. The use of qualitative data gathering method is advantageous as it is more open to changes and refinement of research ideas as the study progresses; this implies that qualitative data gathering tools are highly flexible. Moreover, no manipulation of the research setting is necessary with this method. Rather than employing various research controls common to experimental approaches, qualitative data gathering methods are only centered on understanding the occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states. The qualitative data gathering tools can provide rich and well grounded descriptions and explanations as well as uncovering unforeseen findings for new theory construction. In addition, qualitative method allows the presentation of the phenomenon being investigated in a more holistic view. Such notable strengths cannot be obtained from

statistical analysis and numerical data utilized through quantitative means (Cassell & Symon, 1994).

Both methods have limitations and strengths (Befring, 2004). With the qualitative approach, generalization is impossible. With the quantitative approach uncovering in depth narratives and the dynamics of real life experiences may be very difficult (Lassen, 1998).

3.2 Descriptive and Exploratory Methods

My overall intention is to use this combination of integrative approaches in order to attempt to uncover the logic underlying behavioral difficulties and at the same time obtain an insight on how the teachers can break the cycle of ineffective approach toward child they find challenging and help them successfully. In this study, I utilize both descriptive and explanatory research methods to gather data to capture the phenomena. By choosing a phenomenological approach, I hope the data will speak for itself. The focus is on the experience of the teachers and a direct grasping (intuiting) of the essential structures of phenomena as they appear in the classrooms. Lassen (1998. p 148) says:

“Intuiting implies a holistic understanding which indicates a meeting between the researcher and the subject. Such a meeting necessitates an empathic interpretation of the experience. The interpretation may be both, pointing to something or pointing out of the meaning of something.”

In this study, I would like to point to the teacher’s thoughts and needs, and their limitations and possibilities to adjust and change the existing patterns of interacting with their pupils.

Descriptive research is a method used to obtain information relating to the current status of the issue or phenomenon, to describe “what exists” within the variables or conditions of the situation. The two most common types of descriptive research tools are interviews and observations (Creswell, J., 1994; Befring 2004). I would use observations from my experience in supervising teachers’ performances and interactions with the challenged behavior child to obtain real life descriptions. Exploratory research, on the other hand, is often utilized in order to yield information to explain a problem which are not yet clearly defined or where the real scope is still unclear (Befring, 2004). It allows the researcher to familiarize himself/herself with the concepts of the problem being studied thus facilitating development of insight and

hypothesis. Since this study attempt to gather information regarding the effects of teacher's perceived control over the child's behavior and their quality of interactions, it can be seen as exploratory. In addition, a literature review of research and theory on the subject may be useful in further validating my observations and clarify preliminary ideas regarding the research problem. Bushell and Bear explain this as: "If you don't know where you are, you're lost, and it doesn't matter that you know where you want to go" (Bushell & Baer, 1994, p. 4).

3.3 Triangulation of Methods

Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K., 2006). By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer, and single-theory studies. In collecting the data for this study, several instruments were used. Therefore this can be seen as a triangulation of methods, giving richness to the material.

3.3.1 Interviews

A standardized open-ended interview and reactive observation (in real life context in which teachers knew they were being observed) were used as the main data gathering instruments for this study (See Appendix, p. 73-74). The interview involved a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent, in order to minimize the possibility of bias. The interview was divided into two main sections: a profile and an interview proper. The profile contains socio demographic characteristics of the teachers' respondents such as age, gender, civil status, the number of years they had served the institution as well as their assigned job position. The interview proper explored the perceptions of the teacher towards the student's inside classroom performances—it includes teacher's experiences with the challenged behavior child, opinions, and student descriptions in terms of attention, independence, sociability, and consideration (e.g. which approaches work well with the student, and which don't?). The interviews involved just one respondent at a time and their responses were voice recorded for later note taking and further analysis.

3.3.2 Observation & Content Analysis

During observation, a naturalistic observational approach was taken into action—the teachers and the challenged students’ interactions, behaviors, social, and physical environment were observed. Lee Sechrest (1979) suggested that social attitudes like prejudice are best studied through subtle observation in natural, real-life settings, preferably without direct input from the individuals in the setting. These observations provide more accurate data than that obtained from research participants, which are often biased by the set to give a socially desirable response (Gall, Meredith D., Gall, Joyce P., and Borg, Walter R. –8th ed, 2007). My role as an observer was as a complete observer—in which I maintained a posture of independence from the setting being studying. And in order to ensure accurate recording, I took immediate written field notes using single sheets of paper in order to not distract the research participants neither the rest of the students; soon after leaving the scene, I took the time to go over the notes, arrange them and formally write them down in my recording notebook.

3.3.3 Reflective Journal

The reflective journal was my formal recording book—in which I kept in written my reflections and field notes. The journal allowed me as the researcher to describe my feelings about conducting research in this area of study. According to Morrow and Smith (2000), the use of a reflective journal adds rigor to qualitative inquiry as the investigator is able to record his/her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process. The field notes provided additional data for the analysis.

3.3.4 Student Referral Process

A student referral process was explored. A review of social, psychological, medical, and achievement data from the student’s educational record was requested—in order to be professionally aware of the students’ problem severity. At first, I was intending to double check their professional psychological evaluations to ensure their reliability by re-applying some of the evaluations that were already taken. Due to my timeline, this was impossible to accomplish. Therefore, I decided to keep and review the original results.

3.4 Participants

Initially, three teachers and children (a total of six) were selected for the project. As the study progressed, it became obvious that observation of only three targets was not enough to attain sufficient validity. The five teachers and five students were recruited. One of the teachers withdrew from participating in the middle of the process. At first, three different schools were selected to participate with a pair of target (teacher-student), but one school declined my invitation to take part of the study—therefore, the number of participants originally settled plus the new additions were accommodated within the two schools that were willing to take part of the research. All teachers worked at private bilingual elementary schools in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

The four children were from 9 to 12 years of age. The children families were predominantly middle-class, and students who had been formally identified as behaviorally challenged and who had presented questionable social and academic performances. The 4⁽²⁾ participants were distributed in four different bilingual elementary/middle grade classrooms; each classroom had 1 participating teacher and student. The classrooms were situated in two schools, of which both of them were private. The average class size was between 20 to 33 students. Each teacher could be considered “qualified” due to their amount of experience in teaching, holding at least a Bachelor’s degree; although, of the four teachers—only two of them had a degree on Education. The teachers’ range years of teaching experience was from 5 to 15 years. Besides their respective second language curriculum, a national curriculum issued by the Honduran Ministry of Education is mandatory, and therefore all the teachers follow complement and follow both guidelines, although some flexibility might be permitted.

Permission from the Education Ministry, the Schools, and the teachers to conduct the study was obtained. Consent forms were sent to parents, and all parents of the students that were asked to participate in the study agreed with the request. The study was reported as accepted by the Norwegian Ethical Committee (see 3.7).

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

When the field work phase of my qualitative research study was completed, I had an extensive set of field notes and visual data that served me as a record of my observations and during the process of analysis. Here, my research task in analyzing my observational data involved me by becoming directly connected to the individuals being observed. Furthermore, I also used my observations as a means of learning about the needs of those individuals involved. This resulted in doing practical and political work to address their needs.

Prior to analyzing the data, I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries and field notes. The process of transcribing allows the researcher to become acquainted with the data (Reissman, 1993). I created a Microsoft Word file for archiving the interviews, observations, journal entries, and other documents regarding to the project. All files are saved and protected with a password in my portable computer in which I, as the researcher, am the only one with access to. As far as unit of analysis, I used the meaning of analysis context for coding and also for description—which means that the data was not coded sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph, but by meaning. The qualitative researcher must realize that, in reading and analyzing the text, he creates his own meanings and the analysis procedure is likely to be emergent. The results take form of interpretations and hypotheses. (Gall, Meredith D., Gall, Joyce P., and Borg, Walter R. –8th ed, 2007). For the thematic analysis, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke (2006) step-by-step guidelines. The authors used the word guidelines to highlight the flexibility of this qualitative analytic method. These guidelines are (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) The researcher read throughout each transcript to immerse in the data, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Stake (2006) describes three different cross case procedures for a multiple case study.

Time management is one of the significant aspects of any proceedings, and it becomes even more significant when it comes to a study. A thesis timetable, therefore, attaches importance to good on time proceeding and successful completion as well. The research field lasted 6 months and the overall research project till completion took 9½ months. Various official tasks, library visits, reading, researches, consultations & communications, deadline fulfillment, revising & rewriting, typing & printing, submissions of drafts & final papers were accomplished during this 9½ month timeline.

3.6 Validity & Reliability

As the area of qualitative research increases, social and behavioral scientists critique on the validity of studies that use such methodology. Thus, qualitative researchers utilize various validation strategies to make their studies credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Credibility for this study was achieved using the validation strategies of triangulation—researcher reflexivity, thick description, and interpretation (Befring, 2004). The data was triangulated with the various forms of data that were collected in this study (i.e., interviews, observations, documents, reflective journal entries and field notes). Thick description was achieved by presenting the participants' voices under the theme and by providing detailed description of each of the cases. Patton (2001), states that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study. To ensure reliability and validity in this qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness was considered as crucial. Seale (1999), while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, states that the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” (p. 266).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As this study required the participation of human respondents, specifically human resource professionals, certain ethical issues were addressed. The consideration of these ethical issues was necessary for the purpose of ensuring the privacy as well as the safety of the participants (Befring, 2004). Among the significant ethical issues that were considered in the research process, it includes consent and confidentiality. In order to secure the consent of the selected participants, I relayed all important details of the study, including its aim and purpose. By explaining these important details, the respondents were able to understand the importance of their role in the completion of the research. The respondents were also advised that they could withdraw from the study even during the process. With this, the participants were not forced to participate in the research. The confidentiality of the participants was also ensured by not disclosing their names or personal information in the research. Only relevant details that helped in answering the research questions were included.

Followed procedures (see appendix):

- Letter of permission to proceed with research; addressed to the Education Ministry.
- School authorization for research execution.
- Teachers' consent for interviewing and observe them.
- Parents' authorizations to evaluate, observe, and interpret their child disability.

At the end of the research study the findings and subsequent suggestions will be presented to the school, teacher, and the parents.

4 Research Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings that provide answers to the research question: “What are teachers’ approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior?” and the two sub-questions derived from the main question: What appears to influence the way that teachers relate to a child with challenging behavior?; and how teachers’ actions affect their students’ emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances?

The chapter is organized in four parts. First is a background of the schools and informants. Second is a general description of aspects concerning the interviews and observations. Third is the presentation of four case scenarios including presentation of the student, description of the teacher’s responses to the students’ challenging behavior and the students’ reactions to the teachers’ responses. The last part consists of a summary of the results.

4.1 Schools and Informants’ Background

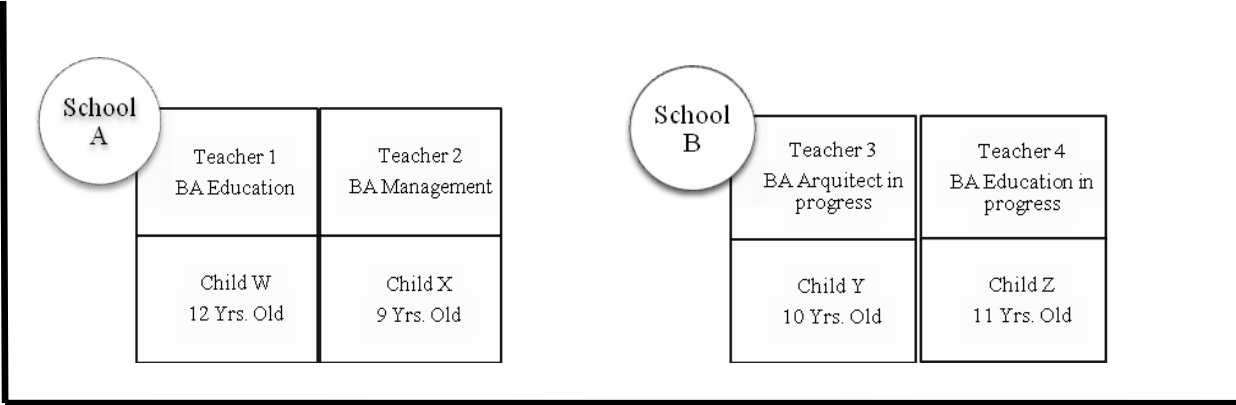
The two schools participating in the project are located in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Both are private bilingual schools (covering pre-school to high school). School A has 300 students and School B 450 students. School A is categorized as Christian; School B is considered secular (Non- religious/spiritual). None of the schools have established a special needs department. One of them (School A), however, has a counseling department which sometimes serves as a resource room for certain special needs assessments and inquiries (questions and/or concerns).

One (Teacher 1) of the four teachers participating in this study has achieved a bachelor’s degree in education. Another (Teacher 2) has completed a bachelor’s degree in another subject than education. The other two (Teacher 3 & 4), are still in the process of completing their bachelor’s degrees (one in an education area & the other in a non-education related subject).

The four students participating in the study are all middle age students. They range in the ages of 9 to 12 and all of them are boys. Three of the students have been diagnosed with some type of disorder that affects their behavior inside the classroom on a regular basis. The fourth has not yet been officially diagnosed. He does not have a diagnosis noted in his school

record, but shows similar behavioral problems in the classroom setting. The four students are unique and quite different, but have some similarities in their overall condition.

Figure 1: Table of Background Variables



4.2 General aspects concerning interviews and observations

The interviews with the teachers and teacher-student observations were conducted during the fall of 2010. The results are based on both the information obtained in the interviews and the observations in the natural settings.

4.2.1 Teacher interviews

The interviews of the teachers included questions about the school situation, the teachers’ backgrounds, and their attitudes towards their students, their teaching strategies and their description of the students. During the *interviews*, the teachers were very opened about describing the challenging student that was going to be observed. Three of them answered each question about the student in depth. One teacher seemed to take the interview less seriously. She answered questions vaguely and appeared to be in a hurry. When questions about their attitudes and teaching strategies started to come out, the teachers portrayed and evaluated themselves in an overqualified (as having more training and experience) manner.

They all described themselves to be well acknowledged about their teaching roles and practices. A representative example is teacher 3 who says:

Quote 1: “When a student challenges me and a problem arises in class, I always maintain myself calm and take control over the issues; I own the challenging incident—I’m superior because I am the teacher. I have the rights skills to use in every situation.”

Two mentioned that they felt they were giving “more” of themselves to the classroom than what they were required to. When I asked them in which ways? They replied with the following:

Quote 2: “I am always working extra hours in order to have my teaching plans well organized and I stay in school after hours if any student requires any special attention from me. I make use of my personal time to tutor students. I also take the time during class to explain things over and over again if necessary; always try to keep things in perspective in order to be able to help my students”.

Quote 3: “I consider myself a person who handle difficulties in a good way. I’m always giving verbal encouragement to my special students, I lead them to believe in their potential and how the power of motivation can do so many things. I take time from my teaching hours to read to them real stories about the important heroes through history and the importance of the expression ‘Yes I can’.”

One teacher discussed that sometimes he encounters negative feelings toward the challenging behavior scenes, but having the desire and willingness to learn more to help the student cope and overcome his difficulties. He expressed this in the following manner:

Quote 4: “I am aware in how the behavior of this student has evoked plenty of negative feelings in me several times. Feelings of fear that someone in my class will get seriously hurt, feelings of frustration and anger that I may not accomplish my teaching goals for the day, and anxiety that I won’t be able to manage his behavior. I am a perfectionist—especially when it comes to my teaching goal plans; and when I fail to accomplish them, I become overwhelmed and all these feelings together intensify my reactions making it hard to control or change them. Consequently, my

perceptions over the child's behavior and capabilities become somehow distorted during specific moments”.

The answers the teachers gave in the interviews appeared to be quite subjective. It seems that they did not have a reflective perspective on their practice and qualifications.

4.2.2 Observation in the classroom settings

Four pair of participants (two teachers/students from school A and two teachers/students from school B) agreed to become part of my research project. The observations of the teaching practices in the classroom were conducted by the researcher. They covered activities over a day of instruction, periods. I, the observer, sat in the back of the class without participating neither interacting with teachers nor students during the observation phases. Although, if they would come to me at breaks and talk to me during that time, of course I did have that informal interaction without using it as a means of my observation process. The observations were written in single sheets of paper in order to not distract the class. Soon after leaving the scene, the notes were formally written down in my reflective journal. The teachers observed were aware of the researchers presence as well as the children being observed; although, the students were not fully mindful of the researcher objective. The children's parents were fully conscious of what was going on during the research, but it was orally accorded, with the parent and the teacher, that the child would not be entirely notified of the researcher's objective due to the fact that having the children completely aware could cause some distortions in their behavior. Taking in consideration that having the teachers being totally cognizant of the researcher's purpose—it would be enough cause to somehow twist their classroom performance; having both participants' behaviors altered in any way, it wouldn't have helped much into the research reliability and validity.

During *observations*, the two teachers' that highlighted to be giving “more” than what they were required were the ones that struggled most with the challenging student. Examples of this were responses as: experiencing during class intense moods and reactions—easily outburst and become frustrated and struggled staying cool and collected in the middle of a difficult scene; impeding them to think clearly and effectively resolve the case. More likely to need the help of the school counselor or principal to attend and solve the class disruption. These examples indicated a lacking of understanding about the student's case and of a better way of approaching to them. It was obvious that they lacked ownership inside the classroom

by not being able to effectively control and intervene the problem during the required timing. This was reflected in their classroom management and overall performance through their inability to find effective teaching strategies to work with the student and by having trouble adjusting their teaching style to enable the student to function and feel comfortable in their classroom. Therefore, academic and behavioral expectations according to the school's regulations (School's curriculum timeline and disciplinary rules) were not always met—at least not successfully as judged by some of the interviewee's responses during the interview.

The other two teachers also encounter difficulties inside the classroom with their challenging student in regards to minor incidents as tapping their pencil, not following instructions, occasional tantrums inside the classroom, etc. They reported that these occurred on a daily basis. Under the observations, it became clear that teachers managed to overcome those situations. Furthermore, they reported being able to manage major circumstances either by themselves, or with the help of the school counselor or principal.

The observations will be further exemplified in the following case scenarios. These are excerpts from the total pictures of student- teacher collaboration which will to some degree illustrate interaction patterns.

4.3 Four case scenarios

Each of the following case scenarios illustrates some of the many interactions between the four teachers and the student experiencing challenging behaviors.

4.3.1 Case Scenario 1

Student's Case

'X' is a 9 year old boy in the fourth grade. He has a clinical diagnosis of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Mood disturbance. This affects his progress in the general curriculum. He has difficulties:

- following written directions
- taking tests that he must read
- with impulsive control
- focusing on tasks

- interpreting and reasoning about his environment

With such multiple difficulties, he appears often to be restless, frustrated and confused. Behavioral issues have been of great concern for him and his teacher over several years. Last year he was, however, able to master the skill of not hurting others. This student is using medication to help mediate some of the symptoms of these disorders.

The summer of 2011, he started using a new medicine. When he returned to school he was very different from the 'X' they had seen in May. He was very aggressive and volatile and highly agitated when he would be corrected. This different behavior was observed closely and conveyed to his parents. This resulted in a change of medicine which did not seem to improve his overall behavior, since he continued with aggression and agitation when corrected. Some of the symptoms of paranoia, evident in previous medication, however, seemed lesser. Again, the behavior was systematically observed and recorded. After this was conveyed to the parents, the students' medication was changed back to the medication which had been using successfully the year before. Since then his behavior is better in the sense that he is slightly more able to receive adult correction without behavior outbursts.

When observed, the student had a pattern of highs and lows in his behavior. After several weeks of very calm and more controlled behavior, he goes through periods of upheaval. Currently he is having a calmer period, but with several behaviors which appear to be out of his control. He blinks frequently and obviously, which may be distracting to the people who are watching him. His facial expressions (sometimes: gloomy, suspicious, frustrated, bored, and smug) unintentionally conveys a look of disrespect or deliberate defiance. He also makes small noises in his throat regularly. These behaviors seem to be side effect of the medications. When observed, it was obvious that he was not trying to be noisy or disrespectful.

Teacher's Response

The teacher gave this student several forms of personalized attention, this include:

- Arranged setting accommodation (For lectures, he gets preferential seating—seating in front of the class in a spacious area where he could not get easily distracted. For pacing, he is allowed frequent breaks/vary activities.)

- Academic modifications in which the curriculum has been adapted to his individual needs (Individual educational plan—elaborated by the school counselor. For assignments, he gets directions given in a variety of ways, extended time for completion, he maintains an assignment notebook, and gets assistance in recording assignments. For tests/exams, he gets extended time for completion, open book exams.)
- Positive reinforces (Positive/concrete reinforces, frequent reminders of rules, often check up for understanding/review.)

These responses can be seen as adapting the classroom situation so as to promote on task behavior and minimize difficulties.

Additionally, the teacher used pre corrects and prompts before difficult situations and assignments. She gently reminded him of her expectations during the day—such as a hand on his shoulder and a few short words of correction. She used a daily tracking sheet to follow sequence of events when he made a decision that she considered as “bad” or behaved inappropriately according to class rules. She also provided verbal feedback about working patterns that could be improved when needed and positively praised him when he was on task and behaving appropriately.

When ‘X’ was off task or having a difficult time, the teacher used verbal (words, grunts, inflections) and non-verbal (body language) cues to redirect him. When such verbal or non-verbal cues did not work, ‘X’ was given free time in the classroom before going back to his task. When he couldn’t redirect himself, he was sent to the resource room to have a chance to get things under control. But if he couldn’t get control of the situation, he was given a recess detention for choices which the teacher considered as “bad” and “inappropriate”. This recess detention was served in the resource room. If things were still out of hand, ‘X’ would be given an after school detention and his parents would be given information about the situation by writing.

Student’s Reaction

Despite of the teacher’s approaches and reinforces, ‘X’ became disruptive in class by making noises, tapping his pencil, talking to other students several times a day. At times he

overreacted towards other students or his teacher demands by giving tantrums—screaming, running around the class and throwing things to his classmates.

These reactions surfaced in the following types of situations:

- during class lessons
- independent work
- hallway times
- unstructured times

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A typical teacher response- student reaction scenario for “X”

Mrs. ‘X’ is trying to teach her health class. While she is explaining the concept, ‘X’ student begin to tap his pencil on his desk and starts talking to one of his neighbor. Mrs. ‘X’ tries to ignore this and goes on with the presentation, but a moment later even more students have begun to talk.

Mrs. ‘X’ says, “Would everyone please be quite and listen. You’re going to be doing some exercises and if you don’t listen, you won’t know what to do.” The class becomes quiet, including ‘X’, and Mrs. ‘X’ continues her explanation.

Within two minutes, the tapping noise level begins to rise again and Mrs. ‘X’ again reminds the class to be quiet, but also addressed directly to ‘X’—“‘X’ if I hear that tapping noise again, I’m going to have to put you on time out! So, you choose either stop the noise or assume the consequences”. ‘X’ stopped the noise, but started throwing papers to his classmates when Mrs. ‘X’ was not looking.

She ends up sending a notice to the principal and sends him directly to the resource room.

It appeared that ‘X’ wanted to get away from or escape work, gain attention, or leave the classroom. He was often at these times redirected to work, brought back on task. More than often he was sent out of the classroom for a time out or to cool down in the hall or the resource room. The teacher usually managed to integrate him back to the activity once he

returned to class. His behavior and attitude had often changed after these “time out” periods. Once he had settled, he maintained a good regular relationship with his teacher.

4.3.2 Case Scenario 2

Student’s Case

‘Y’ is 10 year old boy in the fourth grade with physical, behavioral and academic problems. He suffers from seizures and is currently under medical evaluation, but already taking medication for ADHD. If this medication is not administered at the same time each day, problematic behavior (for example: hitting) increases.

Academically, “Y” has difficulties with:

- Reading at the same level as his peers.
- Understanding academic instructions, especially, if working without adult help.

He gets very frustrated while in reading class or classes that requires a little extra reading. However, he is very willing to be read to by his teachers or classmates and receptive to taking tests and completing worksheets orally.

“Y” also exhibits behavior problems. They appear both as non-responsiveness and socially inappropriate behavior in his classroom. He rarely listens to his teacher and frequently fails to respond to her when the teacher speaks to him. Periodically, ‘Y’ becomes upset and loses his temper during the school day. He also has difficulty establishing “healthy” interactions with the other students in his class. During observation, hitting was the problematic behavior that prevailed. ‘Y’ hits with a closed hand or fist, or pushes, which is also recorded as ‘hit’. He appears to hit others when he has to work on his own, without adult supervision. Often after hitting a classmate, he will look up at the teacher. If he is not attended to by an adult (teacher), he will continue to hit. Once he has been attended to by his teacher, his hitting is likely to stop. This usually requires several warnings from the teacher. The school counselor who has observed “Y” over several occasions commented that the function of the students’ hitting is primarily to get attention.

Teacher's Response

'Y's teacher has been unable to find effective teaching strategies to work with this student. She gets frustrated and breaks out easily in front of the whole class when the student doesn't engage in the class subject; do not listen to what she has to say, or suddenly starts hitting others. She describes his typically non-responsiveness or socially inappropriate behaviors as defiant. When a co-worker enters the classroom right after a challenged scene, she immediately expresses out loud thoughts as:

"I'm not trained to work with children like this";

"He never listens to me";

"I no longer know how to reach him".

She has expressed that having to take care of 'Y's frustrating and challenging behavior inside the classroom, makes her lose a lot of time in her teaching period. Therefore, she attributes to 'Y's performance inside her class, as the reason for her being behind in her curriculum responsibilities.

After several incidents with 'Y', the school counselor was consulted. He recommended the teacher to use a *point system (token economy)* and *time out* with him. "Y" earned points for desired behaviors which again was exchanged for a variety of reinforcers. Initially the point system was effective. Approximately, after 2 weeks, "Y" was no longer responding to the point system. Therefore, it was discontinued. A *time out strategy* was used with little success. When 'Y' had problematic behaviors, the teacher would first warn him of consequences, and thereafter send him to the principal's office.

Student's Reaction

When faced with academic tasks, "Y" would first try to work it out as best as he could, until the struggle hit hard and frustration kick in. Obviously, he struggled with his reading. If the topic was manageable for him, he would do well. But, not much attention was given to "Y"s academic areas; most of the focus was on his challenging behavior.

VIGNETTE

A typical teacher response- student reaction scenario for “Y”

It was in a mid-day Thursday, when throughout the literature class the teacher noticed that “Y” has been non-responsive. As the class begins to exit the room, “Y” end up next to a classmate (we’ll call him ‘A’). ‘A’ slightly pushes ‘Y’, which results in ‘Y’ turning around and throwing a punch. (‘Y’ has caused many previous problems in the class all week- particularly with the other children).

His teacher reacted abruptly towards him and loudly called his attention in front of the students that were still in the classroom—saying: “I cannot believe you just did that! One more time and I will send you directly to the principal’s office” [she frowned].

‘Y’ bowed down his head and left the room.

“Y”’s troubled behavior inside the classroom became very consistent and the struggle between him and the teacher became highly volatile. In addition to the teacher’s warnings and the different approaches used that had already been mentioned, “Y” was often (2-3 times p/week) sent to the principal’s office. This typically led to a temporary reduction in inappropriate behavior for between 1-2 hours, before a new confrontation occurred.

4.3.3 Case Scenario 3

Student’s Case

‘Z’ is an 11 year old boy in the fifth grade. His teacher reports that he seems to enjoy his class breaks, eating lunch with his classmates, computer time. Also this student is given rewards for “good” behavior by using a token economy strategy. ‘Z’ enjoys exchanging his points for tangible items at the “class store”. This student’s favorite educational subjects appear to change with the assigned activity and his mood. ‘Z’ challenging behaviors often appeared when it was unclear to him what he was supposed to be working on and when he was expected to wait for assistance. The problematic behaviors did not seem to be affected by time of day or by the individual working with him. It was affected by the setting. Typical

behavior would be kicking, hitting, spitting, pulling hair, throwing objects (books, pencil, and chair), biting and scratching. 'Z' also made aggressive comments towards teacher and classmates.

The special needs department of the school has been unable to ascertain the exact function(s) of 'Z's behaviors. He does not have a complete, nor up to date clinical diagnosis. This makes it difficult to understand his outbursts and reactions. However, the school's special needs department speculates that the functions of 'Z's behaviors may be three-fold. The first seems to be a need to control the setting. The second may be his need to minimize fear of failure, exclusion and rejection. The third may be avoidance of unpleasant stimuli. These functions are not present during the activities and behaviors where "Z" enjoys and manages his academic tasks.

Teacher's Response

'Z's teacher expressed struggling with managing his students' challenging behavior for over a year—1 ½ school period. This teacher described himself as perfectionist, especially when it comes to accomplishing his teaching goal plans. Therefore, he often noticed that he became a little emotionally overwhelmed when he failed to accomplish what he has planned for the day. He often feels frustration and anger when he can't accomplish his academic goals for a specific day, but also anxiety about not being able to manage his student's behavior. In addition he shared his awareness of and reflections upon how his student challenging behaviors evoked negative feelings as fear in him. He was especially afraid that someone would get seriously hurt when 'Z' had aggressive behavioral reactions. He felt these emotions intensified his reactions, making it harder for him to control or change them. Consequently, the teacher felt he often distorted his perceptions of the child's behavior and capabilities.

Although, the teacher's emotionally overloaded responses appeared once in a while during the observations, other responses characterized by caring and supporting the student were often evident. The teacher greeted 'Z' every morning as though he was sincerely glad to see him. He gave him assignments that allowed him to utilize and get credit for his talents. When the child brought the assignments that he had accomplished to him, he took the student seriously and praised him for his accomplishments. During the observations, it became obvious that the teacher made an effort to make the student feel he care for him and that he was willing to help him manage the behaviors that were destructive for himself and others

around him. The teacher reported discovering that the student's troubled behavior would diminish during that day when he was able to take a caring, sensitive, and responsive approach towards the child.

Student's Reaction

Regardless of 'Z's aggressive behavior and the teacher's feelings (fear, frustration, and sometimes even anger in the midst of a difficult moment), the teacher's awareness, willingness, and approaches that were applied to help the student improve seemed to have positive effects. The tensions between the student and teacher and sometimes within the entire classroom were lowered.

VIGNETTE

A typical teacher response- student reaction scenario for 'Z'

When 'Z' was not interrupting his teacher, he was talking, kicking, hitting, spitting, pulling hair, and/or throwing objects to his classmates.

When the teacher tried to talk to him about this behavior, he flipped over his chair and made an inappropriate comment—talking back to the teacher.

The teacher then showed signs of anxiety about having him in the classroom. She expressed not being able to find anything to like about him.

After a week and a half (during observation), it finally got so bad that the teacher asked the school counselor for help. The counselor reminded him that teachers are much more effective when their positive interactions with their students outnumber their negative ones.

Following his advice, the teacher made a positive behavior chart and placed it in his desk and every time he would recognize a 'Z' positive behavior, he marked the chart with a star—that way he would be reminded to look at 'Z' in a more positive way, finding creative ways to help him control his challenging behavior and eventually (a month after) their relationship appeared to improved.

Overall, the student got along well with the teacher. Especially when a challenging behavior has been well-managed, he also had more control over his emotions. During such periods, he also got along better with his classmates. ‘Z’ seemed to be gaining confidence in himself (he was addressing more to the teacher whenever he was experiencing difficulties rather than suddenly acting out). His troubled behavior appeared to diminish to an extent during the observation period.

4.3.4 Case Scenario 4

Student’s Case

‘W’ is a 12 year old boy in the sixth grade that has both productive days and not so productive days. He works hard and participates most days, but works and moves more slowly than peers. He likes science and hands-on activities. “W” has difficulty with tasks necessitating writing. Usually, he responds well to teachers and enjoy praise and positive, social reinforcement.

This student is diagnosed with some behaviors associated with Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder and Tourettes syndrome. He has both motor and vocal tics. These are sudden, rapid, recurrent, non-rhythmic, stereotyped motor movement or vocalization, which includes tapping, noises/verbalizations, some scratching/rubbing hands and face, and some repetitive movements. Biological factors and medication interactions seem to affect his reactions to situations and/or directions differently on some days. The behaviors also appeared to be exacerbated by anxiety.

The behavior ‘W’s teacher perceived as challenging and observed in the classroom are:

- not completing assignments
- inability/unwillingness to work in class
- avoiding a task he disliked or found frustrating
- use of profanity around younger students
- attention seeking
- venting anger/frustration by screaming
- throwing chairs

These behaviors seemed to occur when ‘W’ was uncomfortable with something and appeared to experience feelings of anxiety. He had a history of allowing himself to express in the classroom openly and loudly negative feelings when he got frustrated.

Teacher’s Response

Observations in the classroom indicated that the teacher was not too familiar with the children’s case. She seemed to have difficulties adjusting her teaching style to enable her troubled student in the classroom function and feel comfortable. The teacher often highlighted the occasions when the student behaved in a manner that she considered inappropriate than in occasions when the student behaved well. She gave the impression of being a person with intense moods and reactions. She easily reacted to ‘W’ in anger and with punishment, expressing her annoyance and frequently saying no. Usually, she would keep her distance from him, limiting herself to necessary interactions of giving out assignments and instruction.

When confronting a challenging event, this teacher struggled to stay cool and collected. She became defensive and stressed, losing control of her temper and allowing the child push her buttons. At times, the conflicts escalated to the extent that immediate attention from the school’s principal was required to intervene. She regularly (almost daily) gave ‘W’ warning notes that were sent to his parents to keep them aware of their son’s behavior difficulties.

Student’s Reaction

The teacher’s approaches to ‘W’s behavior seemed to escalate his frustrations and anxiety. The following example is one of the many interactions observed in the classroom.

VIGNETTE

“W” working on a written assignment

‘W’ seems to be very talented, but sometimes refuses to make an appreciable effort during class. One morning, Mrs. ‘W’ was doing a word wall activity with her students, based on one of the class favorite books. All of the students were very eager to contribute to the word wall. So, during this activity, Mrs. ‘W’ was requiring the children to spell the word correctly before they were allowed to write it on the board under its category. All of the students waited impatiently in hopes that Mrs. ‘W’ would call on them.

‘W’ raised his hand for every word, and Mrs. ‘W’ called on him twice. However, each time he spelled the word wrong, so he was unable to write it on the board. Mrs. ‘W’ continued with the activity, trying to call on different students. When she was through and started with a class assignment, she noticed that ‘W’ was softly banging his head over his desk and not willing to continue working.

Mrs. ‘W’ asked ‘W’ to stop the banging behavior. He did not stop and started to become louder while mumbling at the same time; she went over to see what the problem was. ‘W’ said he was upset because he didn’t get a chance to write on the board. Mrs. ‘W’ said to him that he was called twice, but he didn’t spell the words correctly—therefore, he needed to stick to the rules of the activity and let the others participate.

‘W’ got more upset and started screaming by accusing Mrs. ‘W’ of being racist because she didn’t let him write on the board. The teacher gets mad and yelled at him saying: “You better calm down, if you don’t—I will send you to the principal’s office and a note to your parents!”

The child picked up a chair and threw it away. Then the principal was called and walked into the class; took the child—that at that time was very upset—to his office and was given a detention with an attached note to his parents.

‘W’ has multiple needs for support and help with academic assignments. His attempts for completing an assignment were more likely not to be recognized. He rarely received positive reinforcement or praise for appropriate verbal interaction. When his difficulties were rarely seen or met constructively by his teacher through adaptations, it

became hard for him to verbalize his frustration or need for modification. He continuously struggled with getting attention using interacting with his peers to be seen. He appeared to have difficulties recognizing own anxiety anger/frustration. Therefore, getting help to vent negative feeling appropriately before they escalated was not made possible for him. Neither was he provided with opportunities for building proactive behavior such as interacting appropriately with younger students (reading to them, tutoring them). As such this student was using behaviors that provided him with negative rather than positive attention. He was not provided with the approaches and support that enhanced his proactive behavior.

4. 4 Summary of results

4.4.1 Highlights from the individual case studies

‘X’ had a pattern of highs and lows in his behavior. After several weeks of very calm and more controlled behavior, he goes through periods of upheaval. Currently he is having a calmer period, but with several behaviors which appear to be out of his control. When ‘X’ was off task or having a difficult time, the teacher used verbal (words, grunts, inflections) and non-verbal (body language) cues to redirect him. When such verbal or non-verbal cues did not work, ‘X’ was given free time in the classroom; he was sent to the resource room to have a chance to get things under control; he was given a recess detention for choices which the teacher considered as “bad” and “inappropriate” before going back to his task. And/or ‘X’ was given an after school detention and his parents would receive information about the situation by written notification. It appeared that the child wanted to get away from or escape work, gain attention, or leave the classroom. He was often at these times redirected to work, brought back on task. More than often he was sent out of the classroom for a time out or to cool down in the hall or the resource room. The teacher usually managed to integrate him back to the activity once he returned to class. His behavior and attitude had often changed after these “time out” periods. Once he had settled, he maintained a good regular relationship with his teacher.

“Y” encountered physical, behavioral and academic problems. His behavior was the problem given emphasis by the teacher and school—which appeared both as non-responsiveness and socially inappropriate behavior in his classroom. During observation, hitting was the challenging behavior that prevailed. It became visible that he hit others when

he has to work on his own, without adult supervision. Once he has been attended to by his teacher, his hitting was likely to stop. This usually required several warnings from the teacher. ‘Y’s teacher, apparently, has been unable to find effective teaching strategies to work with this student. She describes his typically non-responsiveness or socially inappropriate behaviors as defiant. After using different approaches, mentioned in the case description, when a problematic behavior arose, warning came first and right away ‘Y’ was sent the principal’s office. This happened as often as 2-3 times p/week which typically led to a temporary reduction in inappropriate behavior for between 1-2 hours, before a new confrontation occurs. “Y”’s troubled behavior inside the classroom became very consistent and the struggle between him and the teacher became highly volatile.

‘Z’s challenging behaviors often appeared when it was unclear to him what he was supposed to be working on and when he was expected to wait for assistance. The problematic behaviors did not seem to be affected by time of day or by the individual working with him, but by the setting. ‘Z’s teacher expressed struggling with managing his students’ challenging behavior for over a year—1 ½ school period. He discussed how experiencing those negative feelings of frustration, anger, and fear became a problem for him in those challenging situations because it led him to fail as the teacher he was aiming to be. These emotions intensified his reactions, making it harder for him to control or change them. Consequently, the teacher felt he often distorted his perceptions of the child’s behavior and capabilities. Moreover, his awareness of and reflections upon how his student challenging behaviors evoked negative feelings in him opened up his desire and willingness to look up for ways to change that thinking and emotional pattern. While, the teacher’s emotionally overloaded responses appeared once in a while during the observations, other responses characterized by caring and supporting the student were often evident. It became obvious that the teacher made an effort to make the student feel he care for him and that he was willing to help him manage the behaviors that were destructive for himself and others around him. Despite some of the negative circumstances, these approaches that were applied to help the student improve seemed to have positive effects. The tensions between the student and teacher and sometimes within the entire classroom were lowered.

‘W’ has multiple needs for support and help with academic assignments. His behaviors, which are the ones highlighted, seemed to occur when he was uncomfortable with something and appeared to experience feelings of anxiety. He had a history of allowing

himself to express in the classroom openly and loudly negative feelings when he got frustrated. Observations in the classroom indicated that the teacher was not too familiar with the children's case. She seemed to have difficulties adjusting her teaching style to enable her troubled student in the classroom function and feel comfortable. When confronting a challenging event, this teacher struggled to stay cool and collected; she became defensive and stressed and lost control of her temper. 'W' attempts for completing an assignment were more likely not to be recognized and he rarely received positive reinforcement or praise for appropriate verbal interaction. When his difficulties were hardly ever seen or met constructively by his teacher through adaptations, it became hard for him to verbalize his frustration or need for modification.

4.4.2 Similarities between the cases

Whether a school district is rich or poor, a classroom with a large or small number of students—every teacher, current and future, will probably come across with a child with challenging behavior. These four cases were encountered with a behavior troubled student inside the classroom and a teacher who needed to deal with difficulties as consequence of the challenging child. These classrooms, besides having a student with challenging behavior as common denominator, also shared some other similarities:

- From the four cases observed, each teacher experienced some type of negative feelings towards the troubled child or their challenging behavior; prior, during, and/or after a struggling event.
- The four students that were under observations were also experiencing academic difficulties, besides their disruptive behavior.
- Each case highlighted aggression (physical or verbal, direct or indirect) as their challenging behavior among minor misbehaviors.
- All students participating were boys.
- All teachers relied on behavioral modification techniques, for example using token economy as a means to reinforce positive behavior, and time out as a means to reduce behavior which negatively effects the students' social and educational functioning.
- All teachers reported the students' behavior to the parents, but the ways this was done differed.

4.4.3 Differences between the cases

Regardless of their similarities, each case is unique—therefore, differences are also acknowledged and are listed as followed:

- The teachers participating had different professional backgrounds, although, they all had some experience inside the education field.
- Each student’s educational and clinical diagnosis differed from one another. The teachers’ approaches towards the challenging students varied, consequently, their student’s responses varied as well.
- In two cases, X and Z, the teacher – student relationship showed positive interactional aspects despite the teachers’ experiences of their students as challenging. For X, the teacher was able to ensure the students’ re-inclusion in the classroom after the regulation or modification of behavior. She also openly adapted her teaching style to the students’ needs to prevent the arising of his aggressive or uncontrollable behavior. Z’s teacher showed a caring and supporting way of greeting the student in the morning and following him up during the day.
- In two cases, Y and W, the teacher- student relationship showed evident signs of emotional struggle between the teacher and their students. Y’s teacher seemed to have a very negative perception of her student- labeling him as “defiant”. W’s teacher did not seem to comprehend her students’ needs for. She did not adapt her teaching strategies to her students needs.
- Another difference is the possibility the teachers had for support from counseling or administrative units at the school.
- Three of the students had diagnosed disabilities.

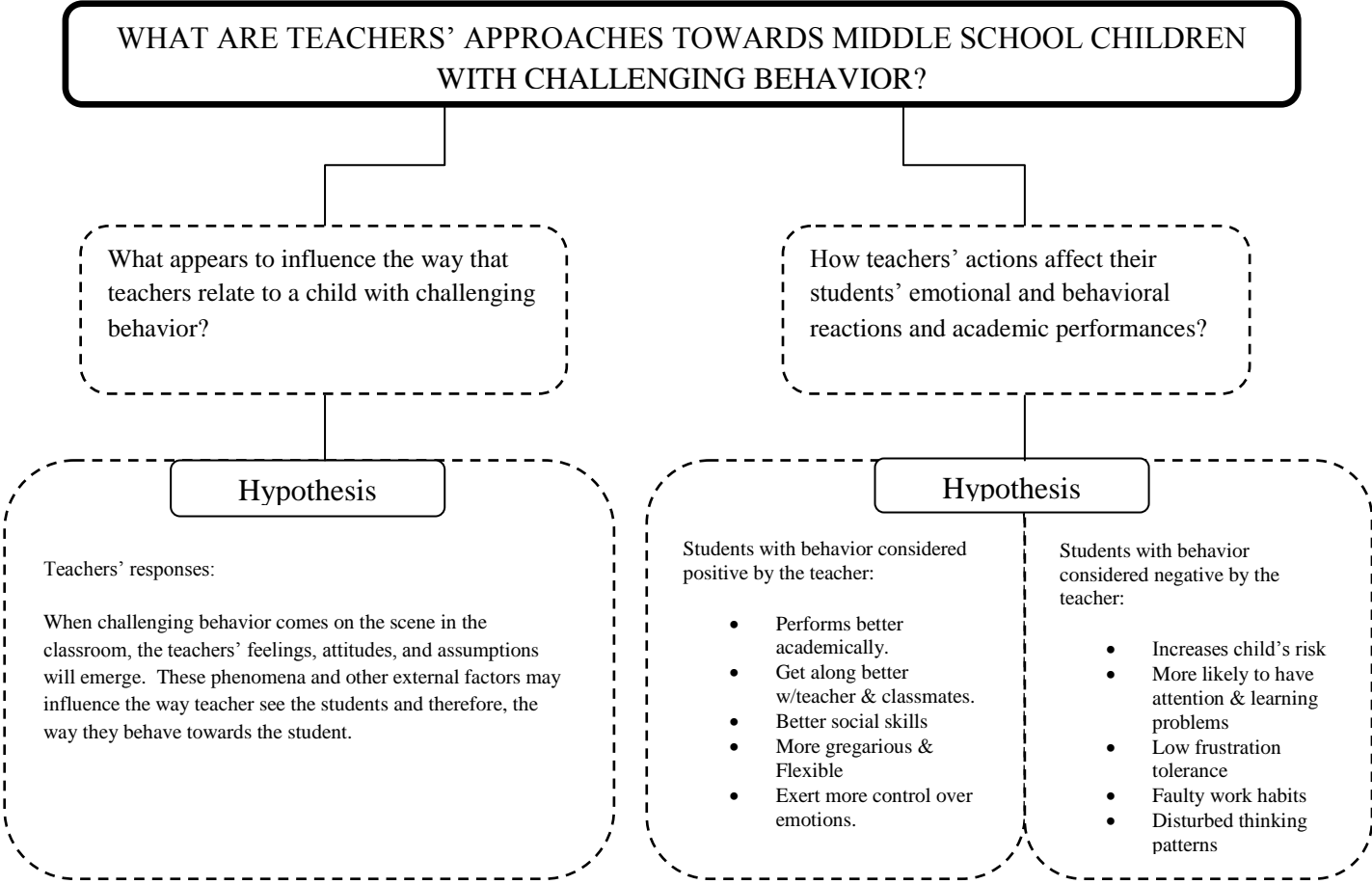
4.4.4 Short Reflection

As this study has indicated every child is unique. The teaching approach that fits the various students’ state of mind, temperament, age, stage of development and culture needs to be individualized to the students. Moreover, teachers also have different styles, values, and life experiences; what suits one teacher might not suit the other at all. One tool tried by all teachers’, to some extent, was using token economy strategies as a means to behavior modification. Both the students’ and the teachers’ variations must be considered. In the following chapter these will be discussed with regards to the research questions.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The quality of teachers’ interactions with students in the classroom is increasingly acknowledged as a major importance for students’ success in school. The main purpose of this study was to determine the teachers’ approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior in Honduras, what appears to influenced the way that teachers related to a child with challenging behavior and how teachers’ actions affected their students’ emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances. These questions are summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Model of Investigative Research Questions and working underlying hypotheses



The discussion of the degree to which the present research study is able to answer the questions and confirm the working hypothesis is organized in four themes. First, the most relevant aspects that became apparent in the research will be analyzed with regards to the chosen theoretical background presented in 5.1 and 5.2. Secondly, a critique of the chosen

methods and design of the study is presented in 5.3. Thereafter, a discussion of whether and how it will be possible to apply the research findings within Honduras. Finally, the research results and the discussion will be concluded.

5.1 What appears to influence the way teachers relate to their students?

Challenging behavior within the educational setting is any behavior that interferes with a child's cognitive, social, or emotional development. The behavior is challenging for the child because it interferes with his progress. It is also challenging for the teacher because she/he may not have the responses available to help the child attain a constructive way of learning, interacting and developing.

5.1.1 Cultural aspects affecting teaching children with challenging behavior in Honduras

Everyone has a culture, but most of the time we can't see it. There is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture (Hall, 1997). As Eleanor Lynch notes in *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence* (1998a) culture is like a "second skin". It only becomes visible when we brush up against one that's different. It is of extreme importance to understand the cultural assumptions within the school setting from two sides: 1. Why teachers expect their students to behave in a particular way; 2. Why the teachers' demands seem unreasonable for some students. The students with challenging behavior seem to act differently than culturally expected. If teachers' are not aware of their own cultural perspective, they cannot reflect on the students' behaviors from an objective viewpoint.

This study revealed several cultural aspects that seemed to effect both the teacher's expectations and responses to their students. Through the observations, the following relevant standards became evident:

- It is expected that students work independently, even if they function better when they work collaboratively with a group of their peers.
- Students are supposed to listen quietly while the teacher talks, and when they're called on, they are to respond one at a time by asking or answering questions.

- To show they're paying attention, students are supposed to sit still and maintain eye contact.
- When reprimanded or corrected the students are expected not to respond or lower their eyes even if they are upset.
- Teachers believe that emotional expressions interfere with open-minded inquiry and communicate a loss of control.

The behavioral standards of working independently, listening quietly, sitting still and not expressing emotions were very difficult for the four children in this study to meet. They very often did not have control of their impulsive reactions. Their externalizing behaviors were, furthermore, directly opposite of what was expected as normal or proper behavior. Without a clear understanding of the children's disorders, the teachers could easily perceive the students as intentionally behaving in a rude or abusive manner. Thus, an impulsive, unintentional response could evoke a judgmental and negative response in the teacher.

One would, however, expect teachers to want to know how to respond to it in order to accomplish their objectives. However, many teachers in Honduras both lack formal education and motivation to be teachers. Only one of the four teachers in this study had formal qualifications; another was in the process of becoming qualified. Two teachers had taken teaching positions as a transaction phase in their career development. One teacher was working towards a degree in architecture and another one in business. It is highly likely that these teachers are not seeking to develop their teaching skills even if they may care about their students. It became apparent that the teachers had more focus in administering the curriculum than enhancing their students with challenging behaviors' learning capacity.

Within each culture there are many variations. Educational level, socioeconomic status, occupation, temperament, and personal experience all influence values and beliefs (Lynch, 1998a). What becomes evident is that there seems to be a lacking of rigorous certification for teacher development and preparation. As a result, the international values that are the basis for teaching practices as inclusion and adaptation may not be infused in Honduras's school system. While this is unfortunate for all students, it seems especially so, for the children who have challenging behavior.

5.1.2 Teachers' support and counseling

Support of teachers through special needs units and counselors is limited in Honduras. In this study, only one of the schools had such supporting teams. Even though the teachers' are not doctors or psychologists trained they can with counseling and support learn to understand their students and adapt the educational settings for them. They can, also learn a lot by observing a student with challenging behavior and talking to their families about what's going on.

The results made it clear that understanding risk factors can make a difference in the teachers' attitude toward a student and enable them to develop a relationship of trust and caring that help the child feel safe, accepted, and more likely to behave appropriately. This study, however, revealed that only two of the four teachers observed seemed to keep the students' risk factors in mind so as to enhance empathy, and empower them with ideas about how to adapt their teaching to the specific student. These teachers drew on the support from counselors and other professionals (doctors, psychologists). Understanding the clinical diagnosis and receiving advice as how to help the child seemed imperative for their success in interacting with the students.

5.1.3 Teachers' perceived control over child behavior

Children's problem behaviors do not only negatively impact upon their own developmental outcomes, but can also have negative consequences for the teacher (Hammarberg, 2003). Children who engage in disruptive and aggressive behaviors are likely to upset classroom order, break rules, and provoke confrontations with the teacher (Ladd et al. 2006). Teachers' reactions to these problem behaviors seem to depend on the type of problem behavior, as well as on teacher beliefs and attitudes towards the management of these behaviors (Poulou & Norwich, 2002).

These findings may have consequences for teachers' beliefs about their ability to cope with children's externalizing behavior and their aggressive behavior in particular. According to theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2002), a person's perceived control to perform an intended behavior or action depends on past experiences as well as an evaluation of anticipated impediments and obstacles. This concept of perceived control over an action refers to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (the perceived ease or difficulty of performing an

action). This theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality. According to Bandura, a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as the self-system. This system plays a major role in how we perceive situations and how we behave in response to different situations. In this study teacher "X" seemed to have this confidence more than the other three teachers. She was able to enact with the student and keep a positive relationship. Teacher "Z" also kept a positive image of his student, but seemed less at ease than "X". The two remaining teachers openly exclaimed that they were unable to cope with their students.

Consequently, applied to a teacher's work context, and specifically their classroom management, teacher's perceived ability to cope with a child's challenging behavior encompasses several aspects. First, is the perceived ease or difficulty of coping with the challenging behavior of the particular student. Second, is teachers' beliefs about the extent to which children's challenging behavior is controllable by the teacher. In an attempt to restore their perceived control, in response to children's externalizing and internalizing behavior teachers may use unfavorable interaction strategies which may increase the degree of conflict in the teacher-child relationship.

5.2 How do teachers' actions affect their students' emotional, behavioral and academic performances?

Within this study it came apparent that there was no straightforward answer to this question. It was also not possible to observe what long term effects the teacher's actions had upon their students. Four aspects seemed possible to identify: 1. Understanding the students' challenging behavioral patterns; 2. effect of the relationship with the teacher; 3. effect of adapted teaching; 4. effect of behavior modification in the classroom.

5.2.1 Understanding the students' challenging behavior patterns

Challenging behavior is troubling and puzzling. Being able to understand the students' challenging behaviors, require insight, interest and observational skills of the teacher. Because of the complexity of the behaviors of the four students in this study, the teachers easily could misunderstand the students. When the teacher's actions are based on misunderstandings, they can affect the student's feelings of being understood, taken seriously or appreciated. This is,

especially, the case if the teacher feels threatened by the behaviors (see 5.1.2). The seriousness of the students’ behavioral problems that were studied were an important factor in analyzing the four teachers’ approaches towards their students.

Among emotional and behavior disorders, there are two classes that were evident within this research study. As earlier described in detail (see Chapter 2), these are frequently described either externalizing or/and internalizing disorders (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2005). For the four children in this study, both types of behaviors were observed to be present. In the following table, various examples of the children’s behavioral problems are presented.

Table 1. Examples of challenging behaviors observed in the four cases studied

<i>Externalizing behavior</i> The acting out or directing feelings outward	<i>Internalizing behavior</i> Withdrawing or turning feelings inward
X: Refusing to comply & aggressive when corrected.	X: Mood disorder & obsessive compulsive behavior.
Y: Losing temper & acting in hostile ways.	Y: Non-responsiveness.
Z: Acting in hostile ways & becoming verbally aggressive.	Z: Mood & anxiety disorder.
W: Expressing his feelings aloud by shouting.	W: Obsessive compulsive behavior & anxiety disorder.

These four students with challenged behaviors have co-morbid disorders including emotional and behavior problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourette syndrome, and learning disabilities (especially reading and writing). Their patterns of behavior are inconsistent, unpredictable and unstable. As a result they have great trouble in the academic area and problems with social skills and relationships. The behavior, if not understood, places the child at risk for being misunderstood, socially marginalized, and insufficiently educated to become viable citizens. These is especially apparent from “X” and “Y”’s teachers actions.

All four students had neurological disorders which they were either born with or had acquired before school age. The challenging behaviors were closely related to lack of impulse control. The aggressive reactions may, however, also be seen as defensive learned reactions to

situations they perceived as possibly harmful. According to some scientists, philosophers, and other serious thinkers, aggression is perceived as an inborn, instinctive human trait. Others are just certain that these types of behavior must be learned (Pepler & Slaby, 1994). Teachers lacking a theoretical overview of behavioral development and often are unable to reflect accurately on how their actions affect a student's behavior. Knowledge about both social learning theory (see 5.2.4), information processing theory (see 5.3.3), and interaction theory (see 5.2.2) could have been helpful for the teachers in this study as a background for their reflection upon and analysis of the student's challenging behavior (Lassen, 2005).

5.2.2 The effect of the student-teacher relationship

In school, one of the most important tasks young children face is to form a close and harmonious relationship with the teacher (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006). However, research to date, consistently found children's externalizing behavior (such as children's aggressive behavior) predict relational difficulties with the teacher, and increasing conflict in the teacher-child relationship in particular (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000).

On the other hand, a close relationship with a teacher brings a child other "strong and persistent" benefits (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). Teachers who were observed to be warmer and consistently responsive to students also tended to be more proactive, managed the activities and student behavior more efficiently, and provided activities that encouraged higher order thinking. With the teacher's warm support, children adjusted better to school—they liked it more (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), participated more actively in classroom (Hamre and Pianta 2001; Ladd and Burgess, 2001), and performed better academically (Birch and Ladd, 1998; Ladd, Birch, and Buhs, 1999). Relationships are actually made up of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of interactions that form a pattern over time (Pianta, 1999). If the teacher responds to a student sensitively, promptly, and consistently, these interactions eventually add up to an emotional investment; a positive, supportive relationship; and an organized way for teacher and child to relate to one another (Howes, 1999). The teachers' early relationship and past experiences with their own family play an important role in what they feel and how they respond to a student (Pianta, 1999). The student's behavior may open old wounds and activate feelings the teacher had as a child, making it difficult to respond in a rational way. Those long years in school also have a profound influence on how the teachers' view teaching, learning,

and children's behavior (Bowman, Donovan, and Burns, 2001). As Carl Rogers and Jerome Freiberg tell us in *Freedom to Learn* (1994), "We tend to teach the way we've been taught [and] discipline the way we've been disciplined" (p. 241). When a challenging behavior is involved, the teachers' temperament, values, and beliefs also have a powerful effect—all these influences the way they see their students, twisting their expectations of them, affecting the way they see themselves and the way they behave.

The interpretation of the interaction-response results implied that effective classroom management and effective instruction are largely a function of positive teacher-student and student-student interpersonal relationships. The teacher is the major determiner of interpersonal relationships and classroom climate. Lack of an authentic and caring relationship was observed between "Y" and "X" students and their teachers. Both these teachers demonstrated negative attitudes towards their students. "Y"'s teacher not only complained about the student's behavior in the interview, but spoke negatively about him during the observation. Students' participated more actively when having a warm, informal relationship with the teacher. This is a circular process that is often difficult for the people involved to perceive (Lassen 2005; Mead 1934).

The classroom quality seemed to affect some social skills, though not necessarily all of them; classroom experiences have been shown to particularly affect social behaviors that are highly dependent on the setting, such as engaging in activities and cooperation with the teacher. It has been known for many years that besides family factors, other people in a child's life and community also play a vital role in fostering resilience, and this support often comes to the child in the form of relationships. Like a parent, caring and competent teachers can act as positive role models; make a child feel loved and valued, and even help compensate for a difficult family situation (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). Teachers' expectations have a strong influence on children's behavior (Berk, 2000). In fact, a conflict relationship with a teacher sets a child up for learning problems (Ladd and Burgess, 2001), poor academic performance (Hamre and Pianta, 2001), misconduct, suspension, and aggressive behavior with peers (Ladd and Burgess, 1999).

5.2.3 The effect of teachers' adapted teaching

A child with challenging behavior can, in a sense, inspire or “dare” the teachers to examine their teaching strategies. This may include considering not only the content and skills they want to teach, but also the behavior which they are trying to encourage in their students.

Kenneth A. Dodge (1980) proposed a social information processing model as the basis for understanding the development of aggressive and anti-social behavior. He meant that as each social cue comes in, the child must encode it, interpret it, think of possible responses, evaluate them, and choose a response to enact. The children in this study seemed often to lack one or more of the skills required to process information properly. They tend to see the world with skeptical eyes, reacting defensively to the teachers' commands or instruction. Because of their skepticism their reactions often were of a defiant or avoidant nature. The reason for such reactions could have been to protect themselves from what was perceived as possible harmful situations. In several observed situations, the students gave clear indications of wanting to avoid tasks or get away from the classroom. Furthermore, Dodge pointed out that the child with behavioral problems often doesn't look at information that might help to solve a problem, and has trouble thinking of alternative solutions. Because the child cannot anticipate what will happen if he responds aggressively, he often ends up choosing passive or aggressive solutions that don't work (Dodge, 1980; Dodge and Frame, 1982).

Therefore, the behavior patterns are maintained until new ways of processing information evolve. The teacher's ability to present information as clearly as possible to the child at his own level of cognitive ability, and stimulate the child's mediation of information, can be a very constructive way to help the child understand and adjust his behavior. This requires adapted teaching methods. It was observed that if a task was too difficult, the students in this study did whatever was necessary to avoid participating and failing. When it was a class that they did not particularly dislike or a physical education activity that demands a lot of coordination, the students' responded with frustration. They often found a way to escape the activity. By not adapting the curriculum, the student's negative patterns of externalizing behavior were maintained and their participation in the classroom limited.

For two of the teachers, the child's behavior prompted adaptation of teacher practices. “X “ and “Z”'s teachers tried to help the student learn by designing and bending the program to meet their needs. Although, full success was not accomplished during observation, the teachers' effort to help the child cope and adapt was giving possible results. These two

children were showing academic progress. They were also included in the class and retained positive relationships with their teachers. Oppositely “Y” and “W”’s teachers lacked curriculum adaptation and adapted teaching practices. The curriculum did not honor each student’s culture and life experience. These two teachers did not shift instructional strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of the students. Neither did they hold consistent and high expectations for all learners in the class. The tension in the relationship between the students and teachers was high. There were explosive emotional episodes which resulted in reprimands and detention. Thus the students’ emotional balance and academic progress was hampered.

Ultimately, how much the children learn and how much fun they’d have learning depended on how well the teachers’ curriculum and teaching strategies reflected the interests, abilities, cultures, temperaments, learning profiles, and readiness of the students in class. This corresponds with the enrichment perspective (Befring, 2005), that ascertains that by meeting the needs of the challenged child, the atmosphere in the classroom is improved for all the students. As such having a challenged child in the class can both “dare” the teachers to adapt teaching to the particular child’s needs, but also to improve their teaching strategies for all their students.

5.2.4 Effect of teachers’ behavior modification practices

Albert Bandura’s social learning theory has been dominant in investigating challenging behavior for the last three decades. It identifies such behavior (for example, aggression) as a lack of impulse and behavioral control and an inability for self-efficacy. Based on principals of conditioning, reinforcement, and modeling, it maintains that people learn aggressive behavior from responses in the environment and use it to achieve their goals. Consequently, this theoretical viewpoint can be helpful to explain how the four children that were observed developed and maintained behavioral patterns. All lacked the skills to perceive the consequences of their behavior when in effect, accordingly, not being able to control their reactions. Therefore, an explanation could be that the children’s responses were learned patterns of behavior (Bandura, 1977) which had been conditioned throughout their childhood. The teacher’s responses to the children’s behaviors could affect whether these patterns were maintained or changed.

Behavior modification approaches were used by the teachers throughout the observation period. Some conditioned or secondary reinforcers were used. These are: praise,

attention, and ignoring, time out, token reinforcers, and activity reinforcers (in which the student is allowed to engage). The introduction of a reward may be a positive reinforcement if this is aligned with the students' values. Introduction of a punishment may be reprimands or detentions. Although, they are experienced as negative for the student, they may also have a positive affect by providing attention or escape from a frustrating situation. The removal of a reward is called either extinction or time out, depending on the situation. The removal of a punishment is called negative reinforcement. As the observations scenarios indicate, all the students in the study experienced a variety of teacher responses that were meant to modify the negative behavior and promote positive task oriented behavior. Usually, reinforcement is seen as a reward given to a student who behaves appropriately in the hope that the behavior would be continued. All these are likely to have a positive effect on the behavior that wants to be change, but not in all cases are the results successful in a long term. For student "Y", for example, the token economy reinforcements did not succeed. There may be several reasons for this as example cross-reinforcements or imprecise responses which were not observable. Behavioral modification techniques must always be carefully aligned accordingly to the students' emotional and cognitive functioning. If not, they may not only be unsuccessful, but harmful to the students' development or progress.

The longer a child uses inappropriate behavior, the harder it is to change. Many children use the same challenging behavior for years because they don't know any other way to behave and that behavior becomes firmly rooted. But the more frequently that teachers help children abstain from challenging behavior, the less they're learning to use it—and the less likely it is to embed itself as a learned pattern of behavior (Shore, 1997). If the teacher can anticipate when and where a student will have trouble, prevent the situation from occurring, and remind him of what to do, instead of waiting for him to make a mistake, he can create a new patterns. The child can thus begin to reap the rewards of appropriate behavior, feel good about himself, and wishes to have that feeling again.

It is, however, not only behaviorist methods that affect the students, as mentioned in 5.2.2, the warm relationship to the teacher and in 5.2.3 the experience of mastery can have very positive effects on the students' motivation to learn and develop. Teachers' insight in their responses and educational training with regards to learning and development seem imperative for this process to evolve. For that reason, the educational policies in any country

must be good enough to empower their teachers with sufficient skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring that all children have possibilities to develop and use their potential.

5.3 Methodological critique of the study

5.3.1 Limitations

A number of limitations of this study need to be considered. First, classroom observations were performed within two months—in which each case were observed half-day school hours, twice a week, making a total of 16, four hours observations per case. Although, the amount of hours observed per case is representative of general classroom practices, is not enough to fully record and determine long term consequences of the participating teachers' approaches towards the challenged behavioral child. Secondly, the measure of adaptive behaviors relied on teacher reports rather than on external observations. In addition, the information for all four cases was collected based on different sources, the teacher interviewed and the students' clinical record. It would have been helpful to have more sources of information. Thirdly, interviews were only conducted with teachers since the emphasis of the study was placed more on the teacher's reactions than the challenged students. The students' and parents' perceptions and feelings about their scenario were not considered, it would be of importance to gather information from their perspectives as well.

Two further limitations should be noted. Only two schools, with two students & teachers in each, were reviewed. It is quite a small sample that cannot be generalized. The scenarios can only illustrate some aspects of the nature of the challenge. Additional research is needed to ensure reliability.

Finally, despite these limitations, this study provides further evidence of the positive and negative associations of the quality of teacher-student interactions with academic outcomes in a Honduran cultural context. The results highlight the potential importance of classroom processes for student learning. The results support the view that efforts to attend to teacher-student interactions, and not merely structural indicators, are essential (Cohen et al 2003; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004; Pianta, 2003).

5.3.2 Future research

From a broad perspective, these findings may be particularly relevant, taking into consideration the lack of studies in Honduras examining both classroom interactions and student skills. Additional understanding of the classroom processes that encourage learning in different socio-cultural contexts may contribute considerably to current efforts to improve social and academic skills of students in Honduras, and why not worldwide as well. Further research should investigate the accumulated effects of classroom quality throughout middle school. Honduran teachers follow the same group of students from first to sixth grade, although not in every curriculum subject.

Research focusing on the associations between classroom quality and students' learning for more than a single year is rather insufficient and much more can be learned through longitudinal research in Honduras. Research examining how classroom quality moderates student skill's growth, and social skills in particular, would be of relevance to shed light on other significant moderating effects that, ultimately, leads to a more comprehensive model of classroom quality.

5.4 Applications of the research findings

5.4.1 For: teacher education and teacher support and development through special education units and counseling possibilities in Honduras

Researchers have identified several factors that increase school bonding—proactive classroom management, interactive teaching, reinforcement of positive social behavior, teaching social and problem solving skills, and giving students lots of opportunities to participate actively through cooperative learning groups—and have begun to use them in interventions such as the Seattle Social Development Project, where they've had enduring positive effects (Hawkins et al., 1999). A strong bond to school—which may be the only safe haven in the lives of some children—protects them against a wide range of risks, including aggressive behavior and academic failure (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbot, and Hill, 1999). Also, support from teachers is especially effective for children in poverty (Luthar et al., 2000) and children with learning disabilities (Margalit, 2003).

Investigators began to study not only protective factors but also the processes and mechanisms behind them (Luthar et al., 2000). Individuals respond to risk in a wide variety of ways, and multiple risk and protective factors are usually involved in any outcome. The child's own history and genetic endowment both play major roles, interacting and influencing one another extensively. During periods of change—for example, when students start middle school or enter adolescence—new strengths and vulnerabilities appear (Luthar et al., 2000), offering opportunities to redirect the course of development (Masten, 2004). These processes are very difficult to entangle, and the work of sorting them out, which involves the collaboration of several disciplines, will doubtless continue [or start to develop] in Honduras for many years to come. Understanding how protection works is crucial to developing interventions.

Protective processes can be *stabilizing* (when they enable children to function even when risk rises), *reactive* (when they work more effectively under low-risk conditions of high-risk), and *enhancing* (when engaging with risk increases children's competence) (Luthar et al., 2000). British child psychiatrist and resilience expert Michael Rutter (2001; Rutter et al., 1998) has proposed eight possible ways that protective factors may contribute to positive outcomes:

1. Reduce sensitivity to risk (e.g., coping successfully with previous adversity makes it easier for a child to meet new challenges).
2. Reduce the impact of risk (e.g., parental monitoring and supervision can prevent young adolescents from spending time with antisocial peers).
3. Reduce the negative chain reactions that follow exposure to risk and perpetuate its effects (e.g., support and guidance from adults [teachers] can enable children to cope successfully with the cumulative effects of early stress).
4. Increase positive chain reactions (e.g., positive school experiences help adolescents plan for the future—that is, success breeds success).
5. Promote self-esteem and self-efficacy (e.g., succeeding in an important task builds self-confidence).
6. Neutralize or counter the risk directly with compensatory positive experiences (e.g., having a warm, close relationship with a teacher can protect a child from the effects of marital strife in his own home).

7. Open up opportunities (e.g., trying a new activity gives a child a chance to meet new people and learn new things).
8. Support positive cognitive processing of negative experiences (e.g., focusing on the positive aspects of a difficult experience seems to make adjustment easier).

These are of significance in school context and culture. When basic human adaptation systems function normally, children usually manage to find the resources they need to cope, even in adversity (Masten, 2001). But children and youth whose environment doesn't contain the appropriate resources may not turn out so well. Sociologist Michael Ungar says, "A child chooses to adapt in ways that are most effective, given the available resources. In some instances, the behavior of dangerous, deviant, delinquent, and disordered youth can actually be more effective in nurturing and maintaining their mental health than conforming to widely accepted, but constraining, social norms" (2004b, p. 69).

Establishing a close relationship may allow a teacher to see what the child is gaining or avoiding with his challenging or antisocial behavior, which in turn helps engage him in thoughtful discussion and find more acceptable, less harmful ways to maintain his mental health (Ungar, 2004b). It's essential to understand the function or purpose of the behavior and enable the student to replace it with appropriate behavior that offers the same benefits.

It is useful to recognize and support the strengths a child employs to survive his everyday life—strengths that can aid him in identifying areas of competence, control, and power that he can build on (Ungar, 2004b.) It would be of great advantage to incorporate resilience into the schools—classrooms—by creating strong relationships with students, enhancing their strengths and potential resources, promoting competence and emotional regulation, and paying close attention both to context and to what students tell and show us.

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

Children displaying high levels of externalizing problems (like aggression) have been found to be prone to a large number of school adjustment difficulties. It has been argued that children's problem behavior do not only negatively impact upon their own developmental outcomes, but can also have negative consequences for the teacher (Hammarberg, 2003). These consequences leads to an inability of teachers to manage behavior problems in the

classroom, which is rated the most serious problem facing teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) and the quality of teachers' interactions with students in the classroom is increasingly acknowledged as a major importance for students' success in school. Based on the international research about the serious consequences challenging behavior can have for children's learning and development, this study was planned to exam, analyze, and discuss teachers' approaches towards middle school children with challenging behavior in Honduras. Both, what appeared to influence the way that teachers related to a child with challenging behavior, and how teachers' actions affect their students' emotional and behavioral reactions and academic performances were examined.

A broad viewpoint of theoretical perspectives for understanding students' challenging behavior within school settings was chosen in analyzing the research questions (Schokoff & Phillips, 2000; Hallahan & Kaufman, 2005; Befring, 2001). The etiology of challenging behavior was examined from biological and environmental perspectives (Dodge, 1991). Social-learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was, especially, emphasized because of its relevance for understanding learning and behavior modification. The importance of relations and interaction with regards to children's development and learning was also focused upon (Ajzen, 2002).

From the interviews with the teachers, it became evident the teachers felt distressed, knowing that their students had serious learning and social problems, but feeling unable to do little about them. Trying to teach children who are chronically unhappy or driven to aggressive, antisocial behavior was disturbing to them. The results, further, indicated that when challenging behavior appeared in the classroom, the teachers' feelings of inadequacy, frustrations, negative attitudes and assumptions towards their students emerged. Because the dynamics of the whole classroom strongly influence individual behavior, it's essential to pay attention to how the class group functions as a whole. Effective teachers use a series of techniques that elicit student cooperation and involvement in academic activities; they keep the classroom running smoothly, and head off behavior problems before they grow too big to handle (Good and Brophy, 2008; Kounin, 1970). A safe, caring, cooperative, inclusive social context and physical space; clear rules, procedures, and classroom management; and interesting, relevant, differentiated instruction maximize learning, minimize behavior problems, and lay a solid foundation for any guidance strategy. The essential—perhaps even more important—cohort of a carefully structured environment is a positive, responsive,

trusting teacher-student relationship. Where children with challenging behavior are concerned, such a relationship may be difficult and time consuming to establish, but it is vital to guiding behavior successfully.

The challenges that the teachers experienced in creating a structured and positive environment influenced the way teachers saw the student and therefore, the way they behaved towards them. Other external factors as cultural expectations for acceptable behavior, lack of teachers' insight and lack of support and counseling also seemed to affect the way the teachers responded to their students with challenging behavior. The way the students were met seemed to affect the students emotionally, socially and academically. Two teachers' responded to their students mainly with reprimands, detention, notes home and sending the children to the principle. These two students were considered as having negative behavior. They maintained consistent challenging behavior, attention problems and learning difficulties during the observation period. They showed low frustration tolerance, and unconstructive work habits and were marginalized in interacting with peers. On the other hand, the two students with behavior that was understood by their teachers and with whom the teachers had a good relationship, performed better academically, had more social interaction with peers, exerted more control over emotions and had a better relationship with the teacher. These students were given adapted curriculums and teaching. The behavioral modification methods (reinforcing positive behavior, using token economy and time out in a secure setting) were perceived as positive by these two students.

A central part of a positive teacher-student relationship is having *high expectations*. A *willingness to spend time working with students on behavior problems*, rather than referring them to the principal or counselor, is also important. The Classroom Strategy Study (Brophy 1996; Brophy and McCaslin, 1992) found that teachers who didn't rely on quick fixes but directed their efforts at reaching long-term solutions were more effective. The way the teacher behaves during a challenging situation also plays a key role in the effectiveness of a strategy. Remaining calm, especially in crisis, makes it much easier for the teacher to think clearly, stay in control of himself, solve problems, and prevent the situation from escalating. *Being able to address the behavior, not the person*—the teacher needs to make it clear that he still like and value the student; the problem is not with him but with what he did (Kohn, 1996; Kottler, 2002). When there is a problem, it's important for the teacher *to be reflective, patient and flexible*, and *talk with the student privately*. The presence of an audience increases

embarrassment and often results in a show off, which only serves to arouse the situation. Above all, teachers should remember that they are teachers and challenging behavior is an opportunity to teach (Kohn, 1996). More often than not, when a child engages in challenging behavior, he is in some way reaching out for help, indirectly telling that he must learn new skills in order to meet his needs and behave correctly at the same time.

In school, children with challenging behavior are at risk for developing academic problems as increasing classroom disengagement and underachievement (Ladd & Burgess, 2001) as well as social difficulties (Ladd, 2003). This study, however, indicates that the teachers that were able to maintain harmonious relationships with their students and adapt their teaching were somewhat able to minimize the risks and maximize learning for their students (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006). By its very nature, a challenge is difficult, but once conquered it may bring incredible rewards. For children with challenging behavior and their teachers, this may entail a basis for life-long learning and functioning.

APPENDIX A

Permission from the Norwegian Ethics Committee

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Liv M. Lassen
Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1140 Blindern
0318 OSLO

Vår dato: 05.10.2010

Vår ref: 24854 / 3 / MSS

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 26.08.2010. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 28.09.2010. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

24854
Behandlingsansvarlig
Daglig ansvarlig
Student

The Severely Emotional Disturbed Student (SED) & Its Teacher
Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens overste leder
Liv M. Lassen
Linda Aguirre

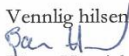
Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.02.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henrichsen


Marie Strand Schildmann

Kontaktperson: Marie Strand Schildmann tlf: 55 58 31 52

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Linda Aguirre, 12 Ave. 5 y 6 Cll. S.O. #103, Barrio el Benque. San Pedro Sula, Honduras,

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSD i tråd med NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

APPENDIX B

Teacher Interview Guide

- ❖ Openly expose the case and difficulties you face with the student presenting challenging behavior.
- Which of the child's behavior do you consider challenging, and what do they look like?
- When and where does this behavior occur?
- When and where does the child behave appropriately? Which activities does he enjoy?
- Who is present when the challenging behavior occurs? And who is present when the child is behaving appropriately?
- Go over the daily routine in your mind. What activities, events, and interactions take place just before the challenging behavior? How much waiting is there? How much choice does the student have? When the routine changes, is his behavior different?
- What subjects and times of day does the child find difficult?
- What happens after the challenging behavior? How do you react? How do the other students react? Does the child manage to avoid something, such as doing an assignment? Does he get something from the behavior, such as your personal attention?
- Which approaches work well with the student, and which don't? For example, does he prefer interaction with you to be loud or soft, fast or slow? How much space does he like to have around him? If a particular family member, teacher, or staff is especially successful with him, what does s/he do?
- If the child is from a different culture, this behavior may not have the same meaning for the family as it does for you. Is it troubling for them? Why or why not? How would they like you to respond to it?
- When a student challenges you in class, what are the replies you use to avoid a power struggle?
- What is your response when the student is able but unwilling to perform a task? And When the student is unwilling and unable to perform a task?
- When a student breaks a rule, what are the consequences you follow? Have they been effective?

- Do you give any kind of verbal encouragement to the challenged student? Give an example.
- When a problem arises, who owns it? Is it you or the student? How so?
- From 1 to 10, being 10 the best, how do you consider your performance as a teacher?

APPENDIX C

Request to conduct research project within San Pedro Sula, Honduras Schools

“The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher”

In connection to my Masters Degree, I will conduct a project on teachers’ approaches towards middle school boys with challenging behavior in which their conduct is constantly reflected in their regular basis (classroom) behavior. The aim is to observe, analyze, and find out the relationship between student-teacher-student by focusing in their behaviors inside the classroom. Highlight these behaviors and conclude with ways to help the teachers’ improve their approaches towards the troubled student in order to develop a more successful interaction between them—therefore, better behavioral and academic achievement among the challenged students.

During the research development, the consideration of theories and the approach to different methods are valuable tools in the process repertoire. My intention is to use a combination of multimodal and/or integrative approaches in order to identify the faulty logic underlying behavioral difficulties and at the same time obtain an insight on how the teachers can break the cycle of their ineffective approach toward the challenged student to help them out successfully.

The teacher and student’s identity is unknown to me until it has been agreed to participate in this study by returning the consent statement.

Participation in the project means that I converse (in an interview) with the teacher in order to have some questions answered from the student’s development inside the classroom and from their personal (teachers) experiences approaching the challenging student. The interview will take about an hour. I want to learn more about how both—the student and teacher relate to each other and to the classroom in general. It will also be collected information from the student’s clinical record in case of being previously diagnosed.

It’s completely voluntary to participate in the project and teacher or student parents may at any time opt out and request personal information that is subject to anonymous, without needing further explanation. Whether you choose to participate in the project or not, has no significance for further processing by the department. Information gathered is subject of confidentiality and will be treated strictly confidential.

The results of the study will be published as group data without the individual being able to be recognized. The Masters project is expected to be completed by April 2011. After the project is completed, the data will be anonymous.

The project is recommended by the Privacy Ombudsman for Research, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services A / S and the Regional Education Prime Ministry.

If any questions regarding this request, please feel free to contact me at the address provided below.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Aguirre

12 Ave. 5 y 6 Cll. S.O. B. el Benque #103

San Pedro Sula, Honduras

Tel. 558 35 00

ASSURANCES

As the researcher, I understand that I am requesting assistance for a research study. I am not requesting information pursuant to [Open Records legislation](#). If my research request is approved, I agree to abide by all existing legal and ethical codes. I further agree to comply with the above obligations. I assure that the research I perform will not significantly differ from the research proposed. The privilege of conducting future studies in S.P.S. Schools is conditioned upon the fulfillment of such obligations.

Applicant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Request to participate in the research project

“The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher”

In connection to my Masters Degree, I will conduct a project on teachers' approaches towards middle school boys with challenging behavior in which their conduct is constantly reflected in their regular basis (classroom) behavior. The aim is to observe, analyze, and find out the relationship between student-teacher-student by focusing in their behaviors inside the classroom. Highlight these behaviors and conclude with ways to help the teachers' improve their approaches towards the troubled student in order to develop a more successful interaction between them—therefore, better behavioral and academic achievement among the challenged students.

During the research development, the consideration of theories and the approach to different methods are valuable tools in the process repertoire. My intention is to use a combination of multimodal and/or integrative approaches in order to identify the faulty logic underlying behavioral difficulties and at the same time obtain an insight on how the teachers can break the cycle of their ineffective approach toward the challenged student to help them out successfully.

The teacher and student's identity is unknown to me until it has been agreed to participate in this study by returning the consent statement.

Participation in the project means that I converse (in an interview) with the teacher in order to have some questions answered from the student's development inside the classroom and from their personal (teachers) experiences approaching the challenging student. The interview will take about an hour. I want to learn more about how both—the student and teacher relate to each other and to the classroom in general. It will also be collected information from the student's clinical record in case of being previously diagnosed.

It's completely voluntary to participate in the project and teacher or student parents may at any time opt out and request personal information that is subject to anonymous, without needing further explanation. Whether you choose to participate in the project or not, has no significance for further processing by the department. Information gathered is subject of confidentiality and will be treated strictly confidential.

The results of the study will be published as group data without the individual being able to be recognized. The Masters project is expected to be completed by April 2011. After the project is completed, the data will be anonymous.

The project is recommended by the Privacy Ombudsman for Research, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services A / S and the Regional Education Prime Ministry.

If you wish to participate in the project, it would be nice if you sign the enclosed consent statement and return it in the prepaid envelope as soon as possible.

If any questions regarding this request, or would like to be informed about the project results when they exist, please feel free to contact me at the address provided below.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Aguirre

12 Ave. 5 y 6 Cll. S.O. B. el Benque #103

San Pedro Sula, Honduras

Tel. 558 35 00

Teacher Consent Statement:

I have received information about the Project “**The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher**” and I’m willing to participate in the study.

Print Full Name
Phone #

Signature

Date

Student Parent’s Consent Statement:

I have received information about the Project “**The Behavioral Challenged Child & Its Teacher**” and I give consent for my son to participate in the study.

Print Student Full Name
Phone #

Parent Signature

Date

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