

Behavioral difficulties in elementary school.

A qualitative study on how teachers' think about and experience working with students with behavioral difficulties.

Hannah Davidsen



Master thesis in Special Needs Education, autumn
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The world is about to degenerate for the worst.

It is a sign that the earth shall pass away.

Children who no longer obey their parents.

Clearly we are moving towards the end of the world.

– Ancient writing on 6000 year old
Egyptian pyramid (Nordahl 2005)

Summary

This research addresses the topic of children with behavioral difficulties in first grade. My concern arisen when I worked as a special needs educator, I often felt helpless when it came to giving advice to the teacher who I could see desperately wanting to help the child. More concern arise when roughly 70% of students conducting in a research admitted that they had been disturbed often or sometimes bothered by noise and disturbance in the lessons. These are disturbingly high numbers. I emphasize the kind of behavior difficulties in the first grade, because that is the first year of school, the foundation start in first grade. The study mainly investigate *how do first grade teachers think behavioral difficulties affect the learning environment?* Where the focus is on the teachers experience.

This research, concentrates about young children, often complications starts early in life, so it will be interesting to research what is going on in a first grade when it comes to children with behavior difficulties, and how is the learning environment in first grade. The research consist of definitions, a theory chapter, method and results.

In the chapter about definitions, several definitions will be presented. Definitions with different levels of severity. The age has to be taken under consideration when we want to define a behavior. A child in first grade will act differently than a child in high school.

In the theory chapter we will take a closer look to previous studies, theory about children and behavior difficulties in school, studies between children and their teacher. How to be a good class leader and a role model. A lot of the theory is found in books by Ogden, Ogden is aProfessor at the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo and Research Director at the Center for Studies of Problem Behavior and Innovative Practice. He has done a lot of research on the topic, which I found suitable for this study.

After the chapter about theory, method will be presented. This is a qualitative study, validity, reliability and ethical thoughts will be presented her. Participating in this study were seven informants, all female with ages ranging from 27 to 46 years old. All informants are working as teachers of first grade and some have followed their class up to second grade. Their education varies some from regular teacher education, elementary education and preschool teacher education. They have all worked as a teacher for minimum 4 years. The average of working with first grade is two years.

The results of the interview will be presented and discussed and finish with a closing discussion. . The most common behavior in first grade, are the children who finds the school norms and rules challenging. Additional, there are the children who have not broken the social code yet, and need to work with social competence. Many of the teachers find it time consuming spending five minutes her and 10 minutes there, in the end of the day a lot of time is spent mediating instead of teaching. To reach a good learning environment, there are many different factors. Schools and their leaders are constantly working towards improving their work on different aspects, for example bullying. They help teachers in becoming good leaders, and arrange for teachers and students to create good relationships. They have a culture for learning and the cultural environment and creates good relations between parents and the school. (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2016).

Preface

In 1997, there was a new reform in the Norwegian school; children should now start school at the age of six, instead of seven. Still, researchers do not agree if this was the best decision.

The children were promised the best from kindergarten and the best from school. Teachers nowadays feel that playing has gotten lost in-between all the academics a first grader needs to learn before starting second grade. Before, there was more room for games and fun, then the new promotion of knowledge came. Kids with a lot of energy not ready to learn how to read or calculate needed to follow a stricter learning curve from the very first day at school.

Researcher Hogsnes (2017) believes if the transition between school and kindergarten were better, many of the challenges we meet in school nowadays would be avoided. On the other hand, if the room for play and fun would come back to the first graders, maybe there would not be many academic or social struggles. (Holterman 2017)

Working each day with children who find school, writing, or numbers difficult has led me to this research. Along the way, there has been many interesting conversations, thoughts, ideas, theories, research and books. Many thanks to my lovely daughter, who has showed so much empathy and compassion when I have been tired and worn out. Thank you to my supervisor, who has been patient with me, and the texts I have sent her. Thanks to family and friends who have been there for me and supported me along my journey. It has been challenging next to working a fulltime job and raising a toddler, but it has been worth it. It has helped me to gain more knowledge on the topic and will help me in my future career.

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1 Introduction

The first minute of a child's life- is the minute a completely new life begins. A life that will be filled with experiences, vicissitudes, love and affection. From birth and the three coming years, the child is in its most developing years. We can call these three years the foundation of life. During these years, the child will learn social connection, facial expressions, and love, to feel safe, explore, and learn to walk, talk, and experience the senses. This is the time where the brain develops at super speed, creating up to 1,000 neural connection every second. Therefore, it is extremely important that children receive rich nutritional food, protection, love, attention, and affection. Unfortunately, some children do not experience this, and often this leads to under development as the child grows – toxic stress that can interfere with the development of the brain. Later on in life, this can be traced back to early childhood as causes for physical, mental or behavioral problems (UNICEF 2017).

In life, there are several important transitions. At a young age, the first big transition is to kindergarten. Kids nowadays start earlier in kindergarten than before, as parental leave is not long enough and they have to go back to work. The process of starting this era is normally set to be three days (In Norway three days is normally the time one can get payed leave from work when your child starts kindergarten). Suddenly these children have to connect and gain trust to one or more adults during these three days with many other and unfamiliar children around - they have to share the attention from the grownups with other children, a new structure of the day and with a new set of rules. A few years later, this transition starts all over again, when the children are changing the arena from the kindergarten to school. Even though most children get prepared for this transition and they have reached that age where it is possible to tell and explain to them what they can expect, it is still a difficult transition for many young souls. In Norway, 84% of the teachers believe that the first year of schooling is too theoretical and difficult for the youngest. The focus is on teaching goals, which is mainly spent sitting still at a desk most days, instead of learning by exploring, playing and interacting socially. (Ertesvåg 2018). Imagine a child who is energetic, often has chaos in the brain, and who sometimes has difficulty sorting too many inputs. At the age of five, the child has to spend most of the day sitting at a desk using the whole day to try to learn something and then having to remember it all as well. The transition from kindergarten to primary education has been a central theme in the project "The challenging kids." The start of the school might seem to be stressful for many children. For challenging children, stress can translate into negative

behavior. (Halsan, 2012) How does these children adapt to the school, class, teachers and fellow students?

The purpose of this study is to get an understanding of how behavioral difficulties show themselves in first grade, how these behaviors affect the surroundings, such as the learning environment at school. Further, this study aims to give some perspective on what teachers think about behavioral difficulties, and how it affects the learning environment.

1.1 Background for chosen study

What are behavioral difficulties? Is there one accurate description? For sure, it is an ambiguous term. There are various reasons that may be the basis of a behavior that is considered unacceptable. If the child has a language barrier, the child might express himself by hitting or kicking. On the other hand, it can be underlying stressful life situation, which is getting expressed by an outraging behavior. (Grøholt 2015). In literature, behavior difficulties are defined in several different ways, but it all depends on which view you decide to look at it from: pedagogical, psychiatrically, sociologically or special needs pedagogical. Throughout the years, behavioral difficulties in school have been featured with different descriptions: noise and disorder in the classroom, bickering among students, and communication where they have negative coverage of each other. (Negative attitude can be about derogatory attitudes, gender, social inequalities, racism, clothing, appearance etc.) The behavior mentioned can impair school and classroom environment in a way that could be a harbinger of more severe norms and rule violations, such as violence (Ogden, 2015).

Schools often face challenges in their work with all kind of students. Not necessarily only children with behavior difficulties, but also children with languages barriers, different economical backgrounds, bullying, and so on. However, according to “student inspectors”, roughly 70% of the students admitted that they had been disturbed often or sometimes bothered by noise and disturbance in the lessons (Ogden 2015). Later on in this chapter, we will take a closer look to what can be the cause of class disturbance and noise.

Once in a while it does happen, that teachers get the so called “problem class”. In this class you can find students who might struggle with sitting still, not paying attention, struggles to concentrate or not showing compassion with other students. Many students can also show reluctance when presented for new tasks or instructions. Some might just have problems with

sitting still, and start wandering around the classroom, or disrupting other students who are working, while some daydream and struggle to begin their work unless the teacher comes over and asks them to continue and helps them get back on track. (Ogden, 2012). One might wonder, is it the students or the adults that has led to the class becoming a “problem class”?

Norwegian students reported that noise in the classroom is a widespread problem and that teachers find it difficult to handle this problem, even causing many teachers to decide to leave their job. This spreading problem has not been focused on enough. Lecturer Martin Ødegård at the University of Oslo just published his doctor degree about disruptive behavior in school, which is a study that included 544 students in Norway and 609 students in the USA. The results shows that 58% of the Norwegian students and 66% of the American students had been disturbed in the class in the last week. (Ødegård 2013). Continuous disturbance and noise throughout a day can cause mental health issues. In 2014, a health report about mental disorders amongst children came out in Norway. It shows that there is a major health problem in mental disorders amongst children and adolescents and estimates that between the age of three and eighteen, there are about 15-20 percent with symptoms such as anxiety, depression and behavior disorder. Until the age of six, there are no major differences between boys and girls when it comes to mental disorders. From the age of six to twelve, two-thirds who qualifies for a psychiatric diagnosis are boys. The most common disorders are concentration difficulties, ADHD and behavior disorders. (Norwegian Institute of Public Health 2016)

To prevent psychosocial problems amongst children, a project called "The challenging kids" by docent Roland. This is a project with the purpose of detecting and remedying psychosocial problems amongst children, aged four to eight years. At the Centre for Behavioral Research, one of the findings by Roland is that teachers and kindergarten employees often are uncertain when it comes to identifying and measuring children with a form of behavioral difficulty. Roland points out that early intervention is important if we want to help these children. (Fylkesmannen i Rogaland & Senter for atferdsforskning 2012)

In Norway, students have many rights when it come to their education, one of them being: “*All students are entitled to a good school environment*”. Paragraph section 9a-1 of the Education Act continues with “*all pupils in primary and secondary schools have the right to a good physical and psychosocial environment that performs health, well-being and learning.*” The students have a right, which implies that the school owner’s finances are not actually

relevant for the right to be met or not. (NORSK LOVTIDEND - Avd. I Lover og sentrale forskrifter mv. 2017)

1.2 Purpose of the study

Over the last years as a special needs educator in elementary school in Norway, the growth of teachers asking their leaders and coworkers for advice has been on how to deal with children with challenging behavior, or more simply, on how to help a child who needs help. This is a theme, which does not have a blueprint answer. Then how can we help these teachers to stay in their job, and to help the children who have been unlucky and learned an unlucky behavior. Pedagogical-psychological service (PPt) has found that the attention of the teachers is often elsewhere instead of conducting the classroom education. In many cases, finding that the attention of the teachers' time easily is tied up in conflict resolution and processing of conflicts that arise, which draws the attention away from the general teaching and schoolwork. In general, proactive prevention through class management and supportive school leadership, are necessary to prevent the development of difficult behavior. (Pedagogisk-Psykologisk tjeneste og oppfølgingstjenesten for Numedal og Kongsberg 2011). What happens to the environment in the classroom when the energy and concentration of the teacher is elsewhere than educating?

1.2.1 Research question

All mentioned above has led me to the research question:

How do first grade teachers think behavioral difficulties affect the learning environment?

I hope with this investigation that I will get a better understanding on what I can do for my colleagues and children at the school I work. How can classroom environment improve, and hopefully give the teachers some useful guidelines they can use in the classroom and their work to educate our children.

1.3 Definitions

Most of the problematic behavior that is registered is often in kindergarten or in schools, a place the children interact in games, learning, working together, getting attention, and a set of rules they have to follow. Places where some sort of behavior is expected, and the minute you behave differently, you are not doing what is expected. If a behavior is not accepted and this behavior is not corrected, the consequence can be that the children adapt a bad behavior.

Some children can have a disorder or something psychological, but it is the adult's responsibility to guide and help the child in the process of becoming an educated independent person. Now, have a look at some descriptive definitions about children who struggle with their behavior that does not fit the normal behavior label. (Ogden, 2015) In this chapter, different definitions will be presented:

The behavior most children display is probably a reaction to the environment they are meeting, which is why the registrations of many children with behavior difficulties get registered at the schools. That environment can require that the students are punctual, accurate and concentrated. Ogden (2015) calls this for learning inhibitory behavior. Further on, Ogden (2015) explains learning inhibitory behavior three ways; the first is a descriptive definition, the second one is a more open definition, and the third one describes more serious behavior difficulties:

Learning and teaching impairment is disquiet, disturbance and interruptions as mutual reinforcing behavior among more students, leading to lack of work or work effort, and thus to a poorer learning environment. (Ogden, 2015, P. 14)

Having a learning- and teaching inhibited behavior in a classroom can lead to a very high level of noise, conflicts, weak progress academically and negative teacher-student relations. Moreover, it makes it harder for a teacher to teach and for the students to learn. (Nordahl 2005).

Simultaneously there are the students who are always seeking extra attention from the adults or fellow students, or those who need clear boundaries and comprehensive support. Norm- and rule breaking behavior can be harder to handle in a schooling situation. These breakers can be students who often skip coming to class, coming late and just cannot seem to follow the set rules and norms the school have for an adapted behavior or a considerate behavior.

Then what is norm- and rule breaking behavior? (Ogden, Sosial Kompetanse og Problematferd blant barn og unge 2015). The second definition by Ogden (2015) follows as:

Norm- and rule breaking behavior are actions that disrupt the school's expectations for the student role. Behavior that violates basic values and norms for responsible, considerate and friendly behavior and prevents positive interaction with others. It inhibits teaching and learning activities and thus the students' learning and development. (Ogden, 2015, P. 15)

The third definition, describes a behavior that breaks with both norms and expectations at school or in a classroom. This description does not contain a certain appraisal criteria and it does not give an exact problem description.

Serious behavioral difficulties manifest themselves as persistent hostility and repeated physical aggressive behavior. The behavior is often stable over time and is not affected notably by the consequences it triggers. In youth, the issues include offenses, violence, escapes, shame and opposition of adult authority. (Ogden, 2015, P. 16)

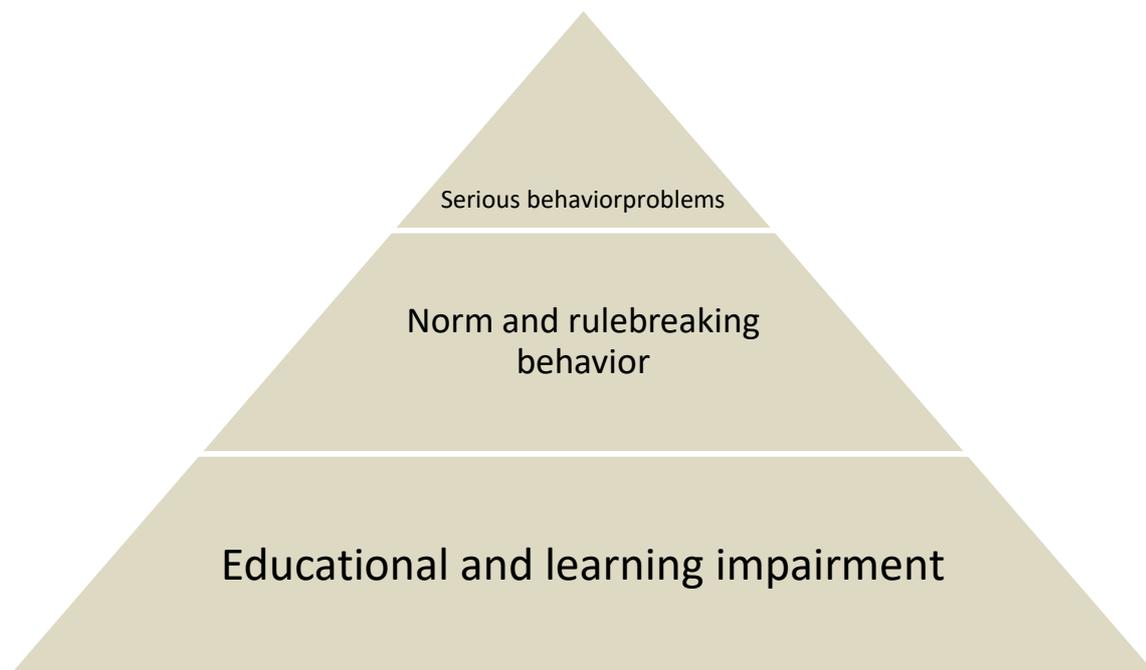


Figure 1.1. Behavior difficulties in school sorted by severity. (Ogden, 2015, p. 16)

The pyramid seen above is a three leveled scale that shows the three definitions of behavior a teacher and fellow classmates can meet in daily situations. Holland (2013) on the other hand divides the seriousness of behavior difficulties into three levels; Level one, a behavior with zero tolerance. With the youngest children this can be; hitting, pulling hair, biting or stealing.

Level two can be a normal behavior, which in periods is more frequent and, measures the need to be taken or to prevent the behavior to settle. The last level, normal, but exhausting behavior, which all kids can have in some short periods. (Holland 2013)

The age has to be taken under consideration when we want to define a behavior. A child in first grade will act differently than a child in high school. Behavioral difficulties in school can be expressed in many ways. Some students speak loud to each other; some will try to get others to laugh and might be seen or labeled as a “class clown”. Others can be rude, bad language, or simply have a big need for attention and do whatever they can to get it. There are also the students who are angry and frustrated which can lead to threatening, conflicts or harassing of fellow students or teachers. Further on there can be a strong opposition against teachers or fellow students. On the other hand, the more classical cases, unmotivated students, the bored students, difficulties to concentrate themselves that can lead to bad scores in the different topics. Some students always seem to small talk with the person next to him or her, lots of giggling, teasing and is often uninterested in what the teacher has to say. (Ogden, 2015)

Finally, the quiet student who is the opposite of confronting, one that might disappear for several days, they can seem sad, lonely, or excessive about their own thoughts and self-being. They rarely say anything in the class, or to fellow students and teachers, and are students who are hard to reach. Behavioral difficulties can, in other words be expressed in many different ways. Mainly it is about which degree the child’s behavior interfere with the set rules, norms and expectations in the society around us, and in the degree the child’s behavior differs from the expected age. Behavior in a way that affects the child’s own development and learning or causing problems for others. (Nordahl 2005). If a child shows some of these actions, it does not necessarily mean, that child classifies as a child with behavioral difficulties, because most children will do some of these actions some times during their lifetime. The problem will arise if you see that the behavior repeats itself often and starts to become a problem for the child and those around.

2-3 % of children who classify with behavior difficulties at a severe level fulfill the demands of the “difficult” behavior diagnoses, in preschool the numbers varies from 4 to 16 % of the children with a diagnosis. A comprehensive part of these kids will need extra help in kindergarten and school. The education needs to be adapted to the child with the assistant, the parents, pedagogical-psychological service, school, and child and youth psychiatric center.

(Zeiner 2016). Three of these severe behavioral diagnosis are classified in ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases), ADHD, ODD and CD:

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is considered as a congenital and neurological disturbance, which consists as an unbalance in the brain. In short, the criteria for this diagnosis is presented as a higher degree of concentration problems or impulsive and over activity compared to what a “normal” child on the same age has.

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)

ODD is a behavioral pattern consisting of negative, hostile and deviant behavior over at least a six months period of time and during this time, the behavior need to consist of at least four of the following:

- Anger outbreaks
- Quarrels with adults
- Ignoring rules and reprimand from the surrounding adults
- Bothers and annoys others
- Blame others
- Is “touchy” and easily gets annoyed.
- Is angry and resentful
- Hostile and vindictive

Conduct disorder (CD)

To have conduct disorder three of the following types of antisocial behavior have to be detected in the last twelve months, with at least one of the types the last six months.

- Bullying

- Starts fights and threatens others
- Use weapons
- Is physically vicious towards other humans or animals
- Steals and robs/burglary
- Involuntary sexual conduct with others
- Vandalism
- Firestarter
- Lie
- Is out all night without permission
- Skip school

The mentioned diagnosis is only to be used by specialists. It can be helpful to describe and concretize a certain behavior, especially for those who work with these children each day. (Holland 2013). It is proven that efforts made in the environment have been very effective when it comes to stop serious behavior difficulties and aggressiveness. These measurements are usually rooted in the cognitive behavioral therapy. Most of the programs in Norway working with these children use this kind of therapy. Programs such as for example the “amazing years”, these programs involves teaching parents how they can reduce problems at home and to give them better strategies to meet these children during anger outbreaks and other situations that are difficult. The families who has participated in these programs has shown significant reduction of behavior difficulties, both at home and at school. (Grøholt 2015)

1.3.1 How can we understand behavior difficulties

How we understand and explain behavior difficulties varies from which theoretical starting point we have. This is one of those areas where there is no exact scientific answer, where

you can draw two lines under your answer and be done. Holland (2013) presents different perspectives on behavior difficulties:

Often you can hear the phrases; “oh, he is just the same as his father was when he was young”, “the youth nowadays” or “the apple does not fall far from the tree”. With this understanding, it will be hard to connect the behavior to a specific pattern of behavior. To get a more descriptive understanding of the behavior, one can look at it from a neurological perspective. Under this perspective, there are professionals who will examine the behavior pattern of the person/child and diagnose a neurological cause, for example, one of the earlier mentioned diagnosis. Alternatively, there is the psychodynamic perspective, which involves children or adults who have experienced some sort of trauma, or maybe neglect by family. Psychologists and child welfare are the best professionals who can advise the schools and help these children. (Holland, 2013)

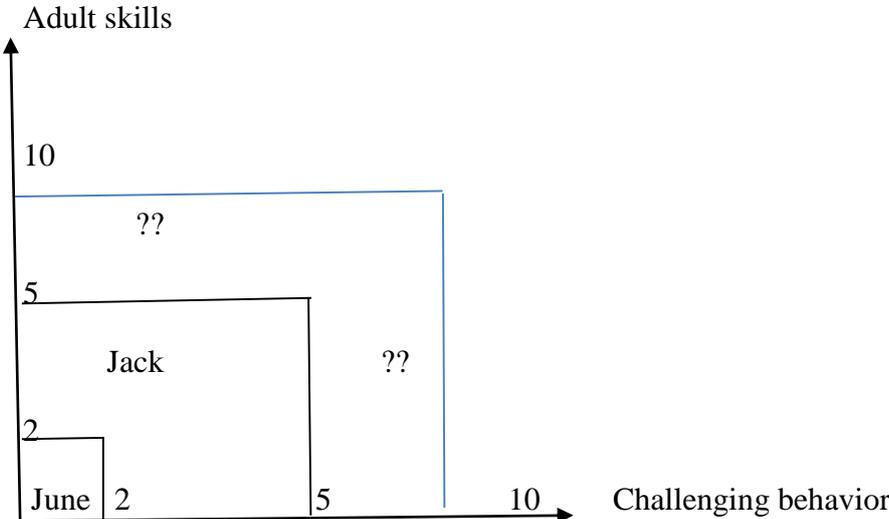


Figure 1.2. Challenging behavior and required adult skills.

This model is based on the model of Holland (2013, p. 18). This model shows a degree of challenging behavior on a scale from 1 to 10 (where one is very little challenging behavior and ten is very challenging behavior). The model shows a degree of “adult skills” required for different behavioral patterns. A perfectly normal Jack will score five on this scale, a regular

student with "normal" behavior that can sometimes indicate unwanted behavior. Jack may at times test the limits, but will be rebuked and learn from his actions. This can be challenging for the adults, but within the norm. On the other hand, student June, who may turn out to be a little challenging, follows messages that are given, but may occasionally forget to raise her hand before talking or can easily forget herself and talk to the classmates around her. This "challenging" behavior requires little adult skills. Two students who require different degrees of adult skills. Both Jack and June have a behavior on a level that is within a normal behavior. When the level increases in challenging behavior, there will be an increase in adult skills as well. How to handle different situations that occur and how to prevent it in a good way, thus avoiding unwanted situations for both the student and the adults. This requires more of the adults and that the adults are aware of how to prevent and avoid a student from locking in an action pattern that is unfavorable to oneself and those around them. (Holland, 2013)

Behavior analytical perspective focuses on that; all behavior is learned. Moreover, when it is learned it can also be changed or start the learning process again, but this time with the help of consequences. Here it is often a one-way direction, which the child has to change. It is easy to forget, but the adult also needs to change their behavior, to set a good example and to help the child to relearn a behavior. (Holland 2013)

System theoretical perspective is all about the "here and now" situations, and the possibility to change. However, it is not as if we overlook what the child has experienced from before, since that is in the past and we cannot change it now. Nevertheless, the situations we experience with the child here and now are situations we can control and change. This perspective also focuses on turning the concentration from the individual to the system. What around the child maintains the certain unwanted behavior? The adult should not be blamed for the problem, but the adult can be guided in the right direction and to help the child back to a wanted behavior. (Holland 2013)

2 Theory and previous studies

When we look at students with behavior difficulties, age has a lot to say. Pupils at the elementary school will show one type of behavior, and pupils in the secondary school will show a different type of behavior. Let us look at the first-class student; the transition between kindergarten and school is a big transition for most children. Many children are not used to being part of such a large group which they meet in school (in Norway the class consists with about 24-28 pupils), here the students have to wait for their turn, taking into account all the other children. An environment where they can be both challenged and rejected. School age is most likely the life stage where the requirements for adapting to others are the highest and where the children can in a limited degree be with the ones they want to be with. They need to find out how to get along with students who are very different from one's own. If it is a class of 28 students, this will be a complex group with many different personalities; it will be the best behaved and it will be the rebellious children, the cautious and vulnerable and those who are dominant and outgoing. If one is looking for common denominators for behavior difficulties in school, one can focus on the teacher. There could be students who violate the expectations the teacher has against acceptable behavior. Alternatively, maybe the student violate the school's unwritten rules and norms on what good behavior is. The learning environment¹ will vary from school to school. The lowest tolerance of teachers lies enough in the behavior that challenges the authority and which they fail to control. A common feature of these students may be that demeaning behavior makes it difficult to "acquire" friends and then "keep" the friends. Pupils with a difficult behavior often have not cracked the friendship code, and have not achieved the social skills they need to feel good socially. Pupils, who have a relationship based on conflicts with their teachers, can at the same time be very dependent on them. The teacher can therefore perceive them as appealing, helpless or demanding. As students grow older, this difficult behavior may develop into a more physically undesirable behavior. Something that corresponds to several unfortunate episodes for the student and those around. (Ogden, Sosial Kompetanse og Problematferd blant barn og unge 2015)

¹ Short explanation of learning environment. Schools and their leaders are constantly working towards improving their work on different aspects, for example bullying. They help teachers in becoming good leaders, and arrange for teachers and students to create good relationships. They have a culture for learning and the cultural environment and creates good relations between parents and the school. (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2016)

A study conducted recently in Denmark has some disturbing results. In the last six years, the percentage of children with a given behavior diagnosis, has increased by 43%. More children get this diagnosis when the number of adults per child decreases. The researchers believe we have to look at the adult situation instead of the child first. A child who shows unwanted behavior gets more attention. Kjær a Danish researcher believes that a child will show less unwanted behavior if the adults around are qualified and good pedagogues. Kjær believes that a pressured group of adults, find it easier to send a child to a psychologist to receive a diagnosis, because resources follow instead of having aims and needs to help the child before it escalates. Instead, the child gets branded. Egelund, a professor in special need education at the University of Aarhus has published a study that investigates the resources given when a child receive a diagnosis. He states that - *if the child has the diagnosis, the money will follow*. The outcome of this is that a child is branded for life because institutions like schools and kindergartens are understaffed. Odenbring at the University of Gothenburg backs up the study by Egelund after interviewing several pedagogues and teachers in Sweden with similar results (Schultz 2018).

In other words, some behavioral disorders can be explained by the child's individual characteristics and social background, which leads to the "here and now" situations that are maintained by the environment around. The surrounding environment consists of social systems such as the family, kindergarten, school, peer-to-peer communities or cultural institutions in which the child is participating.



This photo, borrowed from Google, is a picture of a water drop that hits the water. The water drop hitting the water can be looked at as a small event, but it can develop to something bigger, just as the rings in the water shows us. The rings in the water around the drop, comes from one action. The rings around symbolize the environments around. As mentioned earlier, these environments can be the family, kindergarten or school. Within the different arenas, there are other children and adults. At school, it may be a teacher, fellow students or school

leaders. The events can be explained, as a chain reaction a small event, and then involving into more from the surroundings. Something that started as a very small event just got bigger and bigger. (Ogden, 2015)

It is difficult to measure behavioral difficulties in school. Firstly, how is behavior even defined? It depends on who one asks if you ask family, fellow students, the student himself or the teacher.

We can take a look at a survey conducted by Ogden in 1998 (Ogden, 2015), about teachers' experiences and views on student behavior and learning environment in primary school from 10% of Norway's primary schools. A total of 3661 teachers participated in the survey, where they were asked to report their experiences at a randomly chosen school week (before the survey) and then on their experience of the current school year. This survey showed that it was the less common problems that are dominant in the classroom and the school environment outside. Problems that are most common in the childhood stage are high conflict level and have characteristics such as lack of consideration and respect among the students. Although the teachers encountered these conflicts with a routine manner, it was found that the cumulative wear and strain effect of such problems was significant. Like the image above with the drop that hits the water, many of the small problems become a major problem. This survey also shows that there was a correlation between class size and behavioral difficulties. Teachers that work at small schools in small classes reported fewer behavioral difficulties. However, there were no fewer serious behavioral difficulties in small classes and schools, suggesting that such difficulties are more a question of the child's background and characteristics than the characteristics of the school. Schools that used educational tools in their work with social skills - teachers reported about significantly fewer behavioral difficulties than at school where no measures were taken. Ogden conducted a new survey in collaboration with Lindberg in 2001, based on it in 1998. Where the results overall could indicate a polarization of the teacher's answers; where some believed that the situation had become more difficult, while for others it had become less problematic. (Ogden, 2015)

In order to be able to say something about the development of behavioral difficulties in school, one must carry out comparable mapping studies on a regular basis. There are few of these mapping studies in Norway and other countries. Sørli and Ogden conducted a survey in 2008, asking the same questions that were surveyed in 1998. This survey showed that it was relatively stable over the 10-year period, but the proportion of teachers reporting daily issues

of difficult behavior was significantly reduced from 1998-2008. A comparison of the two surveys shows that the extent of "daily" noise and turmoil has had a robust decline with half of daily difficult behavior (including students who spoke without luck and disturbed other students in the class). If we look at a student survey in the period 2010-2013, which includes more grades, points in the same positive direction as the surveys above, and supports the extent of noise and turmoil in Norwegian schools which may be less than before the turn of the millennium. (Ogden, 2015)

Most of the difficult behavior registered in the schools are probably reactions from the students on the environment they face in school, such as showing up on time, punctuality in general, paying attention and focus. It is expected of the students that they join in on many new activities with the rest of the class, play together in recess or work with collaborative tasks. During this learning or adapting process, there is no doubt there will automatically be competition, jealousy, rivalry, rejection and conflicts. The Danish philosopher Løgstrup once stated that:

Conflicts often arise when a person in the face of another human being shows its honesty and vulnerability without being met. – Knud Løgstrup (Brønstad 2016, pp.171)

We can also see the same from the Danish philosopher in the work of the German-American psychologist Homburger Erikson (1902-1994). He believed that the life is just one big learning curve, and that the humans spends their whole life learning. Where the learning curve is divided into eight stages. The first learning stage is the age 0-1,5 years old where the last is 65- until you die years old. In the stage 3-6 years old, the child shows vulnerability, and it is up to the surrounding persons to help the child evolve. For a child to experience defeat or to be punished when he or she tires out on doing something, it can give the child guilt instead of a good learning outcome. The child might end up saying to himself or herself “I do not manage to do anything right, I am not worth much then”. (Brønstad 2016). If we look at how we as adults would respond to not being seen or getting the wrong comment just at the wrong moment, it can be really hurtful, we can also answer back to quickly without thinking it through, and up raises a conflict. Only difference is that as an adult, there is more experience and knowledge in the background, which can lead to an easier handle of the whole situation than for a child for example.

A municipality in Norway (Ålesund) created in 2012 a team with six persons, who specializes in behavior difficulties. The team set out to be an extra resource for schools, the students and the parents for a short time period. Where the goal is to help students to function as well as possible socially and professionally. The team started up with a set of questions;

- What should we define the challenging behavior?
- Which benchmarks do we have in the kindergarten and at the schools?
- How can we achieve those goals?
- What kind of programs are there and what kind of tools can we use, with a review on how it is actually working.

The goal of this team is to come up with a game plan, for everyone around the child with behavior difficulties. This included coursing the staff/teachers especially on the attitude they show the child. It is hard work, and it is important to make the time and effort to receive success. The weight is not only set on regulating the behavior, but to create a development and growth of the child (Hoseth 2018).

Many teachers feel unprepared to deal with children who have behavior difficulties, and the beliefs they are left with is the unsuccessful ability to include and teach these children (Mitchem 2005). This is supported by a study protocol from BMC Public Health, where challenging behavior is commonly reported source of stress and burned out teachers. (Ford 2012). Mitchem (2005) believes that in addition to stress and all the never-ending paper work - teacher who deals with children with behavior difficulties are at a greater risk of becoming burnt out and leaving their work. To prevent this from happening she has come up with a strategy called BE PROACTIVE (Mitchem, 2005, pp.188).

BE PROACTIVE Strategy Steps

B Build relationships

E Expectations-teach them

P Praise appropriate behaviors

R Routines

O Opportunities to respond with feedback

A ABCs of self-management

C Collaborate and cooperate with parents, teachers...

T Teach replacement behaviors

I Individualize instructions

V Visualize yourself somewhere else

E Enjoy the experience

If the students like their teacher, they will enjoy spending their time with that teacher, the possibility is higher for them wanting to prove themselves and please their teacher by doing what is requested. We know from experience with our own family and friends that a good relationship takes times and work to develop. Children who have experienced little trust and stability in their previous relationships are likely to be more reluctant to trust that someone cares. One of the most shown effects of developing a positive and supportive classroom environment is to focus on recognizing and affirming the positive behaviors rather than correcting and redirecting the negative actions. Some tips can be:

- **Planned ignoring**. Do not call out the student if the student forgets a rule. For example instead of raising the hand, the student speaks out of turn. Ignore.
- **Prompt**. “The look”, to prompt a student to be quiet or raise the hand. Providing a verbal cue or a physical gesture can be a good reminder for a student who easily forgets.

- Praise around. Also called “buddy” praise, praise the students who follow the rule, to prompt the student who keeps forgetting.
- Catch the student at being good. When the student who usually forgets raising the hand, and suddenly raises the hand, it is then important to catch the act and praise the student.

Misbehavior is an opportunity to reteach, there might be situations where the student does not pick up on the prompts and cues, then it is important to look at the situation as a good possibility to reteach a rule or experience. Do this as quietly as possible, not drawing attention to the student. A systematic instruction; Describe the problem behavior in a nonjudgmental way, explain why it is a problem, and have the student describe an appropriate response. The student should then be given the chance to demonstrate the appropriate response. Praise the student for compliance. (Mitchem, 2005)

Sometimes the student might misbehave, but does not understand that it was not an exactable behavior. To get the students to be more observant on their own behavior, one can introduce the ABCs of self-management by Mitchem (2005) and Wells:

- **Antecedent (trigger):** What happens to trigger the behavior
- **Behavior:** The action or what you say
- **Consequence:** the result of the behavior.

To get the student realize what they do “wrong” the actions can be set into a chart. Here is an example taken from Mitchem (2005, pp.190).

Triggers	Your behavior	Consequence
<i>Teacher says, “write your name on the paper and number 1 to 10 down the side”.</i>	<i>You take your mechanical pencil apart and flic the eraser at your buddy.</i>	<i>The teacher takes your pencil and moves you to the desk beside her.</i>

To visualize the actions for the student will help prevent the students from making the same mistakes again. Showing the student that he or she has options will give them a positive reaction instead of a consequence; helping the student choose a more wisely action (Mitchem 2005)

Research dated back to 1986 points out that the majority of disrupted behavior in the classroom associated with lack of attention, often forgetting classroom rules and inconsistent on-task behavior (Alter 2013). Alter, Walker and Landers (2013) found old and little research on the topic challenging behavior. Based on lack of information and data they conducted a new study with the purpose on getting updated research regarding perceptions of specific challenging behavior that teachers find to be most prevalent and/or problematic. In this study, there were 800 participating teachers from five different public schools in one state in the Southeastern United States. In this research, they wanted to determine what challenging behavior teachers perceive as most prevalent and problematic. The two research question were:

1. *What challenging behaviors do teachers regard as most prevalent and/or problematic?*
2. *What impact do different demographic factors have on teachers’ perceptions of challenging behaviors?* *(Alter, 2013, pp.54).*

Off-task behavior was measured to be the most frequently occurring and problematic behavior, it might be that this behavior can lead to other challenging behaviors. The next challenging behavior that followed was verbal disruptions, general and aggressive and respectively. The least challenging behavior, which emerged, was physical aggression amongst the lowest prevalent and problematic challenging behavior. One finding which

shows to be a little disturbing was that the least prevalent where the children who isolate or have no social interaction with others was the least problematic. This result can be consistent with the idea that these children often get overlooked by the teachers. Children who are withdrawn, may be suffering from psychiatric disorder like depression go undetected and unattended in the classrooms. It is recommended that teachers be trained in this area to deal with these students in the best possible way. (Alter, 2013)

Psychology professor and leader of the program “The incredible years²” Willy-Tore Mørch (Skogstrøm 2014) states in a newspaper article “*Teachers need to learn how to handle children with behavior difficulties*”. He explains it by saying that the schools are the only ones who can solve these problems. Further on he explains that teachers need to be trained in how to deal with the issue and how to meet these children in an appropriate manner, because currently, many teachers meet students with behavior difficulties in an inexpedient manner, which will just enhance the already existing negative behavior. Additionally, Mørch points out that teachers in the Norwegian school do not have the right tools to handle the issue at hand. He answers the question, *what are the teachers doing wrong*. – They often enhance the negative behavior by giving the child attention, they try to have negative consequences as punishment, or try to speak with the child and explain why they cannot behave in such manners. Instead, this is what they should be doing; take the student away from the situation, do not give the child any attention the next couple of minutes. This is very effective if the teacher also enhance good behavior, calmness and overlook the negative behavior. (Skogstrøm, 2014)

² The Incredible Years are a state-funded initiative that helps families and professionals promote good interaction with children, prevent difficulties from developing. Alternatively, to break locked behavior, which has been locked for a certain time and can be offensive or hard to live with. ((DUÅ) 2018)

2.1 The teacher as a role model

What does it mean to be the leader of a class? This theme can be difficult, because of the connection to noise and disorder in the classroom. The role as a leader is about the difficult balance between structure and freedom, in between the need of the teacher to be in control and the students' wishes of autonomy. The teachers' role is constantly changing, with the students who come and go and the school and society that is in a constant change. The expectations students, parents, coworkers, school have to the single teacher where they need to educate everyone with adaptations, good organization in the classroom, fun and educational activities. A good teacher also has a good teacher-student relation, where the main goal is to get the students to be self-regulated, which leads to responsibility over self-educating and behavior in the school. These are just some of the principles for a good class leader. How can we get there? (Ogden, 2012). Now more than ever, does the teachers need to be flexible and well educated on areas that surrounds the classroom education. More and younger students' experiences that they do not extend to the exceptions, it is overwhelming with expectations others have about you, on how you should behave, perform and participate. According to the Norwegian health institute (2016), an increasing share of the young population does not participate in the working life, they are on a sick leave because of the psychological health difficulties such as behavior difficulties/disorders, stress, anxiety, depression, exhaustion and burned out (Samnøy 2018).

Throughout the school, children have a massive progress: from when they first start school at the age of five. They are on different levels of academic knowledge and behavioral control. Claessens & Dowsett (2014) conducted a study with more than 21,000 children who entered kindergarten and school, 16,260 of these children, parents and teachers were interviewed and answers were analyzed, each spring in kindergarten, first, third and fifth grade. Where the results shows that problems with classroom attention leads to problems with achievements over the first years of elementary school. Further on they found evidence of the kindergartens who worked on attention tasks gained these children when they begun schooling. They were more focused on the tasks given - which can apply that attention problems can interfere with academic gains, which can be a cause of disruptive attention in the class. (Claessens 2014)

How can a single teacher prevent these health difficulties for the students and the teacher?

The learning environment center points out two recommended ways to work with in a

difficult class. First off, a strategy based on cognitive learning, where the approach is through rules, procedures and routines. The second way is an approach to the social hierarchy in the class, if the class does not follow the teacher, the teacher is not the leader of the class anymore, and the class need to be rearranged accordingly, so the teacher can gain the leader position (Læringsmiljøsentret 2017).

What is a good teacher? It is important that the teacher have time to cooperate, especially in their teams to prevent the feeling a teacher can get; standing alone with a class. More and more loads are made for each teacher. The teacher must cooperatively design his own curricula with justification for why they have chosen to put up the teaching as they do. Further on a teacher should hold the ability to reflect on his or her own practice and last, but not least caring for their students. Imsen (2005) highlights some points on what is making a teacher good.

1. The teacher is the school's mediator and should therefore hold knowledge, understanding, different skills and a good attitude
2. Knowledge of the school's materials and structures. Furthermore, the teacher should have knowledge of the school, organization, regulations, textbooks and anything else that concerns the school
3. Formal pedagogical knowledge of how children learn and develop
4. Practical knowledge - an acquisition of practical tricks and routines, experiences that teachers achieve through their practice (Imsen 2005)

Ogden (2012), points out many of the same ways under ten chosen principals and guidelines for a practical class leadership - preventing noise and disturbance, creating a harmonic learning environment for all students and teachers should expect to meet each day:

1. The physical environment

The classroom is important for a good teaching environment and it should be decorated and well established to enhance learning for all the students. In an ecological perspective, one can talk about the environment regulating the behavior. For example, the importance of each teacher being conscious of furnishings, placement of the student and structure the activities.

The possibilities and options can be very limited; it depends on the classroom size and how many students there are in the class. If there is no space in the classroom to move around freely, where there is room for lines and tribulation, clashes between two students will easily occur. There is no standardized recipe for how classrooms should be organized. The optimal classroom is adapted to the activity and the students who are participating. Each student has their own individual needs however, there are some guidelines one can follow; 1) the teacher should be able to see all students. 2) The students should be able to see all that is presented in the classroom. 3) Material that is often in use should be easily accessible. 4) The classroom should be easy to move around in, for both students and teachers. 5) It should be easy to regroup, that way the students can work in groups or pairs. 6) The room should not contain unnecessary distractive stuff. (Ogden, 2012)

2. Good relations in the class

Roland (2017) presents in an article posted for learning and environment center in Norway, that an interview of 81 teachers, they all concur that building a teacher-student relation is central in their job as a class leader. Many of the teachers describes the relation building as a work that starts with the first meeting until the last. It also comes forward that there can be certain situations with one student or a group, which they are not sure how to handle. That is probably visual for the student/s. Then it is as if a game has started between that teacher and the students. (Roland, 2017)

Thoroughly documented in Ogden (2012) is that students learn more from teachers they like and have a good established teacher – student relationship with. Some of the signs of a good qualified teacher – student relationship can be seen in the way the teacher address the student, on what the teacher says, and what the teacher does. It can be shown in the way the teacher addresses the student in a friendly tone, shows an interest, thoughtfulness, empathy, and in the sense of humor. It is also about finding a good balance between positive and negative communication and the positive communication overweighs the negative communication, that way, corrective communication will not be a negative impact on their relation. It is important for the students that the teacher likes them, and even though they do not admit it, they often care about them and want to prove for them that they can succeed at school. Sometimes for a teacher to get to know the students the teacher needs to use time, some more than on others. On the other hand, the students' needs to get to know their teachers too. The teachers can let

the students get to know them by opening up, telling information about them, who they are, where they are from, and what they expect from the students. To reach this contact, one has to talk about something other than school and school related topics. Topics that can include, music, sports, drama or other cultural activities. The last important point is to address the student by their name always, at school and outside. A study done by Allday and Pakurar in 2007 (Ogden 2012) gave the results; - when the teacher welcomed all the students by shaking their hands and directly addressed the students, the ones with behavior difficulties concentrated better and disturbed less in the beginning of the day. Should there be escalating conflicts, a teacher should address the student calmly, and say, "I really want to talk to you, if you can talk as calmly as I am". (Ogden, 2012 p. 32). This way the teacher has control, and with looks, body language and a calmness, the teacher will achieve a self-raising role.

An American study which followed students the three first years of elementary school, focused on the teacher-student relations, the student engagement, and the learning outcome and looking to see if the three were connected. The results showed that these three points amounted to a dynamic system and that it is all connected (Midthassel 2015). Midthassel suggests that since the relation building between teacher and student is so important, should start before the student starts schooling for example, by sending the student a greeting.

3. The class development steps

In Norway, the children start schooling the year they turn six. When they start school, they need to build a social network, find their places in the group, in regards to popularity, leadership, control and dominance. The need to be accepted is big, that applies for adults as well as children. Each child will stretch far to be accepted. This means the teacher needs to help setting the norms and rules for the classroom for it to become a safe and welcoming learning environment. The teacher needs to be good at reading their students, to find out which student has the norms that affect the other students, both positively and negatively. Behavioral difficulties amongst children may be due to roles they are reaching for, and to change that behavior if the child believes they will lose that role can be difficult. If the class manage to land on good roles, and becomes a knit group with respect, empathy and friendship, the class will have good assumptions to reach for. Not all school classes are so fortunate to have that class environment, which leads to challenges for both students and the teachers. One way to prevent this is to spend a little more time on the social networking in the

beginning of the school year instead of the educational subjects. In a study based on the first week of school, researchers claimed they could predict how the class would function the rest of the year. This research claims the importance of the first week of schooling; it is where the foundation is built for the rest of the year. The social pattern is built from day one. (Ogden, 2012)

The first step for a teacher and the class is to find common rules. Rules can be walk in a line, raise your hand if you want to say something and a sign from the teacher when the teacher wants attention. If the students get to participate in the discussion about common rules, it will be easier for them to remember. The first week of school should include time and effort to learn the rules, and the teacher must expect to remind the students often in this time. The next step for the teacher is seating, how and where should the students sit. Some students impact each other on a positive level, and some have a negative impact. This will not necessarily show as much in the beginning, but when the students are getting warm and comfortable in the school setting, one might notice a difference. This is why the seating situation should not be set seating, but rather, the teacher should be clear that this can change in a couple of weeks or sooner. (Ogden, 2012)

When the students have established themselves in the classroom and gotten to know each other and the teacher better, it is often a time with noise and conflicts. This is the time where the students are trying to find their place in the group. Who clicks well together, who does not stand out in the crowd but is the quiet one and as earlier mentioned, who are the most popular playmates and who needs help to engage in playing with fellow students. This is also the time where students will test their teacher, if the teacher is full of empty threats or if the teacher will give negative consequences at ones. They will probably try to sabotage the teachers' instructions, by not doing as they are told or answer rudely. Even though these children often are relatively innocent, they can push it really far with comments and behavior to challenge the teachers' leadership. A good leader will prevent some of the unrest and conflicts by actively engaging in the social clarification in the class. Engagement to bring problems up for discussion with the whole class or in smaller groups. Through these conversations topics like, friendship, leadership, conflict resolutions and the teacher-student relationship should be discussed. What is acceptable, and make it clear what is not with concrete examples. In order for the discussions to be productive, the teacher needs to invite

the students to engage and participate, and help the children in finding good solutions to engage with other students and how to sort out conflicts. (Ogden, 2012)

4. Structured and direct education

Teachers spend a lot of time planning their lessons, because they are responsible for their students' learning. The time and energy they put into their lessons is so that the students will achieve motivation, pay attention, and participate in activities. The best way to begin a lesson is to be well prepared, be there before the lesson starts, write the goals for the lessons/day on the whiteboard and have all the equipment in place. (Ogden, 2012)

During the lessons, the teachers' main attention should be towards the class, maintain their attention, and preferably get their attention before the lesson starts. To get the attention of the class the teacher can start with a thinking activity; for example, show four pictures and ask which one should go. Let them have two minutes to discuss, or a calming activity with yoga music, do some activities with the arms, like touching your head, your nose, and you do different movements until you have the whole class paying attention. The attention the students give during the lesson is a sign on how successful the lecture has been. When the teacher moves around in the classroom when speaking, and manage to meet everyone's gaze, the students are more likely to pay attention. (Ogden, 2012)

In direct teaching, the teacher conveys the purpose of the activity – what should the students learn from it and what criteria is needed to succeed. Use visuals to show and be a model for the learning activity. It is crucial that each student gets to explain the activity with guidance from the teacher, this way the student can show that he/she has understood the activity and has mastered it. If the teacher spends too much time to explain a task, she/he will lose their attention so it is important to keep the instructions simple and clear. A small reminder to the teacher, to let them have time to think before one expects an answer. Preferably longer than three seconds. If the student answers wrongly, the teacher should give the student more clues and another chance to answer. (Ogden, 2012)

5. Structured learning activities

Learning activities need to be adapted to each child in the class, especially children with behavior difficulties. The activities need to be adapted to the student prerequisite; needs and

interests, activities that is adapted may help to calm an uneasy class, and to construct a positive working structure. Work sessions should be divided into shorter and more effective sessions. The sessions should contain activities that give the impression of being reasonable with short and accurate information. Students also need visual aids with colors, large font or shielding (can be that the student is facing the wall when concentrating on an assignment is needed). Every student including the weak needs to be challenged with a situation where they need to be strain to succeed. (Ogden, 2012)

6. Pedagogical use of attention, praise and encouragement

Teachers believe they praise their students more than what they actually do. (Ogden, 2012). The use of praise or confirmation is often described as the most powerful pedagogical instrument. "*Catch the children being good*" is an appeal from a group of American behavior researchers from the 1930's. (Ogden, 2012, p. 49). One can meet the same plea in the 1960's; "*It is more effective praising a child for a positive behavior than to give them a reprimand for unwanted behavior*" (Ogden, 2012, p.49). Both positive and negative attention from the teacher, affects the behavior of the student. Behavior that gets the attention has a tendency to repeat itself, whether the teacher is aware of it or not. Sometimes a negative attention is better for a student, instead of receiving no attention. This attention seeking behavior this normally applies for the children who finds it hard to get positive attention. Paradoxically it is often the negative behavior, which gets the most attention. An example where the students can get unwanted attention can be, if they are late for class, do not pay attention, forgotten indoor shoes, or their backpack outside/wardrobe, forgotten to do their homework all these are situations where the child will stand out compared to the rest of the class. This can trigger a need to correct from the teacher's side, which leads to the student getting exclusive attention from the teacher and manifests a stamp as a "problem child". When these children arrives to school at the correct time, have done their homework or have all their stuff in place, then it is easier to be unseen and not get any attention at all. This way the teacher is actually stimulating to the unwanted behavior. Be conscious on the attention the child receives, in front of the rest of the class, because with the youngest children the attention from the teacher- whether positive or negative, is teacher attention they want and seek. (Ogden, 2012)

While praise and confirmation is described as the most powerful tool, it is more important to know how to use it. Children easily look straight through exaggerations of praise. First off,

one has to mean it, it ought to be built on knowledge about the student, and it should be spontaneous, real and varied. Repeating praise like, “well done”, “nice” and “good job” does not give the same impression as; “I liked the way you handled and solved this task, because...” Many students respond best on the sense of achievement, grades and acknowledge from fellow classmates, praise serves more as an encouragement and is important for most students. (Ogden, 2012)

7. Student activity and complicity

Students require that the school covers most of their needs. The need of affiliation and the need to be seen with confirmation are probably amongst the most important needs of the student. Fellow classmates and teachers mostly cover these needs. Next to the desire of succeeding at school, educationally and socially, they need adults that guides them on their learning path, and when it gets rough and meets many challenges, someone will be there, understand them and encourage them to deal with the challenges and give them confirmation when they make it. A ground rule should be that each student should experience at least one positive experience each day, hence he/she can look forward and be excited about it. (Ogden, 2012)

To create a good environment, the students need to get involved, they need to learn and understand how their behavior affects others and through their behavior, they are a part of creating that environment. Create dialogues and explain both the positive and the negative consequences of their actions. How do their actions affect the others?

8. Proactive and preventive class leadership

According to Ogden (2012) it is easier to prevent disturbance than stop it when it has first started. How do the teachers prevent disturbance in the classroom? The best moment for a teacher to intervene is right before a situation is about to escalate. A small sign or a authoritative message to the student/s who is/are involved. By building up a positive learning environment and being forefront on picking up signals the teacher is a proactive leader. For example, if the students ends up waiting too long before getting help on a task, the student will most likely disturb someone else, and then it will spread like fire in dry grass. Suddenly the concentration is broken, and the teacher has to use time to get everyone back on track with

the work assignment. A routine for the student should be, to try a little longer and ask the person next to them before waiting for the teacher. (Ogden, 2012)

9. Messages and consequences

How many of us know the feeling, when you tell someone to do something, but they do not do it. This happens to teachers as well. They can give a message and there will be someone who just refuses to do it. It can be that the student does not understand the message, or it can be that the student does not see the point in doing it, or it can be that the student did not hear the message. This often leads to the teacher repeating himself/herself, many times until the end, where phrases like; “I am tired of repeating myself! Do as you are told”. If the message is good, then the student will most likely understand what he/she has to do next. Try formulating messages as statements rather than questions. Long and many messages at ones is confusing and functions poorly. (Ogden, 2012)

When a student behaves well, there should be a positive consequence; a positive consequence can be that the student achieves something for the whole class or that he/she gets extra time on the iPad/computer. If the student does not behave as expected, there should be a negative consequence, such as losing the possibility to participate on something fun, which the student likes, or a timeout supervised by an adult. One has to think on the student, and what might function best as a consequence. (Ogden, 2012)

10. Stop and correct disruptive behavior

A teacher can interact two ways in a problematic/conflicted situation. The first option is to “talk down” a student, showing a will that you want to understand and try to solve the problem at hand, and preventing it from escalating. On the other hand, a teacher can face the student, and go front against front (this is not recommended, because it can already trigger an angry student), but it is a normal reaction to a stressful situation – but be prepared for strong sanctions. In the long term, the last choice can have negative followings. It can make it harder to get oneself in a good position to the student concerned or have a bad impact on the learning environment. Earlier mentioned, a negative consequence should be given, but if the person who gives it has no relation with the student, it will not most likely help or prevent situations in the future. There is no doubt that many teachers ends up with a sick leave or quit their jobs if they have rough students or rough classes. (Ogden, 2012) The learning environmet center in

Norway published an article about the challenges the teacher face when he or she has a class affected by students with disciplinary problems or ignorance of instructions. When the students have this sort of behavior, it will affect the class and teacher, where it will end up being harmful for the wellbeing. (Læringsmiljøsentret 2017)

Short about different aids for schools who deals with difficult children.

PALS (Positive Behavior, supporting Learning environment and Interaction) is a structured action model, which is carefully adapted to the individual school and their needs. This model is for schools that need to develop a more positive behavior and promote a better learning environment. It is a model that takes about three years to implement, where the first year is planning, second is implementation and the third is a follow up year. The schools that implement this project need to commit fully with 80% of the personnel, parent selection and pedagogical psychological service (in Norway PPT). (A. S.-A. Arnesen 2003)

THE INCREDIBLE YEARS, developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton at the University of Washington, Seattle, USA. This is a program, which is developed to strengthen teacher classroom management strategies. Incredible Years is intended to reduce classroom aggression and noncooperation, and to promote positive interaction between classmates, school readiness and enjoyment with school activities. (The Incredible years - parents, teachers and children training series 2013)

The relations, which affects the teacher's teaching – affects the teaching outcome for the students. School should strive for a comfortable learning environment, clear expectations to the students, academically and socially, have defined learning goals, clear management and often gives feedback on progress. When students struggle to follow these guidelines, and it starts to go wrong, it is important that early measures are taken, it has been shown that measures are added too late. Why do we not add measurements when the student shows signs on lopsided development? Why do schools have the police "to wait and see"? (A. &-H. Arnesen 2011) If the school's rules are not intact, it is hard to enforce punishment if they are broken. To finish this chapter it is important to notice that students who shows serious behavior difficulties also have the most positive development as long as they are allowed to be included in the school, the school activities and the surrounding local environment. (A. Arnesen u.d.)

3 Method

3.1 Research approach

In the search for how the teachers see and work with the children they are in charge of, the need for conversation was present (Fuglseth 2006). That is why in this thesis, the main method used is a qualitative method. The method chosen as mentioned is because of the inquiry of how people experience a certain aspect in their natural setting at work. This thesis aims to seek an understanding on how it is for the teachers with a less structured method, where an interview will give the best data with the possibility with open-ended questions. The study contains an interview guide about behavior difficulties amongst children in the first grade, administered to teachers. This chapter will provide an overview of method used in this study, the research design, sampling, credibility (validity and reliability) and research ethics.

Creswell (2014 p. 4) defines qualitative method as;

“...an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation”.

In a qualitative research, there are a few types of approaches; the approach used in this thesis is a phenomenological research. Creswell explains a phenomenological research as *a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. The descriptions culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews.* (Creswell, 2014, p. 14)

After reading on the different methods, Creswell (2014) inspired with his perspective and easy read facts about the qualitative method.

3.1.1 Illumination of understanding

The journey started in 2013; the beginning of the education that led to this research. Before finishing the master's degree, the passage between a student and special needs educator started. In my line of work, I met students and colleagues with different backgrounds. The teachers were well educated, with different experiences and knowledge about the school system. Students with different needs, some in need of a bigger challenge, some sought out advices, and some needed reinforced support in different areas, such as in the classroom, hallway or in the breaks. Often the questions from colleagues kept repeating itself; "I have a student I am worried about, what can I do?" I only want to help him/her. Not an easy question to answer. The need for more information, options, help and advices— how to help teachers and students with behavioral difficulties in the classrooms. Ethically, the creation of a picture, an understanding on how it is for these teachers in their everyday life is there. I must therefore be aware that this may affect my approach and interpretation in the analysis.

3.1.2 Starting point and approach

The starting point for this assignment is to find out:

How do first grade teachers think behavioral difficulties affects the learning environment?

How do the teacher define behavioral difficulties?

How do the teacher see their relation to pupils with behavioral difficulties?

How do the teacher define a good learning environment?

With this approach, the method of choice suited the interview guide. As mentioned earlier, there are many ways to approach a research, but there are two distinguished basics methods, quantitative and qualitative. Creswell (2014) explains quantitative method as the method best suited for measuring values between different variables. Take web forms for example, which is very common type of data collection in the quantitative method. The different variables are often measurable so that you can use statistical calculation strategies to reach the results. A qualitative method is more of an approach that you use if you want to investigate and get an understanding of the opinions from a group of people. Normally the data collection is conducted through an interview on the participants' area. It is also possible to mix the two

methods, resulting in a “mixed method” approach. For example interviewing candidates on their turf, but also data collection through web forms (or similar). Looking through the questionnaire, the choice fell naturally on a qualitative approach. This approach will give the reader and myself a detailed understanding on how teachers experience a normal day at work with behavioral problematic students.

Choosing interview, the qualitative method, the question was, should the interviews be single interview or group interview. One positive side of a group interview is the possibility that the informants can complement and enrich each other knowledge when they have the conversation. On the other hand, this requires a lot from the interviewer and everyone in the group should have the possibility to say their opinion and take part in the conversation. (Fuglseth 2006)

3.1.3 Analytical approach

Qualitative method has different approaches, such as interview, observation or written text. Best suited for my research, the choice fell naturally on interview – a semi structured interview. A semi-structured interview, consists of an already made interview guide, with some questions that are already thought of, but the interviewer has the possibility to add questions with more depth to reach answers that are more complementary. The advantage of this form of interviewing is having the chance to extract answers with depth through the interview. (Fuglseth 2006). The reason being that the interest lays in the teacher’s thoughts, experiences, feelings and opinions about working with students with behavioral difficulties. Interviews may have different degrees of openness, if you follow a certain structure of interview setup, it may be challenging to get the desired flow in the interview. In the interview guide, you will find open questions, interpretation questions and discussion questions. In this way, the insurance on the various topics to investigate are affected and the candidates are free to respond to their experiences and opinions (Spradley 1979). During the interview period, it has been open for candidates to question what they find unclear or if they have something to add, which might be of importance but has not been asked for. This way one can get an insight into what is unclear, whether it is ideas, thoughts or more. With the interview, hopefully there are no direct questions, because then it might be difficult to get an insight on the “free” thoughts of the participant. In an interview, one can reach deeply in to the individual and thus get more knowledge of how it works for the individual.

3.1.4 Data collection

Furthermore, an explanation will follow, about the process before, during and after the data collection regarding the criteria around the informants, as well as a brief introduction about the informants. Additionally at the end there will be information about the interviews and the implementation of the interviews.

Criteria for the selection

The main question for this study limits the selection of informants to teachers who teach the first grade. It is desirable to find out how a teacher defines a student with behavioral difficulties. One of the reasons why this is interesting to investigate is the thoughts and experiences first grade teachers have, since they are the adults who work with these children each day. The teacher and parents are the ones who sit on valuable information; this study concentrates on the teachers' perspective. The teachers who deal with these students' day in and day out, the teachers who have to deal with parents, leaders, environment and all the paperwork that comes with the job. Other significant points needed from the informants include; how long they have worked in the school, and how long or how many times they have worked with first grade. Do the less experienced teachers have the same view as the more experienced teachers?

It should be noted that the school chosen is where I work, thus, the interviewed candidates are my colleagues. The question arises, is it good data collection if one know the informants? Yes and no, accordingly to Spradley (1979). He explains how the relationship between the informant and interviews may be relevant to the answers given. If there is trust between the ones concerned, you can get different answers than if there is a completely unknown asking the questions. Spradley (1979) further explains how he conducted an interview, where he started just to observe the informants before adapting to their culture of behavior. To get accepted and managing to ask questions more suitable for the culture and the informants. During the interview it often felt like a conversation rather than an interview, where thoughts, experiences and ideas came from them rather than answering questions. One last point, is that all the participants were female.

Before the interview, the principal at school was informed about the study and the procedure of the study. The teachers were briefly informed about the topic, all together there are seven

informants. Information is as follow; at the school where the informants teach, the arrangement is that the teachers follow one class through the first grade and through the second grade, and then they start with first grade again. With this arrangement, they will have teachers who are specialized on the youngest students and the education they are entitled to.

There were seven informants, all female with ages ranging from 27 to 46 years old. All informants are working as teachers of first grade and some have followed their class up to second grade. Their education varies some from regular teacher education, elementary education and preschool teacher education. They have all worked as a teacher for minimum 4 years. The average of working with first grade is two years.

3.1.5 The interview guide

As a semi-structured interview guide, the guide was composed before the interviews - who are the informants, questions adapted to the age and profession, what kind of answers are desirable, are the questions open-ended? These questions were in the back of my mind when the interview guide took form. It helped reading the mixed method study done by Magnar Ødegård (2017) and the book *Social Competence and Problematic Behavior Amongst Children and Young* by Ogden (2015), they bring forward some earlier and own studies on the topic, studies where professionals/children/parents are asked crucial questions when it comes to behavior difficulties. The interview guide, which took form and tried out in the pilot interview, needed some minor changes before it was ready.

At first was pilot interview, with the main goal being to check if the questions were clear and the duration of the interview. The time was set to approximately 25 minutes. Each interview started with information about the research topic with openness for questions from the informants. All the interviews were recorded, the informants were informed about the anonymity, how the recordings would be saved and when they will be deleted, and that there would be no one else with access to this information. The first questions are informative, information about the informants background; sex, age and education. During the interviews, the atmosphere was good, the interviews were conducted in a conference room or in the teachers own classroom. In the end, the informants were asked if there was anything they felt should have been mentioned, or if they wanted to add some information they had thought of but didn't find it fitting to say during the interview.

All the interviews were conducted during two weeks, on different days, after teaching hours, and in between meetings. To have had so many informants managing to find time to participate was lucky. The implementation of all interviews went well and the confidence in the role as an interviewer after each interview grew. During some of the interviews, the questions were adapted to the informant, based on earlier thoughts and experiences the informant had given. Often there was also a follow up question to the informant to clarify or to get additional information. The flow of information differed from informant to informant. Some of the informants opened up more about themselves while some were more reserved and quiet. It was very exciting to listen to each of the informants. On the other hand, what can be improved or be changed for the next interview? Maybe able to be more patient, giving each of the informant time to elaborate and think, when stillness occurs, it does not necessarily mean to hurry up and quickly ask a new question.

3.1.6 Transcription of the interview

After the interviews, it was important to check if the whole interview have been recorded. The recordings were saved on a memory stick, which is only used for the study. Transcribing the interviews took longer time than expected, Writing down every word the informant said, just to make sure nothing of value got lost. With the thought of all information written down, it might be easier to compare the data and find information with significance.

3.1.7 Analysis process

After the transcription, I compared the interviews up against each other, with the research question in my mind. Based on the theory, I looked for elements of introspection that could illuminate the categories of class leadership, behavioral disabilities, the teacher as a model and competence. Such was the framework for the results prepared.

The significance of the informants' experiences and their thoughts and explanations for why. Here it is my job to look at the information with new eyes, and connect it to already existing literature or earlier studies; maybe there will be some new information that appears (Fuglseth 2006). The way I interpret the answers is probably not in the same way another researcher with another background of experiences would interpret the same answers. We are all different individuals with a different point of view on the world. The best I can do is to

compare the results from each informant against each other. The data collected is written notes and tape-recorded. These notes will be discussed up against the literature.

3.2 Reliability, validity and generalization

How valid and reliable is the conducted research? Do I manage to answer the research question? To which degree have I managed to answer the asked question, measured up to the literature and the questions I have asked the informants? It is not always easy to consider these questions. In this qualitative research, I have tried to accentuate some relevant theory connected to the topic, to support the process in making an interview guide - relevant for this research and to back up the results of the research conducted.

A weakness in this study is that all the informants are from the same school; this means if teachers from different schools and school sizes had participated, the answers could be different. Additional, if I had chosen observations next to the interviews, there might be findings that could back up my results, or helped me during the interviews with my questions. I might have had other questions that would give other answers.

The informants are my colleagues therefore; they may not want to answer the questions with all of their thoughts. They might be reserved in relation to giving out information, or answering the questions. On the other hand, according to Spradly (1979) it may be an advantage to know the informants because one of the important aspect about an interview is to get the informants to talk. We often make conversations with people we know, and with whom we share interest and philosophical values. (Fuglseth 2006) Knowing the informants can be an invitation to a more open and relaxed interview, an interview where they can feel at ease and answer openly to all questions. At the same time, I need to be open minded to their opinions, attitudes or experiences that are new and unknown to me. In addition to this, it is also necessary to be open minded in the process of observations and interpretations, before, during and after the interview. (Spradley 1979)

Further on the data collection is based on the interviews, the questions asked during the interviews is the foundation for the data material used in this study. Additional I must considerate that their daily form or what they might have experienced that day, can influence the informants answers. Do they have an agenda with their answers? Do they see me as their colleague or a researcher?

This study emphasizes more the internal validity than the external validity, thus there are no possibility to generalize this research findings, however there are possibilities to transfer some findings from the given context in this study to comparative contexts.

One last point I have to enlighten is that English is my second language, which means I have to translate all the information from the interview considering the interview were done in Norwegian. This means the way I have interpret the answers from the informants have to be translated into a second language, the readers might not interpret the answers the same way as I did. Considering during the interviews I got to read their body language as well as getting their answers. I have to point out that some of the answers where hard to translate, some local sayings is harder to translate when you are not sure if the English language have the same sayings. I hope I have interpreted it correctly and managed to translate it in the best possible way.

3.3 Ethical considerations

What is ethics? Ethics is about caring for others, or take into account that others might not feel, think or act the same as you do. In an interview connection, we can meet someone who has many experiences connected to the topic, and can be emotionally influenced by these experiences. To have a set balance between the interviewer and informant, it can be good to start the interview by clarifying the roles one has during the session. The interview topics, which contain sensitive information, should be handled with care. If the informant changes his/her mind about sharing or continue this information, the interviewer must respect those choices. (Fuglseth 2006)

Before one conducts a study that contains personal information, one has to submit a proposal with the aim of the study and information about the method and how sensitive information will be handled and kept. This proposal is submitted at NSD (Norwegian Center for Research Data) for approval. When the project is done and approved, the data will be deleted. The hope of this study is to help with some questions teachers may have, or guide them further on in a quest of continuing their education on the topic. Since I have experienced children with behavior difficulties, I might have my own perception of the case, which is why it is important that I try to put my thoughts aside as I listen to the informants, about how they experience their day with the children.

4 Presentation of results

There were seven informants, all female with ages ranging from 27 to 46 years old.

Informant 1, 27-year-old female. Elementary school teacher, worked four years as a teacher and one year as an assistant. Second time working with first grade.

Informant 2, 29-year-old female, four years of teacher education, worked four years as a teacher and second time working with first grade.

Informant 3, 31-year-old female, teacher education plus a year of special needs education. Worked six years as a teacher, one year with first grade.

Informant 4, 31-year-old female with a bachelor in elementary education and mathematics, worked six and a half year as a teacher. Worked twice with first grade.

Informant 5, 31-year-old female with preschool teacher education, 1 year teacher education, one year of mathematics and is now currently studying educational guidance. Worked seven years in school, second time with first grade.

Informant 6, 35-year-old female with teaching education, Norwegian teacher and currently taking her master degree. Worked eleven years, as a teacher and it is her third time with first grade.

Informant 7, 46-year-old female with teacher education and a nursery nurse, worked 18 years as a teacher, and it is her seventh or eighth time as a first grade teacher.

4.1.1 Class leadership

Good class leader possesses characteristics such as caring, warm, generous, see the child as it is, sets clear limits and routines, has good teacher – student relation, is fair and clear, predictable, has a good practice and sets expectations.

“I believe I am quite good as a class leader, I feel I have created good relations between the children and I, but there are days I am a bit fluttery. There are days the daily fitness is not present, which of course impacts the day...” (Informant number 1), *“I am a strict class leader, I always start new classes to be clear and definite, so they know what can be expected*

of me, after a while we can let go of a bit. They will find a sense that they always know what I do and say and what is expected of them. I use humor and clarity at the same time. I see myself as a warm class leader". (Informant 5). Most of the informants agree on that the ideal class leader they just explained is the goal. Some just wished they had more time to build good relationships with those children who need time to settle and let someone get close to them. *"If you have class challenges, it's not always possible to be equally consistent"*. (Informant 4)

All the teachers use TIEY³ and learning partners. They vary the education with lectures, gatherings, computers, visual support, individual work, smartboard and whiteboard, song, dramatizations and group work. Informant 5 stated; *"I am the kind of teacher who likes to think outside the box, amongst other things I care for outdoor education, which is very effective, especially for the children who finds it hard to sit still"*. Another teacher (informant 4) said; *"I try to have activities where they can use their bodies and be active, but then the challenge is to separate between play and work, but we just need to practice more"*.

One of the biggest challenge teachers meet in their everyday life at work is time! (Informant 3 and 5). Time to manage everything they plan and need to do. Informant 1 says it varies from class to class, but time to follow each child and have a teacher-parent relationship, which can require some work. Informant 6, *"working with social competence takes time, talk about why we should not swear and why we should not hit each other's. They are very impulsive and cannot seem to stop this behavior, the class has a rude tone towards each other's and towards the adults, as I have never experienced before"*. Another informant (2) says she finds it challenging to meet children who have emotional difficulties. Informant 4 answers that the challenge lays with the children who needs something extra – *"I feel that I am trying, but it is not good enough"*. The constant work with social competence and conflict resolution. The last teacher (informant 7) said, *"My biggest challenge is to be alone with the class, if someone loses their concentration, and I try to get them back on track, the rest of the class has lost concentration. When you work with first grade, you have to be 100% present at all time because they are so young and so many – That is not possible all the time, a little cold would*

³ TIEY (Early (Tidlig) Effort (Innsats) Early Years) this is a form of education based on stations for the children. The class is divided into groups, each group composed by children on the same level of learning outcome. They will have about 15 minutes on each station. There is one station which is steered by a teacher, and the other groups with individual activities or group activities, all with a learning outcome. (Aamli 2014)

set you back a few percent.” She also points out the importance of having rules and good routines from the start, which have a preventive effect for the rest of the school years.

“When you work as a teacher, you are never done with work, there is always something you can work with, the challenge is to separate the urgent work from the less urgent work.” – Informant 5. Another teacher (informant 1) reminds herself, to make sure she gives attention to each child in the class, and differentiate the academic tasks, in order to give each child a sense of achievement.

- *“Well, I do work a lot of overtime... And I wish the first grade would not have to have goals of competence hanging over their shoulders all the time”.* (Informant 3)

One teacher (informant 4) explains that she tries to praise the children instead of reprimand and correct them. An additional informant 3, answered that she tries to explain the consequences of their actions, in a way they will understand, when she has the patience to do so. Sometimes she talks about it with the whole class present. The challenge then is to make sure that all the children pays attention and can participate.

4.1.2 Behavior difficulties

Two of the teachers (informant 1 and 7) had a very similar definitions of a child with behavior difficulties: *“A student who has many challenges when it comes to dealing with a normal school day, the child differ from what is considered “normal”, and need extra help throughout the day”*

“A student with behavior difficulties, is a child who ruin their own learning as well as others, who ends up in conflicts and has an impaired mood” – Informant 2

“A student who finds it hard to follow the common rule, and they do not have the relations it should have. I believe that the child never wants to be bad, it is just that the child does not know or manage to be better in a certain situation” - Informant 3.

“A student who struggles socially, building relations, use their body language to try and reach out to others, by hitting, kicking, or bad comments, sits uneasy and poor concentration” - Informant 5

“A student who has a behavior that is very demanding that affect the learning outcome, even with reminders, repetitions of rules, and still struggles with the behavior in a way it affects the learning outcome and the other children in the class plus the learning environment. I believe that none of these children really want to have this behavior” – Informant 4

“A child who lacks the way to express himself/herself, and these expressions get misunderstood by others, which leads to conflicts. And struggles to see the consequences of their own actions” - Informant 6

Does the teachers believe these students have an impact on the rest of the class? One teacher (informant 7) answered yes and no, based on the reason that these students has a lot to bring into the class, both in a positive way and sometimes in a negative way. What she considers to be the biggest gap between the students are their learning outcome, because if they struggle in first grade, it will create a gap between these students and they will always be a little after the others, and the gap will only get bigger. The motivation disappears and the struggle becomes a challenge.

Informant 6 agrees that it can both be resourceful and damaging for the child, the child can end up with no one wanting to be with the child causing ignorance, irritation and exclusion. This is clearly not the desired outcome. A third teacher (informant 4) has the same point of view but adds that the child will steal a lot of the adult attention away from the rest of the class.

A fourth teacher (informant 5) explains that a teacher will have that problem if there is room for this behavior. If one starts with a set of rules and expectations, and tells the other students what is acceptable and not, there will not be room for merrymaking and unrest.

“I noticed a huge difference from the last class I had and the one I have now. The whole dynamic in the class was different”. – Informant 1. If it is a class of 28 students, this will be a complex group with many different personalities; it will be the best behaved and it will be the rebellious children, the cautious and vulnerable and those who are dominant and outgoing. (Ogden, 2015). Some classes requires more work than others, or as Holland (2013) would say it requires more adult skills with a more challenging class.

These teachers and their assistants spends a lot of their time on their students. *“Normally it is the assistant who spends most of the time with the children who needs an extra break. Some*

kids just need an extra break because it is difficult to concentrate over time or sit still on a chair for too long". – Informant 7

One of the teachers has one challenging child (the child experienced a lot to be difficult right in the period the interview took place) in the class, in the interview she talked about the day before, where she spent 30 minutes overall of the education time. 15 minutes with other members of the class who were involved in a case including the child with behavior difficulties, 30 minutes after the school day with a conversation to get advices from a colleague and 30 minutes after hours playing chess to build teacher-student relation.⁴ (Informant 4).

Another teacher answered that on average she spends somewhere between ten minutes to an hour each day talking with three of her students. *"That is too much out of the school day compared to what the remaining 24 students get"*. The assistant probably uses about the same amount of time with the three students. (Informant 6)

In addition, the rest of the teachers have the same point of view in that, they feel they often use five minutes here and ten minutes there, throughout the whole day. These students often get a lot of attention, both negative and positive attention. This includes educational support, comments on misbehavior, reminding, repetitively and help to concentrate.

4.1.3 An average day

Most of the teachers have an hour before the school bell ring and they go and meet the students outside. During this hour, the teachers make sure all the equipment for the day is available and the classroom is ready. If it is TIEY, they make sure the stations are ready. In addition, most of them have time for a cup of coffee with the colleagues. During the week, two out of five days are spent on meetings with the leaders, and the other three days are spent in teams planning the next week. After school hours, the teacher concentrates on correcting homework, goals for each day or week, answering emails from parents and so on. Several of the teachers work overtime about two days a week, where they come to work seven in the morning and goes home at about nine in the evening. Still they are left with a feeling they

⁴ A school day in Norway the first graders have 4 hours of lessons and about 5 hours if the breaks are included.

have not finished all they should have finished or spent enough time on planning fun activities.

Some of the teachers manage to implement the plan they have 50-85% of the time. The other teachers pointed out that it is hard to set a number to it. Often they need to work on building a relation, work on social competence, maybe the day need to be changed in the last minute because what you planned last week does not work out that day after all. Maybe there have been episodes throughout the day that need to be discussed and possibly to build on what the class has to contribute with during the lessons.

4.1.4 Teacher as a role model

Five of the teachers believe they have a good relation with their students, some of them feel they have to work extra with some, or that some need that reassurance and confirmation that you are there for them and like them just the way they are. Two of the teachers feel like they need more time to build a good and stable relation because most of their time is spent on education, learning letters or numbers, conflicts and rules. Time easily goes to one or the other, hard to manage both the learning and the fun part where you can get to know everyone.

“Absolutely, yes.” Is the answer from all the teachers when it comes to having a bad day and if that influences the class. A bad day can be because lack of sleep, bad morning, bad week or sickness like a cold. Then it will have an impact on the class, especially when you work with the first grade, where they are still in a habituation situation when it comes to school and everything that follows.

4.1.5 Competence

Four of the teachers (informant 1, 4, 6 and 7) feel they have too poor of competence when it comes to children with behavior difficulties, and wish they could increase their knowledge on the topic. Informant 1 suggested that maybe a course on the topic could help, or that the school should have some sort of forum. A forum where you can ask questions, because often there are some other teachers who sits on many tips and information who you could ask. One is not sure, because all of the children are so different; *“you never know what works, as a teacher you try and you try, if it still does not work, it affects the self-esteem and afflicts stress”*. – Informant 6. Another teacher feel she is competent, especially because she has

toddler pedagogy as a background, she uses it often and it seems to work most of the times. One more teacher feels competent, because she has one year of special needs education, and feels she can use a lot from what she learned through that study.

The resources found at the school these teachers work at are, r-team⁵, coworkers, leaders, special needs educators, parents, pedagogical psychological service and speech therapist. One of them explains that if you have a child you are worried about, you need to consult with the leader closest to you; he or she will be the first one to give advice. Then further on it is also normal to ask the others on your team. When the teacher has received advices the teacher needs to try them out, if it is still not helping, the leader will bring it up with the r-team. The teacher will be able to ask there for help and guidance there. Sometimes it goes fast other times not so fast. One teacher points out that it depends on the leader sometimes too, how fast the help arrives. *“When it works – it is good, but often it takes a lot of time before one gets help”, “It should be a group for low threshold cases, a group you can contact when you just need help, guidance and advices fast”*.

Before ending the interview, one of the teachers pointed out that she thinks that first grade has too many students in the class. *“I have a class with 27 students, where everybody requires theirs, but at some point you just have to put all work aside and go home, the worst part is when you feel you have to reject a child because there and then you just do not have the possibility...”* Another teacher is missing early effort, the children who are struggling with the academics; need extra support from the beginning, not after a year. It should also be more room for games and fun, not so much pressure on language and mathematics. An extra teacher or special needs educator who has time to be in each classroom, give guidance and has the possibility to take on groups of children who needs extra support with the school academics from the very first weeks of school.

Two teachers do not get why there are not enough resources in the schools, every class should have an environmental worker instead of an assistant who does not have any pedagogical background. All grades should have an extra teacher. When you are studying to become a teacher, there should be a larger focus on strategies to prevent burned out teachers. If it is strategies on class leadership or other strategies she is not sure off, but some sort of strategies.

⁵ Resource team often consist of the principal, the assisting principal, inspector, counselor, special needs educator and a represent from the pedagogical psychological service.

On the other hand, two teachers point out that sometimes a child gets a diagnosis too fast. Especially children who are not “A4” those who are not made to be inside the four walls of the classroom. Why there is no room for alternative education, because many of these children has a lot to contribute, instead they get a stamp on the forehead as a “problem child”.

The last teacher has an additional point, that she misses the possibility to have time for meetings with the personnel at afterschool. All adults who work with the children should have the possibility to exchange information and share experiences.

5 Short discussion of results

In this chapter, some of the answers from the informants will be enlighten and compared to the theory mentioned in this study.

The teachers agreed on several important aspects a teacher should practice. Words like relations, see the child, clear, routines and expectations were some of the words repeating itself.

Ogden (2012) and later on Arnesen (2011) gives their point of view on how they define a good class leader. A good class leader should have a well-established and good teacher-student relation - educate everyone with adaptations for each student, good organization in the classroom, fun and educational activities. The teacher needs to help setting the norms and rules for the classroom for it to become a safe and welcoming learning environment. Also, be good at reading their students, to find out which student has the norms that affect the other students, both positively and negatively. (Ogden, Klasseledelse: Praksis, teori og forskning 2012) School should strive for a comfortable learning environment, clear expectations to the students, academically and socially, have defined learning goals, clear management and often gives feedback on progress. (A. &-H. Arnesen 2011)

Some of the teacher repeatedly pointed out that they wished they would have some more time to build good teacher-student relationships. If we look back to the theory, it is mentioned many times how important it is to build that good relation between a teacher and a student. In order to prevent learning- and teaching inhibited behavior in a classroom, which lead to a very high level of noise, conflicts, weak progress academically and negative teacher-student relations. Moreover, it makes it harder for a teacher to teach and for the students to learn. (Nordahl 2005). We also know from experience with our own family and friends that a good relationship takes times and work to develop. Children who have experienced little trust and stability in their previous relationships are likely to be more reluctant to trust that someone cares. (Mitchem 2005). It does take time to build a good and stable relation. Midthassel (2015) suggest that since the relation building between teacher and student is so important, it should start before the student starts schooling, for example by sending the student a greeting.

An additional question, what if the room for play and fun would come back to the first graders, might there be less academic or social struggles. (Holterman 2017). What if there were room for thinking a little outside the box for all teachers, like informant 5 does who stated; *“I am the kind of teacher who likes to think outside the box, amongst other things I care for outdoor education, which is very effective, especially for the children who finds it hard to sit still”*. Alternatively, as informant 4 said, *“I try to have activities where they can use their bodies and be active, but then the challenge is to separate between play and work, but we just need to practice more”*. Why do teachers feel like they have to pressure their students into learning how to read and write the first year, but do not have time to build strong and good relation between themselves and the students. The focus is on teaching goals, which is mainly spent sitting still at a desk most days, instead of learning by exploring, playing and interacting socially. (Ertesvåg 2018). In Norway, 84% of the teachers believe that the first year of schooling is too theoretical and difficult for the youngest. (Ertesvåg 2018)

Having a learning- and teaching inhibited behavior in a classroom can lead to a very high level of noise, conflicts, weak progress academically and negative teacher-student relations. Moreover, it makes it harder for a teacher to teach and for the students to learn. (Nordahl, 2005). There are some similarities between definitions by Ogden (2015) and some of the informants. Behavior that affects the learning environment and outcome as well as being in conflicts are time consuming for many of the teachers.

Learning and teaching impairment is disquiet, disturbance and interruptions as mutual reinforcing behavior among more students, leading to lack of work or work effort, and thus to a poorer learning environment. (Ogden, 2015, P. 14)

“A student who has a behavior that is very demanding that affect the learning outcome, even with reminders, repetitions of rules, and still struggles with the behavior in a way it affects the learning outcome and the other children in the class plus the learning environment. I believe that none of these children really want to have this behavior” – Informant 4

Simultaneously there are the students who are always seeking extra attention from the adults or fellow students, or those who need clear boundaries and comprehensive support. Norm- and rule breaking behavior can be harder to handle in a schooling situation. (Ogden, Sosial Kompetanse og Problematferd blant barn og unge 2015). The second definition by Ogden (2015) follows as:

Norm- and rule breaking behavior are actions that disrupt the school's expectations for the student role. Behavior that violates basic values and norms for responsible, considerate and friendly behavior and prevents positive interaction with others. It inhibits teaching and learning activities and thus the students' learning and development. (Ogden, 2015, P. 15)

“A student who finds it hard to follow the common rule, and they do not have the relations it should have. I believe that the child never wants to be bad, it is just that the child does not know or manage to be better in a certain situation” - Informant 3.

Even the third more serious behavior can be seen in one of the informants' definition.

Serious behavioral difficulties manifest themselves as persistent hostility and repeated physical aggressive behavior. The behavior is often stable over time and is not affected notably by the consequences it triggers. In youth, the issues include offenses, violence, escapes, shame and opposition of adult authority. (Ogden, 2015, P. 16)

“A student who struggles socially, building relations, use their body language to try and reach out to others, by hitting, kicking, or bad comments, sits uneasy and poor concentration” - Informant 5

These definitions varies from the child who needs guidance and help to concentrate, to the child who express himself/herself by body language. If these children are not worked with correctly and are provided with help, the problems will probably not go away at first. Pupils with a difficult behavior often have not cracked the friendship code, and have not achieved the social skills they need to feel good socially. Pupils, who have a relationship based on conflicts with their teachers, can at the same time be very dependent on them. The teacher can therefore perceive them as appealing, helpless or demanding. As students grow older, this difficult behavior may develop into a more physically undesirable behavior. Something that corresponds to several unfortunate episodes for the student and those around. (Ogden, Sosial Kompetanse og Problematferd blant barn og unge 2015)

Many teachers feel unprepared to deal with children who have behavior difficulties, and the beliefs they are left with is the unsuccessful ability to include and teach these children (Mitchem 2005). This is supported by a study protocol from BMC Public Health, where challenging behavior is commonly reported source of stress and burned out teachers. (Ford 2012). Mitchem (2005) believes that in addition to stress and all the never-ending paper work

- teacher who deals with children with behavior difficulties are at a greater risk of becoming burnt out and leaving their work. Informant 6 mentioned that *“you never know what works, as a teacher you try and you try, if it still does not work, it affects the self-esteem and afflicts stress”*. Or the feeling one of the other informants were left with, *“I have a class with 27 students, where everybody requires theirs, but at some point you just have to put all work aside and go home. The worst part is when you feel you have to reject a child because there and then you just do not have the possibility...”*

What does it mean to be the leader of a class? This theme can be difficult, because of the connection to noise and disorder in the classroom. The role as a leader is about the difficult balance between structure and freedom, in between the need of the teacher to be in control and the students' wishes of independence. The teachers' role is constantly changing, with the students who come and go and the school and society that is in a constant change. The expectations students, parents, coworkers, school have to the single teacher where they need to educate everyone with adaptations, good organization in the classroom, fun and educational activities. A good teacher also has a good teacher-student relation, where the main goal is to get the students to be self-regulated, which leads to responsibility over self-educating and behavior in the school. (Ogden, 2012)

Ogden (2012) presented ten guidelines for practical class leadership. Many of these steps can be found in the informants answers. The teachers varies their education with visual support, they have activities that requires group work or a teaching partner, gatherings, songs and drama. TIEY is also a teaching activity, which is used on a regular basis. Here the students move from station to station, executing different activities. It is a variable learning environment, coexistent with what Ogden (2012) describes under the first point, physical environment. The optimal classroom is adapted to the activity and the students who are participating (Ogden, 2012). Further on Ogden (2012) and Roland (2017) enlightens the importance of having good teacher-student relation, if this relation is not there, the students can test the teachers authority. This often happens by breaking rules and answer the teacher in a bad manner. Five of the teachers believe they have a good relation with their students, some of them feel they have to work extra with some, or that some need that reassurance and confirmation that you are there for them and like them just the way they are. Ogden (2012) points out that the best way to begin a lesson is to be well prepared, be there before the lesson starts, write the goals for the lessons/day on the whiteboard and have all the equipment in

place. Most of the informants have an hour before the school bell ring and they go and meet the students outside. During this hour, the teachers make sure all the equipment for the day is available and the classroom is ready, if it is TIEY, they make sure the stations are ready.

Both positive and negative attention from the teacher, affects the behavior of the student. Behavior that gets the attention has a tendency to repeat itself, whether the teacher is aware of it or not. Sometimes a negative attention is better for a student, instead of receiving no attention. This attention-seeking behavior this normally applies for the children who finds it hard to get positive attention. Paradoxically it is often the negative behavior, which gets the most attention. (Ogden, 2012). One of the teacher pointed out how much time she thinks she spends with the students who requires the most attention. In average she spends somewhere between ten minutes to an hour each day talking with three of her students. *“That is too much out of the school day compared to what the remaining 24 students get”*. The assistant probably use about the same amount of time with the three students. (Informant 6)

In additional the rest of the teachers have the same point of view, they feel they often use five minutes here and ten minutes there, throughout the whole day. These students often get a lot of attention, both negative and positive attention; this includes educational support, comments on misbehavior, reminders, repetitively and help to concentrate.

“When it works – it is good, but often it takes a lot of time before one gets help”, *“It should be a group for low threshold cases, a group you can contact when you just need help, guidance and advices fast”*. One of the teachers gave this answer about the resources they have at the school she works at. Why does it take a lot of time before the teacher gets help? Would it not be better to help at once, to prevent that the student adapt a bad behavior or the teacher will be burned out? Sometimes it must be better to prevent or to be proactive as Mitchem (2005) points out, to give teachers tools they can try out before it escalates. It is better to prevent fire than extinguish fire.

Before ending the interview, one of the teacher pointed out that she think that first grade have too many students in the class. *“I have a class with 27 students, where everybody requires theirs, but at some point you just have to put all work aside and go home, the worst part is when you feel you have to reject a child because there and then you just do not have the possibility...”* Two teachers’, do not get why there are not enough resources in the schools, every class should have an environmental worker instead of an assistant with no pedagogical

background. If all grades would have an extra teacher and environmental worker in the classroom for the two first years, would it not prevent burned out teachers? If time is so consuming, and they work so much for these kids, and are left with the feeling that it is not good enough. These kids are our future, should we not invest in them?

6 Closing discussion

How do first grade teachers think behavioral difficulties affect the learning environment?

From the theory and interviews we have gotten a wider understanding of different definitions, all definition is very clear in their meaning. We can agree that there are different levels of behavioral difficulties. Some difficulties are on a lower level and then you have the behavior, which is considered more outraging and a more difficult behavior. The most common behavior in first grade, are the children who finds the school norms and rules challenging. Additional, there are the children who have not broken the social code yet, and need to work with social competence. Many of the teachers find it time consuming spending five minutes her and 10 minutes there, in the end of the day a lot of time is spent mediating instead of teaching. If the student is constantly testing the teacher and the teacher feels like she is trying everything, it will take its toll on the teacher, and if the teacher is having a bad day, many of the students will feel it too. It is like a drop in the water. The water drop hitting the water can be looked at as a small event, but it can develop to something bigger, just as the rings in the water shows us. The rings in the water around the drop, comes from one action. The rings around symbolize the environments around.

All the teachers are well educated and has years of experience, some more than others. Some of them still feel they could learn more on the topic for example good strategies to help these children, at the same time it might reduce some stress, less burned out teachers or avoided the feeling that they are just not good enough in their job. Perhaps each school should have a team that helps the teachers with guidance, or can have some alternative days during the week with outdoor school in smaller groups for those energetic kids. It would be interesting to start a project where you follow a first grade that starts with one or two environmental workers and an extra teacher, to see if that would prevent some of the classroom noise. If not there should be a forum at the school, a low threshold forum, where you can ask for tips and guidance, I know there are many forums like this on social medias, where teachers ask other teachers for tips and tricks when it comes to education.

We have to remember that some of these children are only five when they start, end the expectations set by teachers and amongst themselves are high. They have many years of school; the first years should be motivational and filled with good experiences. To experience

that, I believe children need good teachers, clear role models, a class with good relations between the teacher and the students but also amongst the students. The teachers have to be clear from the beginning with rules and expectations but also warm, and inclusive, take time to get to know each other at least the first couple of weeks.

To reach a good learning environment, there are many different factors. Schools and their leaders are constantly working towards improving their work on different aspects, for example bullying. They help teachers in becoming good leaders, and arrange for teachers and students to create good relationships. They have a culture for learning and the cultural environment and creates good relations between parents and the school.

(Utdanningsdirektoratet 2016). To help teachers, the need good leaders who will not use a long time before they help, they have to show that they are there for their teachers and want to help them in any possible way they can.

We know that different class have different individuals. Individuals with different needs, which can acquire low adult skills or high adult skills. If I have interpreted the teachers correctly, children with behavioral difficulties impacts the learning environment by interrupting, or end up in the middle of conflicts, get a stamp as the one who stands out, finds it harder to concentrate and disrupt in class and is often a child one spends a lot of time with, both negatively and positively. Constantly a work in progress next to meetings, preparing, never ending paper work. It would be interesting to have asked the teachers if they have ever felt like switching jobs, or been on a sick leave because it is just been too much. Tips for further studies would then be, interview more teachers, different schools, class size, workers with the class, alternative education, over time, what gives the best results and why do they get good results in enhancing the learning environment.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Background information:

- Age:
- Gender:
- Education:
- How long have you worked as a teacher:
- How many times with first grade:

Class leadership:

- What signifies as a good teacher in your eyes?
 - Do you see yourself as the good teacher you just described?
- What kind of teaching methods do you use in your classroom?
- What do you consider as the biggest challenge in your everyday life at work?

Behavior difficulties:

- How do you define behavior difficulties?
- Do you think the behavior you just defined would have an impact on the rest of the class?
- How much time do you spend on a child you consider has a difficult behavior.

An average day:

- Tell me about a regular day at work.
- How much of the planned education do you manage to implement throughout one school day?

Teacher as a role model:

- How do you experience the relation between you and your students?
- If you have a bad day, do you think your bad day impact your students?

Competence:

- If you had a child in your classroom with behavior difficulties, how do you see your competence working with this child with behavior difficulties?
- Do you have any help or resources at your school?

Ending:

- Do you have anything you want to add before we finish?