ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL TEACHERS’ EFFICACY PERCEPTIONS
TEACHING STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES

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By

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The purpose of this qualitatively-driven mixed methods inquiry was to explore teachers’ perceptions of their efficacy as it relates to their role teaching students with behavioral difficulties—specifically students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, Autism, and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder—in an alternative school setting. Teacher efficacy has received significant attention by educational researchers; however, minimal research has explored the teacher efficacy of these teachers, and little is known about their experiences in alternative school environments.

Surveys and in-depth interviews were utilized to provide rich data on four alternative school teachers’ efficacy perceptions. Through data analysis, three key findings emerged that related to the teachers’ sense of efficacy, specifically their sense of efficacy in classroom engagement, instructional practices, and classroom management. These findings displayed the complex nature of the construct and delineated the difficulty in identifying the teachers as exclusively highly efficacious in these three realms of their teaching. Findings were also examined in relationship to the literature in teacher efficacy and in teaching students with behavioral difficulties. This research provides an underexplored representation of this specific teaching role and has important implications relevant to current school settings, as well as general and special teacher education programs.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students with behavioral difficulties are a unique population of students. Educating students with behavioral difficulties—specifically students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), autism, and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—involves a comprehensive effort of supporting their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004). This multi-faceted effort is challenging and demanding as students may exhibit inappropriate, off-task, and disruptive behaviors, as well as antisocial behaviors and symptoms of depression in the classroom (Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002; Kauffman, 2001; Sutherland & Singh, 2004).

Despite a recent increase in research concerning students with behavioral difficulties, they continue to have poor academic outcomes. Teaching students with behavioral difficulties involves not only teaching them skills and behaviors that allow them to succeed in the classroom; their education also needs to focus on their ability to function at home and in the community. This is not always the easiest or the most convenient (Strain, Schwartz, & Barton, 2011); however, when students lose the opportunity to master basic academic skills that are necessary for their success in society, they face significant hardships for the rest of their lives, both economically and socially (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008; Zweig, 2003).
Because of the complexity involved in their education, teachers of students with behavioral difficulties face major obstacles in the classroom (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Sutherland & Singh, 2004). In any given school day, a student’s battle with his/her behaviors and emotions may take precedence over planned academic lessons. I have struggled with this personally as I have taught students with behavioral difficulties, and I have witnessed this struggle with my colleagues. This unintended lack of attention to academics can result in less academic time in the classroom. Having less time to teach, the teacher can begin to feel discomfort, uncertainty, and doubt in his/her teaching abilities. For example, in a study of 109 teachers of students with behavioral difficulties, Sutherland, Denny, and Gunter (2005) found that teachers felt least comfortable in this area of their teaching role. Because of the challenging nature of their classrooms, these teachers had low levels of confidence in their ability to plan and deliver academic instruction to their students.

Research over the past thirty-five years has demonstrated that a teacher’s sense of efficacy is related to and predictive of various components related to academic success. Teacher efficacy (TE), a teacher’s belief in his/her ability to impact student learning, has been related to both student and teacher characteristics and outcomes, specifically:

- student academic achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, 1992)
- teachers’ predictions and perceptions of their students’ academic achievement (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Tournaki & Podell, 2005)
• teacher dedication to the profession (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986)
• teacher persistence in overcoming obstacles in the classroom (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010)
• teacher willingness to implement new instructional strategies (Berman et al., 1977; de Mesquita, & Drake, 1994; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988).

In this research study, the teacher efficacy construct is shown to be powerful in understanding the complex nature of teaching students with behavioral difficulties. The results of this research are useful to provide overall awareness of this population of teachers in the educational community and to improve current school settings and teacher education programs that support and prepare teachers to work with teachers in this school context.

**Significance**

In the current environment, teachers have few opportunities to really assess and scrutinize the underlying assumptions behind the approaches they use; nor do they have the chances to examine how different approaches could help or hurt their practice (Fries & Cochran-Smith, 2006). The study of teacher efficacy has the potential to improve the field (McArthur, 2008); however, little research has explored the teacher efficacy of these special educators.

Teacher efficacy research has identified important aspects of the construct that could be pertinent in the study of teachers of students with behavioral difficulties. First, there is a relationship between TE and how teachers perceive and react to student behavior. Not only do teachers with high TE spend less instructional time trying to
“control” their students and their behaviors (Denham & Michael, 1981; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), but research has demonstrated that TE is related to teachers’ views and expectations of their students. For instance, teachers with low self-efficacy predict that students who exhibit negative behaviors will have poorer academic outcomes (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Tournaki & Podell, 2005). TE further impacts student behavior through students’ conceptions of their academic ability (Denham & Michael, 1981). This is particularly important for a population of students that can display negative behaviors and struggle academically. Teachers with high TE could potentially be positive influences on students and with their school successes, both academically and behaviorally.

TE has also been significantly correlated with teachers’ commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007). Though all teachers have issues in the classroom, teachers with high TE cope better with emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) and seem to persist through barriers more than their low TE counterparts (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008). This dimension of teacher efficacy could be particularly important to a population of teachers that faces significant challenges in the classroom and is prone to burnout.

This dissertation study explored the teacher efficacy of teachers serving students with behavioral difficulties in an alternative school environment utilizing a qualitatively-driven mixed methods approach. A considerable amount of research in teacher efficacy has focused on how to appropriately measure and define teacher efficacy utilizing quantitative research methods (Denzine, Cooney, & McKenzie, 2005; Henson, Kogan &
Though this research has provided a useful basis in understanding how teacher efficacy could benefit teachers and students, the numerical results of these studies has largely been unusable to the larger educational community (Wheatley, 2005). This research has not dug deep enough into teachers’ perceptions past what teachers perceive through Likert-based scales to be applicable to schools, teachers, or teacher education programs.

The findings of this research study generate a more complex and holistic understanding of teacher efficacy and thus benefit multiple audiences in the educational community. For instance, this research contributes to a body of knowledge on teacher efficacy research. The findings have implications for further research and add to our understanding of the teacher efficacy construct, in general. This further understanding of teacher efficacy can then be used in support and promotion of positive school reform for these teachers and students. Also, the results of this research are beneficial to teacher education programs. Findings delineated characteristics of these teachers that may better prepare prospective teachers who will work specifically in this teaching role. Finally, this research illuminates a better understanding of teachers who work with these populations of students and promotes further research and recognition of this population of teachers and the alternative school settings in which they teach.

My Perspective

I believe that research is expressed in and confined by the epistemological and ontological orientations of the researcher and the research study at hand. Epistemology generally refers to the nature of knowledge, or what we can assume about the knower and
the known; whereas ontology refers to the nature of reality, or asks: what do we know about our world? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Though theoretical in nature, epistemological and ontological theoretical frameworks are vital to the discussion of research as differences in frameworks lead to differences in general assumptions about the researcher, the researched, and the way the research is carried out. Also, though less discussed, research questions and forms of research impact the researcher’s view of knowledge and reality. Mason (2006) further expands upon this notion: “Our ways of seeing, and of framing questions, are strongly influenced by the methods we have at our disposal, because of the way we see shapes what we can see, and what we think we can ask” (p. 13).

As I explored this research, I was influenced by an interpretivist framework. Researchers that ascribe to the interpretivist paradigm, assume a relativist ontological stance and a subjective epistemological stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This is consistent with research that mixes research methods in a qualitative way, as interpretivist assumptions are recognized within this form of inquiry. My framework is built on ideas proposed by Mason (2006) that recognize the importance and usefulness of both quantitative and qualitative research (as opposed to purist views of research). Considering an interpretivist way of thought, I recognize that our world is multi-dimensional and such, I aimed for multi-dimensional explanations of it in my research. The study’s mixed methods analysis attempted to illustrate these complexities rather than assuming a singular “truth” about these teachers’ perceptions. This study collected
qualitative data from teachers on the perception of their sense of efficacy and is supported
by quantitative survey and background information collected from participants.

From this epistemological viewpoint, I believe that to obtain a rich and multi-
dimensional understanding of these teachers’ sense of efficacy my explanations needed to
include quantitative as well as qualitative understandings. I believe this research is
stronger because I have chosen a research design that I believe to be compatible with my
epistemological assumptions (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

**Research Questions**

Consistent with my theoretical perspective, the primary focus of this study was to
explore and come to understand the teacher efficacy of teachers of students with
behavioral difficulties. I utilized a qualitatively-driven mixed methods framework to
delve into these teachers’ perceptions. I was specifically interested in how these teachers
construct their sense of efficacy within this challenging teaching environment.

The research was guided by the following questions:

What are the efficacy beliefs of teachers who work with students with behavioral
difficulties?

- What are their efficacy beliefs in student engagement?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in instructional practices?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in classroom management?

**Summary**

Because of the multidimensionality of needs that students with behavioral
difficulties bring with them to the classroom, their teachers face an array of challenges.
Teacher efficacy has received significant attention by educational researchers; however, few researchers have studied the teacher efficacy of teachers of students with behavioral difficulties. This study addressed how teachers of students with behavioral difficulties perceive their ability and confidence at impacting their students’ learning.

I was particularly interested in how these teachers perceive their students’ academic successes and failures in such a challenging environment. This study utilized a qualitatively-driven mixed methods approach to explore the teacher efficacy of teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties in an alternative school setting. This topic was prompted from my own experiences as a teacher of students with behavioral difficulties. I was interested in how other teachers in this same position view their teacher efficacy and how they make meaning of their ability to influence their students’ academic successes, or lack thereof, within such a demanding educational environment.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Chapter I, I presented an introduction to the study and formulated my research questions within the framework of my experiences. In Chapter II, I explore the literature that serves as the basis for this dissertation: the literature on teaching students with behavioral difficulties and the current research field of teacher efficacy. In the following section, I review the literature on teaching students with behavioral difficulties—specifically students with EBD, autism, and ADHD. Areas of focus include defining each of these disabilities within the field of education, illuminating the nature of teaching students with behavioral difficulties, and teaching them specifically within alternative school contexts.

Since I approached this literature review from a general educator’s perspective, I began with a broad introductory search of special education books and articles on teaching students with behavioral difficulties. These resources were primarily theoretical and gave me an initial understanding of the topic. The search process was then refined to primarily focus on understanding and teaching students with EBD, autism, and ADHD. Sources considered for inclusion for this part of the review included both empirical and theoretical pieces and were primarily conducted using searches within an online database of journal articles.

Further, this literature review investigates the robust history of the teacher efficacy construct, primarily through the development of the various measurement scales
utilized within the research, in an attempt to begin to show how this powerful field of research could be transferred to the study of teachers of students with behavioral difficulties. Initially, teacher efficacy studies were identified using a search of “teacher efficacy” in an online database of journals. An extensive historical analysis was then conducted by identifying key articles and using the bibliographies of these texts to identify other relevant references. Each article was read and coded by research method and key findings and was organized into a chart according to year published. Findings were primarily empirical studies, though a few key theoretical pieces were included that discussed the constructs of self-efficacy and teacher efficacy.

The study of behavioral difficulties did not begin until the early 1960’s, and thus, the study of teachers in this field and the challenging nature of the work they do is scarce (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Walker, Sprague, & Close, 2000). The focus of the field of behavior disorders has primarily been on behavior management strategies and replication of research studies, and thus, there is little to no research on teachers’ understandings within this environment. There is also a lack of research in the education of special needs students in current alternative school environments. Aside from a lack of research involving these specific school environments, in general, there is little to no research concerning the teachers who work in these settings.

Conversely, there has been a considerable amount of research in teacher efficacy. This research, however, has largely been concerned with correlational studies in the development of appropriate TE scales; researchers have strived to find an appropriate way to measure the construct. Though this is an important focus, this has left a
significant gap in the explanation of the data; without understanding teacher efficacy, researchers have been unable to apply the construct in educational settings. This literature review is the initial step in becoming aware and understanding the overall nature and the gaps in the field of teaching students with behavioral difficulties, as well as in the field of teacher efficacy.

**Definitions**

The following sections provide definitions of EBD, autism, and ADHD and the student characteristics of each disability group.

**EBD**

The Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (2004) defines emotional disturbance (ED) as one of 14 categories of education disability (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004). Initially, as part of the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975, “serious emotional disturbance” (SED) was defined based on Eli Bower’s early notion of “emotionally handicapped” (Merrell & Walker, 2004). Bower deemed that the emotionally handicapped child is one who is significantly vulnerable to behavior problems. Furthermore, as an adult, this child is unable to lead a happy life because of these problems (Bower, 1960). Though the term “SED” was changed to “ED” in 1997 (Forness & Kavale, 2000), the definition itself has not undergone many significant changes and remains similar to the initial outline of the definition (Merrell & Walker, 2004).

The current draft of IDEA (2004) therefore defines ED as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by
intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The student must exhibit these conditions over a substantial time period, and the aspects of the disability must also considerably impede the student’s academic performance.

IDEA further specifies that the term emotional disturbance is not used for children who are “socially maladjusted” (IDEA, 2004), unless these children are deemed emotionally disturbed as classified by the previous guidelines. This has since been termed, “the exclusionary clause” (Olympia et al., 2004). There is no universal definition of social maladjustment, though it is sometimes interpreted as conduct disorder, the externalization of behavior disorders, and/or social deviance (Kehle & Bray, 2004). The inclusion (or more appropriately-stated exclusion) of this aspect of the definition has been the source of much confusion and frustration within the educational community (Clarizio, 1992; Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Merrel & Walker, 2004; Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 1992; Weinberg & Weinberg, 1990), especially as it relates to determining eligibility for special education services.

This definition in its entirety has also been widely debated and criticized within the literature for being outdated, for lacking a foundation in educational research, and for use of complicated wording/terminology (Cullinan, 2004; Forness & Kavale, 2000; Merrell, 2003; Merrell & Walker, 2004). One of the key problems in the first criteria, for
example, is the confusion between “an inability to learn” and the definition for a learning
disability (LD) (Forness & Kavale, 2000). This lack of consistency is problematic, as the
impact of an emotional disorder is not always expressed in academic deficits, and
different disorders may impact a students’ educational performance differently and at
different rates in a child’s life (Woodrich, Stoba, & Trica, 1998). Merrell and Walker
(2004) state that though the definition itself is not the primary cause of problems for
students with EBD, the definition is vital as it impacts which students will receive special
education services.

A widely popular alternative to the ED definition is the use of the term “emotional
or behavioral disorder” (EBD), as proposed by the National Mental Health and Special
Education Coalition (NMHSEC) (Forness & Knitzer, 1992). NMHSEC, a group
comprised of 30 professional mental health and education associations, seeks to improve
the services for children with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (Forness, 1988). The
Coalition defines EBD as follows:

(i) The term emotional or behavioral disorder means a disability characterized by
behavioral or emotional responses in school so different from appropriate age,
cultural, or ethnic norms that they adversely affect educational performance.
Educational performance includes academic, social, vocational, and personal
skills. Such a disability
   (A) is more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the
environment.
   (B) is consistently exhibited in two different settings, at least one of which
is school-related; and
   (C) is unresponsive to direct intervention in general education or the
child’s condition is such that general education interventions would be
insufficient.

(ii) Emotional and behavioral disorders can co-exist with other disabilities.

(iii) This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorders
affective disorders, anxiety disorders, or other sustained disorders of conduct or
adjustment when they adversely affect educational performance in accordance with section (i). (p. 14)

This proposed definition promotes early identification and intervention, including intense interventions as part of the general education classroom (Forness & Knitzer, 1992). The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD), a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, and other leading professional organizations within the field have supported and adopted the term EBD (CCBD, 2000; Forness & Kayale, 2000) over the ED terminology and definition.

**Student characteristics.** Identifying the characteristics of students with EBD has been vital in the struggle to better understand how to appropriately teach and serve them. In the Twenty-Eight Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), a national breakdown was provided for students with ED. Of the six million students in the United States being served under IDEA and receiving special education, roughly 8% of students have an emotional or behavioral disability. Of this group, 63% of students have at least one additional disability, with 26% of students with ED having two or three additional disabilities. It is important to note that these numbers may not be entirely representative of the students who actually have EBD, as identification (and specifically underidentification in this case) of students has been and continues to be a challenge for school personnel (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2006; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007).

Though males are overrepresented in special education in general, the number of male students in the ED disability category is the most prominent (Coutinho & Oswalk, 2005). In regard to gender, males are more likely to be labeled ED; about 80% of
students being classified as ED are male (Donovan & Cross, 2002). This is consistent with research that examines school discipline by gender; a body of research demonstrates that boys are more likely than girls to receive consequences for misbehavior, be referred to the office, and be suspended (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Research has also demonstrated that girls must exhibit more extreme problematic behaviors to be identified and receive services as ED (Cullinan, Evans, Epstein, & Ryser, 2003; Ron Nelson, Babyak, Gonzalez, & Benner, 2003).

Aside from disparities concerning gender, racial disproportionality also exists. Specifically in terms of ED classification, African American students are 2.24 times more likely to be labeled ED than other students (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). African American students are also overrepresented in restrictive classroom environments for students with ED. Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz (2006) found that African American students with ED are 1.2 times more likely than their peers with ED to be placed in separate classrooms, and about 50% less likely to be placed in general education environments.

A number of researchers have studied this aspect of data, as well as the much-discussed “discipline gap” (Ainsworth & Downey, 1998; Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Monroe, 2005). Gay (2006) illuminates the four most common reasons that are given for this gap:

- African American student behavior is more frequent and serious and should be punished as such
• Racism or racial discrimination is occurring
• Teachers interact differently with students of color
• Cultural insensitivity or discontinuity between teachers and students.

It is important to note, however, that within this body of research there is lack of evidence for the first reason; there is little to no evidence that the higher rates of discipline received by African American students are actually due to more serious or more disruptive behavior (Gay, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

The U.S. Department of Education (2006) determined that the number of students with ED significantly increases from kindergarten to fifth grade. Research suggests that the characteristics of ED exemplify as a child ages (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004). However, there is little research that examines variations in characteristics of EBD by age. Literature does, however, often point to the disturbingly low graduation rates for adolescent students with EBD, as well as the troubling drop-out rates.

Though there was a minimal increase in graduate rates from the 1994-1995 through the 2003-2004 school years, students with ED consistently had the lowest graduation rates out of all disability categories. The story is similar for the dropout rate. There was a decrease from 69% to 52% over the previously mentioned school years, and though this decrease may seem substantial, the drop-out rate is still substantially higher than the dropout rate for the next disability category (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Of those students with EBD who drop out of school, 73% of them are arrested within five years of leaving (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). There is a vital need
to attend to this matter in the educational community, as high school dropouts experience significant hardships, both economically and socially (Zweig, 2003).

**Autism**

In the landmark article, “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact”, Leo Kanner (1943) described eleven young children who shared a set of irregular characteristics that he believed formed a syndrome that had yet to be identified or labeled. Case studies of these children determined that they were uniquely independent and had difficulty relating to others. They demonstrated what Kanner called an “extreme autistic aloneness” (p. 242). The eleven children were able to relate to objects but had severe difficulty relating to other people. Other characteristics that the children displayed included: a delay in speaking ability, an excellent rote memory, a desire for repetition, and an extreme dislike of loud noise/moving objects.

The term “autism” became the label to categorize the children described in Kanner’s article. Since Kanner’s article, the characteristics of autism used for diagnostic purposes have evolved based on further research. Currently, evaluations to determine if a child is autistic are based on the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organization, 1993). According to these sources, autism—also referred to as early infantile autism, childhood autism, or Kanner’s autism—is a pervasive developmental disorder and is defined by the presence of abnormal and/or impaired development. It is further characterized by abnormal
functioning of social interaction, communication, and behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; World Health Organization, 1993).

Autism is additionally categorized as a “spectrum disorder”, and it can be referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD. The notion that there is a spectrum or continuum of symptoms makes the disorder even more complex (Freeman, 1997). Symptoms can range from mild to severe and impairments tend to vary in the combination of type and severity. Subtypes of autism on the spectrum include Rett syndrome, Heller syndrome, Asperger syndrome, atypical autism, and atypical Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Freeman, 1997; Kubina & Yurick, 2009).

In schools, the definition of IDEA is used for identification purposes. Currently, autism is specifically defined by IDEA (2004) as a developmental disability that significantly impacts verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction that adversely affects the child’s educational performance. The student engages in repetitive activities and stereotyped movement, is resistant to changes in the environment (including changes in daily routine), and exhibits unusual responses to sensory experiences. IDEA further specifies that autism does not apply if the student’s educational performance is negatively affected because the student is identified as having an emotional disturbance.

In the classroom, students with autism exhibit a wide variety of behaviors. These can include hyperactivity, short attention span, impulsivity, aggressiveness, and self-injurious behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). As specified in the IDEA definition, students with autism may also exhibit an unusual reaction to sensory
experiences, including oversensitivity to touch, sound, and/or light (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; IDEA, 2004). Further, these students also generally exhibit an impaired or abnormal development of social interaction and communication, as well as a restricted range of interests and activities. These deficits in social interaction are one of the key characteristics of autism and can lead to peer rejection, social isolation, and social loneliness in the classroom (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; White, Keonig, & Scahill, 2007; White & Roberson-Nay, 2009).

Students with autism vary in terms of their IQ level; however, there is significant mental retardation in 75% of children identified (World Health Organization, 1993). Research has shown that cognitive level and IQ assessments tend to be indicative of students’ outcomes later in school (Ben-Itzchak & Zachor, 2006; Freeman, 1997; Harris & Handleman, 2000). Early intervention tends to produce the best outcomes in increases in cognitive development; appropriate early interventions have led to a significant positive impact in children’s cognitive functioning (Itzchak, Lahat, Burgin, & Zachor, 2008).

**Student characteristics.** The overall estimated prevalence of autism is 11.3 per 1000 or one in 88 births (CDCP, 2012). In U.S. schools, the number of students aged six through twenty-one who were identified and served under IDEA in the Fall of 2007 was approximately 257,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). From 1997-2007, autism is the only disability category that has exceeded *quintupling* in numbers (Loiacono & Valenti, 2010). As with students with EBD, there are many challenges in monitoring the prevalence of autism in children due to the complex nature of autism and the changes in
how it is defined. Researchers agree that it is difficult to determine if there has been a significant increase in the prevalence of autism or if there is currently better assessment and awareness of the disorder (CDCP, 2012; Prior, 2003; Whitby & Mancil, 2009).

Similar to the student characteristics of students with EBD, more male than female student are characterized as having autism. The World Health Organization reported that in 1993, the disorder occurred in boys three to four times more often than in girls. Similarly, current data reports that the rate of autism is significantly higher among boys (one in 54) than girls (one in 252) (CDCP, 2012). Significant research has attempted to determine why males are more often identified as having autism than females. Recently, one argument has been made that autistic behaviors tend to be more masculine and therefore these differences can be attributed to biological factors (Baron-Cohen, et. al., 2011; Bartley, 2006; Kunzig, 2004). Regardless of the reason, and as with male students with EBD, over-identification of males exhibiting behaviors related to this disorder may be an issue that warrants further attention.

In regard to race, as of 2007 the United States Department of Education reported that sixty-seven percent of autistic students being served under IDEA primarily identified as White-Non Hispanic. Fourteen percent identified as Black-Non Hispanic and thirteen percent identified as Hispanic. While the prevalence of autism in the overall population has increased, the largest increases over time were noted among Hispanic children and non-Hispanic Black children (CDCP, 2012).

Current research agrees that early interventions lead to overall better outcomes for students with autism. This includes interventions occurring in the preschool years (ages 4
or 5) (Corsello, 2005). Though children begin exhibiting characteristics of autism before the age of 3 (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; World Health Organization, 1992); little is known about best intervention practices for children aged birth through 3 (Corsello, 2005). In schools, the most rapidly growing age group of children with autism is between the ages of six and eleven (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Again, prevalence issues are difficult to characterize as it is unknown whether these increases are occurring because of “true” increases or because of increases in overall awareness of autism.

**ADHD**

Even though students with autism may exhibit inattention and hyperactivity in the classroom, they are not typically identified as ADHD if they are already diagnosed as being autistic (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). ADHD, or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, is characterized by a frequent display of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity. Though all children exhibit these characteristics occasionally, children with ADHD exhibit these behaviors at a higher rate and severity than their same-aged peers (DuPaul & Stoner, 2004). Symptoms of ADHD usually appear in multiple situations, though symptoms tend to increase in situations in which the child requires a great deal of attention or in situations that do not appeal to the child intrinsically, such as listening to a teacher for a period of time or reading lengthy materials. To be diagnosed with ADHD, children must present symptoms that impair living in at least two settings (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) currently recognizes three subtypes of ADHD: predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, predominantly inattentive, and combined type. Most children are diagnosed with the combined type, where six or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity and inattention have persisted for six months or more. Initially, the subtypes were created to include hyperactivity when this symptom was only a subtype of ADD. In the late 1980’s, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders improved the criteria for recognizing and identifying ADHD, by including hyperactivity in the definition and renaming the disorder ADHD (Barkley, 2006).

IDEA (2004) does not have a specific category for students with ADHD in schools. If a student is evaluated and identified as ADHD (without another diagnosis), students are labeled and served under the category “other health impairment.” According to the IDEA definition, this refers to having limited strength, vitality, or alertness that adversely affects the student’s educational performance. Aside from ADHD, other conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome are also categorized as other health impairment. Depending on their symptoms, students can also qualify for special education services through the learning disability category or the emotional disturbance category.

Students with ADHD often have difficulty in a typical classroom and may be perceived as disruptive because of the behaviors associated with the disorder. For instance, due to their difficulty with attention, students may struggle following directions
and working independently. Further, the student may have poor test taking and study skills. Because of their struggle with their impulsivity, students may unintentionally disrupt their classmates by talking out without permission, talking inappropriately with peers, and showing anger when they are approached about the behavior. Finally, because of the student’s over-activity, the student may physically be fidgety and restless. Though this does not necessarily seem harmful, it can become disruptive when it occurs frequently in a large classroom (DuPaul & Stoner, 2004).

**Student characteristics.** As with children with EBD and autism, children with ADHD are a varied group of students. Since every student displays an array of symptoms and behaviors, there are currently over 7,000 combinations of symptoms that a child could display to be categorized as ADHD (DuPaul & Stoner, 2004). As of 2010, five million children in the United States aged 3-17 (roughly 9% of children) were diagnosed with ADHD. It is important to note that it is difficult to truly assess the prevalence of ADHD due to a variety of factors including: debate in the definition of ADHD, difficulty in measuring symptoms, and agreement/disagreements over diagnosis (Cohen, Riccio, & Gonzalez, 1994).

As with students with EBD and autism, the number of boys with ADHD is substantially higher than girls; specifically, school samples have shown that the rate in boys is two to three times more than the number of girls (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Barkley, 2006; CDCP, 2010). Recently because of such disproportion, researchers have begun to even question the use of the same symptoms for diagnosing ADHD in boys and girls (Gomez, 2013; Ohan & Johnston, 2005; Rucklidge,
As with EBD and autism, current ADHD symptoms can be perceived of as male-oriented or masculine and may not be appropriate for identifying female students.

Though there is a general agreement that boys are more often identified as having ADHD than girls, there is inconsistency in the literature concerning ADHD diagnoses based on race (Bussing, Zima, & Garavan, 2003; Cuffe, et al., 1995; Knapp, et al., 2006). In general, white boys are more likely to receive ADHD evaluations than White girls or children of other races (Bussing, Zima, & Garavan, 2003; Leslie, Lambros, Aarons, Haine, & Hough, 2008) and Hispanic children are less likely than non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black peers to be identified as ADHD (CDCP, 2010). Because of problems with identification in schools and categorization of ADHD as other health impaired under IDEA, assessments of race/ethnic differences are difficult to evaluate further.

Among children who are identified ADHD in schools, Black children are more likely than their Latino and White peers to be identified as ED (and not other health impaired) in regard to the special education services they receive. This research suggests that disruptive behavior is typically identified as a key factor in academic underachievement for Black children and may suggest bias in the special education identification process (Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008). This is consistent with research in the EBD field that suggests racial biasing exists in assessing children’s behavior and that Black children’s behavior are often seen as “worse” than their peers even when no difference exists (Ainsworth & Downey, 1998; Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Gay, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).
Since children with ADHD represent a heterogeneous population of students, there is significant variation in the age of onset; however, children generally start exhibiting symptoms of ADHD before the age of seven (Barkley, 2006; DuPaul & Stoner, 2004). Researchers agree ADHD should not be diagnosed in children younger than five years of age due primarily to the similarities between the disorder and typical, age-appropriate behavior; very young children may be exhibiting symptoms of ADHD that are actually developmentally appropriate (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Considering these complexities, early identification and intervention though somewhat difficult, is a key factor in promoting early school success for students (DuPaul & Stoner, 2004).

Every student differs in the extent to which they demonstrate characteristics of behavioral difficulties; thus, teaching students with EBD, autism, and ADHD is particularly complicated. Because of the degree of heterogeneity among students, they benefit from implementation of a variety of best practice educational practices (Kubina & Yurick, 2009). The following section examines these practices.

**Teaching Students with Behavioral Difficulties**

Research on teaching students with behavioral difficulties focuses on both behavioral and pedagogical interventions conducted during a child’s schooling. Behavioral interventions have been rooted in the behaviorist approach, the cognitive behavioral approach, and the ecological systems approach.

**Behavioral Interventions**
Behavioral interventions for students with behavioral difficulties tend to fall into one of three paradigms: the behaviorist approach, the cognitive-behavioral approach, and the ecological systems approach. A behaviorist approach to the management and alteration of student behavior in the classroom “has been and continues to be a dominant and influential paradigm in both educational research and the preparation of teachers” (Landrum & Kauffman, p. 47, 2006), as this model has more “empirical support” than other theoretical orientations (Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 1992, p.20).

Today, all strategies utilizing behaviorist practices involve either positive or negative reinforcements, or some use of punishment or extinction (Landrum & Kauffman).

**Behaviorist approach.** In the 1970’s, psychologists studying behavior modification connected it to the overall culture of schooling at the time: the need for a quiet classroom with still and obedient students (Ribes-Inesta, 1974). As based on B.F. Skinner’s theory of radical behaviorism, it was believed that through the systematic modification of classroom behavior, more desirable behaviors would occur and classroom behaviors that were disruptive would decrease (Bushell, 1974). Though contemporary trends in behavioral research have shifted slightly from earlier behaviorist strategies—today there is a substantial focus on early intervention and prevention of behavioral problems and the identification of antecedents and consequences (Landrum & Kaufman, 2006)—the model has proved useful in diagnosing causes of behavior, monitoring behavior, and remediating problematic behavior.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a widely used application of behaviorist theory with students with behavioral difficulties. Though research has generally focused
on the use of ABA with students with developmental disabilities, the past thirty years of research as seen an increase in the use of ABA as a means to address problem behavior in the classroom, as well (Lewis, Lewis-Palmer, Newcomer, & Stichter, 2004). Underlying concepts of ABA assume that student misbehavior is learned, and such, it can be unlearned. Time out (removing a child when they misbehave) and response cost (removing privileges after an unacceptable behavior occurs) are two of the most widely applied consequences that are utilized by classroom teachers (Jackson & Panyan, 2002).

Functional behavior assessment (FBA) is an application of ABA that has been receiving increased attention for usage with students with behavioral difficulties and is considered one of the best tools that ABA provides students with behavioral difficulties (Lane, Falk, & Wehby, 2006; Lewis, Lewis-Palmer, Newcomer, & Stichter, 2004; National Research Council, 2001). The underlying assumption of FBA is that treatment is enhanced when it matches the function of the behavior (Nelson, Roberts, & Mathur, 1999). Thus, FBA focuses on the variables—antecedents, consequences, and the environmental context—that predict and maintain problematic student behavior. A detailed assessment is done to understand what maintains the behavior, to predict when a behavior will occur, to identify ways to prevent it, and to then plan ways to respond to the behavior when it does occur (Fox & Gable, 2004; Horner & Carr, 1997; Lewis, Lewis-Palmer, Newcomer, & Stichter, 2004). FBA has been incorporated as a required best practice under IDEA for students suspected of having ED (Walker, Sprague, Close, & Starlin, 2000). It also tends to be used when other simpler behavioral assessment tools have failed (Armstrong & Kauffman, 1999).
From my own experiences, I initially hypothesized that the teachers in this study would rely primarily on the behaviorist approach in the development of behavioral interventions. The reliance on a “level system” in alternative schools to evaluate student behavior contributes to this hypothesis. Level systems are often used in alternative schools to promote positive behavior and extinguish negative behavior. Students move upward on a level system after consistently engaging in appropriate behaviors. Students are often rewarded with material incentives and increased privileges according to their level.

A significant amount of research has challenged the use of extrinsic rewards and their usefulness and long-term impact on student motivation (Ames, 1992; Reeve, 2006; Wentzel, 2006). Common critiques of the behaviorist paradigm are that these strategies are not useful in the long-term deterrence of misbehavior, the strategies manage student behavior through coercive means, and the strategies do not typically promote positive social skills as is necessary for students with behavioral difficulties (Covaleskie, 1992; Nie & Lau, 2009; Slee, 1999; Stanley, 1998; Watson & Battistich, 2006; Weinstein, 1999).

**Cognitive-behavioral approach.** Instead of focusing exclusively on how people behave, the cognitive-behavioral approach focuses on how people think, as well (Brewin, 2006). Unlike behaviorism, which typically focuses on the use of external elements in managing a student’s behavior, the cognitive-behavioral approach—sometimes referred to as cognitive behavioral modification (CBM) or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)—focuses on the student as means to regulate his/her own behavior. In this approach,
therapeutic strategies are used to alter a student’s behavior by teaching the student to actively participate in understanding and changing their behaviors. Cognitive mediation is a vital component to the intervention and the label “cognitive-behavioral” can only be applied to approaches where this mediation is demonstrated and emphasized (Dobson & Dozois, 2010; Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2006).

Cognitive-behavioral researchers trace the roots of the field to ancient Greece and Plato’s notions of idealism. Leahy (1996) illuminates an example:

In a classic story, known as "Plato's Cave", Socrates describes how a group of men who are chained facing a wall observe shadows dancing across the wall in front of them. They have never known that these shadows are due to figures near the entrance to the cave moving behind them in front of a candle. To these men, the shadows are reality. One day one of the men turns around and sees that there are figures moving behind him casting their shadows across the wall. From that day on, the "reality" of the shadows no longer exists. Reality is now defined as the figures that one sees outside the cave. We might view cognitive therapy as the attempt to get the patient to unchain himself and see outside the cave (p. 9).

The cognitive-behavioral paradigm gained momentum in the 1970’s utilizing Beck’s (1976) cognitive model of psychopathology in the treatment of depression (Dobson & Dozois, 2010; Leahy, 1996). Today, cognitive behavioral therapy has since been successful in addressing other aspects of behavioral difficulties, including aggression, anxiety, panic disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and social phobias (Kendall, 1993; Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005; Rotheram-Fuller & MacMullen, 2011).

Self-instruction training, based on Meichenbaum and Goodman’s (1971) work with impulsive students, is a common cognitive behavioral strategy used with students with behavioral difficulties. Meichenbaum and Goddman developed a program that allows students with EBD to talk to themselves while completing their schoolwork as a
way to modify their behavior. Current self-instruction training typically uses the following as described by Maag and Swearer (2005):

1. Cognitive Modeling: The teacher performs a task while talking aloud as the student observes.
2. Overt External Guidance: Both the student and teacher perform the task while talking aloud together.
3. Overt Self-Guidance: The student performs the task using the same verbalizations as the teacher.
4. Faded Self-Guidance: The student whispers the instructions (often in an abbreviated form) while going through the task.
5. Covert Self-Guidance: The student performs the task, guided by covert self-speech.

As with the behaviorist approach, there are critics of the cognitive-behavioral model; the approach has been critiqued for utilizing a too-narrow view of behavior and for lacking an awareness of students’ social environments (Beidel & Turner, 1986; Kendall, 1993). Further, this approach has often only been utilized in clinical settings; the model has been difficult to adapt to the school setting (Rotheram-Fuller & MacMullen, 2011). Overall, the use of self-talk and self-regulation as part of the cognitive-behavioral model appears to be essential in students’ development of autonomy, problem solving strategies, and their general emotional well-being (Carter & Doyle, 2006). These approaches are strengthened when students with behavioral difficulties feel a sense of collaboration and become partners with their teachers in the process of improving their behavior (Friedberg et al., 2003).

**Ecological systems approach.** The third paradigm of behavioral interventions for students with behavioral difficulties is the ecological systems approach. Instead of focusing on cognition as advocated by cognitive-behavioral theorists, the ecological model focuses on the interactions between individuals and their environments (Doyle,
2006; Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 1992; Stacks, 2005). The ecological systems approach is primarily based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) work in human development. Bronfenbrenner believed that a child’s behavior is a reflection of the transaction between the child and his/her family, friends, and school. This approach differs from the previous models as this interaction assumes that the child is not the primary source of his/her behavior issues; the teacher considers the context of the student’s behavior (Brendtro, 2006; Doyle, 2006).

The relationships that students form with their teachers are a vital aspect of this model. Positive teacher-student relationships impact a student’s motivation, self-esteem, beliefs about school, and academic success (Pianta, 2006); conversely, negative teacher-student relationships, specifically those that are conflicting or distant, are often associated with delinquent and aggressive behaviors. The process is harmful and cyclical, as students who engage in problematic behaviors may then receive even more negative responses from their teachers, which then creates more misbehavior (Howes, 2000; Stacks, 2005; Pianta). Research suggests that a teacher’s ability to reflect on their relationships with their students may be more powerful than other teacher characteristics, such as amount of teacher training or education (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2001).

Though the nature of the teacher-student relationship is complex, it is obvious that students with behavioral difficulties are especially in need of caring teachers with whom they can build trust and dependence (Stanley, 1998). This relationship is one component of the ecological systems model of behavioral interventions for children with behavioral difficulties.
Social skills instruction. Since students with behavioral difficulties struggle with peer relationships and in social situations, as described previously, social skills instruction (SSI) or social skills training (SST) is often included as part of their education. This form of instruction varies as each student differs in how they respond to this instruction. The primary goal of social skills instruction is to improve the students’ use of social skills in a variety of settings; however, this instruction is often included in a students’ educational sporadically and few children receive it as a key aspect of their educational plan (Bellini, 2006; Bellini, Benners, & Peters-Myszak, 2009).

Teachers can utilize social skills instruction within any of the previously described approaches. Table 1 illustrates Baker’s (2010) breakdown of the approaches utilized by teachers of students with behavioral difficulties.

Though social skills instruction has been determined to be a needed element of the education of students with behavioral difficulties and many different approaches have been created, researchers disagree on the best practice approach. Further, research has determined that traditional social skills training has little if any impact on the overall improvement of students’ social skills (Bellini, Benners, & Peters-Myszak, 2009; Forness & Kavale, 1996; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, & Forness, 1999).

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Table 1

*Breakdown of Approaches to Behavior: Modified from Baker (2010)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviorist Approach</th>
<th>Cognitive-Behavioral Approach</th>
<th>Ecological Systems Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrete Trial Training (Lovaas, 1987)</td>
<td>Relationship Development Intervention (Gutstein, 2007)</td>
<td>DIR®/Floortime™ (Greenspan &amp; Weider, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Behavior Therapy (Sundberg &amp; Partington, 1998)</td>
<td>Social Thinking Model (Garcia-Winner, 2006)</td>
<td>Son-Rise Program (Kaufman, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pivotal Response Treatment (Koegel &amp; Koegel, 2006)</td>
<td>Social Stories (Gray, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augmentative Communication and Visual Supports used in the context of ABA (Frost &amp; Bondy, 2006)</td>
<td>Visual Supports to expand understanding of events and tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pedagogical Interventions**

Traditionally, research has focused on the most effective behavioral intervention strategies to utilize with students with behavioral difficulties; the focus was primarily on student behavior and not on teaching students. Researchers believed that academic interventions would be useless if student behavior was uncontrollable (Wehby, Lane, & Falk, 2003). This was true in the classroom, as well, as the teacher’s primary concern was on adjusting the student behavior, not on tackling the student’s academic needs.
However, researchers have recently begun to take a more balanced view of the student, and thus, have begun to focus on pedagogical interventions for students, as well. This shift in focus developed because of the strong relationship between behavioral difficulties and academic failure (Hinshaw, 1992).

Researchers in the field have debated about the specific relationship between problematic behavior and academic difficulties; Do problematic behaviors causes academic difficulties or do these difficulties in fact contribute to the problematic behavior? Researchers in the EBD and ADHD field particularly debate whether these disorders lead to learning problems or vice versa. Further, this literature also questions whether these learning disorders and behavioral difficulties in fact exist as comorbid conditions (Ponde, Cruz-Freire, & Silveira, 2012; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008).

Reviews of the literature suggest that the two exist in a complex, interconnected manner, and that they influence each other over time (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). Because of this, much of the research that discusses pedagogical interventions is interconnected with remedies for student problematic classroom behavior. The following sections target some of the most-discussed instructional strategies utilized with students with behavioral difficulties: direct instruction, student engagement strategies, teacher praise, student choice, and peer-assisted learning.

Direct instruction. Direct instruction is an often-cited evidence-based, best practice to use with students with behavioral difficulties (Freeman, 1997; Gunter, Countinho, & Cade, 2000; Gunter, Denny, & Venn, 2000; Landrum, Tankersley, &
Kauffman, 2003). Direct instruction provides students with structured and sequenced methods of teaching (Atkinson, Wilhite, Frey, & Williams, 2002). The argument for its use is that students with behavioral difficulties need instruction that is explicit, systematic, and that is directed and guided by the teacher (Center for Innovations in Education, 2006).

Methods for utilizing direct instruction typically involve the following steps: (a) gain the attention of the students, (b) present the goal of the lesson (c) review past learning, (d) present new information (demonstrate or model), (e) assist students to perform task-guided practice, (f) evaluate students’ independent performance, and (g) review the lesson (CEC, 1987; Gunter, Countinho, & Cade, 2000; Niesyn, 2009). Direct instruction specifically in reading comprehension has proved to be essential for students with behavioral difficulties who are struggling in reading (Atkinson, Wilhite, Frey, & Williams, 2002; Babyak, Koorland, & Mathes, 2000; Weaster, 2004).

**Student engagement strategies.** Within the framework of direct instruction, student engagement is a primary concern for teachers of students with behavioral difficulties; Participating and being engaged in a lesson may be particularly difficult for students with behavior issues (Center for Innovations in Education, 2006). A significant body of research on instructional interventions for children has focused on the instructional strategy of OTR (Haydon et al., 2010; Maggin, Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011; Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, & Wehby, 2001; Sutherland, Adler, & Gunter, 2003; Sutherland, Wehby, & Yoder, 2002). OTR, or opportunities to respond, refers to the number of opportunities students have in a given academic session to
respond to academic questions or requests. In this approach, the teacher assesses, modifies, and improves lessons based on student responses; this is turn, improves lesson quality and increases student attentiveness (Council for Exceptional Children, 1987).

Advocates for students with behavioral difficulties suggest that if students are given more frequent opportunities to actively respond to their teachers, teachers could see improvement in academic outcomes, task engagement, as well as a decrease in the number of inappropriate and/or disruptive behaviors a student exhibits (Center for Innovations in Education, 2006; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Because of this, OTR is considered an effective practice within special education teaching, and the Council for Exceptional Children (1987) has set specific guidelines for OTR usage in the classroom. Research suggests that videotaped instruction and peer coaching are promising methods teachers can use to increase OTR in their classrooms (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001).

Teacher praise. Research suggests that OTR and teacher praise are related, and that a combination of the two is a powerful source for academic interventions for students with behavioral difficulties (Gunter, Denny, Jack, Shores, & Nelson, 1993; Niesyn, 2009; Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver, & Wehby, 2010; Sutherland, Wehby, & Yoder, 2002). Teachers of students with behavioral difficulties, however, tend to use these approaches infrequently (Sutherland, 2000; Sutherland, Adler, & Gunter, 2003; Sutherland, Wheby, & Yoder, 2002).

Niesyn (2009) affirms that teacher praise is one of the simplest ways a teacher can modify the classroom to promote learning for students with behavioral difficulties. Though it is primarily used as a method to modify inappropriate student behavior—
teacher praise is a component of Positive Behavior Support (Lane, Graham, Harris, & Weisenbach, 2006; Lewis, Newcomer, Trussell, & Richter, 2006) and Assertive Discipline (Swinson & Cording, 2002)—the use of teacher praise in the classroom has been shown to increase academic-related skills, such as following directions, completing tasks correctly, and being engaged in lessons (Partin et al., 2000; Wutherland & Wehby, 2001; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000). Elias and Schwab (2006) warn that praise is only effective if it is: used in meaningful contexts, used when truly deserved, specific, and focused on student effort. Sutherland (2000) suggests peer coaching and self-evaluation as means to promote teacher praise in the classroom.

**Student choice.** Giving students with behavioral difficulties a choice of their instructional materials, as well as incorporating their interests into activities and lessons, is an effective instructional strategy that increases on-task behaviors and produces positive student outcomes (Niesyn, 2009; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Choices not only increase engagement by focusing on the student’s interests. When a teacher offers students a choice, they give the student a sense of autonomy and control over their learning, an aspect of learning that is often absent for students with behavioral difficulties. Students may initially have difficulty making choices depending on their ability and prior knowledge, so it is vital that they are taught how to make and express their choices (Salend & Sylvestre, 2005; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Student choice-making is another approach that like teacher praise, has shown improvements in both student’s academic and social behavior (Gunter, Denny, & Venn, 2000; Lane, Falk, & Wehby, 2006).
**Peer-assisted learning.** Peer-assisted learning, including reciprocal peer tutoring and class-wide peer tutoring, is also frequently cited as an instructional strategy that shows academic gains, while also increases positive behavior (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Niesyn, 2009; Ogilvie, 2011). Peer tutoring for students with behavioral difficulties has proven to be beneficial when the student serves as either the tutor or the tutee. In a review of thirty-eight peer tutoring research studies, Spencer (2006) concluded that peer tutoring is an effective instructional strategy for students with behavioral difficulties at all grade levels, and improvements have been shown in reading, math, social behaviors, and on-task behaviors. PALS, or Peer-assisted Learning Strategies, is one example of a peer-assisted learning method that is used with students with behavioral difficulties (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000).

**Co-teaching.** Lastly, co-teaching, also known as “collaborative” or “cooperative” teaching, is an approach to meeting the instructional needs of students with behavioral difficulties. In special education literature, co-teaching is often defined as the shared collaboration of teaching responsibilities between the general and special education teacher (Gately & Gately, 2001). This utilization of co-teaching is a recommended best practice for teaching children with disabilities (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). The partnership of two teachers collaborating in a single classroom is seen as beneficial, because it is able to provide “direct and immediate support to students with disabilities” (Walsh & Jones, 2004, p. 15).

Though the literature defines co-teaching as the seamlessly shared partnership between general and special education teacher, definitions of what actually constitutes a
co-teaching situation in schools vary. In a metasynthesis of related literature, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) identified five variations of co-teaching situations seen in school settings:

1) Teacher and assistant teaching, where one teacher assumes general teaching responsibilities and the other teacher (often termed “the drifter”) provides individual support, as needed

2) Station teaching, where learning stations are provided and co-teachers provide support at the different stations

3) Parallel teaching, where co-teachers present similar content to separate classroom groupings

4) Alternative teaching, where one co-teacher takes a group of students and teaches in a separate location, and

5) Team/interactive teaching, where both teachers share an equal amount of planning and are equally involved in leading instructional opportunities for students.

Aside from issues surrounding these variations, challenges with co-teaching situations may arise because of differences in co-teachers’ instructional styles, communication problems between teachers, issues with planning time and resources, classroom management, and lack of appropriate professional development (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997; Walsh & Jones, 2004). If successful, however, co-teaching is an instructional practice that can have a positive influence on the academic achievement of students with behavioral difficulties (Walsh & Jones, 2004).
Approaches within Alternative Learning Contexts

A review of the literature suggests that there are behavioral and instructional strategies to effectively teach students with behavioral difficulties. Though research assessing the academic performances of students and the pedagogical interventions used by their teachers has increased, it is still sporadic (Pierce, Reid, & Epstein, 2004; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). The literature suggests that future research recognize the academic and social aspects of teaching children with behavioral difficulties.

Alternative learning contexts are often used as a means to address the multi-dimensional needs of students with behavioral difficulties. As some authors have suggested, “The demands on regular classroom teachers' time, the lack of concentrated support personnel, and the severity of children's problems preclude the effective education of some students in regular schools and classrooms” (Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker, & Ridel, 1995, p. 546). Alternative forms of schooling have become an option for many students.

Students Attending Alternative Schools

Approximately 17% of American students are attending school in alternative school settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Though placements of students with disabilities tend to vary considerably within alternative school programs, for the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 12% of students in alternative schools and program were students with a disability (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). This percentage parallels the number of students being served in general public schools for the
same school year (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris). This is a considerable percentage even as the educational community has shifted toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006).

Because of the shift toward inclusion, moving a student from general education to a more restrictive educational environment, such as an alternative school, has turned into “swimming against the mainstream” (Idstein, 1993, p. 337). The decision to move a student to an alternative school is generally made by the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, composed of the general education teacher, the special education teacher, the local educational agency, the parents, and the student (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2001). Before a student with a disability is placed in an alternative school, as consistent with IDEA (2006), a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) must be conducted. As discussed previously, an FBA aims to determine the function of the student’s behavior. An extensive field of research has focused on the effectiveness of this form of assessment as it pertains to students with behavioral difficulties (Fox & Gable, 2004; Heckaman, Conroy, Fox, & Chait, 2000; Kern, Hilt, & Gresham, 2004). FBAs have also been useful in supporting students with behavioral difficulties even after they have transitioned to an alternative setting (Turton, Umbreit, & Mathur, 2011).

Though it is often unclear how placement decisions are made (Wasburn-Moses, 2011), McCall (2005) affirms that there are typically one of five reasons that students decide to move or are moved to an alternative school program. The student typically exhibits either (a) behavior dysfunction in school, (b) need for academic remediation, (c)
social skill dysfunction, (d) family disruption or conflict, or (e) chronic absenteeism. A student with behavioral difficulties moves to an alternative school program if they exhibit one or more of these characteristics in a manner that exceeds the capabilities of the student’s current school placement. Further, the parent/guardian or student may decide that an alternative placement will better fit the students’ needs.

**Defining Alternative Schools**

Currently, there is no universal definition of alternative schools. The term “alternative education” can be applied to a wide variety of educational institutions with a broad array of philosophies, values, and approaches to teaching and learning (Dunbar, 1999). As revealed by The Alternative School Research Project (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003), definitions of alternative schooling vary by state. However, of the 94% of states that had legislation or policies regarding alternative education, there were common themes among the definitions. These included defining alternative schools as: (a) schools or programs in nontraditional settings separate from the general education classroom; (b) schools that serve students who are at risk of school failure; (c) schools that serve students who are disruptive or have behavior problems and (d) schools that serve students who have been suspended or expelled.

Raywid’s (1994) typology of the types of alternative schools is often cited in defining the differences between various alternative learning contexts. Raywid describes the types of alternatives as follows:

1. Type I alternative schools. Raywid terms these schools “popular innovations” (p.27). They focus primarily on altering aspects of curriculum and instruction to provide a better education for their students. These schools are schools of choice and are usually popular.
2. Type II alternative schools. Raywid terms these schools “last-chance programs” (p.27), as students are “sentenced” to these programs as a last chance before expulsion. Focus of these schools is typically on behavior and behavior modification is often used. Unlike Type I schools, there is minimal attention to changes regarding curriculum or pedagogy.

3. Type III alternative schools. These “remedial focus” schools (p.27) are primarily for students who are in need of academic or social remediation. Type II and III schools focus on interventions that would allow students to eventually return to a typical school setting.

Students with behavioral difficulties attend all types of these schools, as students in this population typically have both behavioral and academic needs that may be deemed too challenging for general school teachers and settings. The type of school a student attends is significant, as there is a distinct difference between the underlying beliefs of Types II and III schools as compared to the popular innovations schools. Types II and III schools work under the presumption that the student is problematic and is need of some kind of correction (as opposed to the belief that it is the school or the society in need of remediation). This difference is also significant as the popular innovation/Type I schools have a more frequent success rate than the corrective schools (Raywid, 1999).

**Aspects of Alternative Schools that Prove Beneficial**

As a group, students with behavioral difficulties face an array of challenges in academic and social functioning. Among these challenges, each student varies in the actual severity of his/her disability, and such, it is vital that alternative schools and programs are highly individualized (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005; Wasburn-Moses, 2011). Besides providing individualized programs, Lange and Sletton (2002) illuminate common characteristics of alternative schools as mentioned in the research: they tend to be small in size, emphasize one-one-one time between students
and teachers, create a supportive environment, allow opportunities to succeed relevant to the students’ future, and allow for flexibility. Each of these characteristics alone, however, is not necessarily beneficial for student success; the combination of these components is what makes the school successful (Maggin et al., 2011).

Alternative school settings also have the potential to connect youth to much-needed public services that may not be provided in a general school setting. These include mental health agencies, the juvenile justice system, substance abuse treatment agencies, family planning agencies, and job placement agencies (Zweig, 2003). Though the most widely reported collaboration is with the juvenile justice system (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002), connection with multiple agencies are vital to students with behavioral difficulties as it provides them with essential social and emotional support.

**Further Research**

Since there is currently such variation in the types of alternative schools, it is difficult to make large generalizations about alternative learning contexts and their effectiveness (Lange & Sletton, 2002). Analyses of individual alternative schools would be beneficial in determining their effectiveness for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Though teaching students with behavioral difficulties in alternative school contexts is in need of further study, more information is needed about teachers working in these specific settings, as well (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006).

Teachers of students with behavioral difficulties are significantly younger, disproportionately male, and have significantly fewer years of teaching experience than other special educators (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). Their teachers are also
more likely to seek reassignment or leave the teaching profession, as student behavior is a leading cause of teacher burnout (Bibou-Nakou, Stogiannidou, & Kiosseoglou, 1999; Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Brownell, Smith, and McNellis, 1997; Hastings & Bham, 2003).

For instance, in their examination of the career plans of teachers of students with behavioral difficulties, George, George, Gersten, and Grosenick (1995) found that over one third of the teachers planned to leave the field in the upcoming school year. This is ultimately disconcerting as students with behavioral difficulties, in general, thrive in environments of consistency and routine (Banda, Grimmett, & Hart, 2009; Kamps, Kravitz, Stolze, & Swaggart, 1999).

To increase retention of these special educators, researchers have searched for reasons that these teachers stay in the field. Prather-Jones (2011) determined that specifically, teachers of students with behavioral difficulties seem to stay in the field because of their belief in their “fit” between their personality and the demands of this career; As one of her participants illuminated in a characteristically unique qualitative study on retention, “you have to have a certain kind of craziness” to stay in this field (p. 179).

In general education research, student misbehavior is often cited as a leading reason for teacher burnout (Bibou-Nakou, Stogiannidou, & Kiosseoglou, 1999; Brownell, Smith, and McNellis, 1997; Hastings & Bham, 2003); however, since the misbehavior that students with behavioral difficulties demonstrate is more severe, teachers of students with behavioral difficulties may experience this stress to an elevated degree. For
example, teachers of students with EBD have to cope with injuries inflicted on them by their students; the injury rate for teachers of student with behavioral difficulties is four times that of other teachers (Center & Callaway, 1999). To further complicate the matter, teachers trained as intervention specialists have additional teacher preparation dealing specifically with student misbehavior, so it is possible that they are more comfortable dealing with classroom management issues.

In light of all these complications in both the teaching of students with behavioral difficulties in alternative schools and the struggles their teachers face, there are few studies that specifically examine this population of teachers (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). This is the case, even as research has shown that teachers are a dominant force in how students in alternative schools perceive their school experiences (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

This body of research has only provided a minimal understanding of the complexity involved in this teaching role. My research questions for this study build on the questions that these research studies have provoked and begin to delve deeper into the examination of these teachers. The fields of special and general education will benefit from further research on teachers of students with behavioral difficulties, specifically regarding their perceptions and their beliefs about their successes in the classroom.

**Defining Teacher Efficacy**

The concept of “self-efficacy” is embedded within Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) developed social cognitive theory in response to the rise of behaviorism in psychology; he believed that cognition played a significant and
under-discussed role in the study of human behavior. He also recognized that though humans are a deciding factor in their behavior, there are also vital environmental factors at play. Social cognitive theory defines human behavior in terms of these three interactions; it is the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior, and the environment. Figure 1 demonstrates this interaction in which Bandura terms “triadic reciprocal causation” (p.24).

![Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation](image)

*Figure 1. Bandura’s triadic reciprocal causation, 1986, p. 24*

Self-efficacy, an aspect of personal characteristics that influence our behavior, is a person’s belief in their ability to achieve a goal. Bandura (1997) suggests that a person’s self-efficacy can influence the judgments they make regarding behavior, the amount of effort they put into an activity, the amount of perseverance in their completion of an activity, and a person’s ability to cope in stressful situations. A person’s self-efficacy is a personal judgment of capability; efficacy beliefs are intentions and focus on what a person “would do” in certain situations, as opposed to what they “could do.” Within the study of human behavior, Bandura believes that self-efficacy focuses on a person’s belief that they are capable of performing a certain action under varying levels of
circumstances, and thus, differs from other related constructs, such as outcome expectancy and self-esteem (Bandura, 1977).

The construct of teacher efficacy is molded for the educational domain from Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy. It is defined as “teachers’ judgments about their ability to promote students’ learning” (Hoy & Spero, 2005, p. 343), or simply a teacher’s belief in their own ability to achieve success in the classroom. The terms “teacher efficacy”, “teacher sense of efficacy”, and “teacher self-efficacy” are used somewhat synonymously throughout the literature.

Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier, & Ellet (2008) assert that “teacher efficacy”, which is often shortened from “teacher sense of efficacy,” is distinctly different from the concept of teacher self-efficacy and does not adequately represent Bandura’s self-efficacy theory. The authors recently (2008) developed the Teachers’ Efficacy Belief System-Self (TEBS-Self) measurement scale through dissertation work to reflect more accurately the “self-efficacy” beliefs of teachers. Other authors have also found discontent with current definitions of teacher efficacy (Friedman & Kass, 2002; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Soodak & Podell, 1996; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), but have not specifically illuminated terminology clarification. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the term “teacher efficacy” as an all-encompassing term analyzing research in teacher efficacy, teacher sense of efficacy, and teacher self-efficacy.

**History of the Teacher Efficacy Construct**

The direct study of teacher efficacy did not begin until the late 1970’s. Up until the 1970’s, “most research on teaching was based on the model of looking for
associations between some measure of student learning (most often achievement tests) and variables describing classrooms, including both teacher actions and those of the students” (Floden, 2001, p.5). This is evident in how the study of teacher efficacy began.

**RAND Items**

The study of teacher efficacy began indirectly with two studies conducted by the RAND organization in 1976. The RAND studies “stumbled” upon teacher efficacy in an evaluation of 100 projects funded by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977). In both studies, teachers were asked to rate the following items: “When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment,” and “If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.” These two items highlighted a significant teacher characteristic and became the foundation for a new area of research: a teacher’s sense of efficacy.

Armor et. al (1976) evaluated the effectiveness of the School Preferred Reading program in Los Angeles, California to determine what made these schools successful in promoting inner-city reading achievement. Results of the questionnaire pinpointed the two items to be most powerful of studied teacher characteristics, and results specifically illuminated that teachers with greater teacher efficacy rendered students with greater reading achievement. Berman et al. (1977) came upon similar results. In their study, teacher efficacy showed to be the best predictor of improved student performance, as well as the percentage of goals that were achieved in the project and teacher success with the methods and materials of the project. In both studies, teacher efficacy beliefs were
thought of as an “intervening variable” that could positively impact teachers’ actions in the classroom (Denham & Michael, 1981).

**Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES)**

In 1984, Gibson and Dembo expanded upon the two items in the RAND studies. Utilizing Albert Bandura’s work in social cognitive theory (1977) to conceptualize teacher efficacy, they developed a 30-item, Likert format measurement called the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES). The authors had multiple purposes in the three phases of their investigation. First in preliminary scale development, the authors wanted to determine the dimensions of teacher efficacy and how it related to Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy. Second through multitrait-multimethod analysis, the authors sought to define teacher efficacy by how it differentiated from similar constructs. Finally, the authors aimed to determine patterns of teacher behavior that were related to teacher efficacy.

The TES defined teacher efficacy as a multidimensional construct paralleling at least two dimensions of Bandura’s model of self-efficacy. From their research, they identified and labeled the two dimensions: *personal teacher efficacy* and *teacher efficacy*.  

*Personal teacher efficacy*, a teacher’s skills specific to him/herself, was represented on the scale in such statements as: “When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students” and “When a student is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust to his/her level.”

*Teacher efficacy* was defined as a general collective view of teacher abilities. This dimension was represented in such statements as: “A teacher is very limited in what
he/she can achieve because a student’s home environment is a large influence on his/her environment” and “If a teacher has adequate skills and motivation, she/he can get through to the most difficult students.” Teachers had the option of choosing from the following to rate the statements: strongly disagree, moderately disagree, disagree slightly/more than agree, agree slightly/more than disagree, moderately agree, and strongly agree.

Through correlational studies in the development of the scale, Gibson and Dembo further added to the conceptualization of teacher efficacy. The authors found that teacher efficacy has the potential to influence teacher expectations of students, teacher persistence, and the nature of student feedback. Specifically, teachers who have higher expectations of their students and who had confidence in their ability to teach those students criticized those students less and persisted longer with those students until they answered correctly. The researchers warned that the current analyses were only suggested hypotheses and that further validation of the TES is needed; however, the scale’s potential was unfathomable. This scale has since become the most widely used in teacher efficacy literature (Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Hasse, 2001; Ross, 1994).

**Further research with the TES.** Whereas the RAND studies had formed a theoretical base and interpreted test items using Julian Rotter’s theory of locus of control (Denham & Michael, 1981; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001), Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) TES opened up a new strand of research based upon Bandura’s construct of self-efficacy. This provided many new avenues for research. Using the TES, researchers constructed studies to determine the relationship between teacher efficacy and various characteristics, as well as to determine the extent of its impact. Research utilizing the
TES has attempted to correlate teacher efficacy with a commitment to teaching, as in studies done by Evans and Tribble (1986) and Coladarci (1992), and disciplinary strategies, as in de la Torre Cruz and Arias (2007).

Evans and Tribble also determined correlations between grade level and gender as it relates to teacher efficacy, specifically that preservice elementary and female teachers have a stronger sense of efficacy than secondary/male teachers. Also utilizing the TES, Goddard & Goddard (2001) tested the relationships of teacher efficacy in urban schools and found that collective efficacy predicted the variation in teacher efficacy beyond that of school contextual factors. The results of Henson’s (2001) use of the TES indicated that participation in teacher research has a positive impact on teacher efficacy. More recently, use of the TES has shown relationships between high teacher efficacy and less negative predictions of students (Tournaki & Podell, 2005).

Since the measure is so widely utilized, substantial research has been conducted analyzing the components of the TES. Utilizing the TES in a correlational study of preservice teachers, Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) determined that the two components of teacher efficacy as suggested by Gibson and Dembo —personal and teacher efficacy — were sometimes related, but not in all cases. Through their work, they identified components of the construct as independent and proposed the labels, personal teacher efficacy and general teacher efficacy. The authors offered an example further explaining the nature of personal and general teacher efficacy: a teacher could believe that teachers, in general, could make a positive impact on their students’ learning (high general teacher efficacy), though that same teacher may not feel that they have the ability to be as
influential with their own students’ content mastery (low personal teacher efficacy).
Woolfolk and Hoy further explained that because of the interrelatedness and sometimes
contrasting nature of the construct, it is difficult to identify individuals simply as “high
efficacy” and “low efficacy” teachers.

Ross (1994) also suggested that the two components of teacher efficacy be studied
independently, as he utilized a time series design to measure teacher efficacy with the
TES. He found that general, not personal teaching efficacy could be changed through a
professional development program. Further researchers also called for independent
measures of personal and general teacher efficacy (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999) and further
development of the general teacher efficacy subscale of the TES (Henson, Kogan, &
Vacha-Haase, 2001). Denzine, Cooney, and McKenzie (2005) go as far to suggest that
previously-made conclusions using the TES, including updated versions of it, are
questionable and may only be valid for certain populations of teachers (e.g. inservice v.
preservice teachers).

Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

Much of the research on teacher efficacy, including earlier studies and current
endeavors, revolve around moderate correlations found using either the RAND items or
Gibson and Dembo’s TES. These studies, especially those utilizing Gibson and Dembo’s
measure, generally credit Albert Bandura’s theoretical framework of self-efficacy as the
basis for their work (Coladarci, 1992). In 1997, Bandura proposed that his theory was
not accurately reflected in the TES; specifically, that teacher efficacy is context specific,
and that it is not uniform across the various tasks that teacher’s undertake in their role of
teacher. Thus, he developed a scale that specifically reflected his take of teacher self-efficiency—the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale. This scale first circulated among researchers in its unpublished form (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), though little research is available utilizing it (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

**Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale**

Inspired from the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and rooted in Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) developed the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES). The authors initially developed the scale in a seminar on self-efficacy in teaching and learning at The Ohio State University. The authors stated that they explored multiple formats for the scale, including a Likert-type instrument paralleling the TES, but decided on an instrument based on Bandura’s scale; 23 items from Bandura’s 30-item scale were used in preliminary development of the OSTES.

The authors tested the scale in three separate studies of preservice and inservice teachers. The results of the study proposed an instrument consisting of three components: teacher efficacy for instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Teachers responded to statements such as “To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused” (Instructional Strategies), “How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom” (Classroom Management), and “How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork” (Student Engagement). The teachers chose from the following anchors: nothing, very little, some influence, quite a bit, or a great deal.
The authors proposed two types of the OSTES that could be utilized in further research: a long form with 24 items, and a short form with 12. The authors firmly believed that the scale had substantial potential, asserting that:

It is superior to previous measures of teacher efficacy in that it has a unified and stable factor structure and assesses a broad range of capabilities that teachers consider important to good teaching, without being so specific as to render it useless for comparisons of teachers across contexts, levels and subjects” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p.801-2).

The authors would later change the name of the scale to the “Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale” (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Through further study of the TSES the authors explored the sources of teacher efficacy beliefs in novice and veteran teachers. Overall, they found that novice teachers had somewhat lower self-efficacy beliefs than their more experienced counterparts. Considering this, they determined that teaching resources and relationships were a vital component to the self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers. Utilizing the short form of the TSES to study contextual factors and student teachers’ efficacy beliefs, Knoblauch and Hoy (2008) determined that teacher efficacy significantly increases following student teaching.

Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (STEBI)

Based on Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) TES and under the proposal that teacher efficacy is context-specific, Riggs and Enochs (1990) developed a scale to measure self-efficacy specifically for teaching science. The Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (STEBI) is a 25 item Likert-type format scale and measures two components—Personal Science Teaching Efficacy and Science Teaching Outcome Expectancy. Statements such as “Even when I try very hard, I do not teach science as
well as I do most subjects” are used for personal science teaching efficacy; and statements such as “The low science achievement of some students cannot generally be blamed on their teachers” are used for outcome expectancy.

Studies utilizing this scale have proposed that increased science content knowledge is related to improved science teaching efficacy (Jarrett 1999; Tosun, 2000), teacher preparation programs have the ability impact prospective teachers efficacy when they enter the field as a teacher (Wingfield, Freeman, & Ramsey, 2000), and inquiry can achieve higher science teaching efficacy (Eschach 2003). Several scales have also been developed by modifying the STEBI. Enochs (2000) adapted the STEBI to Mathematics teaching in developing the Mathematics Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (MTEBI). Ritter, Boone, and Rubber (2001) also developed the Self Efficacy Beliefs about Equitable Science Teaching and Learning (SEBEST) scale, which focuses specifically on science teacher efficacy for diverse learners. The authors state that this scale was modeled after the STEBI, and was influenced heavily from Ashton and Webb (1986) and Bandura (1977).

**Teacher Efficacy in Special Education**

There are only a handful of studies that explore the teacher efficacy of special education teachers or general educators working with students receiving special education services. As consistent with the field of teacher efficacy in general, these inquiries explore teacher efficacy through the development of relevant measurement scales applied specifically to special education topics (Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2011; Viel-Ruman, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010).
These studies have identified teacher efficacy as an element related to the job satisfaction of special educators (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010), the supervision of special education teachers (Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2011), and teachers’ referral decisions (Gibbs & Powell, 2011; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Soodak & Podell, 1994). All of these studies distinguish teacher efficacy as a potentially powerful concept within the field of special education and believe that creating professional development and other educational experiences that foster and support teachers’ efficacy would be beneficial to the special education community (Brownell & Pajares, 1999).

Within this body of literature, there is even less research that focuses specifically on teacher efficacy working with students with behavioral difficulties. The studies that do focus on teaching this population of students illuminate some important aspects of the construct, primarily related to the behavior issues that these students display and the impact on the theoretical orientation on teacher efficacy. Research has begun to demonstrate how teacher efficacy relates to inclusion and the placements settings of students with behavior issues. For example, in their study of 200 second grade teachers, Brownell and Pajares (1999) found that general education teachers with higher efficacy for teaching students with behavioral difficulties are more receptive of inclusion. These teachers also persist in teaching students with EBD even when complications arise, opposed to those teachers who feel less successful in their efforts.

This is consistent with Frey’s (2002) study of special education teachers; Frey determined that teacher efficacy is predictive of the placements settings of students with
behavioral difficulties (e.g. moving students to more restrictive setting); specifically, Frey
determined that these teacher perceptions, especially their perceptions of their classroom
management and discipline skills, impacted the teachers’ decisions to place students in
more restrictive settings, even if these settings were not entirely needed. This is an
important aspect of the construct that warrants further study in that feelings and
confidence in classroom management could contribute to lower levels of teacher burnout
and stress among these teachers (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2010).

Further, research has begun to investigate how teacher efficacy is impacted by
these special educators’ commitment to a theoretical orientation. This commitment to a
specific philosophy of teaching, such as the belief in ABA behaviorist practices, is related
to how teachers feel about their ability to impact their students’ learning; “The more
committed a teacher was to the underlying philosophy of a teaching orientation, the
greater the sense that he or she was having an effect on students” (Jennett, Harris, &
Mesibov, 2003, p. 590). A teacher that feels strongly committed to their theoretical
orientation tends to be more satisfied with the work they do and are less likely to
experience burnout (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003; Siu & Ho, 2010). As with the
studies of teacher efficacy in general, and in the field of special education in general,
these studies utilized solely quantitative measures to determine their conclusions.

**Nature of Teacher Efficacy Research**

Since teacher efficacy research originated within the field of psychology, it is
expected that initial researchers within this field would have primarily taken an objective-
quantitative approach to research on teaching (Gage, 1989); this approach, however, has
continued even through the paradigm wars (Smith, 1983). Since this jostling of ideas in research, inquiry in the broader field of education has begun to explore a variety of ways of knowing in addressing the multiplicity surrounding the behavioral and social sciences. Focus has expanded and shifted to explorations of understanding.

The field of teacher efficacy, however, has not been concerned with understanding the construct (Labone, 2004); the “epistemological disruptions” of the 1960’s and 1970’s have gone largely ignored (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001, p. 18). Researchers in the field have primarily studied the construct through a positivist lens; similarly researchers have believed that we can aptly obtain the essence of teacher efficacy through a mean score on a rating scale. This is consistent with positivism, as positivists believe that knowledge is “out there” ready to be grasped. Positivists attest to a general, external reality and tend to focus on: “how things really are” in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 65).

Positivists also believe that research can be carried out objectively with minimal influence from the researcher; they tend to disregard the fact that the researchers themselves are human beings and are members of various social groups. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) provide some examples of notions of subjectivity that positivists tend to ignore:

deciding what to study (i.e., what are the important problems?), developing instruments that are believed to measure what the researcher views as being the target construct, choosing the specific tests and items for measurement, making score interpretations, selecting alpha levels (e.g., .05), drawing conclusions and interpretations based on the collected data, deciding what elements of the data to emphasize or publish, and deciding what findings are practically significant (p.15-16)
This list draws on the nature of studying teacher efficacy: it is difficult to do through an objective lens. The very definition of the construct—a teacher’s belief in his/her ability—raises (or should raise) considerations of subjectivity. There are authors in teacher efficacy research that address this issue—that results are based on teacher beliefs using a self-report instrument; however, this is done in the limitations section of the studies. The idea that the scale may reflect teachers’ subjective perspectives is seen as a negative aspect of the study.

As mentioned earlier, research parallels the epistemological and ontological orientations of the researcher. Specific forms of inquiry can also continue to impact the researcher’s own view of knowledge and reality. This is directly represented in the field of teacher efficacy: researchers with positivist underpinnings have conducted primarily quantitative research. This has been the case either because their theoretical assumptions have led them to quantitative research or quantitative research led them to certain beliefs about knowledge and the world.

As documented in the above historical analysis of teacher efficacy research, choice of methodology has largely been quantitative, with emphasis on correlational studies. Studies have either developed an instrument scale to measure teacher efficacy or used the scales to determine what variables are associated with high and low efficacy. Though research has determined the importance of teacher efficacy within educational study, the field has had difficulty taking it much further than that. Researchers have, in a sense, become constrained by their one-dimensionality in epistemological and ontological framework and methodology. Research has illuminated the power of teacher efficacy
and variables related to it, but from there it is “stuck”; there is little research that has been able to explain the meaning behind this power.

Since a substantial focus of research in teacher efficacy has been concerned with self-report measurement scales, qualitative inquiries into teacher efficacy beliefs have been rare. This is true even though authors in the field have begun to call for a broader understanding of the construct beyond numerical data (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008; Labone, 2004; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Wheatley, 2005). In qualitative approaches to study, participants in the research become “the expert—it is his or her view of reality that the researcher seeks to interpret” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 455). There have been a few researchers who have attempted to answer this call for research and have done so while abandoning positivistic underpinnings. These authors (Milner & Hoy, 2003; Puchner & Taylor, 2006) use an alternative approach to explore teacher efficacy while recognizing their participants as experts of teaching efficacy.

Milner and Hoy’s (2003) case study of a single teacher is one of the first quality qualitative studies appearing in teacher efficacy research. In their study, the authors examined the experiences of one teacher, Dr. Wilson, in an attempt to understand her teaching efficacy and persistence as an African American teacher in a suburban school district. Milner and Hoy specifically address the lack of qualitative research in teacher efficacy and employed informal interviews and conversations, semi-formal interviews, observations, and other ethnographic methods. Themes were expanded upon with rich data gained through interviews with the participant.
The use of qualitative methods illuminated aspects of teacher efficacy that would not have appeared on a teacher efficacy survey. For example, Dr. Wilson might have been easily categorized as a teacher with high teaching efficacy; however, her sense of efficacy fluctuated as she struggled to feel welcome or part of the school community. The teacher efficacy doubts that she experienced were a necessarily element to her establishment of self (Wheatley, 2002). Dr. Wilson also alluded to strategies she used to overcome these times, specifically reflecting on areas of accomplishment and success in her teaching career. The authors further note specifically that: “This inquiry provided evidence that the current measures of teacher self-efficacy may fail to capture some of the issues that this teacher encountered when she experienced stereotype threat” (Milner & Hoy, 2003, p. 274).

Puchner and Taylor’s (2006) inquiry into “lesson study”, a Japanese approach to professional development, represents another qualitative approach to teacher efficacy research. Utilizing a collective case study methodology, the researchers were interested in how teachers talked about their experiences and perspectives regarding the lesson study process. The authors stated that teachers’ perceptions were the “most important and most striking” of the study (p. 928). One of the themes that emerged from the teachers’ perceptions was teacher efficacy. Since the teachers saw that they could have a positive impact on their students’ learning, they increased their expectations of the students. The study concluded that in the long term, teacher efficacy had the power to increase student achievement.
These two studies have offered an excellent starting point into qualitative research and have addressed an aspect of teacher efficacy that has largely been ignored; however, qualitative teacher efficacy researchers have had difficulty bridging the gap between a largely positivisticly-oriented field of researchers and research and purely interpretivist, qualitative approaches to a problem.

Summary

In this section, I explored the theoretical and empirical foundations for my research study—the field of teaching students with behavioral difficulties and the field of teacher efficacy. Specifically, I defined EBD, autism, and ADHD, and explored the dimensions of teaching these groups of students. I also examined the field of teacher efficacy by tracing the history of research on the construct. Finally, I pinpointed gaps in research in both fields and have begun to connect these to my research study. This literature contributed to the development of my research questions and to my study as a whole. In the next chapter, I illuminate the methods and procedures that I implemented to explore my research questions. I present these procedures within my realm of my theoretical orientation. Further, I detail the specifics of the procedures, including participant and site selection, data collection and analysis measures, and trustworthiness and validity.
CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research was to explore a group of teachers’ perceptions of their efficacy as it relates to their role teaching students with behavioral difficulties in an alternative school setting. In this chapter, I present the design and procedures I used to conduct this research based on the information presented in Chapters I and II. To best explore my research questions presented in Chapter I and based on the literature presented in Chapter II, I utilized a qualitatively-driven mixed methods approach. Specifically, I conducted this research using a mixed methods sequential design with priority given to the qualitative data collection and analysis. Table 2 specifically illustrates my research questions, combined with the data source and the method of data analysis that was used to address the questions. I have also included the ways in which the data was merged within the research procedures.

In this section, I will explain the aspects of this table in further detail. After initially introducing my theoretical orientation and the design for this study, I will describe the process of participant and site selection. I will then specify how I collected the quantitative and qualitative data, analyzed the data, and promoted trustworthiness and validity throughout this process.

Theoretical Orientation
Researchers influenced by an interpretivist theoretical framework focus on understanding life through the participant’s viewpoint; these researchers believe that people create meaningful interpretations of their experiences (Creswell, 2003; Erickson, Table 2

*Merging of Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Merging of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **What are the efficacy beliefs of teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties?** | • Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale  
• Interviews Round 1  
• Interviews Round 2  
• Interview Round 3 | • Descriptive statistics  
• Initial coding  
• Focused coding | • Analysis of survey informed interview questions  
• Analysis of all measures used to make comparisons in the write-up process |

Sub 1: What are their efficacy beliefs in student engagement?

Sub 2: What are their efficacy beliefs in instructional practices?

Sub 3: What are their efficacy beliefs in classroom management?

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Sub 1: What are their efficacy beliefs in student engagement?

Sub 2: What are their efficacy beliefs in instructional practices?

Sub 3: What are their efficacy beliefs in classroom management?
1986). For this study, interpretivist assumptions were recognized. I acknowledged that there is no objective reality or truth “out there” waiting to be discovered; and thus, I focused on the teachers’ perspectives of their teaching experiences. Research shows that this can lead to some challenges as the outcome of the research can be somewhat unpredictable (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). I embraced this aspect of the study, however, and I continually tried to explore data that produced “surprises, changes of directions, and new insights” (Bryman, 2008, p.268). For example, in the first round of interviews, the teachers and I spent time talking about the participant’s co-teachers, as they were mentioned as a significant part of their school day. This was an unanticipated direction to the interviews; however, it offered much insight into their life as a teacher and to the construction of their efficacy.

**Design**

Mixed methods research is a powerful means to obtain more meaningful ways of knowing by “stretch[ing] the boundaries of what is known in new directions” (Greene, 2001, p. 251). Mixed methods approaches to inquiry let the researcher utilize both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses methods to gain further and more in-depth insights into the phenomenon under study (Rocco et al., 2003). These approaches can be also extremely useful in terms of understanding the complexity of human life and experience (Greene & Caracelli, 2003) and can prove to be extremely powerful in understanding a complex construct, such as teacher efficacy.
For this study, I employed a qualitatively-driven mixed methods design. The use of mixed methods in educational research has increased in recent years, including in the field of teacher efficacy, (see Bruce, Esmond, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010; Hebert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998; Henson, 2001; Ramey-Gassert, Shroyer, & Staver, 1996; Ross, 1994). However, a significant amount of this research focuses primarily on quantitative data from a positivist epistemological perspective; the qualitative data is only used to validate the quantitative data findings. Conversely, qualitatively-driven mixed methods approaches acknowledge an interpretive epistemological perspective and are carried out with priority given to the qualitative research.

This approach to research acknowledges key characteristics of qualitative research, while pushing beyond the boundaries of both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Mason, 2006). For instance, qualitatively-driven mixed methods designs have the ability to recognize and operate under the same fundamental assumptions of purely qualitatively driven studies: such as focusing on participant meaning making, the researcher as the data gathering instrument, inductive data analysis, and reflexivity (Hatch 2002). Following this approach, however, I was also able to utilize quantitative methods to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic of study. (Bryman, 2008).

A mixed methods approach rooted in an interpretive perspective allowed me to dig deeper into the construct from the teacher’s point of view and offered a means to obtain a multifaceted understanding of these teachers’ efficacy (Morse, 2003).

Participant Selection
Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of the participants. In the spring of 2012, I initially selected an alternative school that I believed had sufficient information to explore my research questions. This school was selected because: (a) it was a school that primarily served students with EBD, (b) it was smaller than a public school setting and boasted a low teacher-to-student ratio in each classroom, as is consistent with alternative school programs, in general (Lange & Sletton, 2002; Maggin, Wehby, Partin, Rovertson, & Oliver, 2011), and (c) it had an optimal location for traveling. Three of the four lead teachers at the school completed the survey and agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. However, after many attempts to contact the participants, only one teacher continued with the interviews. Due to low teacher participation, another alternative school was selected and utilized for this study.

After I submitted a modification to my Institutional Review Board application and was granted approval to work with additional schools for this research study (Appendix A), I selected an additional school in early Fall of 2012. Valley Alternative Schools was selected because it had the same qualifications as the first school, aside from one key characteristic. This difference between the initial school and Valley Alternative was that Valley Alternative did not only serve students with EBD; the population of students enrolled at Valley Alternative varied. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the disabilities served at the school.

Valley Alternative Schools is categorized as a group of tuition-free, non-profit 501(c)(3) community schools that serve students throughout the state of Ohio. Run by the Valley Alternative Management company, a non-profit 509(a)(3) foundation, the
schools are specifically designed to address the social, emotional and academic needs of students with special needs. The organization’s web site states that the majority of the students that attend the schools are alternative learners on an Individualized Education Plan.

The schools are guided by the belief that every child can learn if given the appropriate education. Specifically, the mission of the organization is the following: “Valley Alternative School* promotes an educational environment where each student has an equal opportunity to develop skills essential for lifelong learning and to meet the challenges of living in society.” Using a whole child approach to learning, the organization states that the schools implement individual counseling, social skills training, therapeutic martial arts, and the behavior principles of ABA (web site). Valley Alternative Schools* is a pseudonym that I created to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

The first Valley Alternative School opened in the 1999-2000 school year. Since then, the school has branched out to include 27 elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The teachers that were invited and that participated in this dissertation study taught at two schools within Valley Alternative Schools—Valley Alternative Community School (CS) and Valley Alternative Secondary School (SS). On the available 2010-2011 Report Card provided by the Ohio Department of Education, Valley Alternative CS is designated as Academic Emergency with 2 out of 25 state indicators being met. Valley Alternative SS is designated as Continuous Improvement with 2 out of 11 state indicators being met.
As of the 2012-2013 school year, Valley Alternative CS is a K-12 community school serving 242 students. Of those students, 69% of students are male and 31% are female. Regarding the race/ethnicity backgrounds of students, 72.4% of students identify as White, 12.3% as Black, 7.1% as Hispanic, and 8.1% as multiracial. Sixty-seven percent of the students enrolled are categorized as economically disadvantaged. Table 1 illuminates the breakdown of disabilities at this school for this school year.

As of the 2012-2013 school year, Valley Alternative SS is a secondary school serving 88 students in grades 9-12. Of those students, 68.2% are male and 31.8% are female. Regarding the race/ethnicity backgrounds of students, 69.6% of students identify as White, Non-Hispanic. Eighty-two percent of the students enrolled are categorized as economically disadvantaged. Table 3 illuminates the breakdown of disabilities served at this school.

Table 3

*Breakdown of Disabilities by School: 2012-2013 School Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valley Alternative CS</th>
<th>Valley Alternative SS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Language Impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Disability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impaired Minor (typically ADHD)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability Identified</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>242</strong></td>
<td><strong>88</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All classroom teachers at Valley Alternative CS and SS were emailed an introductory letter and a survey to complete. The introductory letter outlined the specific details of the study, including my personal information and background, the goals of the study, possible risks/benefits to participants, the means of data collection for the study, and the responsibilities of the participants (Appendix B). This letter was similar to but more informal than an informed consent form that was utilized later in the research.

The survey that was emailed to the teachers was composed of two sections: a demographics section (Appendix C) and the teacher efficacy scale (Appendix D). Ten teachers returned the survey. Of those ten, five teachers agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study and two requested more information. Of those seven teachers, four teachers participated in the interview portion of the study: Paige, Mary, Russell, and Lynn. These participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym that was utilized throughout the study. To ensure participant confidentiality, the pseudonym was used in all labeling of surveys, audio-tapes, transcripts, and in the write-up process.

**The Teachers**

This section introduces each of the four teachers that agreed to participate in this study. Each of the teachers reviewed this biography and provided feedback on appropriateness and accuracy.

**Paige.** Paige teaches secondary science in grades 9-12 at Valley Alternative CS. In her current teaching environment, Paige interacts with a co-teacher during the day. Paige’s co-teacher was a new teacher this academic year. She had the opportunity to participate in the hiring of her co-teacher, an uncommon practice at her school.
Paige has been teaching students with special needs for three years. She is a 46-year-old female and identifies as non-Hispanic White. Her educational experience includes earning an MS/MA plus additional credits. Paige was a research chemist before becoming a teacher at Valley Alternative.

When Paige was applying to schools for a teaching job, she stated that she had difficulty finding a typical position, because her teacher education program had a brief student teacher practicum. She described teaching at Valley Alternative as: “It just worked out that way. It all comes down to fate I guess, where life takes you…This ended up just where I ended up being. And this ended up being sort of perfect” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). When she got this position, the other teachers in her program believed that this was a good fit for her, because of the similarities between her home and school lives.

At home, Paige has two children with special needs: an 11-year-old with ADHD and a 12 year old with Asperger’s Syndrome. She believes that having children with special needs at home has impacted her role as a teacher at Valley Alternative as described below:

I look at these kids. And these kids, they are my son, you know, they are Asperger’s. My daughter has ADHD, you know, those kids come from trouble backgrounds, that was myself, my sisters, so you know, I see these kids as more of a connection to them…and I actually see my son in a lot of things. He will do a face or something like, God, you just look like Joe, you know, and then he’s like, who’s that? And I’m like, you know, just a kid. And so, I see him a lot. So, it
does. I think it makes a difference for me like…I have kids that have special needs (Interview 2, October 16, 2012).

In our discussions together, she further described this job for her as her life mission because of this connection she has to the children. She feels that this is not just a job to her.

Paige also stated that she feels a connection to the parents of her students, as well, and believes that it is difficult for other teachers to “get it” because they don’t go home with the children. She said that she believes that other teachers can be successful, but until they have that connection of someone they love with special needs, it is difficult to really have that connection to their work that she has.

**Lynn.** Lynn also teaches at Valley Alternative CS and teaches in grades K-2. She is a 29-year-old female and identifies as non-Hispanic White. In her current classroom, Lynn is part of a co-teaching environment with a first-year teacher. It is Lynn’s third year as a teacher at Valley Alternative and her first year as a teacher in the K-2 classroom. The last two years her classroom was specifically an Autism Unit (AU) for the primary grades.

Before becoming certified as a teacher, she spent two years as assistant teacher at Valley Alternative. She initially started out as an assistant in the fifth grade classroom; however, she struggled with this position and moved to the AU room in her second year as an assistant. In our first interview, she describes this experience: “Emotionally, I was just not prepared for it. So at that time I just didn’t have a lot of confidence in myself” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012).
She came to the teaching profession after completing her undergraduate degree in business and working in advertising and sales. She worked as an assistant teacher while receiving her certification and pursuing her Master’s degree in Mild/Moderate Intervention Specialist. She stated that she did not get the most out of her Master’s degree and that she appreciated having the experiences at Valley Academy as an assistant teacher. She said that: “This job has taught me the majority of what I learned so far” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012). She admitted that initially, she had some difficulties as lead teacher; she said there were times when she thought it was going to be too much for her. She elaborated that: “there were times when I didn’t think I was going to make it through. I had no idea like about the math curriculum and how to do that on top of the interventions for the kids and on top of behaviors” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

During the school day at Valley Alternative, Lynn follows a tight schedule. She primarily teaches Reading and Math to groups of kindergarten, first, and second graders (in various groupings); however, she also tries to “squeeze in science and social studies”, as well as social skills instruction during the school day with her students (Interview 1, 9/24/12). She receives a break from 12:30-1:00 for her lunch, though it is rare that she gets this “break” as she says that students are always struggling with behaviors and need help during this time.

**Russell.** Russell is a first year teacher and teaches Mathematics in grades 9-12 at Valley Alternative SS. Throughout the school day, Russell works with two co-teachers at various times. One co-teacher acts as an intervention specialist in the classroom and
handles IEP responsibilities. His second co-teacher did not hold a degree and assists solely with behavioral interventions.

Russell is a 34-year-old male and identifies as non-Hispanic White. His educational experience includes earning an MS/MA.

Russell worked for ten years as a consultant actuary out of college. He stated that he went back school to become a high school math teacher, because “it was something I wanted to do for a long time” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Russell came to teaching and to Valley specifically after completing a 15 month Masters Degree program in education; and he just finished the program the summer before he started at Valley. He stated that there wasn’t anything special about his program other than it focused on students in urban populations. He further said that his student teaching did not specifically focus on teaching students with autism or ADHD, so that part of his position has been a learning experience for him. For example, in his student teaching experience, he only had one student that was on an Individualized Education Plan.

In our first meeting, he shared his job search process: “Well I mean I was looking for a first year job. I did not have any other offers. That being said, I wasn’t going to jump in without being on board. So as soon as I saw the opening and was reading more about Valley, I really became excited about the idea” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Russell stated that he was not necessarily purposefully looking for this school, because he doesn’t have the background working with this population of students. However, the students that he worked with in his student teaching were also high needs, so he felt that the similarities between the populations would and have helped him. He stated that he
believes that all children can be considered as having special needs and because of this, he was very excited about getting the opportunity to work at a school like Valley.

Mary. Mary teaches Science in grades 9-12 at Valley Alternative SS and has been teaching students at Valley for seven years. She is a 52-year-old female and identifies as non-Hispanic White. She has numerous teacher licensures, and her educational experience includes earning an MS/MA.

Mary initially earned her teaching licensure through a Bachelor’s Plus program after completing her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and General Science. She taught for three years in Florida and Ohio before she decided to stop teaching to start a family. When she returned to teaching after her divorce, she updated her certification and added Middle School Science and Language Arts certification, as well as a K-12 Reading endorsement to her credentials. She stated that in the future she is also interested in going back to school to earn her intervention specialist certification. Ideally, she would earn this specialization part-time while continuing to teach at Valley.

She taught for three years at a catholic school before her position was cut. She then began working as a substitute teacher and applied for many full-time teaching positions unsuccessfully for four years. She then turned to work as an office assistant to support herself and her children. When she ended up getting the position at Valley, she stated that “I didn’t really choose to teach here, they chose me” (Email communication, 3/22/2013).
She expanded on this choice and her ability to find a teaching job in a typical school setting in our first interview. When I asked her why she chose to work at Valley she responded:

Why did I choose, I didn’t really choose to work at Valley. I have a lot of years of experience, and I took time off when I had my kids. And I had a hard time getting back into teaching because with the economy the way it is and funding for education, nobody wants to pay for an experienced teacher. And here there is no union. So they didn’t have to pay me for my years. And so that’s why I’m here. I was working for an accountant, and I wanted to get back into teaching. So that’s why I came here (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

She stated that it was by chance that she ended up at Valley and when she applied, she was really focusing on getting a teaching job with benefits, specifically health insurance. Further, she stated that it was the only school she had applied to in years that had given her a chance to return to teaching.

Even though she did not choose to work in this situation and it was very difficult when she initially started, over time she has begun to enjoy teaching in this school setting: “I definitely did not come looking for this, but it’s grown on me.” In a separate instance, she further elaborated on this idea:

I really enjoy it, I really do, and I don’t think I could find a teaching job somewhere else. But really, I don’t even look anymore, because I really enjoy seeing these kids that people give up on and kids who feel like they can’t do
anything right. I love seeing them have success and seeing them grow (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

She stated that she loves seeing the students succeed, especially when they are students who have struggled and are often suspected to fail.

The practice of co-teaching varies considerably in Mary’s classroom as compared to the other teachers in this study. Mary’s co-teachers vary depending on the class she teaches. In her first class, freshman Biology, she is the sole teacher and does not have a co-teacher. In her second class, Earth Science, the social studies teacher is the “lead” co-teacher of her classroom. For her third period class, a second Biology class, the health/physical education teacher serves as her co-teacher. In her Physical Science class before lunch she has an instructional aide as her co-teacher in the classroom. In her final class of the day, another Physical Science group, she has a different instructional aide as her co-teaching partner.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected to explore the research questions for this study. In a mixed methods research study, implementation refers to the sequence the researcher uses to collect the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Though it can vary, methods are typically implemented sequentially or concurrently (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). For this study the data was collected sequentially. First, quantitative data was collected in the form of participant surveys. After all of the survey data was collected and initially analyzed, I
began to collect the qualitative data. Results of the survey served as a springboard for the first round of interview questions.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative data collection was the first step in the procedures process and was obtained from the teacher efficacy surveys, specifically the long form of the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; Appendix D) (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The long form, consisting of 24 items, is divided into three subscales: efficacy for instructional strategies, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for student engagement. Participants responded to each item using a 9-point Likert scale. The following anchors were used for responses: 1 nothing, 3 very little, 5 some influence, 7 quite a bit, and 9 a great deal.

The three subscales represent the teacher’s personal and general teaching efficacy. The eight questions in the instruction subscale asked the participant to rate the extent to which they utilize and feel confident in various elements of teaching. For example, question two asked: “How much can you do to help your students think critically?” The eight questions in the management subscale pertain specifically to classroom disruptions and student behavior. For example, question five asked the participant: “To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?” These questions were analyzed carefully, as disruptive behavior is often seen as an accepted aspect of these teacher’s classrooms. The eight questions in the third subscale pertain to the participant’s efficacy for student engagement and motivation. For example, question four asked: “How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?”
Tschannen-Moran and Hoy report that the TSES is reasonably reliable and valid. In instrument development the authors found reliabilities for each subscale to be: 0.91 for instruction, 0.90 for management, and 0.87 for engagement. Construct validity was determined based on correlations between this measure and current measures in the field. The authors found positive correlations between the two most frequently used measures.

Aside from the survey data collection, general demographic information was collected from the participants, including their sex, age, ethnicity, grade level taught, level of education, years of teaching experience, and years of experience working with students with EBD (Appendix C). This information is typically requested in teacher efficacy survey studies, aside from the last item. The last item was included to explore the amount of experience these teachers had specifically with this population of students in relationship to their responses. There was also a blank space at the bottom of the information sheet that allowed participants to write additional information concerning their background, as necessary.

Data collection and analysis of quantitative measures led directly into data collection and analysis of qualitative measures. Data analysis of quantitative measures will be further detailed in the data analysis section.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

In qualitatively-driven mixed methods inquiry, the qualitative data is given priority and becomes the primary source of data collection in the study (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). For this study, I conducted three rounds of open-ended, in-depth interviews with each participant as the primary source of data collection. The
interviews were conducted in the teacher’s classroom, a meeting room in the school, or at a nearby coffee shop. Interviews were held after school at a time chosen by the participant.

These 12 interviews were treated as focused conversations. In this way, I approached each interview with broad, open-ended questions and let the “conversation” develop according to the discussion. In the conversational spirit of the collaboration, each interview varied in some way depending on participant perspective and willingness to share (deMarrais, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interview times varied from 30 to 60 minutes.

Interview questions were developed from my own interest, the literature on teaching students with behavioral difficulties and teacher efficacy, and participant responses. I initially developed an interview guide containing a list of questions (Appendix E). This guide was utilized primarily for the first interview only. However, I did briefly reference the guide when approaching the second round of interviews.

In the first round of interviews, I began by offering to answer any questions about the study and by asking the participants to sign the university-approved informed consent document (Appendix F). All of the participants signed the consent document and agreed to the audio-taping of the interviews. The goal of these first set of interviews was to get to know the participants, in general, and to begin to build a research relationship with them, as rapport building is a vital component to qualitative research (deMarrais, 2004; Schram, 2006).
The interviews in this round consisted mainly of “touring questions” that overviewed the participants’ general teaching experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example after introducing myself and the study, I began each of the first round of interviews by asking participants to walk me through their school day. Some participants provided me with a minute-by-minute breakdown of their day. Others walked me through their day in a general way, and I had to ask additional probing questions to get a better understanding of the general aspects of their teaching day.

In this first round, I also asked questions pertaining to the best and worst part to their job, including where they felt successful and least successful in their teaching. These answers helped me to determine their initial perceptions of their efficacy. These answers also led to questions on why they chose to work at this school and why they are still working at this school. Throughout these interviews, I continually used follow-up questions and probes to get richer descriptions in the conversations. This first round of interviews was very useful, in general. As previously described, research concerning teachers of students with behavioral difficulties is scarce, and thus this first round helped to paint a much-needed picture of their teaching lives.

The goal of the second round of interviews was to begin to target more specific aspects of the teacher efficacy construct, including their efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management—the main elements of my research questions. This second round of questions was also developed from the results of the quantitative data analysis. During the interviews, I asked teachers to expand on responses given in the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale. The goal of the second round
of interviews was to explore specific aspects of their efficacy, as well as to address inconsistencies and gaps between the quantitative and qualitative data.

Overall, the teachers had the lowest ratings in regard to the student engagement aspect of their efficacy. For example, Paige gave herself a rating of “3” rating (very little) for question number 9: “How much can you do to help your students value learning?” In response to this during this second round of interviews, I constructed interview questions that let her expand on this. For Paige, I asked her to describe to me how she knows her students are motivated in her various classes and what this looks like. I also discussed with her the role of engagement within her interview responses. For example, in this round of interviews she was discussing a hands-on science activity that she felt was successful with her students. During this conversation, she mentioned that she always has to search for ways to encourage her students to be more invested in what they are learning since they don’t care about grades or points. So my next interview question probed into this aspect and asked her to describe this further.

The third round of interviews were conducted after the second round of interviews were conducted and analyzed, and after a peer debriefer was utilized. The goal of these interviews was to begin to construct a holistic picture of the participants’ teacher efficacy (Erickson, 1986). Teachers were offered the choice to conduct these interviews through electronic communication and were these interviews were primarily used in response to previous interviews. In the email conversations with the participants, they had the opportunity to expand on previous notions, as well as to clarify previous responses.
The email was constructed around the following questions: 1. Do you have any thoughts on any changes/improvements that you have made in your classroom (or any general comments to make) regarding student engagement or motivation, teaching to varying abilities, student behavior or classroom management, and/or co-teaching? And 2.) Can you think of any recent examples on your thoughts/experiences with any of these areas? Each of these emails was personalized specifically to the participant based on our previous meeting. I found that this round of interviews was especially important, as they gave me an opportunity to explore some of the insights that emerged during data analysis and during peer debriefing sessions.

Participants were further contacted in the form of member checking, through email, as needed. I also contacted participants if I saw something that pertained to our conversations. For example, I sent a social skills instruction web site to one of the participants after we discussed her need for more social skills training materials in her classroom. All interviews were audiotaped for further analysis. After transcription of the interviews, audiotapes recorded in the interviews were kept in a locked cabinet when not in use.

**Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to explore the research questions. Analysis of the quantitative data collected in the demographic questionnaires and the teacher efficacy scales provided an initial “snapshot” of the teachers’ sense of efficacy. Through analysis of the qualitative data, details were added this snapshot to
create a more in-depth understanding of these teachers’ perceptions. Initial data analysis began as soon as surveys were returned. Further data analysis was ongoing.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

I conducted simple statistical analyses immediately as each survey was returned. Responses from survey questions were organized and summarized into an Excel spreadsheet. Participants were labeled in the spreadsheet according to the pseudonym previously provided. The survey data was entered, as well as the participants’ identification of their sex, age, ethnicity, grade level taught, level of education, years of teaching experience, and years of experience working with students with behavioral difficulties.

I also organized the data according to the three categories in the TSES scale: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Means and standard deviations were calculated for total efficacy scores, as well as for these categories.

These analyses served two purposes. First, I examined the participants’ answers in relationship to their personal characteristics. Descriptive statistics were examined; means and standards deviations of efficacy and characteristics were identified in the Excel spreadsheet. These analyses were especially useful in creating a picture of who the participants are.

The second and primary purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to flesh out any interesting responses to items in the survey and to use those items to inform questions in the interview process for participants, as a group and specifically. As
previously stated, I examined the components of the survey for each participant and focused some of the questions to encourage participants to expand on those survey questions.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

For this research study, the qualitative data analysis process was cyclical; as a researcher, I engaged in a process of “moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell, 2007, p. 150). I continually moved back and forth between the surveys, the interviews, the transcriptions, and the coding process.

Data analysis for the qualitative data began with the organization of the data—the transcription of the first round of interviews. I personally transcribed all of the interviews immediately following the meeting. This allowed me to being to analyze the data as soon as possible, while the interviews were fresh in my mind. At the same time, I had the interviews transcribed by the Research and Evaluation Bureau at Kent State University to ensure that I had an accurate copy of the interview data.

After I transcribed each of these interviews, I read through physical copies of the interviews twice. These first readings allowed me to get a general sense of the interview and to immerse myself in the entirety of the process before I began breaking it up for analytic purposes (Creswell, 2007). I also took brief notes in the margins and wrote a short summary at the end of each transcript.

After these initial readings and after I had transcribed all four interviews, I utilized Rubin & Rubin’s (2005) stages for beginning analysis. First, I read through the transcriptions thoroughly and identified common ideas among the interviews. Second,
after compiling a list of five ideas, I defined them. When defining the initial ideas, I gave each of them a label, definition, and summarized how it was used within the data. I also included a quote from the participants to include as an example (Boyatzis, 1998). This process in defining the initial concepts helped to make the analyses more thorough and rigorous. These defined concepts and ideas were used in the development of the second round of interview questions, along with the participants’ responses to the survey, as described previously.

Again, transcription of the second and third round of interviews began immediately after each interview. Coding of these interviews began once I transcribed them. During this process, I continually returned to my research questions and reacted accordingly, as the goals of these later stages of interviews was to explore my research questions, in depth.

I began this coding process by reading the transcriptions and making initial notes and summaries as I did with the first round of interviews. After this initial reading, I read through the text again and began highlighting the words in the text that I believed captured key/interesting ideas and concepts. I then returned to my codes from the first interviews and combined with my notes from these interviews, I identified six major organizing categories. I reread the transcripts with these categories in mind and marked instances where these categories were present. Categories with corresponding evidence were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for organization purposes. These became my coding schemes.
Through this process, I began to realize that by returning to my research questions I was actually approaching the data with three “prefigured” coding schemes (Crabtree & Miller, 1992): (a) student engagement, (b) instructional strategies, and (c) classroom management. These three themes were the three primary categories of the survey and served as the basis for many of my interview questions. With these coding schemes in mind; however, I still utilized immersion strategies and allowed myself to engage with the data more naturally. I wanted to be open to new codes as they emerged. This led to coding schemes that intertwined within the three prefigured coding schemes.

Finally, after these codes were developed, I created a joint display of the analysis organized by each of the participants. This allowed me to further define each code and to further develop them. These codes were checked for accuracy among the data, and were revised appropriately. The themes are presented as part of the study’s findings in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

**Peer debriefing.** After I transcribed the second round of interviews and began coding the data, I utilized a peer debriefer. The peer debriefer was a doctoral student who is familiar with my work and is currently completing his doctoral studies at a university in a neighboring state. He has been doing research in teacher efficacy and I thought it would be helpful for him to serve as someone who could possibly offer new perspectives on my coding schemes, as well as be able to relate my work to the current literature.

The debriefer was first given a copy of the interview transcripts and my initial codes. He was then asked to think and respond to the following: a) Do my titles and summaries of the code accurately reflect what the participants are saying? (Are these
initial themes representative of the data?) (b) Are there instances that challenge the code? (c) Is the theme worded correctly?, and (d) Is there anything else in the data that really “pops out” and I failed to mention it in the coding scheme? I further let him know that I appreciated any of his feedback, including challenges to my assumptions or ideas for alternative interpretations of the data.

Having multiple conversations with this peer debriefer allowed me to explore and refine many aspects of my research. First, the debriefer encouraged me to re-explore/reconsider some of the language I was using. For instance, as I was speaking to him about student engagement, I tended to put too much of the focus on the student and not the teacher. Since he was operating from an outside perspective, he was able to see some of these things that I completely overlooked. Second, he gave me notes on aspects of my study I would want to explore deeper in latter interviews. Some of these instances were notes that I had made about additional interview questioning, but some of them were ones that I had not considered. Finally, he prompted me to consider additional literature that would help me understand some of the codes better.

**Memoing.** Through this process, I also documented my thoughts and ideas in an electronic research journal. Theoretical memo-writing is an ongoing, intermediate phase between data collection, analysis, and the write-up phase (Charmaz, 2006; McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). I believe that these memos were an important component in my journey in that they helped me to develop new ideas, as well as to bring some of my ideas together. My memoing consisted mainly of freewriting (Charmaz, 2006) about the research process. For example, I have memos on additional ideas about the surveys,
interviews, and initial analysis. These memos were recording at various times throughout the day as I thought of them. By recording them electronically, I was able to easily access and dissect the information.

I also believe that these memos served as a means of reflection throughout the process. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that aside from memoing for theoretical enlightenment, memos can increase the sophistication of ideas, as well as document reflexivity. These memos also helped me to leave a “paper trail” of some of my ideas.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

Guba and Lincoln (1982) identify criteria that can be used to evaluate the trustworthiness of research. This section details credibility, confirmability, and reflexivity. Triangulation was utilized to establish credibility in the findings of my research; survey data and multiple rounds of interview data were collected. Member checking and peer debriefing were also used to enhance credibility. For this study, I utilized member checking in the later stages of research. Participants were emailed the biographies that I had written based on information given during the initial survey and during the interviews. In this email, participants were given a copy of their biography and asked to respond to the following: a) if the information is correct, b) if you agree with the information/it is worded appropriately, and c) if there is additional information about yourself that I left out that you believe is pertinent. I also mentioned that my goal was to ensure that I am giving the reader of this study a good sense of who they are as a person and as a teacher.
From this process, the participants made some changes to the details of their background, as well as experienced discoveries about themselves as participants. For instance, Paige mentioned that the information sounded accurate but she was embarrassed by how much she said “like you know” during our interviews. Mary made changes to her biography and then replied that, “Ok, I guess I write better than I talk.😊” (Email communication, 3/22/2013).

A described in a previous section, a peer debriefer was also used to ensure credibility. Member checking and peer debriefing were especially vital to the credibility in my research, in that I wanted to be representative of the teachers’ understandings. Throughout these processes I attempted to remain open to any discrepancies or explanations that challenged my own thinking (Charmaz, 2006).

Consistent with my aspiration to enhance my awareness, I attempted to enhance confirmability and reflexivity through a bracketing interview and constant memo writing. The phenomenological approach of a bracketing interview, borrowed from Pollio, Henley, & Thomson’s (1997) work, consisted of a colleague interviewing me and asking me to respond to some of the prompts that I planned to give my participants. This interview, which was conducted before the teacher interviews began, helped me to develop my awareness of the assumptions and/or prejudices that I brought to the research as influenced by my previous experiences as both a researcher and a teacher of students with behavioral difficulties (Kramp, 2004). I recorded the notes from this interview as a memo (Appendix G).
In the memos, I tried to pay attention to my own assumptions and behaviors that may have impacted the participants and the study in order to develop an authentic construction of what was begun said (Schram, 2006; Watt, 2006). This awareness also helped to ensure that ethical considerations are an ongoing part of my study (Miller & Bell, 2002). As stated previously, I reread these memos as part of the analysis. This awareness that developed from bracketing and memoing is especially important to me in this study, as previous research has asserted that reflexivity is a central element of qualitatively-driven mixed methods inquiry (Hatch, 2002; Mason, 2006).

Concurrent with my established epistemological framework, the goal in establishing credibility here was not to reach an ultimate truth (Charmaz; Schram, 2006), and I subscribe to the idea that a study’s trustworthiness is determined only if the reader judges it to be; Multiple readers of my study outcomes may not arrive at the same categories or ideas (Rolfe, 2004). The utilization of a peer debriefer contributed to my establishment of credibility.

Summary

This chapter provided details about the methods and procedures utilized to carry out this study. A qualitatively-driven mixed methods approach that utilized an initial teacher efficacy survey and three rounds of in-depth interviews was chosen as it connected to my underlying theoretical orientation, it proved appropriate to explore the research questions, and it addressed the gap in research on teaching students with behavioral difficulties and in teacher efficacy. In the next chapter, the findings that emerged from these procedures will be discussed.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study. These findings emerged from the analysis process as described in the previous chapter. The research questions in this study targeted how teachers perceive their efficacy in specific elements of their unique role. Specifically, this study explored the following research questions:

What are the efficacy beliefs of teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties?

- What are their efficacy beliefs in student engagement?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in instructional practices?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in classroom management?

The findings that are presented in this chapter describe and provide examples of the teachers’ efficacy related to: (a) student engagement, (b) instructional practices, and (c) classroom management. Because of the complex nature of the construct, it is difficult to identify the teachers as being highly efficacious in any of these realms of their teaching. Thus, these findings display the complex nature of teacher efficacy as a construct, as well as identify the essentials and challenges present teaching in an environment with students with behavioral difficulties.

Specific findings pertinent to the research questions are presented in the next section. This chapter also presents an emergent theme that developed through data analysis.
Quantitative Findings

At the onset of this study, the four participants were asked to respond to the twenty-four items on the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). The teachers were asked to indicate their opinion on each of the statements on the TSES using the 9-point scale provided. Higher scores on the TSES are indicative of greater efficacy beliefs. As seen in Table 4, according to the TSES results Mary had the highest efficacy beliefs overall, and Paige had the lowest. Mary and Russell exhibit a high-range sense of efficacy, Lynn perceives mid-high range efficacy, and Paige exhibits mid-range efficacy.

Table 4

TSES Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Investigation into the subscale scores displayed additional information about the teachers’ efficacy. Efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management were each computed and analyzed according to the TSES.

Student Engagement
To determine the teachers’ efficacy in student engagement as measured on the TSES, unweighted means and standard deviations of items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22 were calculated. These means for each of the participants are found in Table 5.

Overall, as a group means were lowest for this category (in comparison to the other subscales). Aside from Paige, the teachers rated on the mid-high range of the TSES. Paige’s ratings in this subscale were low to mid-range. For example, Paige rated her opinion in response to the questions as “very little” to “some influence” for most of her responses. Conversely, Mary and Russell stated their opinion as “quite a bit” for most of the questions. The exception was that Mary marked the highest rating, “a great deal”, when asked: “How much do you can you do to get students to believe they can do well in their school work?” Lynn’s responses were primarily high mid-range; all of her responses in this category were between 5 and 7 on the scale (“some influence” to “quite a bit”).

Table 5

*Student Engagement Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses to individual items on the TSES offer a detailed examination of the group means. Table 6 displays the means and standard deviations for each of the eight items designed to measure teacher efficacy in student engagement on the TSES.

Individual responses indicate items 1 and 6 as the highest rated. These items focus on motivating “difficult” students and instilling confidence in students. Teachers displayed the least confidence in items 2 and 4. These items focus on critical thinking and engaging students with low motivational levels.

Table 6

*TSES Individual Items: Student Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Practices

To determine the teachers’ efficacy in instructional practices as measured on the TSES, unweighted means and standard deviations of items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24 were calculated. These means are found in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings in this subscale paralleled the responses to the previous subscale; Paige continued to have the lowest efficacy rating, and Mary and Russell had the highest scores. However, all of the teachers’ individual ratings were higher than the previous category. For instance, all of the teachers’ means were above “5” (some influence) and the mode for the responses was “8” (between “quite a bit” and “a great deal”). The group mean was higher than the previous category, as well.

As with the previous subscale, responses to individual items on the TSES were examined. Table 8 displays the means and standard deviations for each of the eight items representing instructional practices on the TSES.
Item 1, representing teachers’ confidence in answering difficult student questions, received the highest mean rating. Lowest means were items 17 and 24. These items focus on adjusting lessons based on individual student learning levels and challenging very capable students.

**Classroom Management**

To determine the teachers’ efficacy in classroom management as measured on the TSES, unweighted means and standard deviations of items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21 were calculated. These means are found in Table 9.
Table 9

Classroom Management Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means were generally high for the classroom management subscale and as a group, means were the highest in this category. Aside from Lynn, individual means were also highest in this category. Paige, Mary, and Russell responded “quite a bit” and “a great deal” for most of their responses. Specifically, Mary rated “9” for all but one of her responses. Though Paige’s scores were generally high, she responded mid-range or “some influence” to question 19: How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?

Though Lynn’s overall mean was above mid-range for this subscale, her rating was lower than that of the previous subscales. Her mode rating was “6” (between “some influence” and “quite a bit”). She responded “some influence” to question 19, as with Lynn, and to question 3: How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?
Responses to individual items on the TSES offer a detailed examination of the group means. Table 10 presents the means and standard deviations for each of the eight items designed to measure teacher efficacy in classroom management.

Table 10

*TSES Individual Items: Classroom Management*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. How well can you respond to defiant students?</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means for items 5 and 21 were the highest in this subscale. These items focus on student expectations and student defiance. Item 19, which measures confidence managing “a few problem students,” was the lowest rated in this subscale. However, the mean of this item—6.75—was similar to the highest rated item means in the student engagement subscale—7.00.

Quantitative findings illustrated that according to the TSES, the four teachers had mid- to high-range efficacy. Two of the teachers had high-range efficacy, one teacher
had mid-high range efficacy, and one teacher had mid-range efficacy scores. In regard to the means calculated for the three subscales, the teachers as a group had the lowest efficacy in student engagement and the highest in classroom management. Investigation into individual teachers and items exposed variation in responses and pinpointed confidence levels of particular teaching tasks. Specifically, teachers demonstrated confidence in areas of motivating difficult students, instilling confidence in students, responding to difficult questions, giving clear behavior expectations, and responding to defiant behavior. Areas of low efficacy involved the tasks of promoting critical thinking, engaging student with low motivational levels, individual student instruction, and keeping a few problem students from ruining a lesson. Quantitative findings are further examined in combination with the qualitative findings in the latter portion of this chapter.

**Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative findings stemmed from the three rounds of interviews conducted with each of the four participants. As seen in Figure 2, the qualitative findings are all interrelated in how they combine to form a configuration of the teachers’ perceptions, including how those perceptions were constructed. Each qualitative finding also all has distinctive features that are relevant to specific aspects of their teaching roles.

**Student Engagement**

The first major qualitative theme that emerged through data analysis is student engagement. There are three codes related to this theme: 1) motivation variation, 2) approaches, and 3) family engagement.
Motivation Variation

The first code of the teacher’s efficacy in student engagement is related to the perceived variation in motivational levels of the students. The teachers perceived their students were engaged by assessing the motivational levels of their students and their students’ willingness to participate in classroom activities. The teachers identified that their students varied in terms of their motivational levels.

Teachers noted fluctuation in student motivation depending on the class/lesson they were teaching and by individual student. For instance, Paige elaborated on the varying motivation as a class dimension: “We have some classes that are really
good…we have other ones that you can see you’re, you’re dragging them along every step of the way. And it can be really hard to get them to focus in” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012). Similar to Paige, Lynn described her students’ motivational levels as “hit or miss” (Interview 2, 10/23/12). Teachers also identified fluctuation in motivational levels by student. For example, when asked about engaging students in her classes, Mary stated: “it depends on the student” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

This variation ranged from teaching extremely motivated students to teaching students who exhibited an overall lack of motivation. The teachers felt that with some of their classes, they had students who demonstrated an increased willingness to learn and to even be challenged with the content. For Lynn, this occurred with a group of students in one of her classes. This increased engagement surprised her and provided her with positive feelings. She describes this group:

I’m lucky enough to have a second grade reading group where they are all very engaged. They love to talk about their own experiences, they pretty much, I have some of them competing to answer every single question. So at times like that where it’s awesome and I could just sit here and teach them all day. I love those moments (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

The teachers tended to talk about these positive engagement experiences in terms of “luck.” They felt “lucky” when they had students who were extremely motivated and engaged with the material an “unlucky” when they did not.

This luck was defined as having students in their classes, or whole classes of students, who were very motivated. The teachers defined these highly motivated students
as eager to participate and learn new material. These students were also eager to be challenged with the new material presented, and sometimes showed excitement for attaining high grades. Mary discussed this variation and how some of her students are extremely motivated and show instances of increased engagement: “It will vary all the way up to students who love the subject. They are self-motivated. They push themselves. They are totally engaged (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). Paige described one of her students in the past who modeled this highly-motivated student behavior:

We have one young man that was really, really brilliant and always asking questions. And he was the kid that would always ask the question- you know, wait, I’m gonna get to that tomorrow, we’re gonna talk about. You know, he was always one step ahead (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

The teachers perceived that these high levels of motivation were the result of some internal factor that the student possessed. They did not believe that they influenced these students’ motivation; these students were perceived as having an independent, strong internal motivational level independent from the teachers’ efforts in the classroom.

Students defined as possessing increased motivational levels were not common in these alternative school classrooms. For example, as Mary described the students who demonstrated an increased desire to learn or willingness to participate, she added quickly that there are “not a lot of those” in her classes (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). The teachers identified that in a typical lesson it was rare to have all of the students in their classes engaged; generally only a “handful” of students are engaged and eager to learn. Unfortunately, the teachers perceived that most of their students were on the opposite end
of the variation continuum and exhibited limited motivation. Most of the time, the teachers struggled to encourage student participation and engagement. With the low levels of motivation, the teachers felt they were not able to get through to their students and help them make needed connections to the content.

Teachers defined students with low levels of motivation as students who do not participate in academic activities and do not show an eagerness to participate. These students do not respond even after multiple attempts are made by the teacher. These students make negative comments about academic work, for instance by “saying it’s stupid” (Lynn, Interview 2, 10/23/2012) or will only engage with the lesson when they are “in the mood”:

When they’re in the mood where they want to comply and say the right things they know if they’re asked to do things they should follow it. But if they’re not in the mood they will be defiant, won’t listen (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

Students will also exhibit negative behaviors that prevent them from participating:

I do have students who I have struggled to keep them engaged in lessons. We typically deal with them shutting down, refusing to work, or acting out like shouting or laying on the floor resulting in removal from the classroom (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

Many of the older students professed that they just “don’t care.” The teachers stated that many of their students at Valley Alternative subscribe to an “I don’t care” mentality. This attitude was featured in multiple aspects of classroom life and the teachers’ practice. For instance, the teachers stated that the students do not care about
doing their school work. They also expressed this attitude in response to the repercussions for not doing their work. Students’ attitudes toward their learning are specific student characteristics; however, these student characteristics had a significant impact on the teachers and their feelings about their ability to engage the students with their lessons.

Teachers also defined students with low levels of motivation as students who do not like to be challenged academically. For instance, Russell described a situation where he tried to encourage real-world scenarios in his teaching through the use of word problems. When he tried this, he stated that “the kids didn’t seem to like that too much…I think they’re more comfortable with the, just, ‘alright, give me a problem and tell me how to solve it’” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). The teachers perceived that students who exhibit these low levels of motivation prefer to complete the minimum amount of academic work. Paige described one student that impacted her:

We had one kid last year, really brilliant kid, and, uh, we tried to give him extra work, and he’s like, ‘I ain’t doing that. If they don’t have to do that, I don’t see why I have to do that. I did what they did, I should just get my A and not have to do all that other stuff’ (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

This variation, and particularly the lack of motivation, was part of the teacher’s daily lives. When Lynn summarized her day for me, she stated:

I guess overall, we had a few students who shut down, didn’t participate in some of their activities, but that’s kind of an everyday occurrence where it’s very rare to
have all fifteen of them on task and participating, so (Lynn, Interview 2, 10/23/12).

In terms of the extent of variation, attaining high levels of student motivation and engagement was perceived as primarily out of the teacher’s control. The teachers viewed high levels of motivation as a rarity in their classes. They identified that a few of their students were very engaged; however, they spoke about these students in terms of these particular students’ high internal motivational levels. When students demonstrated increased engagement, the teachers did not feel that it was because of something they did. They believed that these students possessed some internal characteristic that played a role in their increased engagement.

Conversely, the teachers discussed a lack of student motivation in terms of external factors. The teachers often felt that it was their responsibility that many of their students lacked motivation. The teachers identified that it was not very common to have students with high motivational levels and that many of their students had low levels of motivation. For these students, they felt that they were not able to “get through” to them or make a significant impact in their learning. Overall, the teachers expressed joy when speaking about students with high levels of motivation and perceived struggles in coping with teaching students on the lower end of this variation. This variation in motivation, especially working with students with such perceived low levels of motivation, impacted their perceptions of their teaching and the impact they felt they were able to make presently and in the future.
Because of the challenges the teachers experience in response to the variation in their students’ motivational levels, and specifically the perceived low motivational levels, external motivators were used throughout the school day to encourage and support student engagement. Though the intention of these external motivators were to promote motivation, the teachers identified that there was variation in response to these motivators and often, students that demonstrated a lack of motivation were not drawn to the use of external motivators. The most common external motivator was the schools’ ticket system and the use of school dollars as part of the school-wide behavior management program.

Often, teachers described situations where they attempted to motivate students with tickets and school dollars. By earning tickets, students could later participate in reward days and field trips and “spend” what they earned at the school store. However, the teachers identified that their students have such a short term perception of rewards and consequences that it was difficult to encourage student motivation and engagement through the tickets.

The teachers believed that utilizing the ticket system as a motivator was often ineffective as many of their students do not respond well to the tickets. From the teachers’ perception, the students do not seem to care about the tickets or the school dollars. As a new teacher, Russell was especially surprised by his students’ apathy toward the tickets, especially since the students were all familiar with the program and had been using it for years at the school. He stated: “I don’t know, there are a lot of kids who you know, they don’t profess to care about the tickets at all” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). Further, he is not confident in his use of them: “So I almost feel dumb that
it’s a ticket” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012). He wonders how much the students really care about the tickets but he continues to use them nonetheless. Mary, an experienced teacher, was also confounded by the ticket system as a motivator. When I asked her if there was something else she could do to encourage student motivation with the ticket system she said: “I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s been really hard, cause they’re [the students are] just like ‘pffft’ [laughs]” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). Her students do not respond to the tickets in the way they are intended to respond.

The high school teachers attributed some of the variation in student motivation to the students’ proximity to graduation time or to the number of credits the students needed to graduate. The students that they identified as least caring were high school seniors. For example, Russell spoke of his students’ lack of motivation as a result of grade level: “I mean they are high school seniors so they don’t want to do anything pretty much” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). For him, this lack of motivation was typical for this group of students.

Further, the teachers believed that this variation in motivation in regard to the behavior management program was the result the age/grade level of their students; the three teachers who worked with high school students believed that utilizing behavior management programs as a motivator is not as successful for older students. For instance, Mary said that in her years of experience she has found that: “Elementary students are more easily motivated by the point/ticket systems than older students. Those systems only work with older students if there is a desirable reward to work towards” (Interview 3, 2/11/2013). However, as a current teacher of the younger students, Lynn
struggled immensely with the behavior management system and was constantly making changes to it for it to be successful with her students. The other teachers assumed that the behavior management system was a successful motivator for the young students; though, Lynn mentioned her struggles with the program more often than any of the other teachers.

Teachers also identified grades and points as an external motivator for student engagement. The teachers stated that since their students are atypical, they are rarely motivated by their grades. Paige described this in detail:

They, they really- you know, if they’re- a lot of times we’d even have it if they’re failing, ‘whatever, I’m failing.’ Um, some of it would be, ‘Oh, I’m a 60, is that a D? Is that passing?’ ‘Yeah, you’re just passing. You know, if you go down a point…’ ‘That’s okay, that’s good enough.’ Um, they, you know, they just really don’t care. We’ll have a handful that will come up, ‘Why isn’t this an A?’ Or, ‘I should be getting an A.’ But I would say out of 70 students, you would have maybe four that would really care that they’re getting an A. Or, you know, even giving an opportunity to you know, ‘Here, you can make up this work, you’re only five points away from, from getting an A and you have a B.’ ‘I don’t care.’ You know, it doesn’t, it just doesn’t matter (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

The teachers stated that when tests are given and graded, students do not ask about their grade and do not show excitement for their grade when they receive it.

One teacher mentioned that grades are a motivator for a group of her students. Students have been recently more motivated by their grade if they are interested in
playing on the newly developed Valley Academy basketball team. Mary describes this specifically: “They had to have a C so we had a lot of boys who were motivated to have that C. Now they need to maintain that C to play basketball, to be able to come off the bench and play” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). For her, if she knows the students wants to play basketball, she uses that to support student participation and to encourage students to do well in her class.

Other external motivators such as food and “fun lessons” are also used in response to the varying motivational levels. For example, Paige describes using food as her students’ motivation, though this is “much to the chagrin of our physical education teacher” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012). In physics class, she described a situation where students are rewarded with pizza when they show instances of engagement. She said that this really helps students have something invested in participating or otherwise she believes they wouldn’t be as engaged and enthusiastic to participate. This is an instance for her where food as a reward encourages her students’ engagement with the lesson.

“Fun lessons” was also an external motivator that the teachers felt was an effective motivator for students. The teachers described persuading students to complete certain academic work with the promise of these “fun lessons.” Paige described this in her classroom:

We do some motivation with the promise of fun activities or labs, for instance today I had some dry ice that the students were permitted to experiment with. Not only will I be able to refer back to what they experienced but I can keep the idea of doing fun labs as that carrot to work for” (Interview 3, 2/8/2013).
This idea of “fun lessons” was not defined in the same way by all of the teachers. For instance, Lynn stated that she tries to keep her lessons fun and exciting for the students as a way to increase student engagement, but not necessarily as “that carrot to work for.” Similar to the other teachers, she defined “fun” as having hands-on activities for her students and relating students’ interests to the content, though she attempted to include levels of fun within her lessons as opposed to rewards for participating in her lessons. For instance, she states that:

Like in math when we use examples I’ll either let them pick what the example will be talking about. If we’re doing an addition sentence, I can ask what you want the manipulative to be. That’ll usually keep them really excited (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

She attempted to include aspects of “fun” into her lessons so that she can support student engagement; students do not have to earn these activities after completing perceived “less fun” academic work.

**Approaches**

The teachers described their perceptions of their students’ engagement with the content and their motivation to engage and participate in lessons as a challenging area of their teaching, as there was such variation in the levels of motivation and many of their students exhibited low levels of enthusiasm and inspiration for learning. The second code related to the theme of student engagement is the approaches that the teachers’ used to manage or remedy this issue. The teachers’ perception of their students impacted the
approaches they used and these approaches both challenged and contributed to the teachers’ perceptions of their abilities to make an impact on their students.

When asked to describe her students’ engagement and motivation and how she could get her students invested in their education, Paige admitted: “that’s one thing I think I, you know, just sort of struggle with everyday” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Overall, the teachers had a discouraging attitude toward strategies to improve student engagement. The teachers described their students’ lack of motivation and engagement throughout the interviews as “unfortunate” and “frustrating” and struggled with finding approaches to engage all of their students. As identified in the motivation variation code, the teachers did not feel responsible for the high levels of student motivation, though they did feel responsible for students’ low levels of engagement and thus felt responsible for developing approaches to manage this perceived problem.

The teachers were especially conscious that their students’ level of engagement differed from typical classrooms; however, only one teacher specifically identified students’ difficulties with engagement as a possible manifestation of the student’s disability and used that information in developing an approach. As Lynn described her students’ reactions to her attempts to engage them:

It’s hard to gage that when kids are off task or not focusing as if they’re bored with it or that’s just part of their disability that they can’t pay attention (Lynn, Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

Though Lynn struggled to identify whether problematic behaviors stemmed from the student’s disability or from her teaching, she was the only teacher to specifically
articulate that her students’ struggles with their motivation could be because of her students’ disabilities.

Because of this realization, Lynn also recognized that certain approaches do not always work with students with specific disabilities:

With a particular student whom has ODD [Oppositional Defiant Disorder], we still struggle on a daily basis to try to find ways to keep him engaged. Often there is no antecedent to what may cause him to get upset. We try different strategies like one-on-one, challenging him because we thought maybe he was bored, or having him work toward a reward upon completion of his work. We still have yet to find a solution that works consistently (Interview 3, 2/13/2013).

Though she struggles with engaging this specific student described in this example, she takes the student’s disability into account as she plans strategies to remedy his engagement issues.

The teachers all recognized that their students have special needs; however, as they talked about their attitudes and perceptions toward engaging and motivating students, it was rarely discussed. For instance, Russell recognized that the “typical” way of approaching student engagement does not work for his students. He stated that he has tried just explaining the content and utilizing the standard way of teaching in some of his lessons, but the students do not respond to him: “I can’t say I was too surprised. I mean it might have been just where we were in the class. They weren’t too excited about it” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). However, he did not attribute that this was because of students’ specific disabilities or that specific methods might be helpful with students with specific
disabilities. He just knew that he was responsible for finding some kind of alternative methods to teach and to engage his students.

One approach to manage deficiencies in motivation that was utilized by the teachers was encouraging student self-regulation of behavior. This was primarily done by utilizing the behavior management program. The teachers described the system as a way to manage the behavior, while also taking the pressure off of them as the teacher. Paige described this as a respond to her students’ lack of participation:

I’ll say, ‘Look if you don’t start your work I’m gonna have to mark you as being off-task.’ And then the kids will be ‘I don’t care just mark me off.’ And then you don’t have to argue with them anymore (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/12).

In this instance, she attempted to remedy issues with student engagement by placing the accountability on the student. In doing so, she was able to move past an issue with student engagement and continue teaching the rest of the group.

Similar to Paige, Russell described a situation where he allowed the ticket system to handle a student’s difficulties with engagement:

I have a girl who, ninth period, just decided that she didn’t want to work. I don’t know if she was feeling talkative or well yeah, I think that was it. She was feeling talkative. I had a couple tries trying to get her focused on the work and each time she had a reason why she couldn’t do it. She asked for help and, ‘I’m here to help.’ Or, she couldn’t find her worksheet at one point, so I had to direct her towards that. By that time we had ten minutes left in class. She just kind of said, ‘Oh, I’ve asked for help all these, this many times, so I’m not going to work
today.’ And so like, ‘if that’s the decision that you’re going to make, we’ll mark it down on this sheet’ (Russell, Interview 2, 10/31/2012).

As demonstrated in these instances, at times, teachers felt that this approach was the easiest as it allowed them to place the responsibility of student engagement onto the student.

The teacher’s also described the strategy of “switching gears” or “flipping a lesson” based on their perceptions of student engagement. For Lynn, she stated that “When I find that I have a difficult time with the majority of my student’s engaging in lessons, that is when I evaluate what my lesson consists of and try to switch gears to use more engaging strategies” (Interview 3, 2/13/2013). This evaluation is usually done right within the lesson: “I try to gage that if I’m starting to lose them, I’ll try to kind of switch tracks and try to do something that might keep their attention a little bit more” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012). She gave an example of switching tracks to increase student engagement:

Oh, the other day we had, I was working with the Kindergarteners and identifying their numbers one through five, and they were just working with, trying to make it out of play dough and it just really wasn’t working. It wasn’t getting through to them like how we really wanted them to like roll it out and like actually like form the number but they were just kind of, I didn’t think it was effective in the way that for them to like, make the numbers. So I just took them out in the hall and we had gotten one of our new things from that we had just purchased was little blocks that they can take the numbers to and include kind of like a running down
the hall, go find this number, take your little block, and match the number that I
tell you to so and then they were really engaged and they enjoyed it. So ‘cause
they were still working on their numbers, they were still doing math, but they got
to change activities, so. And they may not have noticed that it wasn’t really
working ‘cause they might of been enjoying it ‘cause they thought maybe like
they weren’t engaged, but it just wasn’t being, it wasn’t effective enough so
(Interview 2, 10/23/2012)

Russell also discussed “flipping” a lesson based on his perception of student’s
engagement. Whereas Lynn continued with the same concept and thought of a different
way to present it to the children instantly, Russell took time to contemplate what went
wrong and approached the content the next day with a different approach. He believed
that this helped him to “have a chance to come back and look at it from a different
perspective” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). He then tried the lesson the next day and his
students were more engaged with the content. He believed that the break and his
reflection on the content helped both himself and his students.

As a group, the teachers all spoke positively about their relationships with
students and identified their ability to establish relationships with students as an approach
to increase student engagement. The teachers felt that if they built connections with their
students, they had more opportunities to encourage their participation during instructional
time. The teachers felt that because of these connections and by really “knowing” their
students, they could help students become more invested in their learning. This included
helping students make connections to past learning experiences, their interests, and their thoughts about future endeavors.

For the younger students, these teacher-student relationships were built through the utilization of a teachers’ helper or having the students sit close to the teacher during instruction time. For the older students, teachers focused on relationship-building by simply talking with the students independently, in small groups, or as a whole group. For example, Mary described a senior who is in two of her classes and isn’t motivated because he only needs a ½ credit of science to graduate: “So for him, the motivation isn’t there.” This student does not need the credit, so she is always working with different ways to talk to him about why this is important for him to learn. With this student she said that her job is: “Just trying to remind him, ‘you need a high GPA when you’re going to college, it’s going to cost less.” And she said that for this student, talking with him like this helps “a little bit sometimes” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

The teachers stated that with some of their students, they feel that they are able to sit and blatantly talk through their engagement issues with them. When individual students struggle for that motivation, the teachers find that can be right there for the student and can redirect them and help them find it easier. In our last interview, Paige shared with me an instance in her class where she talked with her students as a group about their lack of motivation. She stopped mid-way through a lesson and spoke with them:

I gave them the analogy of walking along train tracks having a good time, fooling around and not knowing that a train is barreling down the track ready to run them
over. I told them that their mom, dad, me, all their teachers and anyone that cares for them, we are on the sides of the tracks yelling and pointing at behind them, but they are just walking and laughing and not paying any attention to us. We are scared for them we see the train coming, we know what it is and we are trying to warn them. I was very animated as I was talking to them, then I told them the train represented life, you know, it is coming and they have to stop fooling around and get serious. We are here to help them and get them ready so they don’t get run over. Then I told them, ‘but I realized last night, that it doesn't matter how many nights I lay awake at 3 AM worrying and wondering how to help you or how much your parents worry, nothing is going to work until YOU start to care!’

After she shared this analogy with her students, she said that all but one started to quiet down and begin working. This student started talking about how he was going to be a rapper and how he did not need to be in school because of this. She asked him what was stopping him and he responded that his mother wouldn’t let him. And she responded: “I told him, ‘you know why she won’t let you? She can see the train and she is point and yelling, Look behind you the train is coming!’ She said this all in a “yelling” voice (Interview 3, 2/8/2013). Paige described her pride for this experience, and she could feel her students improvement in engagement because of this talk. She was not sure if it is because she was being loud or funny, or if it was because her students were starting to realize how much she cares that they care.

In our first interview, Mary described a similar situation where she was getting really frustrated and decided to just sit down and talk to a group of her students about it:
I sat down with them and I told them like, ‘Well, this is very hard for me because I am used to students being able to read. Like you need to be able to read for the OGT [Ohio Graduate Test] because you have to read information from it. It’s a reading test as much as he does in a science test’…so I told them, ‘you have to be able to read this.’ I just told them, ‘you know, I feel like you are angry with me because you are not passing the class. I am getting frustrated.’ We just had to talk in about how I really need you guys to try harder when somebody is working with you because there are almost like, they were just like, ok, you read, I am gonna sit here. So that really worked (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

As with Paige, Mary described this experience as a “breakthrough.” However, even within this situation, there were varying levels of progress made depending on who was working with her directly and who did not have that one-on-one attention. It felt like such a breakthrough *during* the experience and students seemed to be completing their work, though when she went through and checked the work of the students who were not working with her directly, she found that all of their answers were incorrect. For her, though this experience felt successful in the moment regarding engagement, the overall experience felt like a failure as she was still unable to combat the low ability levels of her students by solely utilizing engagement strategies.

Overall, the teachers felt they had an advantage in building relationships with students as an approach to combating issues in student engagement as they have the opportunity to work with the same students year after year. As opposed to a typical school setting, they work in a smaller group setting where they have the same groups of
students every year. Paige described a group of students who are motivated by simply having her as their teacher. She said that with some of the older students she gets a few every year where she is the key to their engagement. She illuminated this idea with an example:

I’ve had kids like where I’ve had projects and I divide ‘em up on projects, and I’d be like, well, this is the harder section of, you know, a jigsaw type project, this is the hard section…’Oh, I wanna do it! I wanna show you I can do this!’ You know, so sometimes there’s that motivator.

Since she has worked with these students for multiple years, she feels that she has built a strong connection with them and is able to use that as encourage for engagement.

The teachers, in general, struggled with their feelings about how to engage students who are struggling with low levels of motivation. Many times, they felt failure in this element of their teaching; however, they continued to use various approaches in attempt to remedy and manage student engagement issues. They also recognized that they needed more support in this area, including more ideas for approaches.

**Family Engagement**

The third code refers to the impact of perceived family engagement on the teacher’s efficacy. All four teachers identified that they lack communication with many of their students’ families. Further, they believe that many of the students do not have ideal home lives and these situations promote negative behavior in the classroom. This lack of support at home can also contradict with what they are trying to do with the students in the classroom. Thus, this lack of family engagement plays a role in the
previous two codes, as well as the teachers’ overall perceptions of students’ engagement within the classroom teachers’ and their perception of their ability to make an impact.

Communication with parents at Valley Alternative varies and the teachers experience a wide variety of families. First, the teachers experience parents who they consider to have a primarily positive impact on their child’s engagement. The teachers defined these parents as ones who are involved in the school and are eager to participate in their child’s education. The teachers identified that these parents can be used as a motivator for their students, as they will enforce rules from school at home. Paige stated that if a student is not paying attention or getting in trouble in class, then she can make a phone call home to this kind of parent to encourage the student to make changes to their behavior. Lynn stated that she has kept parents updated with the different behavior management approaches and that some of the parents are “on board” with what she is doing and will even attempt to enforce the system at home.

Second, the teachers experience parents who are seen to have a negative impact on their child’s engagement. The teachers stated that many of their students do not have a “solid” home situation and “they don’t have somebody at home to go home to” (Lynn, Interview 2, 10/16/2012). The teachers felt that these negative home experiences had a significant impact on their students’ engagement and behavior in the classroom, as students modeled their school behavior based on the behavior they experience and witness at home. Lynn described this barrier and how it impacts what she is trying to do with the students: “And you see them coming in and I can’t believe how they act. And I think, that’s just what they see at home.” She says that part of her role is teaching her
students to separate what is appropriate from what is inappropriate and teaching them that “the things they do learn at home might not be the correct way” (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

The teachers perceived that in these students’ homes, students do not have a positive role model and so they learn behavior damages their engagement during school. Paige elaborated on this idea and how she responds to it: “Some of these kids don’t have good role models. They see me. I let them see me with my kids. How people can be with their kids. And what people can do for their kids” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Paige feels that if she is able to illustrate positive parent-child relationships to her students, they maybe they will begin to ignore the behavior they see at home. Students’ parents are seen as negative role models for the students as students replicate the negative behavior they see at home while at school.

Further, this negative parental impact stems from the perceived inconsistency between the home and school environments. Since the teachers identify that many of the students have a problematic home environment, the teachers found that it is difficult to encourage consistency regarding student behavior from one environment to the other. For instance, Lynn stated that she tries to encourage parents to utilize some of the practices that they use in the classroom so that the student are better able to learn appropriate behavior and have consistency in both environments; however, parents do not follow-through with school practices. In one specific example: “I can tell their kid needs to be disciplined, they’re not getting their Playstation that night, and they come in with a
brand new game (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012). This lack of consistency is frustrating for the teachers as they feel that this home barrier is difficult to overcome.

Finally, there are parents where the teachers experience little-to-no interaction and thus, it is difficult to identify what kind of impact these parents have on their children. The teachers stated that they often know nothing about these parents, because they are unable to contact them and they do not see them at school events. The teachers all stated that they will call home, primarily if they are having problems with a student, but these parents are often hard to reach and do not call back. Further, the teachers perceive that many of these parents demonstrate the same “I don’t care” mentality that their students exhibit.

This unidentifiable parent is common. In regard to parent-teacher conferences, Mary stated that: “Very few come. We are here eight to eight, and we will probably see five parents. In 12 hours. That can be bad” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). She stated that this is unfortunate, but that she has tried, with her other teachers, to encourage parental involvement and does not have any other solutions to this issue.

Both Russell and Mary discussed a situation where the parents can have a significantly negative impact on the child’s engagement, while also maintaining little-to-no communication with the teachers. In this instance, the parents pay their child to come to school: “I have one student who is paid to come to school and he sleeps all day. So he’s totally unmotivated” (Mary, Interview 2, 11/6/2012); “They’re paying him to go to school, not actually to do anything” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012). In this specific situation, Russell has tried calling his parents to see what he could do for this student, but
had not been able to reach the parents. Mary recognized that with this particular student: “unfortunately, it’s a lost cause. The parents are no help. They’ve given up. Nothing they’ve tried work so they just gave up” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). In this situation, the teachers stated that the parents have given the student the permission to drop out when he turns eighteen in a few months. Because of this, they struggle to engage this student; they are frustrated because they are unable to develop an approach that would work with this particular student.

Overall, the teachers experience parents who have a positive impact on their child’s engagement, a negative impact, and who have an unidentifiable impact. Paige recognized that: “We have some tougher parents than other ones” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012) and these “tougher” parents are often a source of frustration for the teachers. Dealing with repercussions from students’ home lives, in general, causes the teachers more challenge than support. The teachers identified that they have parents who are supportive and who interact with them on a relatively regular basis, though, this is not very common. Teachers also seem to lack an understanding of ways to encourage family engagement beyond typical parent-teacher conferences and phoning home for problematic behaviors.

Summary

The qualitative findings that emerged from the interview data revealed the efficacy beliefs of the four teachers and specifically the teachers’ judgments and thoughts about their capabilities in engaging their students in their classrooms. Since efficacy is a teacher’s assessment of his/her own ability as a teacher, the three codes described in the
above section—motivation variation, approaches, and family engagement—revealed insights into this assessment and explored the teachers’ efficacy specifically related to teaching for student engagement.

Within these three codes, the teachers discussed the different levels of motivation that their students exhibited and the impact that this had on their teaching and on their confidence in engaging their students. The teachers’ perceptions of their students’ motivational levels and the teachers’ ability to engage these students impacted the approaches they used. Further, student engagement was impacted by perceived family disengagement, which the teachers believed had an impact on their students’ ability to engage with the subject matter.

Overall, the teachers indicated efficacy doubts when discussing their ability to get through to their students and specifically to their students who lacked motivation. They discussed many barriers that they needed to overcome to attain high student engagement, including a family engagement barrier that they believed could not be fixed. Also, when the teachers were successful and were able to engage their students—a situation that would typically strengthen their efficacy—the teachers attributed this success to “luck” or to some internal student characteristic that was beyond their control. The teachers did, however, continue to persist to overcome these barriers, an element of their teaching personality that would indicate a desire to succeed in this realm of their teaching and is demonstrative of highly efficacious teachers.

**Instructional Practices**
Through analysis of the interview data, three codes emerged that impacted the teacher’s efficacy in relationship to instructional practices: 1) variation in learning needs, 2) differentiation and handholding, and 3) there’s no time.

**Variation in Learning Needs**

The first code, variation in learning needs, exhibits some similarities to the thoughts and struggles expressed by the teachers with the perceived varying motivational levels. As with the motivation variation, the teachers attended to a variety of students in their classrooms; they worked with students who they perceived had a variety of levels of ability in mastering the curriculum. In a single classroom, teachers experienced students at an introductory or novice stage at mastering the content, students who have and were able to master a basic understanding of the content, and students who were beyond expectations and benefited from being challenged with additional material (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). The variation differed in some degree across the teachers, and the teachers identified having variation within and across class periods and expressed different amounts of variation.

A commonality that all of the teachers expressed was that these extremes in student differences were significant in their teaching role and often problematic for them. They struggled to cope with the variation in their classes. As Lynn stated in regard to teaching to a variety of student needs and ability levels: “this has a large part in my classroom” (Interview 3, 2/13/2013). Mary described what this variation looks like in one of her classes: “I have one class where a student is reading at a preschool level. And then I have everything in that class all the way up to college-bound students” (Interview
The teachers recognized that all students have different learning needs; however, within their classrooms they perceived that the needs of their learners varied significantly to a point where it was sometimes unmanageable.

At times, this variety of learning needs proved to be troublesome and demanding for the teachers. The teachers identified that their classes that vary the most are: “the most challenging” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012) and “very stressful actually to work with, it really is” (Mary, Interview 1, 10/4/2012). By the time we met in our third interview, Russell stated that, “It is still difficult, and I still haven't figured out how to keep the highest-level students working to the extent of their abilities” and that “I still will have days where a lesson flies over its target audiences' heads” (3/6/2013). The teachers stated that they struggled with the highest and the lowest students, specifically. Further, they felt most confident in their use of instructional practices when all of their students were learning on the same level. As Mary said, when there are such a variety of students’ needs to meet: “It’s really difficult to meet all of those levels” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

Mary further described what this challenge is like for her. She described it as striving to “reach the equilibrium”:

There are so many that needed read to and it’s so hard to work with all of them, and then keep everybody else, the other students who don’t need to be read to. It’s really hard trying to, and it’s just like trying to reach the equilibrium, and we have never had student assisted before so it’s just been, it’s been a huge
adjustment. We just need those who were able to come in and read the worksheet and do the worksheet and they can’t (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

Even as an experienced teacher at a school for children with special needs, Mary struggled to accept teaching students who performed significantly below grade-level expectations.

Coupled with the struggles that the teachers faced having to cope with teaching to a variety of academic ability levels in their classrooms in an attempt to reach an equilibrium between the low and high performing students was the notion that the teachers also had to manage teaching to students who were performing significantly below grade level. The teachers experienced significant struggles in instruction and planning to this group of students.

Paige described why having these students proved to be a challenging situation for her. She described a situation where she had involved the students in an inquiry-based science lesson:

It’s really hard to get them, so much is on the lower end of Bloom’s [Taxonomy]. It’s hard to get up to that creating end of Blooms. Even in Fundamentals, like with that experiment today, trying to get them to create that experiment, I’m afraid to see what they wrote. Because I didn’t give them much [direction]” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).

The teachers felt that these lowest level students had multiple struggles interacting with the content in their classrooms. The teachers themselves struggled to help these students exhibit a basic understanding of the curriculum. As Mary stated: “getting them to
understand what they’re doing, that’s at least nice” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). The teachers did not attempt to encourage students to think critically about the content; their goal was to just get them to a basic understanding level. This is further discussed in the next coding scheme.

The teachers also struggled with these students’ overall difficulties in reading. For Paige, she stated that: “We have a lotta kids in that class that are like second grade reading level” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Mary described this struggle with one specific student in one of her classes:

And then I have one student in there who is in the Earth Science class, who isn’t even reading at the preschool level, who cannot read anything at all, so it’s a real struggle trying to figure out what to do with him. Basically, he can’t do anything by himself, he can’t read anything (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

Only one of the teachers was a reading teacher (Lynn); the other teachers felt unprepared to address deficiencies in literacy skills in addition to the content they were already attempting to teach.

Included in the variety of students in their classrooms were students that performed above grade level. The teachers described these students in a variety of ways depending on the students’ motivational level and behavior; however, these students generally learned more rapidly than the other students and sometimes enjoyed being challenged in their learning. Paige stated that there were a “handful of those kids” (Paige, Interview 2, 10/16/2012) in her classes that exceeded her expectations when mastering the curriculum. The number of “gifted” students was less than the number of
students performing below grade level; however, they did exist and provided challenges in regard to the variation aspect. These students also provided feelings of an “awesome” teaching experience (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012)

Since the teachers find it especially difficult to teach to the variety of students and to students performing below grade level, they tended to feel most comfortable and most successful when teaching to students that they perceived have similar learning needs or teaching to a “very bright class” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Russell admitted that he enjoys teaching his third period Business Math class, because there is not as much variation in student learning needs: “It’s been a real joy to work with all pretty much at the same level” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Paige stated that she feels successful when she has the opportunity to really challenge students and to see the pride that they take in learning something so challenging. Disappointingly, she only teaches a Chemistry class every other year, because they do not have students that are able to learn this material: “We don’t have kids that are a high enough level” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Similar to Paige, Russell’s “joy” was also because his students performing at the same level were also the highest ability level. He said that after testing all of the students at the beginning of the year, “four of the six highest scores in the school are in this class” and as freshman.

Overall, all of the teachers experienced struggles with the variation in student learning needs. This included both veteran and novice teachers. Mary, an experienced teacher, elaborated how teaching to a variety of levels impacted her efficacy in instructional practices:
I think I still have some work to do to, because they keep bringing in the extended standards for our students that are the lowest. And it’s really hard to look at those standards and it’s like teaching kindergarten. You know. It’s like how do you do that when you have all these other students. So it’s kind of a juggling and a learning experience (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

Even with her years of experience Mary admitted that she is still learning how to teach to a variety of levels, as well as to address the learning needs of her lowest students.

When Russell, a first year teacher, was asked to describe a terrible experience he had so far in his teaching, he also alluded to this notion of teaching to a variety of levels, and specifically teaching students with significant learning needs. He gave an example of one his lessons “flying” over the target audiences’ heads: “I just tried explaining the standard way of teaching it, which is just an algorithm, you set two ratios, cross multiple, and divide. The kids didn’t seem to get it at all. I can’t say I was too surprised” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Russell was especially confused by his students’ lack of background knowledge in mathematics; he was surprised that the students were so far behind typical high school students. He attributed it to a lack of previous education; students were not able to learn the material because they hadn’t seen the material at all yet: “Since we’re learning it from scratch, it’s going to take us longer” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). As a first year teacher, Russell believed that the material he ends up teaching to the students is content that his students should have already been introduced to in previous grades.
The “wide variety of kids” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012) that the teachers experienced played a significant role in the instructional practices they chose to implement in their classroom and the feelings they have about the successfulness of those practices. All of the teachers identified that they had to alter their instructional practices according to the range of students’ needs. Further, the teachers recognized that they still needed to continue learning in this element of their teaching.

As Russell stated in our conversation about altering the content for students who operated at a variety of levels: “But that’s something I’m still learning about how to keep them involved, involved in the class and the learning stuff, without overstepping” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Mary stated that she wanted to earn an intervention specialist degree for this aspect of her teaching specifically. When asked what she hoped to gain from the degree, she stated: “Just different ideas of how to help the students at different levels. To differentiate a little better. Maybe different strategies to help them what they need to learn” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). The following code illustrates how the teachers coped with the variety of learning needs in their classrooms.

**Differentiation and Handholding**

The second code deals with the teachers’ reactions to the first code. As described in the previous code, the teachers were elated when they were able to teach students who were all operating at the same level; however, they recognized that this was not common and attempted to modify their teaching because of their students’ needs. These modifications primarily took two forms. The first was how the teachers responded to the
variation in student learning needs. The second was how they responded to students struggling to master the content and performing significantly below-grade level.

The teachers modified their instructional practices in response to the variation in student learning needs in their classes by utilizing a form of differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction typically involves making modifications to teaching practices so that the instruction fits all students. The approach is typically seen as successful when working with students of varying ability levels, as the teacher is able to plan and teach according to individual student strengths and needs (Shillady, 2013; Tomlinson, 1999).

The teachers in this study primarily described differentiation in their use of cooperative learning groups. Through these groupings, teachers were able to “tier the students based on where they’re at” and have students work in small groups with similarly-abled peers (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012). Mary gave an example of differentiating based on groups of similarly-abled peers:

I have some students who like, they work very slow. I have one group in the physical science class that works really slowly, so they take an extra day to do that, while the other students do concept review or cross disciplinary work; we just tie other things or go deeper” (Mary, Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

By grouping students in this way, the teachers were able to teach to a variety of student needs and allow students to be successful with the material in their own way and at their own speed.
Lynn recognized, however, that even within these cooperative learning groups, students had different needs that needed addressed. She described an example of this in her classroom:

Sometimes differentiation also does need to occur within the same groups simply because some students have more significant needs. For example, I am currently teaching addition strategies to one of my first grade groups. While we have moved into connecting addition and subtraction, I still have one student who struggles to identify and write numbers 0-10...he does participate in our group discussions, but he receives additional one-on-one intervention and his assignments are modified” (Interview 3, 2/13/2013).

Teachers also utilized groupings with students of different abilities “mixed into each group” (Mary, Interview 3, 2013). By grouping students this way the teachers felt they could assign various tasks to students based on their ability level and students could learn from each other in these groupings.

In addition to using cooperative learning groups as a method of differentiation, the teachers utilized independent study with their students. In this instructional practice, the teachers identified that it was difficult to have all students in the class working independently. As Russell stated, in one of his classes he has a group of students who have “been pretty good working on their own”; though there are also students within that class that “need a little extra help” from him that prevent those students from working independently (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). So when the teachers utilized independent study time, it was so that they were able to give additional attention to certain populations of
students. For instance, at times they gave struggling students work that they were able to do independently without assistance, so that they could work with students who were meeting grade-level expectations; they also gave independent work to students who were able to interact with the curriculum independently, so that more attention could be given to the struggling students.

One of the teachers, Mary, utilized independent study a little differently. In many of her classes, independent study was the primary form of instruction. She stated that most of her classes operate in this way so that students can “work at their own pace.” In further describing this approach, she stated that students “get a checklist and the worksheets are set out over there [points to a table in the classroom]. They just pick up what they need when they are ready for them” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). She found that this strategy has helped her cope with the varying levels in her class, especially with students who are especially “bright”; she didn’t want the gifted students to be left without being challenged in her classes.

The teachers felt that differentiation was “vital when teaching students with varying abilities;” Student needs must be met in order for learning to occur (Mary, Interview 3, 2/11/2013). Further the teachers identified that differentiated instruction was particularly helpful working with students with special needs. As Paige stated in our first interview: “I think anybody learns better that way, but our population really responds to that” (9/20/2012). The teachers were aware that within the alternative school context that they were working, some kind of instructional modification needed to be made to be able to connect to all levels of students.
Differentiation in the form of cooperative learning and independent study was used in response to the varying student needs; “Handholding” was referred to in response to teaching to students who had significant learning needs and were performing considerably below-grade level. The teachers spoke of “handholding” as an instructional practice they used often. This practice included “breaking down” the curriculum into simpler components. Though they believed that this handholding experience was helpful in response to the perception that many of their students were struggling to master the curriculum, the experience was both exhausting and challenging for the teachers, and it often gave them negative feelings about their role as a teacher.

The teachers specifically defined “handholding” as an instructional practice they utilized in response to teaching students who struggled with content mastery. The teachers described this experience as feeling like they needed to metaphorically “hold a student’s hand” as the student participated in and completed academic tasks. The teachers believed that they needed to utilize this practice, as many of their students needed to be exposed to the curriculum slowly and with substantial teacher assistance.

The teachers described handholding as presenting the material to the students in a simplistic step-by-step fashion. This included giving directions for an activity in a slow manner and breaking down instructions step-by-step. Handholding was also defined as breaking down the whole curriculum into the most basic, needed elements; Russell described this as “breaking things down that are simpler” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012) and “boiling down the material” into the most important parts (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). The teachers believed that the students needed this handholding to be able to interact with
the curriculum and to function in the classroom. Without this handholding experience, the teachers believed that the students would not participate and/or would not interact with the curriculum accurately.

Paige brought up the concept of “handholding” in our first interview. When probed, she described what handholding looks like in her classroom:

If you do notes, ‘what am I supposed to write?’ You show a Powerpoint, ‘well what do I have to write of this?’ So you have to tell them what to write. My coteacher today for Biology, they are learning about the parts of the cell. She had an analogy that compared a factory to the parts of a cell. So they were making widgets, so the widgets were like the protein and the widgets were carried by special parts, so the microtubule. So each thing in the factory somehow related to what was in the cell, the factory wall or the cell wall, and then she wanted them to come up with their own. So really, and so literally it was sitting with them.

‘Okay, what do you want to use as your example.’ ‘You want to do a house.’ ‘Okay. What’s the nucleus of the house?’ ‘Well what about, where’s everybody hang out in here?’ And just every step of the way, having to prompt them for everything. So really you have to break every step down for them” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).

In her definition, Paige described handholding as breaking down every step of the learning process for her students. Since her co-teacher’s lesson was exploratory and inquiry-based, Paige believed that she needed to “handhold,” so that the students would be able to complete the assignment appropriately.
Mary also discussed modifying how she presented her lessons so that her students had this handholding experience. She described using fill-in-the-blank notes as a handholding adaptation:

I’ve had to adapt some of the things, like the notes. They used to write the notes. I would verbally say to them and there’s a Powerpoint and they would write them. And now I have fill-in-the-blank papers for the kids who just, like I have kids who can’t spell ‘wet’. I had one, ‘how do you spell wet?’ [pause] It’s just crazy you know. So a lot of the fill-in-the-blank and then we end up writing the words on the board, they fill in the blank because they can’t spell them. So definitely modifying the assignments for some of the lower ones.

Mary also specified that she doesn’t need to handhold with all of her students, since there is a variation within her classes. With her students who are at- and above-grade level and may be “college bound,” she has them write out the notes without the fill-in-the-blanks (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

Russell also described this handholding/teaching the basics experience as “breaking down” the material: “It’s been breaking everything down into various components. I have some kids who don’t have the arithmetic down, and so that I don’t really know how to teach that.” He identified his students struggle with students and their lack of background knowledge as his reasoning for utilizing handholding. He stated that he is “trying to take everything in as slow steps as we need to” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Russell further described an example of planning for this “breaking down” experience:
So this week we’ve been combining like terms for the lesson. And then in my own mind, breaking it down as far as what the individual steps they are going to need. So we need vocabulary. We’re gonna need to be able to combine like terms. Are they going to be able identify what like terms are before anything? So breaking each step down into the very basic components. Essentially down to, alright one plus one. They can handle that. What do they need beyond that?” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

For Russell, handholding involved breaking the material down to the simplest components so that students would be able to interact with it.

For Lynn, handholding with the younger students was done in the form of small group and individualized instruction. She described the difficulty of this handholding experience:

All these kids, I adore every single one of them, but they all need so much individualized attention. It’s so hard for me to take that time out to work with those kids one-on-one, when I still have fourteen others who are sitting there expecting for me to also be attending to them” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

The teachers felt that because of their students’ needs, they needed to utilize this handholding, even if this experience was frustrating, difficult, or time-consuming. Though they utilized other instructional strategies, they felt that this practice was the only way they could continue teaching the content to the students that were performing significantly below-grade level. But as Lynn stated, handholding took significant class time and was often exhausting for the teacher.
Because of the time needed for handholding and the challenges accompanied by working with students in this way, the teachers spoke of handholding in a primarily negative way and stated that it was particularly “frustrating.” Mary stated that these handholding modifications she has to make are “really frustrating” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Paige stated that: “A lot of times we have to open up the book for them, point to the page, which can be frustrating” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). She stated that it is so hard for her as a teacher because: “It’s really you know, every step of the way” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Aside from frustrating the teachers, the handholding experience also specifically impacts the teachers’ sense of efficacy in regard to the success they perceive with students. The teachers tended to perceive more success in their teaching when they didn’t have to utilize handholding; when students were able to work without constant teacher assistance, the teachers felt more successful. For example, when Paige discussed her successful moments in teaching with me, she was quick to point out that they did not involve the handholding she does with the students: “It’s not a lot of the handholding that we do in a lot of classes, like guided notes and stuff, like ‘no, you have to take these notes you have to do these problems,’ the tests are multiple choice” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Even though it plays a negative role in the establishment of their efficacy, the teachers continue to utilize this practice, because students have become accustomed to the handholding experience and feel uncomfortable when the teachers have them attempt to discover the content on their own.
With this comfort, though, the teachers also recognized the possible negative impact of handholding on students. The teachers acknowledged that this coddling experience could possibly lower overall student expectations. Mary stated that we “need to be careful not to expect too little of students” and continue to challenge them (Interview 3, 2/11/2013). By breaking the material down into its simplest components, the students miss opportunities to engage with the material in critical ways. Russell stated that he recognized the possible negative outcomes of handholding and he doesn’t want to “sell the kids short,” but he has to “make a call at some point” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). He identified that his obligation as a teacher is: “Just making sure that we get the most important stuff, and yeah to me that’ll be icing on the cake if we can get, get to that” (Russell, Interview 2, 10/31/2012). Handholding has become a comfort for both the students and the teachers. The teachers stated that it is “miserable” for both teacher and student when they try to present material in a typical way and when they teach without providing this assistance (Paige, Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

There’s No Time

The final code that related to the teachers’ efficacy in instructional practices was the “there no time” frustration expressed by the teachers. Lynn described this code specifically in our second interview when she stated that “There’s no time during the day. I’ve personally been going home and doing hours of work at home ‘cause I don’t really get much done here and then there’s all the paper work” (10/23/2012). Though teachers in typical situations may experience a perceived lack of time and frustrations with time management, the teachers in this study felt that there was a “busyness” that accompanied
this teaching role that exceeds typical planning and instruction. The “no time” factor was especially challenging because of the nature of the school that they worked in, including the type of students that they taught, as well as the curriculum utilized by the school.

Lack of time was an issue for the teachers because they had to balance the time needed to plan and teach to a variety of students, including students who varied in terms of motivation, ability, and behavior. For instance, the teachers stated that they might have to plan for students who are motivated but have difficulty reading, as well as students who are bright but exhibit the “don’t care mentality.” Teaching to the variety of student needs, including differentiation and handholding, made time a constant factor in their teaching role.

As the teachers walked me through a “typical school day” in the first set of interviews, it was immediately apparent that an overall busyness was part of their daily routine. For instance in our first meeting, Paige described her school day and what happens when she initially arrives at school in the morning:

I actually get here early so I can get things settled in, get things ready. Today in particular I came in and fixed a lunch and a breakfast. We have a student who is pregnant…She didn’t have a lunch, so I fixed it for her. A lot of times, our kids are pretty low poverty so sometimes they don’t eat, and so a lot of times I spend my mornings doing something like that, ‘cause you can’t teach the kids if they are hungry. And if it gets to the end of the month the parents might misspend the food stamp money that they get, so it’s a little bit more, so that was my morning this morning (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).
As Lynn was telling me about how she starts her day, she stated that she gets in early to complete everything she needs for the day because as soon as her students come in:

“from there it’s complete focus on them. ‘Cause they need help eating breakfast and constantly just getting into the morning routine, doing their morning work, using the bathroom, all that” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

As the teachers described their school day, it was common that they described their planning or preparation periods in atypical ways. For example, Lynn said that it is rare for her to get a full “break” or planning period: “Even if I do have a planning period, with our kids and how needy they are, we are always working with behaviors and kids breaking down” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012). In our conversation about her daily schedule, Mary informed me that her last period of the day was her planning period. Though she called it a “break,” she identified that it was not the typical definition of a “break” in a work day:

Mary:

And I have break. My last period is break. I am done, ready, please, give me a break.

Interviewer:

And what do you usually do during that period then?

Mary:

Oh, it depends. Like, I did the IEP paperwork today to be turned in. And actually it’s due tomorrow. I do a lot of grading. Take a lot of grading home. Stay here late
at night grading. Run errands, make phone calls home, just basically whatever needs done.

Interviewer:

Sure, so not a real break?

Mary:

No, it is not a break. [laughter] Not that kind of break, but it’s a break, try to like push as much stuff and get it done as I can.

For Mary, though she is busy, she felt that she was able to get some of her tasks accomplished during her planning period. She believed that as long as she could get a significant amount of work done during her “break”, the work she takes home seems more reasonable. The teachers also stated that even though they were supposed to have their lunch period by themselves—administrators and other teachers were responsible for monitoring lunch periods—it was rare that they had time during that “break”; often, they ended up working with students during their lunch period or building relationships with students during this “free” time.

One of the teachers also mentioned an additional endeavor that impacted her schedule. In our first interview, Paige shared that she spent substantial time designing a class for the school to help to specifically address the ability level of her students:

The Fundamentals of Science class is actually a class I designed for the school…with this population it’s really hard, it’s hard enough to learn the content area, so I wanted a class that really focused on reading in the content area, a lot of OGT [Ohio Graduation Test] focus (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).
In our second interview she expanded on her reasoning for designing the class and how it specifically related to the learning level of her students:

So we didn’t have to necessarily incorporate it extra into other than what we do as it is in the science class, but we really didn’t have to focus on writing a research paper or really. Because the way our kids learn, it just would take up too much time (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Paige identified that developing this class meant that she needed to devote additional time to this element of her teaching role, however, she believed that overall it would be a benefit for the students and would help to address some of the struggles with the variation in learning needs.

Other factors involved in the “no time” struggle involved elements specific to the teaching role at Valley Alternative. First, part of this perceived lack of time resulted from the teachers performing the role of both the general and special education teacher simultaneously. The teachers had curriculum and teaching responsibilities that are experienced by a general education teacher with a full classroom of students, as well as the responsibilities of a special education teacher or an intervention specialist. Aside from time needed to cope with teaching students with special needs, the teachers discussed the paperwork that they have to do as a special education teacher as a factor in the “there’s no time” element of their teaching.

For example, Mary stated that the grading combined with the additional focus on work involved with students’ Individualize Education Plans (IEP’s) has been “really rough” for her this year (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). The IEP work has particularly been a
source of busyness and then stress for her: “The beginning of this year was so much focus on the IEP’s and they are trying to push us to do more with the IEP’s and it was just really stressing me out” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). Since our discussion, Mary stated that she had become better at balancing this aspect of her role; she realized that she could only get some much work done in the time allotted during the day.

Overall, this dual nature of their teaching role was something that impacted the teachers’ efficacy in instructional practices as they found to be exhausting and prevented them from completing their work in a timely manner. The teachers felt that it was difficult to supply the additional time needed to serve in both of these teaching roles, and they had to continually work to balance the responsibilities of both of these roles. Additional time responsibilities also arose because of the curriculum issues at Valley Alternative.

The teachers described a significant amount of additional time needed for planning because of the school’s curriculum. The teachers did not take part in choosing the curriculum that is in place for their students, and the teachers identified that the curriculum that is currently in place is not very helpful. In some situations, the school’s chosen curriculum is not used at all. As Mary stated, the curriculum frustrates her because it provides additional challenges in her role. She does not believe the textbook and curriculum materials provided by the school match the range of students’ ability levels. She said that: “I don’t even use the Biology book they got. It’s too high for our kids” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Russell described a similar experience regarding his lack of time with preparation and planning and the mismatch between the chosen curriculum
and what he feels his students are able to do. He mentioned that the school gave him a “pacing guide” as part of the curriculum, which describes the pace he should be going with the textbook. He described this pacing guide as “unrealistic”; it was tough for him to figure how to utilize it with his students (Interview 2, 10/31/2012).

Because of the perceived mismatch between the curriculum and the students’ ability levels, the teachers spend a significant amount of time creating their own curriculum materials. Russell said that he creates his curricular materials throughout the school year on a needs-by-needs basis. He stated that he thinks that even if he did have the appropriate textbook and pacing guide for his students, he might end up “making up a lot of it anyways” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). Though, he admitted that he would not feel the strain of all the additional planning and preparation if he did have the appropriate curricular materials.

Lynn also described the time she spends devoted to creating additional curricular materials:

I create a lot of my own. Just like for example, I have a pool, which is just stuff that I started creating this year. Just different value rates, assessments, and just like, just in that, I’ll create like an activity. A lot of this is what either I’ll do in my math group or I’ll have my co-teacher do it with the kids—that supplemental stuff, but just simple stuff that I can, it’s just this is kind of just like my go-to, quick things that they can do but it’s different than them just doing like pencil and paper (Interview 2, 10/23/2013)
Lynn stated that the school’s curriculum is difficult for her to use because there is also a mismatch between the units in the curriculum and the standards. She finds that there is not enough of this set curriculum to make it through the year, so she is constantly trying to find activities to go with different concepts.

One of the teachers was given the opportunity to provide input on the chosen curriculum; however, this experience was “disappointing”. Unlike the other teachers, Mary was fortunate in that she was able to attend “wonderful” seminars to offer her opinion on what curriculum materials she liked and wanted to use with her students; however, her input was not asked for or used. She said that this was unfortunate because the curriculum the management company chose “doesn’t make sense for our kids” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012); the company chose the same curriculum for all of the Valley schools. Mary said that the seminars were at least somewhat helpful for her, though, because she was able to take the sample book provided and she has been utilizing the worksheets and CD’s that came with the sample book with her students.

The teachers did not have an entirely negative perception of these issues with the curriculum, because they all seemed to believe that they would be better prepared with their future students. As Lynn stated, she is constantly creating materials to use for next year:

I’m also in a process to, one of my goals this year is to create a lot of just like file folder games and have this more organized where I can make it so if I know I want an activity for expanded form, I don’t have like fly through and create all
this. So a lot of this stuff I’ve learned to just start creating and then make copies
of it and then have it ready to go, so” (Interview 2, 10/23/2013)
The teachers believed that these issues they were currently having could be remediated
by the work they were completing presently; in the future they would have these issues
with curriculum matters settled. When asked about specifically planning for the various
ability levels, Mary stated: “It’s a little bit extra, but I’m saving everything so next year
I’ll have it [laughter]” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). Mary believed that next year she will be
more prepared and not be as busy as she is this year, though her laughter showed that she
is aware that this might never happen.

As with many aspects of his role, Russell said that he believes that a lot of his
busyness is just because he is a first year teacher:

I am looking forward to this point next year where I kind of have resources to
draw on. You know, I’m sure once I get to this point next year I will decide at
one point or another that what I did this year, I’ll have ideas on how to fix this,
but so I’m not looking, I’m not expecting that it’s going to go to no work next
year but, yeah” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012).

The teachers are always building curriculum materials with the hope that they will
be more prepared in their teaching environment next year. They recognize that the “one-
size-fits-all” curriculum does not work for the unique set of learners that they teach to, so
they are constantly inventing and revising lessons to fit the needs of their students. Even
though the teachers assume that they will one day be prepared, from the discussions with
the teachers, this feeling of preparedness doesn’t seem to ever happen, as it was a
struggle experienced by novel and experienced teachers alike. It is rare that the teachers ever experience two similar years in their teaching and so the level of busyness that the teachers experience is a constant in their teaching role at Valley Alternative.

The teachers defined the “there’s no time” code as an aspect of their daily life in and out of the classroom. As with many teachers, the teachers at Valley Alternative dedicate a significant part of evenings, weekends, and the summer planning and preparing lessons. When I asked Lynn if going home and doing work after work is exhausting, she further elaborated:

Yeah it is. Yeah, ‘cause I will go home and I will give myself a little bit of a break, eat dinner, go to the gym, and then usually start work and do a couple hours of work before I go to bed and it really, I mean, it really, I mean it, every once in a while I have to make myself just not bring something home. Because the list would never end that I could potentially bring work home with me every night if I wanted to. So if it’s not something due, if it’s not IEP or paper work to write, it’s still like, I could always be planning. So there are times that I definitely have to do just like give it a break and make myself not” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

Paige also described how she stays busy outside of school hours:

I have a couple of students who I have been tutoring outside of class to keep them current with the other students. This tutoring either involves reviewing material we have done in class or previewing what will be coming up in the next lesson (Interview 3, 2/8/2013).
The teachers believed that the work they put in outside of class time is worth it, so that they feel better prepared during class time when students need them the most. The lack of time element of their teaching may be frustrating and challenging at times; however, they discussed this aspect of their efficacy in a primarily positive way. The teachers tended to believe that this was just the nature of their teaching role at Valley Alternative, and they needed to put this time and effort into it to be successful with their students.

**Summary**

Through analysis of the interview data, three codes emerged that impacted the teacher’s efficacy in instructional practices: variation in learning needs, differentiation and handholding, and “there’s no time.” The teachers discussed similar struggles in relationship to their efficacy in instructional practices that they expressed with their efficacy in student engagement, as the teachers felt they had to overcome significant barriers in planning and delivering instruction. These barriers typically stemmed from having to teach to a variety of academic ability levels in their classrooms, as well as managing their teaching for students who perform drastically below grade level.

Teachers exhibited the most confidence in their abilities to impact student learning when this variation did not exist. Further, they felt the most comfortable and the most successful in their abilities when they could teach to students at or above grade level. They felt this success when they set high standards and utilized instructional practices that supported students and challenged them to reach those standards. Since this did not happen frequently, their planning and organizational practices became a stressor for them and a part of their teaching practice that needed managed.
These stresses were multiplied by the lack of time frustration expressed by the teachers. Teachers referenced a lack of time as an issue in terms of their ability to plan and deliver instruction effectively. Though teachers in typical situations may experience a perceived lack of time, there is a “busyness” that comes along with this teaching role that exceeds typical planning and instruction. Part of this lack of time results from the teachers performing the role of both the general and special education teacher combined.

Overall, the teachers were able to recognize that they had issues in this domain of their teaching and utilized two primary approaches in their attempts to cope—differentiation and handholding. Whereas the teachers’ use of differentiation seemed to increase their sense of efficacy in instructional practices, the use of handholding seemed to undermine it. The teachers were less confident in their teaching successes when they felt they had to handhold during teaching or break down the materials for students. They also continued to utilize this practice even as they felt it had a negative influence on their students and on their own esteem. It was not obvious in the interviews if this persistence has a positive impact on the teachers’ efficacy in instructional practices or if it contributes to feelings of doubt about teaching appropriately to this population of students.

**Classroom Management**

The third major qualitative theme that emerged through data analysis is classroom management. There are three codes related to this theme: 1) school-wide intervention, 2) teaching role, and 3) support systems.

**School-Wide Intervention**
The first code as it relates to classroom management involves the school-wide intervention that is utilized within the schools. The system is “for all the students and it’s throughout the building for all the grades” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). When I approached the teachers regarding their classroom management approach, all four teachers initially and repeatedly discussed the school’s system for student behavior. Each of the teachers discussed this program in detail and shared the importance of the program within their classrooms.

As stated in the participant biographies, the teachers all work within the Valley Alternative School System; however, they teach at two separate schools. Paige and Lynn teach at Valley Alternative Community School (CS), while Russell and Mary teach at Valley Alternative Secondary School (SS). All of the schools in the Valley Alternative School System utilize a school-wide intervention, though there is some variation by school. Variations within the system by school are addressed below.

The school system’s web site identifies their behavioral services in terms of this building-wide behavior system. The web site states that the system reflects the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), and it incorporates rewards and privileges as part of the school’s level system. Teachers also use this system to track student progress of specific IEP goals. The level system utilized within the schools is based on four principles: 1) Be a Team Player, 2) Be Open and Honest, 3) Be Respectful and Professional, and 4) Be Responsible and Productive. Further, the system is primarily based on the categories of students “behaving” and “doing their work” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012).
The students at Valley Alternative all begin on Level 1 of the system, and as they demonstrate appropriate behavior and participation through a period of ten days, they move up to the next level. Students continue to move up or down the levels based on their behaviors. “They [students] are given three warnings for a behavior…They have to get less than three marks in 80% of their classes to move up a level” (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012). As student move up through the levels, they earn more privileges.

Paige described this progression: “And so Level 3 has like ten days, so everyday they’re good, that they don’t get many marks, they move up. And then when they get to Level 4, they get to go on field trips, stuff like that” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Paige further described the notion of utilizing field trips as a privilege in our second interview. She said that “it’s actually included in like all students’ IEP’s that they’ll have access to fieldtrips…to learn how to behave in public and socialize and so, it covers the social aspect” (10/16/2012). Though it is included on students’ IEP’s, students only have access to the field trips if they have reached that privilege according to their level. Other privileges that the teachers mentioned included going outside for recess, eating lunch with a teacher or administrator, going to school dances, and using the restroom without an adult.

Movement on the level system at both schools was slightly altered depending on the severity of student behavior. Severe behaviors, like excessive noncompliance or physical aggression, resulted in an “automatic move down.” In Paige’s classroom, for instance, if students “throw something,” then they receive an automatic move down (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). This severity of the behavior is determined by the teacher. In
this way, though this system is meant to be “very clear” and “very concrete” to the students (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012), “it varies like, and they pretty much know there will be times where they will get a couple chances” before their level changes (Lynn, Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

As part of the intervention system, a school-wide ticket and reward system is also used. Students earn tickets based on their behaviors in their classes. The teachers keep track of the number of tickets students have and tally these at the end of the week. Teachers mentioned carrying a clipboard around with them to monitor tickets, as well as using an excel worksheet on their computer to track ticket amounts. At the end of the week, student ticket amounts are given to the behavior specialist. Students are now able to “spend” the tickets that they earned at the school store.

Russell described the school store: “It’s kind of like an amusement park, where there’s like little trinkets where they [students] can turn their tickets in.” The store contains “mostly like little trinkets. I think there is some candy. I think they can earn, there’s some midlevel things like a dress down patch, where they can just wear jeans a day instead of the uniform. That’s like a week’s worth of tickets if they don’t lose any tickets” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Paige described the midlevel items as: “a hat day, a jeans day, or something special, a special lunch” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Since the “prices” of the items in the store vary, students may have to save their tickets to buy items/activities that are worth more. For example, the teachers at Valley Alternative SS described a bike that is in their school store that is meant to serve as a motivator for appropriate behavior: “And there’s a bike in there that one kid worked out when they first
got it that’s mathematically impossible to get. What I think they said they’ll do is auction it off or give kids ways to get more tickets” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012). The teachers described this auction as an end of the year auction as an opportunity for students to spend the tickets that they have not used throughout the year.

Though both schools utilized the level system and ticket economy, an important difference in the systems at the two schools was how “earning tickets” was defined. When I initially asked Russell if he had a method to deal with issues with student behavior, he stated:

The school has this school-wide method. And I think it might be at all Valley Alternative Schools, but I’m not sure. They have a series of tickets. They get five tickets. The tickets get taken away for if they need to get warnings. And whatever tickets they have left they can spend in the shop (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

Unlike the system at Valley Alternative CS where students get tickets by exhibiting positive behaviors and refraining from exhibiting negative behaviors, students at Valley Alternative SS, only tickets taken away for negative behaviors. When I asked Russell if the students earn the tickets, he stated: “They automatically get the tickets for walking in the classroom. So they don’t necessarily earn them” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Since Mary and Russell are at the same school, they utilize the same school-wide system and use a similar overall approach to behavior management and Mary described “earning” tickets and how they use the ticket economy in the same way:
So they earn, when they walk in the classroom, they get five tickets. So, they can only go to, we’re not allowed to give any more than five. So, they actually, they just have the five just for being there, and then, for any misbehaviors, the first time they get a warning and they lose a ticket. And then the second time, they’re given a warning and they lose two more tickets. And then they get another warning, two more tickets, now you’re out of tickets (Interview 1, 10/4/2012).

At Valley Alternative SS, students “earn” their tickets by “walking into the classroom” and “just for being there.” The students then get tickets taken away for misbehavior.

Mary stated that previously they were allowed to give tickets as a reward, but that is something that they are not allowed to do anymore. She said:

Cause they get those five for doing what they are supposed to do. So you’re not allowed to give anything above the five, which was another thing we weren’t crazy about, but. It’s like you haven’t earned them, but you get them” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

Her discussion of previous experiences with the school-wide system sound similar to the approach that is currently being used at Valley Alternative CS. She did not elaborate why the school had modified the system so that students were now losing tickets instead of actually earning them for their positive behaviors.

Another key difference between the two schools was an additional suspension warning system that is utilized at Valley Alternative SS. This suspension warning “list” is used for students who get sent to the office repeatedly for the same behavior. Mary gave an example:
I had a student today who was on the list for disruption. And he did, he disrupted my class. And um I kind of looked for some slight. But the second one was and I just told him, ‘You’re on suspension warning.’ And he’s like begging me ‘cause he’d already been written up once. The first time they go down it’s a warning and a phone call home. Second time they’re suspended. And mine was the second one, so he was suspended. But it’s just for target behaviors. Things that they really need to focus on” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

When I asked what this student was doing in this situation, she stated:

We were going over flash cards. Where I read the definition they show me the words. And he kept talking out and saying the words out so that students didn’t have to look theirs up. We just verbally reminded him, ‘you need to stop doing that.’ But then he moved his chair over, because I have him isolated, he moved his chair over and was talking to another student when I was giving directions, so that was it” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

It was unclear whether this approach was used in both schools; however, it was only mentioned by teachers at Valley Alternative SS.

Additional elements and modifications to the system were also made by specific teachers.

For example, in Lynn’s classroom, the level system is modified based on the age/grade level of her students. Coupled with the privileges mentioned previously is a system where students get to put a sticker by their name on the board if they reach the two highest levels. After a student receives 26 stickers, they get a prize. Lynn also
modified the name of the level system with her classes; for the kindergarten, first, and second graders she works with the system is referred to as “the mountain.” The mountain is a visual representation of the program for the younger students to keep track and monitor their current level (Lynn, Interview 1, 9/24/2012).

In our second interview, Lynn informed me that they were trying to modify “the mountain” slightly because the students were not successful with it. Their new modification presented the levels to the students using different colored clothespins; there is a board posted in her classroom with five colors in order—pink, green, white, yellow, and orange. The colors represent the students’ behaviors throughout the day on a continuum with pink representing “I’m going above and beyond” and orange representing “I’m not making the best choices I know I can make.”

Lynn explained the specifics of this system for me:

So they start at white every morning and after recess every day and then they move up and down the ladder based upon how their behavior goes throughout the day so. We found out the fact that because we used to tally them on just sheets that we keep on a clipboard and it really wasn’t being, it wasn’t too effective so this puts it more in their control where they have to get up and move the clip themselves” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

A photograph of the new system is seen below:
Figure 3. Photograph of modification to system in Lynn’s classroom

Other modifications that the teachers made to the school-wide intervention system included adding a class-wide motivator, individual behavior plans, detention, and a change in the language used in the program.

In Paige’s classroom, she created an additional behavior system to motivate students specifically by class. In this system, students earn cotton balls for good behavior
to put in a jar that she keeps in visible view of the students. When the class fills the container, then they earn a class reward, such as a pizza party.

In addition to the school-wide behavior system, Lynn created individual behavior plans for her students. She explained one to me:

I have a stoplight on the side of my desk. I have a student who sits right on the end there. And he’s very bright. He loves to participate, loves to talk; he’s so lovable. He out of nowhere, though, he will start to get frustrated, whether its sensory issues around him. And so we try to work with him to use the stoplight. He understands if he starts to get frustrated to point to yellow. And that will be my cue for him to leave the classroom and take a break” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012). She further said that once this student is “in the moment,” he will end up screaming and crying. At that point, none of their approaches to behavior management are useful.

Russell described using automatic detention as an additional “discipline tool” when the school-wide intervention system wasn’t enough. He described when detention is used: “I have had times where you know a student was being very rude to my coteacher and there is no warnings. That was just automatic detention” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012). He gave another example of automatic detention for a student throwing an unidentified object in the classroom. He said that he didn’t see what was being thrown; however, according to the rules of the classroom that is automatic detention. He said that these cases are not very common; however, he likes being able to use it when he needs to. He also said that he has seen the automatic detention rule in
place in other classrooms; however, none of the other teachers in this study mentioned utilizing automatic detentions as described by Russell.

The three warnings that students get at Valley Alternative SS for behavior as part of this “marking system” was similar to a three strike rule. After three warnings or “strikes, students are sent to the director’s office. Students get three warnings for negative behaviors that they exhibit in the classroom. Russell: “three times for each student already so it’s already at the point where we’re ready for detention. Like again, if it was just talking to them about their, their work I would of felt bad giving a detention, but you know, there’s, already their fourth warning which meant it should have been a detention” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

“The first three warnings they just get tickets taken away. The fourth warning is detention. The fifth warning is going down to the office” (Russell, Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

Mary made modifications to the intervention system by modifying the language she uses with the students. When I asked Mary how the tickets were working for her she stated: “Well, we used to have a system where we took five and then ten and that was more effective because somehow five and ten sound a whole lot more than just taking one or two” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Because she doesn’t believe that taking a single “ticket” from the students is as effective as taking multiple tickets from them, she modified the language she uses with the system: “So, I really don’t say tickets to them anymore. I just tell them, okay, that’s the second time, that’s the third time” (Interview 1,
Instead of wording it as a ticket system, she turned the language of the program into a warning system.

All of the teachers described the school-wide intervention program at their schools as a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program. As suggested by its name, this school-wide approach to behavior management focuses specifically on positive behavior. This is consistent with how Paige and Lynn described the intervention system at Valley Alternative CS. As Paige stated: “We try to focus on the positive behavior, instead of negative behavior. So we try and get as much to rewarding them for positive things. That’s not to say that you can’t go back and reinforce when they’re doing something negative. We started that I think last year and it made a big difference in their behavior levels” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).

The school-wide intervention system at Valley Alternative SS is also referred to as Positive Behavior Supports; however, Mary recognized that taking away tickets from students was more of a negative than positive approach. She explained: “It’s supposed to be, they call it Positive Behavior Support. But it seems to me like it's more negative” (Mary, Interview 2, 11/6/2012), since students don’t necessarily earn tickets for their behaviors and tickets are only taken away from the students. As we had a discussion on this concept, she said that Positive Behavior Supports is “the new rave everywhere. Everyone’s trying to use that” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012) and she suspected that this is why this label was used for the program.
Even though both of the school programs were based on positive behaviors, the teachers recognized that the system had the ability to provoke negative student behavior, as well. For instance, as Lynn described the level system:

So we found that it has been, it’s becoming much more effective with behavior, but it’s also we have some students who get very, very emotional when they have to move down…one of my students in particular, the kindergarteners, he is ecstatic when he gets the pink but he is very rare that he makes it up there. And he, when he gets the yellow or orange he breaks down. So today he broke down and was crying for about forty-five minutes straight, and then I had another student during recess had moved down because it was indoor recess and he wasn’t playing properly with peers, he had multiple warnings, he was told to sit down in the hallway and he started rolling around and at one point he actually ran out of the school building and as a student who I have had ever since last year, he has never done that” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

Overall, all of the teachers continue to use the school-wide intervention in their classroom, even if there were elements of it that does not work for them or they found that it has a negative impact on their students in their classrooms or if they disagree with some part of it. As Russell stated: “So yeah I follow that procedure, or I’ve been trying my best to follow that procedure” and “I’m not gonna, not gonna question it” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). Mary said that anytime there is a disruptive behavior they “just go through protocol” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). “Just going through protocol” of the school-
intervention system is seen in the next code, as the teachers defined their role in classroom management.

Teaching Role

The second code is to how the teachers’ defined their role in classroom management. These definitions included the teachers’ general ideas about classroom management, as well as the relationship of these ideas to the school-wide intervention program as discussed extensively in the previous code. Lynn described classroom management as: “an ongoing struggle in a classroom of sixteen kindergarten and first grade students with disabilities and only two teachers” and it is an area that for her personally she has been “trying to improve” (Interview 3, 2013). All of the teachers described classroom management as one of the least favorite parts of their role as a teacher at Valley Alternative, whether it was an “ongoing struggle” as Lynn described, or if it was just an area of their teaching that they had to “admit” they “hate(d)” (Mary Interview 3, 2/11/2013).

The teachers stated that classroom management was an issue that was dealt with daily. Since there is such a variation in the student population—as discussed extensively in the two previous themes—student behavior problems also varied. In terms of negative behaviors, teachers stated that they were often confronted with behaviors that are typical of students with behavior difficulties, such as students talking out of turn, calling out answers, throwing items, exhibiting forms of aggression, and being generally noncompliant. When I asked Paige what was the best part of her job, she quipped: “It’d be easier to say what’s the worst part of my job, which is like when they’re not listening
to me, not doing what I tell them to do” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Student noncompliance was a topic of discussion with all of the teachers. As discussed in the student engagement theme, depending on a student’s mood or a student’s temperament that day, a student may refuse or struggle to participate in academic activities or exhibit a negative attitude toward their schoolwork or toward school, in general. This provoked dissatisfaction in this role of their teaching, especially if the students’ behavior continually interfered with the students’ academic work or the progress of other students.

Teachers were also often discouraged when their efforts at classroom management were unsuccessful and students continued to exhibit negative behaviors. For instance, Lynn stated that she becomes frustrated with behavior management when: “I work so hard and I try so hard with their behaviors and they still, or it’s frustrating when you have students just, it’s the same behaviors and that’s really frustrating to me” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012). Further, teacher’s defined having a “good day” or a “good year” in term of their students’ behavior. When I asked Paige how things in general were going for her in our second interview, she responded with:

Good. I mean we’re still having a really good year this year. I mean, behavior for the most part is pretty good, I mean, I think there’s some other behavior problems that we’re hearing elsewhere. Um, but we don’t have those kids this year”.

She further elaborated on who “those kids” were: “So there’s like about five or six kids that we really don’t see. And so, I guess they’re the five or six bad kids. We don’t wanna have ‘em around. So it’s been really good” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012). As evident
in Paige’s example, teachers preferred to have students who were better behaved and who
did not exhibit the most extreme misbehaviors.

All of the teachers recognized the importance of having a good classroom
management system and being consistent with it. The school-wide intervention system
was one way they felt they could portray this consistency with their students. The system
was a way for the teachers to immediately address negative behaviors as they were
exhibited in the classroom in a clear and consistent manner. Russell stated that the
system is “kind of a good way to be more explicit with the kids.” He elaborated on how
the system works in his classroom:

Once you’ve warned them a couple of times, whether it’s the tickets or just the
explicit warnings, it helps them realizing I’ve kind of reached the limits and they
will, you know, refocus on their work or you know, if they were disrupting the
class they’ll quiet down. So I mean, it does seem to work” (Interview 2,
10/31/2012).

Russell also stated that the ticket system, in general, seems to work, because:
“The kids all seem to know that system. I think it’s the same system going back to the
middle school. So yeah, they all seem very up on that” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). The
teachers appreciated that the system was something they could use consistently with their
students; students were aware of the expectations from all of their teachers in their
classes. As Mary described: “I’ve had a few issues with student behavior. But students
knew my expectations. They knew that I would follow the protocol set on the first day of
school the same way with every student every day” (Interview 3, 2/11/2013). “Following
the protocol” of the school-wide intervention system, a system that they did not create nor asked to reflect on, was an important aspect of how the teacher’s defined their role in classroom management.

As described in the student engagement theme, teachers also felt that the school-wide behavior system took some of the pressure off of them and allowed them to place the responsibility onto the student. When Paige discussed the school-wide system, she stated that it is not just helpful for the students but that it “makes it so much nicer” for her, as well; “Cause it takes it off you to have to push and push them” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). The teachers believed that the students made their own choices and this system holds them responsible for those choices. The teachers stated that they like that the school-wide system promotes self-regulation of behavior. This importance of student self-regulation of behavior was included in how many of the teachers defined their role in classroom management.

The teachers’ discussion of the school-wide management approach was sometimes conflicting. The teachers at Valley Alternative SS especially disliked the negative features of the intervention system, as discussed in the previous code, but they continued to use it nonetheless. For instance, Mary mentioned that the school’s approach focused too much on negative behavior and she did not like how the tickets were taken away from the students one-at-a time; however, in our third interview she stated that it is important for teachers, in general, to learn the school’s method for dealing with misbehavior and then to adapt their philosophy to the school’s method. She said that she believes it is important for teachers to develop their classroom management plan.
within the school’s system, “and then implement it fairly, firmly, and consistently” (Interview 3, 2/11/2013). At this time, Mary was speaking from the role of administration (she had recently been promoted) and that could have impacted her perception of the teacher’s role in classroom management at that time.

Aside from feelings about the school-intervention system, the teachers also discussed elements of their personality that played a role in their classroom management approach. The teachers mentioned establishing a routine, establishing respect, being honest, refraining from anger, and encouraging appropriate socialization.

Mary’s feelings about dealing with student misbehavior revolved around this concept of consistency in all aspects of her teaching. Over the years, she said that she recognized that her students thrive on this routine and consistency. Because of this, she is adamant about “consistently enforcing the rules by giving positive and negative consequences” as is congruous with the philosophy of the school-wide intervention system (Interview 3, 2/11/2012). Mary takes this philosophy a step further, however, in that she structures her lessons in a similar way. She states that she presents lessons and the chapters of the book in an identical manner. In this way, students know what to expect from her in every lesson. She believes that students benefit from the consistency in every aspect of their school life.

After Paige discussed the school’s approach to behavior management in detail, she added her personal feelings towards classroom management:

I try to establish a relationship of respect with my students so they feel responsible to show me the respect of good behavior. I usually find this to be the
most effective of ways. I am honest with my students and let them know I am a person with feelings” (Interview 3, 2/8/2013).

She illustrated this experience with an example:

Yesterday I had a student behave terribly, yesterday during my eighth period class. His behavior started others to misbehave and get off-task. He did pull back a little when he saw me get angry, like I addressed the class in a loud voice saying that their behavior was ridiculous and unacceptable. After the class, when I had calmed myself, I found the student in his ninth period class and told him that I would not tolerate that behavior again in my class. So he was chuckling and saying ‘I know I was pretty bad, sorry I won’t do it again.’ I told him that I didn't deserve to be treated how he acted that and he had me this close [she indicated a small amount with her fingers] to crying. He said ‘I'm sorry, now I feel bad’ (Interview 3, 2/8/2013).

Paige stated that behavior was much better after this experience and she felt that the student responded better to this, than if she would have done the recommended warning system and sent him to the office.

Aside from following the school-wide procedure, Russell said that in terms of his classroom management skills, he doesn’t get angry and he tries to refrain from showing these kinds of feelings to the students. He said that there are days when the kids seem “wound up” and he can’t get them to work. He describes this struggle with an example of taking kids out of class to do the assessment benchmark tests:
Nothing I could do could get them to just get quiet for eight minutes to work on the test. I don’t want to yell at the kids. I think at one point I raised my voice to an extent. It didn’t do anything. I mean it was eight minutes (Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

Paige and Russell differed in terms of how they felt emotion should be expressed to their students, and this is reflected in how they interacted with students.

Further, as a first year teacher, Russell is still defining his philosophy and role in classroom management. In our discussions, he began to show some feelings of tensions with some of the set rules in his school. For instance, he did not seem to particularly like giving detentions and he said it was “fortunate” that he did not have to resort to them very often (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). However, he felt that he had to do it because it was part of the rules. As we discussed his reasoning for giving detentions, he worked through his feelings about giving detention and even validated his use for it:

Russell:

I gave a couple more detentions today, I kind of felt bad doing it but my rules are no throwing things in the classroom, if you do it, it’s an automatic detention and other kids throwing stuff.

Interviewer:

Sure. Can you just explain a little more what were they throwing? Like, what, can you set up the situation for me a little bit?

Russell:
Yeah, actually that just happened today. I didn’t even see what was being thrown, it was something very small but, so you know, not that I was worried about it hurting somebody but I would of felt, I probably would of just given a warning if that’s the only behavior but I’d already told him you know, a couple times.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Russell:
To you know, quiet down, do your work, three times for each student already so it’s already at the point where we’re ready for detention. Like again, if it was just talking to them about their, their work I would have felt bad giving a detention, but you know, there’s, already their fourth warning which meant it should have been a detention. And it was an automatic detention for throwing something, so (Interview 1, 9/26/2012).

The relationship between Russell’s feelings and actions in classroom management are still solidifying as he obtains more experience in his role at Valley Alternative.

Only one teacher explicitly talked about social skills instruction as part of classroom management and the importance of positive socialization. Lynn stated that she implements this instruction “constantly around the clock” to help combat the behaviors that are “in the moment” as she previously described. For social skills, she stated that she does a lot of modeling and role playing, as well as playing games with the students. Since Lynn experienced difficulties with maintaining consistency between the home and
school environments, she felt that this element of classroom management was especially important with her students.

The following table summarizes the findings in this code:

Table 11

**Definition of Teaching Role in Classroom Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-wide Intervention System</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(consistent across teachers):</td>
<td>(varied by teacher):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear, consistent, explicit, firm, encourages self-regulation</td>
<td>routine, respect, honesty, good natured, encourages socialization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The left column of the table represents the characteristics valued by the school-wide intervention approach as discussed by the teachers. The right column exemplifies the characteristics of the teachers’ personal philosophies towards classroom management and how they define their role. For the teachers, characteristics of the personal philosophy sometimes conflicted with the philosophy of the school-wide intervention approach. However, typically there was an overlap between the characteristics important to the school and characteristics valued by the teachers.

Overall, the teachers defined their role in classroom management based on the school-wide intervention approach and their own personal philosophy. The teachers tended to dislike this element of their teaching role, stating that in general, student behavior was one of the “most overwhelming aspects of my job” (Lynn, Interview 3, 2/13/2013) and “where I have my hardest time” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). The
way the teachers envisioned their role in terms of classroom management was an important element in the establishment of their efficacy because of the extent that the teachers discussed classroom management issues in the interviews, and the overall extent to which their day is spent managing issues of student behavior, including through the use of the school-wide intervention system.

**Support Systems**

The third code is the teachers’ perceived impact of the school context and specifically, the perceived support systems within Valley Alternative. This element of the teachers’ lives could have been categorized within the classroom engagement or instructional practices themes, as well; however, the support system that each of the teachers discussed in the interviews—the school director and co-teachers—were mainly referred to in terms of managing student behavior. Thus, this code is categorized within the classroom management theme.

Specific elements of the school context and the support system that the teachers have at the school is an often discussed aspect of the teacher’s perceived role and primarily served as a means of support in their efficacy construction. As Lynn stated:

We’re just the type of environment where any of us if it looks like we’re in need, it wouldn’t matter if it’s a high school teacher, one of our administration, that person would drop what they’re doing to help out. I think that is always comforting to know whatever is going on, we have that support behind us (Interview 1, 9/24/2012).
Russell stated something similar: “I mean I really like this school a lot. The principal. The coworkers” (Interview 1, 9/26/2012). In general, he stated he likes the school because: “I think it’s a good group that we have here: co-teachers and administration” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). The support system that the teachers identified at the school primarily consisted of the school director and the co-teachers.

**School director.** There are many layers of administration at Valley Alternative; however, the teacher’s primarily discussed the impact of the school director on their role, as this was the administrator that they came in contact with most frequently. The school director at both schools was seen as the “principal” figure in the building (Russell, Interview 2, 10/31/2012). All of the teachers discussed this administrative figure in positive terms.

Three of the four teachers specifically described the positive support in classroom management practices provided by the director. These teachers felt that they had a good relationship with the director and described the support they received from the director in terms of suggestions for the classroom. This included having informal conversations about student behavior, as well as having the director come in and sit with classes that have students with particularly difficult behaviors. For instance, Russell stated that the suggestions he typically receives from the director are because of “discipline” issues: “Mainly what I’ve asked him for help with is like discipline issues, and he offered suggestions, or I mean he will take kids out of the room if they need some time out of the room” (Interview 2, 10/31/2012). He stated that he has asked him some academic questions, but this is relatively rare. Mary describes daily conversations she has with the
director: “Oh, just about everything. Anything from joking around, what we did over the weekend, or problems I’m having with the class. Issues that I see developing between students. Really anything” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

At Valley Alternative CS, Paige stated that the director even has his own tickets that he will walk around with and give out to the students to promote positive behavior through the school-wide system. Further, she described that the director and the assistant director will “back her up” regarding behavior decisions. As Paige described:

Our director and assistant director are very good if you go to them, ‘I’ve done this and this and this. It’s not working. Then they’ll say instead of marking them, we usually give them two warnings, ‘you need to stop, this is your second warning’, and the kids know the third time they’re gonna get a mark. You can say to them, if it’s daily, if it’s always happening you can say ‘this is your second warning’, you can skip the mark part. ‘I’m sending you down to Mr. J’. They’ll support you, they will back you up” (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012).

Overall, three of the four teachers stated that they talked with director throughout the week, and they appreciated how supportive he is. Mary further elaborated on the relationship she has with the director: “we keep telling him if he leaves we’re going with him. So he has to find a job for all of us [laughter]” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

One of the four teachers, Lynn, exhibited indifference towards the director’s role, especially as it relates to classroom management. When asked about the director and how this figure impacted her classroom, she said:
Everyone seems to be extremely overwhelmed and busy with their own things that sometimes it’s hard to, most times you have to kind of figure out a way. And most of our behaviors and any problems that we do have in our group pretty much we can handle them within a classroom” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

She said that she envisioned the director and assistant director as being useful for certain situations, but these were only in emergency situations. For instance, if a student was exhibiting severe aggression and needed to be physically restrained she would call the director or assistant director for support. Since not many of her students have needed restrained, she hasn’t felt a need for their interventions within the classroom. Lynn was the one teacher who spoke of administration in this way and did not suggest the necessity of their support.

Mary was the only teacher that discussed the challenges presented by the director and by the administration of Valley Alternative as a whole. Though Mary stated that she appreciated the support she receives from the director and she has a positive relationship with him, she stated that administration, in general, has been a source of stress for her at times. For instance, she stated: “the beginning of this year was so much focus on the IEP’s and they are trying to push us to do more with the IEP’s, and it was just really stressing me out” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). Further, she elaborated that the students’ IEP goals became such an important focus for her that it was:

Almost to the point where the IEP is more important than the subject being taught. And it just got a little stressful. Because to me the IEP is supposed to be a tool that helps them to master the content. And they were looking at it the other
way around, where the IEP was the most important thing. And it’s like I don’t think so (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

For this situation, she ended up just coming to the conclusion that she needed to let it go and just focus on what she could do, and it improved the teaching situation for her.

Further, Mary also discussed frustration caused by a new schedule implemented this year in her classroom:

I know that the director is crazy about the individual schedule and it’s like real high school. And you know some of the teachers are like the point is they can’t make it in a real high school, they needed a special setting (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

When I asked if she talked with the director about how these changes made it difficult for her, she said: “I actually joked with him one day when I came in. I said you should have just fired me if you wanted me to quit [laughter]” (Interview 2, 2012). She said that she discussed these issues with him, and the director told her that he did not mean for it to be more difficult for her or the other teachers. It is important to note that Mary was the most outspoken on the impact of administration and is now currently serving in an administrative role. Though these challenges presented by Mary were not entirely related to classroom management, they were important illustrations of the relationship between teacher and school administrator.

Overall, the teachers identified the director as an important member of their support system. Paige specifically recognized the importance of the director role when their director travelled to Australia on vacation for extended period of time. She referred
to his absence and its collective impact: “He was really strong. Him being gone is really impacting people and I think we will all be very happy when he’s back.” She further elaborated later in the interview that:

If there’s anything this past week and a half has shown us is that administration really does make a big difference and whose in there really makes a difference of the atmosphere, the you know, with the teachers and you know, that filters down to the students and I don’t think you necessarily realize that as much. You take that a little for granted” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Lynn’s indifference was evident in this discussion of the situation, as well. Since they are at the same school, Lynn also referenced the absence of the director, but she did not make the same realization about his absence that Paige did. When I asked if it was tough having the lack of administration, she said: “Well I, not really. I kind of stay in my problems here, and we just had so much going on that I personally didn’t really notice too much” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

Co-teachers. Aside from the director as part of their support system at Valley Alternative, the teachers were also part of a co-teaching situation. The co-teaching situation varied for all of the teachers in that Paige and Lynn each interacted with one co-teacher throughout the day, Russell worked with two co-teachers at separate times throughout the day, and Mary worked with a variety of teachers. Mary’s co-teaching situations differed from the other teachers, as the co-teachers she worked with varied depending on the class she taught. In her first class, she was the sole teacher and did not have a co-teacher. For two of her classes, the social studies teacher and the health and
physical education teacher served as her co-teachers, respectively. In two of her classes, her co-teachers were instructional aides. Because of this variety, Mary made somewhat different comparisons on what she does and does not like about having a co-teacher.

One commonality that the teachers shared in their co-teaching situations was all of the teachers were working with “new” teachers or teachers that they had not worked with before. Paige even had the opportunity to give her input into who her co-teacher was this year: She stated: “I was lucky in that I have a new co-teacher and my directors allowed me to take part in the interview process; this is not a common practice here” (Interview 3, 2/8/2013). She said that she believed that administration thought it would be helpful to have her involved in the process, so that she would not complain when the co-teaching situation did not work.

All of the teachers recognized the importance of having a co-teacher in their classroom. As Paige stated: “when you are lucky enough to have a good co-teacher, it is the best thing in the world, and I wouldn’t want to work any other way” (Interview 3, 2/8/2013). However, the teachers did not all categorize their co-teaching situation as ideal.

In regard to classroom management, the teachers appreciated having a co-teacher in the classroom to help with behavior issues. Paige further emphasized: “Behavior responsibilities are always shared. That’s like the main thing. Because there are so many behavior issues, so you need that second person” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). The teachers believed that having another teacher in the room helped students stay on-task during instruction time. The “second person” was beneficial because this teacher was able to
work individually with students, remove especially disruptive students, and reinforce the school-wide intervention system, as the other teacher continued with instruction. Russell described a situation where one of his co-teachers was helpful with student behavior issues while he was teaching:

I had a student today who was acting out a little bit, and my co-teacher took him out in the hallway to talk to him, and I guess he was, just recently went off one of his medications, like an anti-depressant medication, and I guess everything, that or, just his behavior, he was kind of attention-seeking (Interview 2, 10/31/2012).

At the time, he appreciated having his co-teacher available to assist with the student’s behavior without necessarily disrupting the flow of the lesson. Paige also gave an example of how it is helpful to have her co-teacher in the classroom to help with behavior issues:

Like this morning we had a kid that, you know, I could see he was like totally, totally off. And even though it was a class I was lead teaching, I’ve known him longer and have a little more of a you know, so I’m like ‘what’s up?’ He’s like ‘I’ll tell you later.’ ‘Well, let’s go in the hallway.’ So you can do that, you can handle a situation right away” (Paige, Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Paige felt that being able to interact with a student immediately as they were having issues was a significant advantage to having a second teacher in the classroom.

Though the teachers appreciated having the support in terms of classroom management, they were not completely satisfied with the co-teaching situation. The teachers said that they were initially excited about the idea of having a co-teacher and
were looking forward to the benefits of group collaborations in lesson planning and instruction; however, in their classrooms, this collaboration was rare. Often, the teachers said that their classrooms operated in a “my class, her class” form (Paige, Interview 1, 9/20/2012). This occurred by either having two separate lead teachers instructing to separate groups of students, or one lead teacher and one “assistant” teacher interacting with students. The teachers felt that this “assistant” teaching role also operated as an intervention specialist in the classroom at times.

Lynn discussed this in her class: “it’s so hard ‘cause there really is so much separation in this room” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012). When asked specifically about the co-teaching situation Lynn stated that: “We have struggled to co-teach because we have been more focused on me teaching first grade and her teaching kindergarten” (Lynn, Interview 3, 2/13/2013). In Russell’s classroom, his co-teachers function in the “assistant” role as one of his co-teachers will focus her time during class on working with individual or small groups and the other co-teacher “does more discipline stuff” as he teaches the whole group. He stated that his one co-teacher will sometimes work with the students academically, but the content was often difficult for her. He described this in detail:

She will work with kids one-on-one, but I think some stuff we’ve been doing has been beyond her mathematically. So, she can only do so much to help them until she calls me over to help, so. So, then it’s more of a discipline kind of keeping things going (Interview 2, 10/31/2012).
Mary also struggled with her co-teachers lack of content knowledge. She stated that: “I
have had a couple [co-teachers] actually walking and said ‘I hate science! I have never
done well in science!’ which isn’t really helpful, but” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). She
elaborated that “that just doesn’t give the kids a lot of confidence to ask them for help.
‘They are not gonna help me to find the right answer’ (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Since the
teachers felt that the co-teachers’ lack of knowledge in teaching the subject was
inadequate, this automatically put the co-teacher into an assistant teacher role in their
perception.

With these co-teaching systems, the teachers generally felt that the co-teachers did
not necessarily share the lead teaching role with them. For instance, in Russell’s
classroom, he takes entire responsibility for the Mathematics aspect of his teaching,
including the lesson planning and instruction. He said that he will “bounce ideas off of
my co-teacher sometimes”; however, these are rarely academic in nature (Interview 2,
10/31/2012). He appreciates that the one co-teacher does help with the IEP work because
this helps him manage his time more appropriately; however, he has indifferent feelings
towards the other co-teacher and her role in his classroom. As consistent with the
perceptions of the other teachers, he thinks it would be more useful to have a co-teacher
that assumes more of a teaching position in his classroom.

Similarly, the teachers have struggled with their co-teachers taking initiative in
the classroom. As Lynn described, she experiences difficulties in her classroom because
her co-teacher “is still getting used to taking the initiative” (Lynn Interview 1,
9/24/2012). In her classroom, the role of co-teacher is frequently turned into the role of assistant teacher:

For the most part, I still feel like I notice a lot of times recently that I think she, I think that the kids are still viewing me as like the lead teacher, even though most of the kids wouldn’t have even known that she wasn’t interested in going into this. Like for example yesterday, we were working within our math groups and she had a group and even the Behavior Specialist was here observing a kid and as I was working, I heard her say ‘I’m gonna tell Miss Lynn that you’re not behaving’ (Interview 2, 10/23/2012).

She said that her co-teacher does not demand respect from the students as the lead teacher and so they do not treat her that way. Because of this lack of confidence and initiative on the part of her co-teacher, it leads to further behavior complications in the classroom, as well as more pressure on Lynn. She described this: “Like, I wish that she could step up and have more of the confidence just so I didn’t feel like really all the pressure had to be on me a lot” (Interview 2, 10/23/2012). She recognized that there are times when she appreciates having the co-teacher in the classroom with her, but at other times there is that tension for her because of the teacher performing in this “assistant” role.

Mary also operates her classroom with her co-teachers in the assistant role. Where Mary differs from Lynn is that she recognizes that she needs to allow the other teachers to take more initiative in her room. For her she said:
It’s been really interesting to see how they interact with the students and how that’s different than the way I do. But definitely been a process of adjusting to their style versus my style. Letting go of a little control of the classroom.

When I asked her to give me example of this ‘letting go’, she said that: “Just if I see a student whose off-task or doing something they shouldn’t and they intervene first to back off and let them deal with it. Because I’m used to doing everything, all of that in the classroom” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). For Mary, and for many of the teachers, she was still figuring out the dynamics of the co-teaching.

Even though Mary identified the co-teachers as secondary to her role as lead teacher, she is actually not categorized as the lead teacher in her classes. This was an element of administrative decision-making that was interesting and somewhat confusing to her. When she was describing her co-teachers she said: “But they have, I’m not sure why, but this year the intervention specialist is the lead teacher in the classroom. So that the Social Studies teacher is actually the lead teacher in all of my classrooms, even though he is only in one class of mine” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). When I asked if this impacted her role in the classroom, she joked that: “No. No I did offer him to do all the lesson planning and the entering of the grades, but he wasn’t too keen on that! [laughter]” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012).

In general, the teachers appreciated the idea of co-teaching, though they did not think of their current situation as ideal and recognized that it needed considerable work to reach this point. As Mary stated: “This has been a challenging year. I think a lot with the changes but they were making there but they try to get two teachers in every classroom. I
would rather have just me in the classroom” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Mary does not envision having a co-teacher as something truly necessary to her classroom, because she still spends the same amount of time planning and grading, and she did not feel she needed the assistance with classroom management as much as the other teachers.

The teachers’ feelings about co-teaching developed by how the teachers defined co-teaching. The teachers envisioned a true co-teacher as someone who should share all aspects of teaching, including lesson planning, implementation, assessment, and behavior management. None of the teachers in this study were part of a co-teaching team that operated in this idealistic way. Because of this, the teachers either did not consider their co-teachers to be “actual” co-teachers. For instance, even though Mary spoke of her “co-teachers” throughout the first two interviews, in the third interview, she said: “I have not personally been part of a co-teaching team” (2/11/2013). Or, the teachers felt that they still had significant obstacles to overcome regarding how their co-teaching situation was functioning. As Lynn stated in our third interview: “I enjoy the co-teaching model, but it has also been a work in progress” (2/13/2013).

Aside from their co-teaching situations, the teachers spoke of the support of other teachers at the school and the team effort that they all display at Valley Alternative. Paige appreciated having other teachers to help her out around the school. She stated that: “It’s a pretty tight team as far as watching out for each other and helping each other out” (Interview 1, 9/20/2012). Mary stated something similar. She said that she knows that her job is difficult, but it gets better every year, because: “There is a strong camaraderie among the staff that keeps me coming back year after year” (Email
communication, 3/22/2013). The teachers stated that the teachers at the school were all very supportive of each other, primarily because of the size of the school. They felt that teachers become naturally closer to other teachers when there are so few of them at a school. Paige described an instance of how the teachers at her school help each other out.

In this case, Paige is the one helping out another teacher:

> And one class we had here, the class is pretty good, and I was running copies for my co-teacher for students who just came her first day. And a student from math class came and he’s like ‘oh, I’m gonna follow you around.’ And I’m like ‘where are you supposed to be?’ He’s like, ‘I’m supposed to be in Math but I gotta cool off or I’m gonna blow up.’ So I took him, like looked in and she was fine in here, so I took him in our sensory room and I sat and talked to him to find out what the problem was, spent ten minutes with him. Then I took him back to math, and he was able to settle back in Math, do his Math work (Interview 1, 9/20/2012).

Aside from receiving (and giving support), the teachers also said that they learned a lot from the teachers around them. For instance, Mary stated that she even learned her classroom management skills from another teacher at the school: “I learned so much from him [another teacher at the school] just how to control the classroom and how to tell the kids what you expect and then expect that of them and help them to rise to meet that” (Interview 1, 10/4/2012). Overall, the teachers described other teachers at their school as positive and supportive, and even one of the favorite parts of their position.

In general, the teachers recognized that the support they received in regard to their classroom management was an important part of their role. Though, the teachers
did not talk about the support they received from the school director, co-teachers, and other teachers at their school in the same way. Whereas the teachers spoke about the support they received from the administration and the other teachers at the school in a generally positive way; the teachers often spoke of their co-teachers unenthusiastically and sometimes identified them as sources of additional pressure and stress. Overall, however, the teachers appreciated the support they received from the various people they interact with in their roles at Valley Alternative.

**Summary**

Through analysis of the interview data, three codes emerged that impacted the teachers’ efficacy in classroom management: school-wide intervention, teaching role, and support systems. The school-wide intervention system played a significant role in how the teachers’ judged their own abilities in this area as all four teachers repeatedly designated the school’s system as how they managed student behavior. The system, derived from Positive Behavior Supports and based on Applied Behavioral Analysis, encourages students to participate in class and demonstrate appropriate school behavior, in general. Elements of the teachers’ personal philosophy of classroom management sometimes conflicted and overlapped with the values of the school-wide intervention approach. Even so, all four teachers heavily relied on this system as their primary classroom management approach, even if they did not necessarily agree with it in theory or in practice.

In general, the use of the school’s intervention system seemed to help with the teachers’ resilience when things did not go smoothly in the classroom. At the same time,
it also seemed to lessen their belief in their capability to manage behavior issues and decreased their sense of empowerment in the classroom. Classroom management as a whole was stated as the least favorable aspect of the teachers’ roles at Valley Alternative, and the teachers said that they were sometimes frustrated and overwhelmed by students’ behavior. In the interviews, they expressed dissatisfaction for the way some of their students’ behavior, and they were discouraged when approaches, including the school’s intervention system, did not work to deter negative behavior.

The school context impact and the perceived support systems—the school director, co-teachers, and other teachers within the school—also played a role in the development of the teachers classroom management efficacy and was often discussed as an aspect of their position that supported and/or contested their feelings of success with students. Teachers primarily referenced positive support from the school director in terms of classroom management, and negative support in the form of disappointment and frustration from their co-teaching situations. The teachers all liked the idea of co-teaching but were generally dissatisfied with their own co-teaching situations. Overall, the teachers acknowledged that the support they received in regard to their classroom management was an important aspect of their teaching role, and they recognized the importance of a good support system to assist with classroom management practices.

**Relationship between Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data provided important findings in the exploration of this study’s research questions. The qualitative findings illustrated important nuances in the teachers’ efficacy beliefs. Though the teachers could simply be
categorized as generally middle range to highly efficacious in their teaching, the qualitative findings demonstrated the doubts and strengths within the three elements of their teaching that were more specific than the numeric ratings. Even though the quantitative findings determined that the teachers had a range of mid-high to high efficacy in student engagement, instructional practices, and classroom management, the qualitative findings revealed that teachers had not only certainties about their ability to be successful in these domains, but also demonstrated instances of low efficacy in these aspects of their teaching.

By examining quantitative and qualitative data through the TSES and the interviews, I had the opportunity to explore how the teachers see themselves as teachers and make meaning of what makes them feel successful and unsuccessful as teachers. The following table demonstrates the relationship between the survey and interview findings. The joint display connects the two methods utilized in this study and illustrates a multifaceted representation of the teachers’ efficacy.

**Student Engagement**

As seen in the joint display, the teachers as a group exhibited mid-high to high efficacy in student engagement, instructional practices, and classroom management. Student engagement displayed the lowest efficacy ratings out of the three domains. As listed in the quantitative findings section, the responses varied among the teachers: Paige’s ratings were low to mid-range while Mary and Russell’s scores were considerably higher on the scale. Even with this variation in ratings, the qualitative findings illustrated that all four teachers had certainties and doubts in their efficacy. For
example, the teachers all encountered students who exhibited little motivation for school and who did not respond even after multiple attempts were made to encourage participation. This lack of student motivation discouraged the teachers and was a source of frustration and disappointment. Conversely, the teachers also demonstrated their persistence and a sense of elevated efficacy in their use of “switching gears” practices and “flipping a lesson” when they were struggling with student engagement.

**Instructional Practices**

As a whole, quantitative findings in the instructional practices subscale were mid-high range. Individual quantitative findings paralleled the student engagement subscale. Also similar to student engagement was that the qualitative findings illustrated the uniqueness of the teachers’ classroom; the variation in student ability levels exposed a diversity of feelings regarding teacher efficacy beliefs. Even though all of the teachers’

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Table 12

*Joint Display of Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>Instructional Practices</th>
<th>Classroom Management</th>
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<td>Findings:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group TSES Mean</td>
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<td>7.16 (mid-high)</td>
<td>7.44 (high)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Findings:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview Codes</td>
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<td>1. Variation in</td>
<td>1. School-wide</td>
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<td>learning needs</td>
<td>intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Approaches</td>
<td>2. Differentiation and</td>
<td>2. Teaching role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>variation</td>
<td>handholding</td>
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ratings were above a “5” on the particular TSES subscale, the qualitative findings demonstrated the struggles the teachers faced in this area of their teaching and the barriers they struggled to overcome to teach their students successfully. Qualitative findings also generated differences in how the teachers wanted to be and how they actually judged their capability (efficacy). For instance, the teachers wanted to have high standards for their students and teach to those high standards, though they recognized that they felt that some of the practices they used did not follow through with that goal.

**Classroom Management**

The most notable finding between the three domains is seen with the exploration of both quantitative and qualitative classroom management findings as seen in the joint display. Means were the highest for the classroom management subscale, with teachers exhibiting tremendous confidence in their abilities in this domain according to the TSES. The TSES primarily showed a range of six to nine on the nine point scale. Mid-range ratings were exhibited for some items such as teaching with “a few problem students” and “controlling disruptive behavior.”

The qualitative findings revealed the teachers’ reliance on the school-wide intervention system and the impact this had on the teachers’ efficacy. The teachers seemed to demonstrate persistence and resilience—an indicator of high efficacy—because of the reliance on the school-wide intervention system. On the surface the teachers seemed to display confidence in this area of their teaching because they relied so heavily on the school-wide approach. Deeper qualitative investigation illustrated the teachers’ inherent frustration with and severe dislike for classroom management.
Teachers were often dissatisfied with student behavior and the school-wide intervention system as the main approach to manage student behavior. In this way, even though the teachers’ ratings would indicate that the teachers are most confident in this aspect of their teaching, the qualitative findings exposed the doubts and uncertainties that could actually be detrimental to their efficacy.

**Teacher Position Inconsistency**

The fourth theme that emerged through data analysis is teacher position inconsistency. This emergent finding is not specifically related to the research questions; however, it emerged through qualitative data analysis as a component relevant to the overall efficacy of the teachers. In the single school year that this study was conducted, all four teachers mentioned an inconsistency in their teaching position. This theme was defined by this inconsistency, specifically the transfer of the teachers to different roles. This included transfers by choice and transfers where the participants had no choice in their role change.

As stated in their biographies, all four of the teachers stated that they “ended up” at the school. Initially, Valley Alternative was not necessarily their first choice when they were searching for a teaching position. Through the interviews, the teachers shared that even though that they did not necessarily choose this situation, through their experiences they have begun to like or even love their role. This included the teachers stating affection for the overall school, the staff, and/or the students at Valley. However, though the teachers spoke about this contentment for their position, all four teachers
mentioned movement and/or the desire to move to a different position during our interview sessions.

Two of the teachers mentioned looking for a different role that they perceived was better than the position they were in currently. While interviewing, Paige mentioned that she was interviewing for the position of Assistant Director at her school. The school’s Director had recently moved to a different school in the Valley Alternative system, and the Assistant Director was moved into the Director’s position. During our second interview, she mentioned that she was talking with the regional director of Valley Alternative Schools. When I asked her if talking with upper management was a common occurrence, she stated: “No, I had an interview for our assistantship.” When I asked her about being interested in moving within the system, she said that:

    Just being here and seeing like how things run, and then we know we have ideas. And there’s a lot I do, but I am still tied to the classroom. I mean I still have the classroom, I have to teach them, and I have the plans. So I do as much as I can within that confound, but I think, you know, but I could have a position, there would be a lot more I can offer and do, be able to spread out, so (Interview 2, 10/16/2012).

Lynn also mentioned a desire to change positions. She said that she is “content where I’m at for this year but after this year” she would like to be in a different position. This position would not be the lead teacher of her classroom, but as someone who works alongside the teacher and works with students one-on-one. Further she mentioned that: “I’m still struggling with the fact that if this is the long term environment I want to be
in…Eventually I want to be in a resource room type of environment” (Interview 1, 9/24/2012). She also posed this idea to administration on multiple occasions and has described to them how much a resource room would benefit the school. She said that this opportunity would be ideal for her, but she said that every time it is brought up, it is never really taken into consideration. Further, one of the things that frightens her about “moving on” from Valley is the students that she would leave behind. Though, she also said that she believes that it would be like that at any school she was working at and would make any job more difficult to leave.

Two of the teachers discussed an actual migration to a different role within the time span of the three interviews. Though Russell is very new to teaching at Valley, inconsistency was still seen even within his position. Right before Interview 1, Russell was switched from the Title 1 Math teacher (the position in which he was hired for) to the lead Math teacher. When asked about this, Russell stated that the last Math teacher was not content doing all the lesson planning and felt ill-prepared at her position. He stated that she is really good with the students, but she needed significant help with the content. Since she was having such a hard time in that position, Russell was approached with the new position:

So they asked if I would take over. I enjoyed the Title 1 Math teaching. The regular teaching takes a lot more work with the lesson planning, but I’m enjoying it so far. It’s what I expected first year teaching to be: stressful. But I’ve been handling it okay (Interview 1, 9/26/2012).
He stated that he wasn’t resentful about the move, because he sensed that the other teacher was having a hard time. Further, he stated that he really likes the school and wanted to help as much as possible. He said that he had no problem “jumping in” where the school needed him.

Between the second and third round of interviews, Mary was promoted to an Administrative position at Valley. In our third interview she informed me of this change: “I have taken a promotion to 'Instructional Support Administrator.' I no longer teach students, but work with teachers to help them improve. My job includes administering the Resident Educator program & supporting TBT's [Teacher Based Teams] and data-driven instruction at nine Valley Alternative Schools” (Mary, Interview 3, 2/11/2013). In this role, Mary has the opportunity to use her previous experiences to observe and help teachers in their practice. In our previous interviews, Mary did not mention a desire to move to a different position at Valley or a desire to move into an Administrative role, though she did have strong feelings regarding administrative changes that impacted her classroom throughout the year.

Overall, all four teachers expressed satisfaction for their teaching role. Throughout the time frame of this study, however, all four teachers mentioned movement and/or the desire to move to a different position. Though this emergent finding is not specifically related to the research questions, it represents an important asset to this study as inconsistency in teaching position plays a role in how teachers construct their efficacy.
Summary

This chapter delineated the findings of this study. This chapter presented the data and descriptions of the data that represented the three main findings: a) student engagement, b) instructional practices, and c) classroom management. An emergent finding was also presented as it relates to the teachers’ efficacy construction. The next chapter examines these findings in relationship to the literature in teacher efficacy and in teaching students with behavioral difficulties. Implications to the field of education, suggestions for future research, and perceived limitations are also presented.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the beginning of this chapter, I reiterate the purpose and process of this study through an overview of the dissertation. This overview displays a breakdown of each chapter and serves as a springboard for the discussion of the findings. This discussion of the findings is examined within the teacher efficacy literature and the literature on teaching students with behavioral difficulties. Finally, this chapter offers the implications and suggestions for future research. Perceived limitations are also presented.

Overview

In Chapter I the topic of study was introduced. This chapter showcased the academic deficits that students with behavioral difficulties face in the classroom and the challenges and complexities that their teachers encounter in an effort to encourage their students to be successful. In my experiences as a teacher of children with emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, I have faced these challenges firsthand and I was interested in exploring the perspectives of other teachers in a similar alternative school environment. Since teacher efficacy has been proven to be related to and predictive of important aspects of academic success, I proposed that it could be potentially useful in examining the perspectives of teachers who work in such challenging environments and with students suffering from such poor academic outcomes.
Chapter I also illuminated my perspective as a researcher. Identifying and recognizing that I connect with interpretivist assumptions was an important initial step in conducting this research as it contributed to the formation of my research questions and the form of inquiry utilized for this study; my research questions and form of inquiry were framed within this interpretivist perspective. Thus, this qualitatively-driven mixed methods inquiry was driven by the following questions:

What are the efficacy beliefs of teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties?

- What are their efficacy beliefs in student engagement?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in instructional practices?
- What are their efficacy beliefs in classroom management?

These research questions exhibited the primary focus of the study. Chapter I demonstrated my interest in exploring how teachers of students with behavioral difficulties, specifically in an alternative school environment, perceive their efficacy.

In Chapter II, a review of the literature relevant to the study was presented. The literature review examined teaching students with behavioral difficulties and the challenges that teachers can encounter within this setting. Defining emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder within the field of special education and how to teach them according to best practice research was a vital first step in this review. The literature revealed that traditionally the focus in educating students with behavioral difficulties has been on behavioral interventions. Pedagogical best practices, however, have become increasingly important as researchers have begun
to acknowledge and examine the poor academic outcomes of students with behavioral difficulties. A review of the literature suggested that there are strategies to effectively teach them, and these strategies have the potential to be utilized within alternative school environments.

Chapter II also presented the field of teacher efficacy and the potentially powerfully nature of exploring the construct from an interpretivist perspective. Albert Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy serves as a basis for the construct of teacher efficacy in the realm of education. Since the 1970’s, multiple measurement scales have been developed, revised, and further researched in an attempt to evaluate a teacher’s sense of efficacy and its impact on student success. Through this historical analysis, the overall nature of teacher efficacy research was revealed. The field of teacher efficacy, though substantial and promising, has only been researched through these measurement scales; inquiries from an interpretivist perspective have been rare. Because of this focus, difficulties have arisen related to understanding the construct and further applying results to practice. This chapter established the significant need for research on teaching students with behavioral difficulties in alternative schools and the struggles faced by their teachers, and it illuminated the need to do so through a qualitatively-driven research study.

Chapter III identified the methods and procedures of the study. This research was conducted using a mixed methods sequential design with priority given to the qualitative data collection and analysis. After initial attempts to contacting participants at a single alternative school proved unsuccessful, a search for teachers was expanded and four
teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties within a large alternative school organization agreed to participate in this study. Quantitative data was collected through the long form of the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and a general demographic survey. After quantitative data collection concluded, three rounds of open-ended, in-depth interviews with each participant were conducted. As consistent with qualitatively-driven mixed methods as a form of inquiry, the interviews served as the study’s primary source of data.

Quantitative data analysis was primarily used to identify interesting responses to items in the survey and to use those items to inform questions in the interview process. Throughout the study, qualitative data analysis occurred as interviews were transcribed and coded. Interviews were read multiple times and coded in an attempt to identify common concepts and ideas. As the interviews progressed, these concepts were further developed and three primary categories were defined with examples. Transcripts were re-coded with these examples in mind to ensure definitions were accurate. Through this data analysis process, three key findings surfaced.

Chapter IV debuted the three key findings that emerged through this research related to the teachers’ sense of efficacy in: (a) student engagement, (b) instructional practices, and (c) classroom management. The quantitative findings exposed the notion that the teachers had mid- to high-range efficacy in these three domains and in general as according to the TSES. Mean scores on the TSES showed that even though scores in general were high, the teachers had the overall lowest efficacy in student engagement and the highest in classroom management. Investigation into individual items provided
insight into specific tasks within these domains that the teachers felt confident and/or insecure doing. Chapter IV also explored these quantitative findings in combination with the qualitative findings.

The qualitative findings uncovered the details and nuances of the teachers’ efficacy in the three domains. In regard to student engagement and motivation, teachers expressed the following that impacted their efficacy: 1) varying motivation of their students and the particular low level of motivation perceived from many of their students, 2) the approaches they used, and 3) issues with family engagement that they believe played a role in their teaching. In regard to instructional practices, the teachers described concerns related to 1) the range in academic ability levels and the severe academic deficits that their students faced, 2) utilizing differentiation and handholding approaches, and 3) the lack of time and demanding nature of their specific teaching role. In regard to the classroom management finding, teachers expressed the following: 1) the school-wide intervention approach utilized in response to students’ perceived problematic behaviors, 2) the definition of their teaching role within the school’s approach and their personal philosophy, and 3) the impact of the school in terms of support systems. This included support and/or stresses from the school director, co-teachers, and other teachers at the school.

This fifth and final chapter is a discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter. These findings are discussed in relationship to previous research and literature in the field of education, specifically research conducted in the field of teacher efficacy and literature that focuses on teaching students with behavioral difficulties. This
literature was examined and re-examined as it relates to the findings of this study. This chapter concludes with the implications of this study and directions for future research, as well as my perceived limitations of this study.

**Relationship of Findings to Research**

**Student Engagement**

Academic engagement is defined as a variable of a student’s education that can be altered by the teacher; the teacher proposes instructional opportunities for the student in such a way that the student can respond to the curriculum (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). If the student is not engaged with the instructional opportunities, it is difficult for learning to occur. The teacher perceives that his/her students are engaged through the students’ motivation and participation in classroom activities. As seen in their severe academic deficits, students with behavioral difficulties tend to struggle with engagement. They may show little interest in academic work and may exhibit escape or avoidance behaviors at the onset of academic tasks (Koegel, Singh, & Koegel, 2010; Sutherland & Singh, 2004). When a student exhibits these behaviors, they are unlikely to respond to academic instruction. Further, the student may interfere with their classmates’ learning, as well as disrupt the teacher’s initial plan of instruction. These disruptions, as well as a perceived lack of engagement in general, can lead the teacher to become frustrated or challenged in multiple facets of his/her teaching.

Being frustrated by challenging tasks does not necessarily undermine a teacher’s efficacy, but it can weaken it. Mastery experiences, such as the experiences the teachers perceive when they attempt to engage and motivate students, are indicators of capability.
Performing a task successfully strengthens efficacy, whereas failing to cope with the challenge of a task weakens efficacy. Bandura (1997) describes mastery experiences as a powerful component in the efficacy construction process: “Enactive mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Successes build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy. Failures undermine it (p. 80).

The quantitative findings determined that the teachers were to some extent able to perform tasks successfully in this domain or were successful coping with failing to motivate their students. For comparison purposes, results reported by Tschannen-Moran & Johnson (2011), Yilmaz (2011), Tsigilis, Koustelios, & Grammatikopoulos (2010), Fives & Buehl (2010), Duffin, French, & Patrick (2012), Aydin, Demirdögen, & Tarkin (2012), and Fives, Hamman, & Oliveraz (2007) are seen in Table 13. All of the studies used for comparison utilized either the short or the long form of the TSES in their research. Since this study conducted research using practicing teachers and teacher efficacy research is often conducted on preservice teachers, this participant characteristic is included in the table for reference purposes.

As seen in Table 13, the teachers’ scores in student engagement are similar to the scores illustrated in previous TSES research studies. The findings in this study are consistent with three of the six comparison studies (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011; Fives & Buehl, 2010; Fives, Hamman, & Oliveraz, 2007) in that student engagement was the lowest rated subscale on the TSES. Also, the teachers had a mid-high rating in the
student engagement domain, with teachers rating their capabilities in student engagement as “some influence” to “quite a bit.” Thus, according to the quantitative findings, though

Table 13

*Comparison of Means*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Engagem ent</strong></td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.93</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructio nal Practices</strong></td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Manage ment</strong></td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>7.39</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>7.06</td>
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the teachers were least confident in their ability to succeed in this area in comparison to the other subscales, the teachers in this study were fairly confident in this domain of their teaching.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, teachers specifically demonstrated confidence in their belief in their ability to get through to the most difficult students and
their belief in their ability to get students to believe they can do well in school work. They were least confident in their ability to help students think critically and motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork. According to Bandura, the teachers would have had experiences—either successes or failures—that led them to these positive and negative perceptions of their abilities.

The qualitative findings expanded on these notions. According to the qualitative data, low academic engagement and limited motivation to engage in academic tasks was apparent to the teachers and played a role in the teachers’ personal assessment of their success with students. All four teachers expressed weariness over the varying levels of student motivation in their classrooms and particularly the low level of motivation that their students exhibited. For example, Mary stated that out of all of her classes, she only has a “handful” of students who were self-motivated and engaged with the subject matter. For this study, even though the teachers expressed that the level of motivation in their classrooms varied from students who were very motivated to students who entirely lacked motivation, the teachers seemed to evaluate this aspect of their efficacy primarily on the students who lacked motivation.

The teachers all expressed having students who were engaged or experiencing moments of engagement within their teaching; however, they did not necessarily feel successful in this aspect of their teaching. The teachers perceived difficulty in overcoming the barrier of engaging students with limited motivation. This is consistent with the quantitative data that showcased the struggle teachers faced motivating students
who show little interest in school. This feeling of hopelessness weakened their efficacy in student engagement. The teachers tended to measure their efficacy based on their perceived successes with the least motivated students in their classrooms.

In general, teachers assess their efficacy based on their successful and failing performances, though not every success and failure is measured the same. Since efficacy is based on the teachers’ perceptions, their efficacy is based on how the teachers interpret and weigh their contributions to the performance (Bandura, 1997). Because of this, though in general the teachers seemed to feel efficacious in their teaching, the teachers generally struggled to feel successful in the engagement and motivational aspect of their teaching because of the interpretation and weight the assigned to these unsuccessful performances.

The teachers’ perception of their efficacy in engagement and motivation is especially vital to their students’ success. Positive perceptions of this dimension of their efficacy can lead to strengthened student engagement and motivation. Negative perceptions can lead to a continue lack of engagement and motivation. The nature of these perceptions is seen in the figure below:
Figure 4. Perceptions of engagement: a cycle

As seen in Figure 4, the teachers’ perceptions of their students’ attitudes is important, because teachers’ perceptions of students’ motivational characteristics influences the degree and quality of effort that the teachers then put forth to promote and support student motivation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). If teachers sense that their students lack motivation, this in turn impacts how the teacher continues to promote engagement and motivation for learning. Further, students’ perceptions of their teachers’ effort impacts the students’ level of engagement and motivation. For instance, students who perceive that their teachers care about them and are emotionally supportive are often seen to show gains in their engagement and motivation to learn (Wentzel, 2006). Students who perceive that their teachers do not care about their learning are less inclined to engage in classroom activities and exhibit limited motivation.

This cyclical nature can be harmful to both the teacher’s sense of efficacy and can lead to further failure in student engagement. All four teachers demonstrated feelings of good intentions and sincerity toward their students. As evidenced by the teachers’ elevated TSES rating regarding their feelings toward their ability to instill confidence in their students, the teachers wanted their students to feel successful, and they cared about this success. Though, when the teachers demonstrate a decrease in the amount of effort they put into motivating students, these students may begin to perceive sometimes unintentional negative attitudes from the teacher.
In this study, this cycle was seen as feelings of failure led teachers to decrease the effort they put into increasing student engagement. This occurred even though the teachers perceived it as a problem. Though the teachers recognized the importance of student motivation and their struggle with it, they also mentioned that using the level system was a way to relieve the pressure and frustration it caused them. The teachers appreciated using the level system when students said that they didn’t care or showed a lack of enthusiasm toward their work. Using the level system was a way for them to focus less on the students “I don’t care” attitudes and more on other aspects of teaching that they felt they could impact. There is a difficult balance here between the teachers utilizing the level system to cope with frustrations with motivation—which would strengthen efficacy—and the result of students’ perceptions of their teachers’ coping mechanisms—which would decrease student effort as seen in Figure 4 above. Continued decreases in student effort would then force the teachers to over-rely on coping mechanisms to deal with the frustrations of students’ limited motivational levels.

All of the teachers referenced that the goal of using the level system was to teach the students to self-regulate their behaviors. Difficulty arises with children with behavioral difficulties because they may be less self-aware of the difficulties they possess or are causing their teachers (Stevens, Quittner, Zuckerman, & Moore, 2002). Because of this lack of awareness, they are less able to self-correct or self-regulate these engagement-disrupting behaviors. Significant research has focused on improving self-determined behavior and self-regulation of motivation as means to increase student engagement (Carter, Lane, Crnobori, Bruhn, & Oakes, 2011; Stevens, Quittner,
Zuckerman, & Moore, 2002). However, in this study, the teachers seemed to use the level system and its goal of self-regulating behaviors as a “crutch.” Instead of focusing on increasing engagement and motivation based on specific student needs, they resorted to utilizing the level system to ease their own discomfort with the students’ lack of motivation.

The teachers in this study also discussed the use of external rewards from a motivational perspective. From this perspective, teachers utilized the incentives to encourage students who exhibited low motivation for particular lessons or activities (Reeve, 2006). All of the teachers used external motivators throughout the school day, especially tickets as part of the school-wide intervention system. The tickets were intended to motivate the students; however, teachers experienced a variety of responses, including students being unresponsive or apathetic towards the tickets. This was especially true of students who already had perceived low intrinsic motivational levels.

Research suggests that incorporating motivational components into academic tasks can increase students’ engagement. There is also a substantial body of research that argues against the motivational benefits of external rewards, as the behaviorist perspective is not highly regarded in the educational community today (Landrum & Kaufman, 2006). Some theorists suggest that the reasonable application of rewards in context is more desirable than other destructive means, as long as it is not used to manipulate or control students (Everston, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003).
The external rewards that the teachers used through the school’s intervention system amounted to a “bag of tricks” rather than an “integrated set of principles” that drove the teachers’ efforts in student engagement (Brophy, 1999, p.44). When teachers utilize practices that are overly simplistic, they tend to be just quick fixes, if they “fix” anything at all. Teachers are not asked to reflect on what they are doing or even if it makes sense (Kohn, 2006). When teachers resort to these kinds of approaches, they can lose confidence in their own ability to impact motivation. As seen in the study, after experiencing failure to engage students utilizing the external rewards, the teachers exhibited a lack of awareness of what strategies they could implement that would enhance their students’ engagement and motivation. None of the strategies referenced in the literature review section of this dissertation used to increase engagement of students with behavioral difficulties (OTR, teacher praise, student choice, and peer-assisted learning) were mentioned in the interviews as means to increase engagement and motivation.

Teachers also referenced students’ home lives and the contradiction that the students experience between what they see at home and at school in relationship to their perceptions of student engagement and motivation. In this study, the lack of a positive and appropriate home life was seen as unfavorable to the teachers’ efforts to engage their students. In the interviews, the teachers stated that they did not feel that all of the students experienced a poor home situation; however, all of the teachers referenced that many of their students lacked a supportive home environment.
The teachers stated that most of the parents were not very involved in the school and that they felt that they didn’t have the desire to be involved. The teachers perceived that many of the parents exhibited a similar “I don’t care” attitude that they received from the students. Teachers were either unable to contact students’ parents, or the parents exhibited behaviors that they disagree with or disapproved of. The feelings proposed in the interviews are consistent with the findings from the TSES: the teachers indicated their perception in the mid-range of how they felt they could assist families in helping their children do well in school. They felt that they had some influence in this area of their students’ learning, but did not necessarily feel successful in their attempts.

In general, there are typically many barriers that keep families from being involved in their child’s education and from appropriately interacting with their children at home. These barriers, such as lack of time, inconsistency in work schedules, distrust of the system, previous negative experiences at the school, language barriers, lack of transportation, lack of phone/means of communication, parent perceptions of their input, lack of parent education, and parent motivational energy, can make it seem that parents don’t care about their child’s education (Bauer & Shea, 2003).

Teacher efficacy can be enhanced or damaged by parent/teacher relationships and interaction (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Teachers’ perceptions about the current relationship they have with families impacts the strategies they employ to improve these relationships and to further engage families (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). For instance, when family engagement is perceived as negative, teachers may feel they have fewer options to make improvements. As with efficacy in student motivation and engagement,
in general as described above, the process can become cyclical based on teachers’
perceptions of the situation.

There is a direct connection between family engagement and student success.
Research shows that there is a positive relationship between family engagement and
academic achievement. Students with involved parents have better grades and
attendance, exhibit increases in prosocial behavior and social skills, and are more likely
to graduate and proceed to higher education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2004;
Schargel & Smink, 2001). A perceived lack of success in this area of the teacher’s
efficacy is significant as it impacts the teachers’ sense of efficacy, in general, as well as
the future academic success of their students.

As with engaging students, in general, the teachers also demonstrated a lack of
knowledge on how to remedy problems with family engagement. This is not uncommon
as teachers rarely enter the teaching field interested in or prepared to work with students’
families (Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2007). Research shows that to be successful with
families, teachers must recognize, address, and respect the needs of families (Knopf &

The two approaches that the teachers mentioned using to engage families included
parent phone calls and parent-teacher conferences. Three of the teachers stated that they
made phone calls for student misbehavior. Paige stated that although she does call
parents for student misbehavior, she has been making an effort to call parents when
students have done something positive, as well. This has been difficult, however: “And
that’s something I am working on too, it just seems you always run out of time. And you
go, you know, I should call this parent, and I think about it, but then I forget and don’t get around to it” (Interview 2, 10/16/2012). Russell also mentioned phoning home in a positive manner and stated that he called a parent to learn more about a student (though he was never able to reach the parent). Parent-teacher conferences were less successful as very few families attend.

These two strategies employed by the teachers and the schools had a poor success rate. Because of this, the teachers admitted that they do not typically speak with parents on a regular basis. For example, Mary stated that even when she calls a parent about a student, she typically doesn’t even get to talk to them then. She blatantly stated that: “the parents aren’t very involved here. Most of them are really hard to reach. They don’t call back” (Interview 2, 11/6/2012). The teachers’ struggles with family engagement demonstrate the barriers that are present from the teacher perspective in an attempt to involve parents in their child’s education.

Overall, though the teachers felt efficacious in some areas of their ability to engage their students as measure on the TSES, the teachers expressed a concern about student engagement and motivation and their ability to be successful in this element of their teaching. The teachers sometimes felt “breakthroughs”, but they quickly became disappointed when these breakthroughs were short-lived. These disappointments are pivotal to the teachers’ efficacy establishment as teachers with a negative efficacy can begin to focus on these failings instead of the breakthroughs. They then may believe that combating student issues in motivation are beyond their capabilities.
The teachers also displayed a general lack of confidence in how to make improvements in this area. They expressed a willingness to learn more about how to engage students, but at the present time, they felt that the type of students that they worked with would continue to struggle with engagement and motivation and thus this element of their teaching was often out of their control. To be resilient in overcoming obstacles such as perceived failure in engaging the least motivated students, teachers must feel convinced that they have what it takes to motivate their students. Did the teachers feel that they could overcome this obstacle and engage all of their students? Because of the difficulties they experience, they often did not feel that they could overcome this obstacle without further professional development or education in this area of their teaching. This failure to cope is detrimental to the establishment of their efficacy in student engagement.

**Instructional Practices**

As with teacher efficacy in student engagement, teacher efficacy regarding instructional practices was seen in this study as cyclical in construction and experience. Research shows that perceptions of positive feelings during teaching indicate and promote self-assurance and anticipation of future success (Bandura, 1996; 1997). Conversely, feeling of negative emotions during teaching and perceptions of inadequacies lead to anticipation of future failure. These perceptions then lead the teacher to experience further success or failure and emotions related to these experiences.

According to the quantitative findings, overall the teachers felt they could do “quite a bit” regarding their ability to succeed in this domain of their teaching. Means
calculated in instructional practices efficacy in this study are consistent with means found in previous TSES research studies (as seen in Table 13). The qualitative findings, as well as specific item examination of the quantitative data, illustrated that the teachers in this study often perceived this cyclical nature of perception of inadequacy and deficit and the emotions associated with it in their teaching based on their perceptions of their students’ exceptional learning needs. As described in the previous chapter’s findings, the teachers struggled to cope with the heterogeneity of their classrooms. They had to teach to students with a variety of student needs in their classroom and specifically with students who were significantly below grade level.

Teaching mixed ability classes proved to be a challenge for all of the teachers. These feelings spanned quantitative and qualitative findings. According to the instructional practices subscale of the TSES, the teachers felt least confident in their ability to provide students with appropriate instruction based on their individual needs, as well as in their ability to challenge students who were very capable. In the interviews, the teachers expressed that the variation of ability levels within their classes was so extreme that it left them feeling unsure and frustrated with their choice and utilization of instructional practices.

Research identifies a positive relationship between teacher efficacy and attitude toward inclusion; teachers with a high efficacy rating tend to support inclusive practices (Meijer and Foster 1988; Soodak et al. 1998; Weisel and Dror 2006). Research on inclusion is important to note in this study because the teachers in this study seemed to experience similar (yet often intensified) tensions experienced by general education
teachers in inclusive settings regarding efficacy in instructional practices. Though an alternative school is not a “mainstream” classroom often referenced in inclusion research—as this is a school marketed specifically for special needs students—these schools have specific commonalities that help to understand this study’s findings and are relevant to this discussion.

First, as mentioned previously there is a range of students with the school; all of the teachers spoke of the variation of needs that existed within their classrooms and within the school. This is consistent with inclusive settings where special education students are placed with their general education, age-level peers. Second, the teachers seemed to lack the appropriate preparation and training needed to teach to a variety of student needs. Lynn was the only teacher in the study to receive her degree specifically in special education. Even though she had an intervention specialist degree, she still felt ill-prepared in regard to teaching and planning in a whole group setting such as the one she taught in; she felt that her degree only prepared her for a supporting role.

This is a common barrier expressed by teachers in inclusive settings. Teachers who work with students in such diverse settings need to be well-prepared to address the academic needs of students with and without disabilities; general and special educators cannot be expected to be successful in their role without a solid foundation in teaching students with a variety of disabilities and the accommodations and modifications associated with their education (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Fuchs, 2010; Williamson & McLeskey, 2011; Worrell, 2008).
The teachers mentioned using differentiated instruction in their classrooms as a means to cope with the mixed ability levels in their classes. Differentiation involves recognizing all students’ needs and utilizing the appropriate instruction to meet those students’ needs (Tomlinson, 1999). The teachers specifically described cooperative learning groups and independent work as part of their differentiated instructional practices. In the interviews, the teachers did not necessarily offer a positive or a negative perception regarding differentiation, though it is unclear whether the teachers utilized a comprehensive approach to differentiation as proposed in special education literature.

Aside from differentiated instruction, the teachers described “handholding” as a means to cope with their heterogeneous classrooms. Handholding was defined by the teachers as presenting academic tasks to the students in an overly simplified, step-by-step manner. The teachers discussed this experience that they used in response to teaching their population of students somewhat pessimistically. They were disappointed that they had to break down the material to the “bare basics” and lead their students through the entire school day in a step-by-step style. The teachers were not enthusiastic about this process and they expressed positive emotions when they spoke of teaching to grade level or even challenging the students (something that was very rare within their classrooms).

A key tension in teacher efficacy in instructional practices exists between the teachers’ use of differentiated instruction and their use of handholding. Clear expectations is a key component of differentiation (Tomlinson, 1999). Differentiated instruction can be a very useful tool as diverse learners, especially students with behavioral difficulties, benefit from a learning environment where teachers communicate
their expectations clearly and consistently. Where the tension arises is that:

“Communicating clear expectations does not mean that the teacher must tell the students how to do the task” (Lovin, Kyger, & Allsop, 2004, p. 159). The teachers felt that they were helping their students by “holding their hands” through every academic task of the school day, though this handholding experience may have been doing too much for their students and hindering their students’ sense of independence, self-esteem, and sense of accomplishment for completing a task successfully.

The goal of differentiation is to develop maximum student growth (Tomlinson, 1999), but can students grow through this handholding process? Research shows that “coercive, constraint-laden techniques” utilized in special needs settings need to be replaced with “autonomy-supportive techniques” (Clifford, 1998, p. 168). When the teachers utilized differentiated instruction in the form of cooperative learning groups and independent work, they were redesigning their instructional practices to support student decision-making and independence. However, it is unclear if/how this handholding practice was benefitting students in this way.

The teachers stated that they felt they needed to handhold for their students to be able to engage with the subject matter. This is not uncommon, as stated previously, students with behavioral difficulties often struggle with a variety of executive functions that allow them to appropriately engage in self-directed behaviors. Many of the students at Valley Alternative have behavioral issues that impede their ability to interact with the material in a typical manner. From the perspective of the teacher, this may feel as if they need to simplify material and break down instructional tasks so that students can
participate. What is not known, however, is whether the teachers were confusing this negatively-perceived handholding practice with their students’ need for direct instruction. As discussed in the literature review, direct instruction is explicit and systematic with very specific guidance by the teacher. It is also considered a best practice for students with behavioral difficulties. If the teachers had knowledge of direct instruction and the benefits it provides students when utilized appropriately, would they have different feelings about using direct, guided instructional practices? Would they still be frustrated by their students needs in a negative way or would they feel successful in their ability to use this best practice? These changes in perceptions of this instructional strategy could ultimately lead to better perceptions of their efficacy in this domain.

Their current perceptions of handholding, however, speak to their current efficacy in instructional practices. Research demonstrates that teachers with low efficacy predict poorer academic outcomes of students who display characteristics that might impede teaching and learning. For instance, teachers make significantly more positive academic predictions of students performing at grade level, students who are attentive, and friendly students (Tournaki & Podell, 2005). In this study, the teachers’ negative perception of handholding represents their perceptions of their students. These beliefs include rationalizing that their students were unable to function in a classroom without breaking everything into its simplest components and that having to guide their students in this way was an inept instructional strategy.

The teachers seemed to demonstrate an understanding of the population of students in their school; they recognized that they were teaching at a school for students
with special needs. This is evident as the teachers spoke of using differentiation and handholding in response to these difficulties. However, only one teacher, Lynn, spoke specifically about her response to these issues *in terms of her students’ disabilities*. Lynn mentioned problems and solutions for her students while also referencing their specific disabilities. For instance, she was able to recognize that a student with ADHD may struggle with staying on-task for long periods of time. When a student was struggling, she first questioned whether this behavior is because of the student’s disability or because of her choice of instructional strategy. She then was able to choose the best intervention for that student based on this information. As mentioned previously, Lynn was the only teacher with a degree in special education.

The other teachers tended to position the responsibility of these difficulties largely on their choice of teaching practices. Behaviors stemming from students’ specific disabilities were not identified or explored as a source of the difficulty. A barrier to the teachers’ feelings about their teaching role could be influenced by a lack of true awareness of their teaching setting. From their interviews, it was obvious that the teachers were not specifically trained for this teaching role and as mentioned above, lack of preparation in how to appropriately teach to this group of students can put significant strain onto their sense of self as a teacher.

Further, the teachers based their successes on typical or challenging lessons. They were disappointed when they had to “handhold” and break down the material for their students. Teachers’ perceptions of success were based on teaching typical or challenging lessons isn’t necessary alarming as teachers often feel successful when they
feel they have made a substantial impact with their students and have provided them with what they needed to be successful presently and in the future. But refusal to acknowledge and be truly aware of the population of students will only lead teachers to further feelings of failure. Students will also suffer as they will not be provided with the tools they need to function independently in society as adults, a constant struggle for this population of students.

In inclusion research, aside from a lack of preparation and the struggles associated with it, general educators have shown to exhibit other barriers that keep them from being and/or feeling successful. For instance, Fuchs (2010) found that in inclusive settings teachers felt that they had unrealistic expectations in regard to planning and instructional time. They believed that the needs of their students outweighed the time they had available to reach them. They further believed that providing extra accommodations to their students with special needs in the classroom was time-consuming and led to additional challenges and stress.

These were similar concerns expressed by the teachers in this study in response to time. The teachers were not necessarily complaining about the lack of time, they just spoke of it as an overwhelming aspect of their job. They always felt overly busy and had become somewhat accustomed to the lack of time/assumed it as part of their role. Even so, this lack of time and feelings of workload excess left the teachers often feeling overwhelmed and burdened.

This is consistent with research that shows that special educators tend to feel overwhelmed with their workload and struggle with the amount of time to perform their
role successfully (Morvant et al., 1995). Workload manageability, a task not referenced on the TSES, was referenced in the interviews as an issue for the teachers, albeit in some cases at a perceived manageable level. However, feeling overwhelmed or overloaded from the additional responsibilities of being both a general and special education teacher impacted the teachers’ stress and overall provided them with less time to cope with the stressors of the position. This differs from the single role stressors experienced by general education teachers in inclusive settings and special education teachers in contained classrooms.

This is a key finding specific to this teaching role as performing the duties of a special and general educator increased the challenges and stresses of a typical teaching setting. It is difficult to prepare for this role as teachers would need teacher preparation in general and special education. Even though Lynn was trained as a special educator, she was not prepared for the duties of a general educator. Similarly, even though the other teachers were trained as general educators, they lacked the knowledge explored during special education training. Mary understood this and mentioned the need to obtain a special education licensure to improve her knowledge of how to teach this population of students.

As referenced previously, mastery experiences are often seen as the most important aspect of Bandura’s (1997) definition of self-efficacy. The perception that your teaching performance has been a failure impacts your future performances; successes in teaching tend to increases in teacher efficacy beliefs and failures in teaching tend to contribute to the idea that future performances will also be failures (Tschannen-
Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Since these teachers struggled with the variation in learning needs expressed by their students, expressed feelings of defeatedness in instructional practices involving handholding and teaching the basics, and feelings of being overwrought in regard to the “there’s no time” aspect of their efficacy regarding instructional practices, their perception and construction of their overall teaching efficacy was impacted. These struggles were intensified as teachers in an alternative school environment working with children with behavior difficulties, and this research illuminates some of the elements of their teaching context that could be altered and improved with the appropriate preparation and training.

**Classroom Management**

There has been an ongoing debate in education about what classroom management methods are most effective in terms of not only basic management principles, but in the long-term influence of these principles on students (Freiberg, 1999; LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Akar, 2005). Research indicates that the focus of classroom management should stress the role of the teacher in “establishing effective learning environments, not on functioning as disciplinarian” (Brophy, 1999, p.51). Consequently, current research often refers to classroom management as an umbrella term for a combination of the terms discipline, classroom management, and socialization/self-discipline (Hoy & Weistein, 2006).

As seen in Table 13, the teachers’ mean in classroom management is higher than all of the other TSES comparison studies. At a group mean of 7.44, the teachers have considerably high efficacy in this domain of their teaching according to the TSES. While
it is expected that preservice teachers might display nervousness over their judgment in their management abilities (Jones, 2006; LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Akar, 2005) and might have a lower rating than a group of practicing teachers, the teachers in this study also had a higher rating than studies of other practicing teachers, as well.

Why would teachers in an environment working with students with behavioral difficulties have stronger beliefs in their ability to succeed with students in classroom management? As discussed in the previous chapter, the qualitative findings emphasized the teachers’ use of the school-wide behavior system when speaking about their approaches and feelings about classroom management. All four teachers discussed this system in detail and shared its importance within their classrooms. Examination of individual items on the TSES specified that the teachers were very confident in their ability to set clear behavior expectations and in the ability to respond to defiant, disruptive, and noisy behavior—two elements of classroom management that could be linked to a pre-set school-wide system to managing student behavior.

In school environments that tailor to students with special needs with challenging behaviors, as the school organization in this study does, a school-wide intervention system is often implemented as the primary method of classroom management. School-wide behavior management programs, which are typically derived from behaviorist principles, are used because they are seen as a practical and effective way to handle classroom management issues at the school- or district-wide level (Nersesian, Todd, Lehman, & Watson, 2000; Tobin, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2002). For this study, the school-wide intervention system involves a level system in the teacher’s classrooms. As
stated in Chapter II, I initially speculated that the teachers in this study would primarily utilize a behaviorist approach to classroom management and rely on a level system as the key behavioral intervention strategy as this has been consistent with my alternative school teaching experiences and programs I have worked with outside of the school setting.

Level systems are often used in schools for children with special needs as a means to promote positive behavior and extinguish negative behavior. Students move upward on a level system after consistently engaging in appropriate behaviors. As in this study, students are rewarded with material incentives and increased privileges according to their level. Level systems give students increased independence and privileges as they demonstrate increased self-regulation of their inappropriate behaviors.

In this study, hypothetical and physical tickets were used within the level system as token reinforcers (Cruz & Cullinan, 2001). These tickets served two purposes: 1) they could be exchanged for privileges at the end of the school week and 2) they were counted in students’ promotion to the next level of the system. All of the teachers referenced using Valley Alternative’s approach to behavior intervention; however, the teachers were utilizing the level system in significantly different ways.

Though both schools utilized the same level system provided by the overall school organization, there was a distinct difference in underlying philosophy and framework of this approach depending on the school in which the teachers taught. In Paige and Lynn’s classroom at Valley Alternative CS, students earned tickets throughout the day for exhibiting appropriate behavior. In Russell and Mary’s classrooms at Valley
Alternative SS, tickets were taken away throughout the school day. Students did not “earn” their tickets at SS, they were just given them at the start of every class period and then had them taken away when they exhibited previously defined misbehaviors. Valley Alternative CS’s approach seemingly focused on positive behaviors; whereas Valley Alternative SS’s approach centered on the negative behaviors that students exhibited.

Paige and Lynn spoke of the positive nature of the program at their school and how they liked that it was optimistic in terms of student behaviors. Lynn stated that she liked that the approach was positive, though, she didn’t feel that it worked in her classroom. Since Russell and Mary’s program focused more on negative behaviors than positive ones, they experienced tensions between their personal philosophies of classroom management and the school intervention system. Mary even stated that she didn’t believe that there was anything positive about the approach that was utilized at her school; however, this didn’t prevent her from implementing the approach in her classroom. Russell implemented the approach even when he didn’t he didn’t entirely understand the benefits; as a new teacher he was concerned with following the procedure of a new school without any strain on his position.

This was true of Russell’s feelings for giving detentions, as well. He explicitly stated that he felt bad about assigning detentions for minor infractions, but he was insistent on following procedures. Detentions and office referrals were discussed frequently by the teachers in all three secondary classrooms (Lynn did not mention detention as a disciplinary strategy and actually spoke of her preference to involve administration the least amount of possible). Mary also mentioned the use of suspension
for students’ “target behaviors”. She described a situation where she was hesitant about suspending a student for talking out in class. However, as with Russell, she was firm and insistent on following protocol. This was especially seen as Mary was speaking from an administrative standpoint in our third interview as she stated that teachers in general need to adapt their own beliefs and ideals to the school’s policies on classroom management.

All of the teachers referred to this intervention system as Positive Behavior Supports. Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), also referred to as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), is an approach to behavior management that focuses specifically on positive behavior. PBS has gained popularity in recent years as it is the only behavioral intervention recognized, and sometimes even required, within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). IDEA states that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports must specifically be considered during the IEP meeting when the student’s behavior impedes the learning of the student or other students. Further, IDEA also provides support for states to use funds to promote training in the methods of positive behavioral interventions and supports to improve student behavior in the classroom.

The term “positive behavior support” was initially developed in an attempt to extinguish aversive and punitive means of controlling behavior often used with children with disabilities (Tobin, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2002). Even though PBS was initially developed to avoid “controlling” behaviors that teachers resort to in response to student behavior, all of the teachers spoke of the program or of their approach to classroom management in terms of controlling the classroom. This is an important element in the
establishment of the teachers’ efficacy regarding classroom management as a need for control is often equated with a low sense of efficacy. Significant teacher efficacy research has shown that teachers who favor a less controlling orientation toward classroom management tend to have higher teacher efficacy (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2005; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990); In other words, teachers who use less aversive approaches in classroom management tend to feel successful in the approach they have chosen to use in regard to student misbehavior.

PBS is successful when the focus is on promotion of positive student behaviors and when it is a school-wide effort. The school-wide intervention system at the school had specific philosophical characteristics as part of its approach, whether the system was truly a positive approach or not. This included defining the teacher in terms of the following teacher characteristics: being clear, consistent, explicit, firm, and encouraging self-regulation. As seen in Table 4 in the previous chapter, the teachers also had personal philosophies of classroom management that they valued that did and did not overlap with the school’s philosophy. These characteristics included: routine, respect, honesty, good-natured, and encouraging socialization. Anytime a model is implemented in a school-wide manner, it is important that the theoretical orientation of the model and of the teachers is taken under consideration. Blindly implementing an approach to student behavior on such a large scale can lead to tensions between what the teachers do and how they feel about the approach, as in this study.

The teachers’ disconnect in practice and theoretical philosophy of classroom management is an important element of the establishment of the teacher’s efficacy as this
disconnect has a direct impact on the teachers’ perception of their efficacy, even if it was not directly obvious on the TSES. Agreement between a teacher’s underlying theoretical orientation and the approach he/she uses effects the approach that teacher is using and the benefits of that approach. For instance, the more committed a teacher is to the philosophy of the approach they are using, the greater sense of impact the teacher feels they are having on their students (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). Further, a teacher that feels strongly committed to their theoretical orientation tends to be more satisfied with the work they do and are less likely to experience burnout (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003; Siu & Ho, 2010). The teachers implemented the school-wide intervention system regardless of how they envisioned their role in classroom management or their underlying philosophy in how to approach student misbehavior. It was difficult for them to necessarily feel satisfied in this aspect of their role because of this implementation.

The disconnect between the school’s approach and the teachers personal philosophies in classroom management was seen in regard to the use of detention and office referrals, as well. Skiba & Rausch (2006) pose that the PBS model can be used as an alternative to detention, suspension, and other zero tolerance policies. Research shows that disciplinary removals should be reserved for only the most serious and severely disruptive behaviors; however, for these teachers, PBS (or a perceived version of PBS) was used in conjunction with disciplinary removals. The use of detention, suspension, and frequent office referrals as a disciplinary tool, especially for minor offenses that
revolve around disobedience and disrespect was used in this study regardless of the teachers’ feelings about the practices.

This is disconcerting as students with behavioral difficulties disproportionately experience the burden of these techniques. A study of two schools by Kortering, Braziel, & Tompkins (2002) showed that 94% of students identified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder had been suspended in their school career. Students that frequently encounter suspension and other zero tolerance disciplinary techniques as described by these teachers are more likely to have future disciplinary issues, as well as experience a failure to graduate (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). As discussed in Chapter II, these explanations contribute to the poor academic outcomes of students with behavioral difficulties and the shockingly high dropout rate they experience.

These practices are also often associated with student and teacher perceptions of a less effective and inviting school climate, as well (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). As stated in the previous chapter, the school climate was defined by the support system that the teachers perceived having available to them at the school level. These support systems were often discussed and played a significant role in supporting and challenging the teachers’ efficacy constructions in classroom management.

In general, the climate of a school consists of the beliefs, values, and practices that impact the operation of a school and is shaped by the interactions among students, teachers, and administrators (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Perceived school climate has shown to be an important factor in the attrition rates of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004). This research indicates that teachers who have a positive view of
their school’s climate are more likely to stay or indicate an intent to stay in their current position. Research also suggests that teachers are more likely to leave teaching or indicate an intent to leave in the absence of adequate support from administrators (Boe, Barkanic, et al., 1999; George et al., 1995; Schnorr, 1995). Thus, administrative support or lack thereof can have an impact on a teacher’s feelings about their teaching role and satisfaction within that role.

In this study, three of the teachers spoke of appreciation for administration, specifically the director at the school, especially in support of their classroom management role. Paige spoke of the director being supportive when he backed up the decisions she made regarding student behavior, as well when he allowed her to use him as a “threat.” For instance telling students: “I’m going to send you down to the office” when they act inappropriately. As a new teacher, Russell appreciated being able to approach the director with ideas and suggestions to use when he did not have solutions for students’ behavior issues. Further, he appreciated that the director would take students out of the room for severe misbehavior. Mary, as an experienced teacher, did not necessarily use the director for support in the same ways as Paige and Russell; however, she believed that she had a good relationship with administration and makes him aware when she sees severe behavioral issues developing with students.

Lynn was the only teacher to have a distant perspective of her connection to the administrative role. Lynn tended to want to solve her behavioral problems within the classroom and only contacted administration in emergency situations. This was surprising as Lynn often spoke of being overwhelmed with this aspect of her job. Lynn
spoke of administration in primarily positive terms—she even has family in upper
administration—so it remains unclear why she chose not to involve administration in the
ways that the other teachers did. Reasons could be related to the fact that she was the
only special educator of the participants and the only teacher in elementary education.
Further research is needed to verify this reasoning. Finally, Mary was the only teacher
that recognized that the administration had the potential to serve as a source of stress for
her, though these stressors were not related to classroom management or behavior issues.

The teachers did not assign these same positive feelings when speaking about the
co-teachers in their classrooms. As identified in the literature review, co-teaching
definitions vary. Referencing Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie’s (2007) coteaching
situations, the teachers primarily experienced blends of 1) teacher and assistant teaching,
2) station teaching, and 3) parallel teaching. The teachers envisioned and aspired to teach
in 5), the team/interactive co-teaching situations, but were disappointed that they were
unable to reach this status in their classrooms. None of the teachers were content with
their co-teaching situations and referred to them as less than ideal. Mary went as far to
say that she did not believe her co-teachers were even co-teachers, just additional
teachers/people in her classroom.

Research shows that teacher collaboration can have a significant impact on the
development of a teacher’s efficacy (Puchner & Taylor, 2006) and significant research
has focused on the collective efficacy of a group of teachers at a school as an important
predictor of a teachers’ efficacy (see Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). There is a lack of
research, however, that examines teacher efficacy specifically in relationship to co-
teaching situations as seen in this study. Successful co-teaching situations contribute to multiple aspects of the teaching role which can impact a teachers’ sense of efficacy. For instance, when a co-teaching situation is successful, teachers experience fewer classroom disruptions, less paperwork, decreased office referrals for behavior issues, and an overall increase in student achievement. Teachers also are happier in their role and have lessened feelings of isolation (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2000). Further, co-teaching is a recommended best practice for inclusive teaching settings for children with disabilities (collaboration between the general and special education teacher) (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013).

As in this study, the teachers’ dissatisfaction of their co-teaching role led to further unneeded stress and strain in their teaching role. As stated in the literature review, components of a successful co-teacher relationship include interpersonal communication, familiarity with the curriculum and curricular goals, content knowledge, instructional planning and presentation, classroom management, and assessment (Gately and Gately; 2001). Conversely, problems tend to arise with co-teaching situations with some of the same issues, including: communication, instructional planning time, classroom management, and “ownership” of the classroom or students (Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997). In this study, the teachers recognized that having a good co-teacher could have a great impact on their classroom and they appreciated having a second teacher in the room; however, the teachers expressed concern that their co-teachers only served as an assistant teacher, that the co-teacher did not take initiative
within the classroom, and that the two teachers taught as if they were in separate classrooms.

Since the teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their co-teaching situation, their co-teachers and the co-teaching situation contributed to their efficacy construction in a primarily negative way. This teaching context speaks to the importance of the verbal persuasion aspect of Bandura’s definition of self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura (1977) verbal persuasion or social persuasion involves the involvement of others in the development of efficacy, specifically the positive encouragement from others after completing a task. Teachers are typically accustomed to teaching without the presence of other adults (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007) and thus verbal persuasion may not play an overwhelming role in typical school settings; however, in this alternative school setting, the support and positive encouragement of a co-teacher becomes an important aspect of the teachers’ efficacy. Again, this is an element of the teachers’ efficacy that plays a greater role because of the nature of the specific school setting.

Overall, teachers spoke positively about the impact of the school context on their efficacy, specifically the administrator and other teachers at the school. They appreciated the support they received from their building administrator, and the overall climate of the school and sense of school community was important to them. Lynn even stated that the entire staff at the school was her favorite aspect of her job. Though teachers exhibited positive emotions for administration and other teachers in the school, they tended to struggle with having another teacher in their classroom in a specific co-teaching situation, and this aspect of the school context placed greater stress on their role than positive
influence. It is important to note that the teachers did not dislike having a co-teacher in their classrooms. The teachers appreciated having a second teacher in the classroom and often helped significantly; however, their ideal definition of what a co-teaching situation should look like and the lack of their perceived connectedness to this definition was seen as an issue.

In terms of the teachers’ efficacy regarding classroom management in general, there was dissonance between the quantitative and qualitative findings. Results from the TSES posited classroom management as an area of strong teacher efficacy. It was the highest rated subscale and according to the sole quantitative data, the teachers would be considered highly efficacious in setting behavior expectations, rules, and routines, and handling defiant, disruptive, and noisy behavior specifically. But the teachers did not necessarily feel this strong sense of efficacy in classroom management. The TSES did not account for the teachers’ use of the school-wide behavior system or the context of the school setting, particularly the co-teaching element. The qualitative data exposed and clarified the teachers’ feelings regarding their intentions and judgments of their classroom managing abilities.

Specifically, the qualitative data illuminated the teachers’ doubts in classroom management. Though the teachers were confident in their use of the school-wide intervention system of managing behavior, they did not have confidence in their personal abilities in this domain. Further, the teachers considered classroom management to be the least favorable and most challenging aspect of their role as a teacher at Valley Alternative. They tended to put great significance on this aspect of their role and even
defined a “good class” or a “good day” in terms of their perceptions of students’ appropriate behaviors. This assessment even included behaviors such as focusing and staying on-task—behaviors especially common among students with behavioral difficulties.

Though efficacy doubts can have a positive impact on the teachers’ efficacy construction as teachers may reflect on an uncertain teaching task and learn a new method to reach their students successfully (see Wheatley, 2002), the teachers’ reliance on the required school-wide system and their subsequent dislike of classroom management and discipline actually decreased confidence in the teachers’ personal abilities. This decrease is considerably detrimental to the teachers’ success in this domain and deserves further examination.

**Teacher Position Inconsistency**

The teacher position inconsistency finding emerged through data analysis. This finding was not explored through the research questions, though, it is important to note that large variations in teaching context can impact teacher efficacy and it is thus worth exploration in relationship to the teachers’ overall efficacy. Teacher efficacy seems to stay relatively stable once the construct is established. In other words, over time teachers develop a sense of efficacy based on their teaching experiences and this set of beliefs is unlikely to change. This is why teacher efficacy studies are often conducted on preservice or beginning teachers, as mentioned previously. Exceptions noted in the literature include professional development opportunities geared directly at altering/improving teacher efficacy.
Even though a teacher’s efficacy is unlikely to change over time, this efficacy can be challenged when the teaching situation is “disrupted”. Disruptions can include teaching at a different grade level, teaching different subjects, or even utilizing a new curriculum. These disruptions cause teachers to reevaluate their sense of efficacy and can be uncomfortable and stressful to the teachers’ sense of self (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Movement to a different position, even within the same school, encourages instability in the teaching role.

Disruptions that could impact the teachers’ efficacy in this study were seen in the teachers’ role migration or migration aspiration. Within the relatively short time frame for this study, all four teachers either moved to a different position at Valley Alternative or expressed a desire to move to a different position. Paige conveyed her desire to move to an administrative position in the school and was interviewing for the vacant position of Assistant Director. Lynn expressed her strong desire to work as an intervention specialist and to teach exclusively in a resource room environment. Russell was moved from the Title I Math teacher to the lead classroom teacher, though he had not expressed a desire to do so. Finally, Mary was promoted to an administrative position within the management company.

Though teacher role inconsistency can influence a teacher’s sense of efficacy, the disruptions seen in this study did not seem to have a significant impact on the teachers’ efficacy. Two of the teachers moved to a different position; however, Russell’s disruption fortunately occurred early in his career at Valley Alternative and Mary’s disruption moved her into an administrative role. Paige and Lynn expressed that they
wanted a “disruption”, though they did not move to a different position during the
timeframe of this study. Though efficacy was not influenced, this finding speaks to the
inconsistency in teaching role that teachers at alternative schools serving students with
special needs can experience. Further research on this finding over a longer time period
could prove beneficial in understanding these disruptions and how to prevent them.

Limitations

After completion of this study, three limitations were recognized. Each of the
limitations was related to the methods and procedures of the study. First, a limitation in
regard to the methods utilized in this study involves the population of teachers studied in
this research. My initial intention was to study a population of teachers who work
exclusively with students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. The school that I
initially chose to work with was a non-choice school that enrolled students who were
temporarily removed from their home district because of the severity of their behavior.
Schools such as these are seen as a “temporary” solution for the students’ school
difficulties; though, it is not uncommon for students to stay at the school on a more
permanent basis. The teachers who work at these schools encounter such severe
instances of student behavior that studying the teacher efficacy of this population of
teachers could have provided a unique picture of these teachers’ lives. However, as I
mentioned in the participant and site section of this dissertation I had trouble getting a
sufficient amount of teachers to work with at this school.

Second, an unforeseen limitation came from the primarily oral nature of the study.
By allowing the teachers to primarily present themselves and their beliefs in interview
form, I missed an opportunity to hear their perceptions in written form. For example, in follow up emails with the participants, two of them expressed the process of responding to me in written form as opposed to our oral interviews. Mary mentioned specifically when she said: “I write better than I talk” (Email communication, 3/22/2013). She was surprised at reading parts of her interviews and felt that she was able to explain herself more in depth through writing. Paige mentioned her embarrassment at reading the way she talked in interviews. When I asked her to review what I had written for her biography as a participant she wrote to me that it: “Sounds accurate, I'm a little embarrassed to see how much I said ‘Like you know’ (Email communication, 3/20/2013). Another approach to studying the teachers’ efficacy could have involved a written, as well as an oral component.

Finally, I recognize that a limitation of this study could revolve around the self-rated nature of the surveys and the interviews. When teachers evaluate and reflect on their own work as teachers, they do not always see themselves as others do, and they often make comparisons according to their own standards (Moe, 2010). However, the concern of this study was not whether the teachers were necessarily seen as successful but whether they perceived success in their classrooms. This perception is the essence of the teacher efficacy construct; self-efficacy involves a perception of competence rather than an actual level of competence (Bandura, 1997). Observations of the teachers in their classroom would be an interesting additional element to the study, however, and another study could delve deeper into these ideas through observations and field experiments.
Further, this study focused on each teacher’s beliefs about their personal teaching efficacy, as self-efficacy focuses specifically on the “I” component of teaching (as opposed to a “we” component). As a teacher, I recognize that teaching and educational reform should be a collaborative experience. The individual component of teacher efficacy is vital to understand and impact student success, especially the success of students with behavioral difficulties, however, it is important to note that teacher efficacy is just one component of effective education, and successful democratic education and educational reform involves a collaborative experience between teachers, students, and other important people in the student’s life (Wheatley, 2005).

**Implications**

With these limitations in mind, this research has important implications relevant to the education and support of current and preservice teachers. The following discusses implications for current school settings and for teacher education programs.

First, this study articulates the importance of the contextual influence of the school setting on a teacher’s efficacy. Teachers need more opportunities for professional development that are specific to their school setting. The teachers expressed an overall lack of confidence in how to make improvements in multiple aspects of their role. Teachers’ needs must be recognized and acknowledged, and professional development opportunities should be tailored to focus on those specific needs within the school. Teachers also need to be given specific time allotted to participate in these professional development opportunities, so that they are not experiencing further feelings of distress over time management issues. Further time allotment must be give to the teachers daily
and weekly for planning, as differentiating instruction for mixed ability groupings requires daily and weekly planning segments to be utilized effectively (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

Second, alternative school settings must encourage collaboration among school, parents, and community resources. Professional development opportunities need to focus on ways to encourage these collaborations. In these opportunities, teachers should learn how to conduct needs assessments of families to identify the first step in building a relationship. This needs assessment can be the first positive step in determining ways to further involve families beyond rarely attended teacher-parent conferences and phoning home. Further, the teachers perceived an “I don’t care” attitude from many of their students’ parents; however, they were unaware of barriers that parents face that prevents them from being involved in their child’s education. Professional development opportunities need to educate teachers on the barriers that parents face, including lack of time or transportation, distrust of schools, negative perceptions of their own input, and a lack of awareness of how to be involved, so that teachers have a realistic view of families and can have a better understanding of the parents’ perspective.

Further, collaboration must be encouraged in the co-teaching setting. All of the teachers in this study were enthusiastic about co-teaching; however, they were disappointed with the results. Teachers need to be educated on the benefits of a co-teaching relationship and the dynamics of the relationship. Teacher professional development opportunities must directly respond to the skills and practices needed to form an effective co-teaching relationship (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, &
Shamberger, 2010; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Teachers must be able to identify barriers that discourage a positive relationship in the co-teaching setting and time must be given to teachers to allow teachers to develop a relationship with each other which includes a definition of teaching responsibilities and roles.

Third, administrators need to be aware that teachers’ perceptions of their teaching impacts their effort and commitment to their teaching role. If we want teachers with behavioral difficulties to be a constant in the lives of students with behavioral difficulties, they need to be fully supported in their role. In this study, the teachers felt that their school director was supportive in terms of “backing them up” for student misbehavior; however, the teachers were not included in decision-making processes that impacted their daily teaching lives. In this study, suggestions that teachers had were either not taken into consideration or the teachers were not assertive regarding their concerns; they just continued to work through problems they were having.

Thus, teachers need to play a larger role in the decision-making of schools. Schools should be an open environment where teachers are encouraged to share their concerns and opinions and to prove their expertise of an effective program, including an effective behavioral management program. If a school system decides to utilize a school-wide intervention system for student behavior, then teachers should be invited to participate in discussions concerning their thoughts on the implementation of the program and should be involved in program evaluation and improvement, as well.

Further, since school-wide behavior management systems are gaining popularity in schools, office discipline referrals need to be more seriously considered as they are
often used in the implementation of school-wide positive behavior supports (McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Zumbo; 2009. Since this study focused on the perception of the teachers, it is unknown whether the office referrals were being documented and used to inform further practice; however, the teachers discussed on the significant reliance of office referrals, detentions, and suspensions. It is important to note then that if PBS is utilized, or a version of PBS is utilized within a school, than that school needs to be documenting office referrals, as the number of referrals could inform decision making about current behavioral practices, as well as assist in planning for future school-wide behavioral interventions. PBS has the greatest chance of success within a school system when it is implemented based on data-based decision making (Lewis, Newcomber, Trussell, & Richter, 2006).

Finally, preservice teachers need to be better prepared to teach in this specific context, including preservice teachers enrolled in alternative routes to teacher education programs. Teacher education programs primarily prepare teachers for public school situations; however, as in this study, teachers “end up” in a variety of schools. As the natures of school change, so must teacher education programs. Curriculum and field experiences should focus on the nature and challenges of teaching at a variety of schools, including teaching in alternative school settings. As recommended in the above results, a dual degree in special and general education could be useful for this population of teachers. Teacher education programs should also educate preservice teachers on the above aspects as well to better prepare them for the realities of various teaching settings.

**Future Research**
The following defines further research needs based on the findings of the current study:

First, this specific study could be extended by added a writing component to the data collection and writing process. A research study where teachers are encouraged to keep a journal of their thoughts could offer a deeper perspective on the teachers’ efficacy beliefs. Direction could be offered in some elements of the journal, but the teachers should be allowed to freewrite and reflect on their day. This would also encourage further reflection within the teacher’s school day that could potentially improve their practice.

Second, this study could be extended by studying the students and their perceptions of their learning. Since this study determined that the many aspects of teacher efficacy are cyclical in nature and are influenced by student perceptions, specific attention should be given to students’ perceptions of their teacher and attitudes toward the school setting, in general. These findings would also contribute to a deeper understanding of the teachers’ efficacy, as well as provide an understanding of the students who attend this specific school setting.

Third, my initial intention was to conduct a study that focused on teachers who work exclusively with students with severe behaviors and who work at non-choice alternative schools for students who are forcibly removed from the public school setting. My initial research with this population of teachers, including informal conversations with the teachers, provided an extremely needed perspective of these teachers and their
school settings. Further attempts to conduct research with these teachers are needed. Additional studies of both populations of teachers could also be very valuable.

Finally, further research in teacher efficacy needs to be conducted utilizing mixed methods inquiry. This study illuminated discrepancies between the quantitative teacher efficacy survey and the qualitative interviews, especially regarding the classroom management domain of the teachers’ practices. Research conducted using the teacher efficacy scale is important, but it alone does not clarify key issues that teachers are facing specific to their teaching contexts. Without this specific information, teacher efficacy research is largely unusable in educational reform. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research has the ability to specify these issues and offer insight into improving teaching in a variety of teaching situations.

**Conclusion**

This qualitatively-driven mixed methods study examined the teacher efficacy of teachers who work with students with behavioral difficulties in an alternative school setting. Teaching students with behavioral difficulties—specifically students with EBD, autism, and ADHD—can be especially challenging and demanding, and before this study, little was known about the experiences of these teachers. Teacher efficacy as a construct proved to be especially pertinent in understanding this population of teachers and thus, this study explored, examined, and generated a detailed and holistic understanding of these teachers’ efficacy working in this environment. Specifically, the findings illuminated three elements that related to the teachers’ sense of efficacy: (a) student engagement, (b) instructional practices, and (c) classroom management. This study
supports the literature that teacher efficacy is context specific, rather than
generalized (Raudenbaush, et al, 1992; Ross, Cousins, & Galla, 1996; Tschannen-
Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) and provides an exclusive representation of these teachers’
perceptions in the specific role of teaching students with behavioral difficulties in an
alternative school environment.

Chapter V concludes this research study and provides opportunities to extend this
discussion. More attention and research is needed that focuses on this population of
teachers, their students, and the school setting in which they work.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD MODIFICATION
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Modification

RE: IRB #12-132 - entitled “Perceptions of Teacher Efficacy: A Qualitatively-driven Mixed Methods Inquiry of Teachers Serving Students with EBD”

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your protocol modification request. It is understood that the research is continuing with modifications to increase the number of participants and add 3 more schools (teachers). The modification to this protocol was approved on September 27, 2012.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy requires that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or pwashko@kent.edu.

Respectfully,

Kent State University Office of Research Compliance

224 Cartwright Hall | fax 330.672.2658

Kevin McCreary | Research Compliance Coordinator | 330.672.8058 | kmccrea1@kent.edu

Laurie Kiehl | Research Compliance Assistant | 330.672.0837 | lkiehl@kent.edu

Paulette Washko | Manager, Research Compliance | 330.672.2704 | Pwashko@kent.edu
Appendix B
Introductory Letter

Hi! My name is Elizabeth. I am asking for your participation in a research study on teachers who work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), specifically in an alternative school environment. I used to teach in a school in Canton similar to Valley Alternative and I am hoping to have the opportunity to learn more about the work you do as a teacher in this challenging environment.

I am passionate about improving the schooling for students with emotional and behavioral disorders and I am eager to make others aware of the complexity involved in their education. The work I am doing for this study will go toward my dissertation that I am currently working on under the direction of my advisor Lisa (Donnelly) Borgerding, an Assistant Professor in the Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies Department at Kent State University.

I am asking you to participate by first completing a short survey. This survey will take less than ten minutes to complete. When you are done with it, please email it back to me (along with the attachment that includes your contact and demographic information) to elizabethhelenanderson@hotmail.com or eshevock@kent.edu. You will also have the option to participate in the interview portion of the study. These interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be held in a location of your choosing (your classroom, a coffee shop, the library, etc.).

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In the survey packet, there is a space to include a pseudonym to be used for the study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, feel free to call or text my cell phone: 814-330-5392 or email me at one of the above email addresses. You may also contact my advisor at 330-672-0614 or by email at ldonnell@kent.edu.

Thank you,
Elizabeth (Shevock) Anderson
APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY
Appendix C
Demographic Survey

Please respond to the following questions.

1. What is your month and year of birth? (MM/YYYY) _______/_________
2. What is your sex?
   • Male
   • Female
3. How do you describe yourself?
   • American Indian or Alaska Native
   • Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   • Asian or Asian American
   • Black or African American
   • Hispanic or Latino
   • Mixed Race
   • Non-Hispanic White
4. What is your highest college degree attained?
   • Associates degree
   • BS/BA
   • BS/BA + hours
   • MS/MA
   • MS/MA + hours
5. What was the major of your undergraduate degree?
   • Mild-Moderate Intervention Specialist (K-12)
   • Moderate-Intensive Intervention Specialist (K-12)
   • Early Childhood Intervention Specialist (Age 3-Grade 3)
   • Other (please specify):________________________
6. What grade level(s) are you currently teaching? __________
7. How many years have you taught students with EBD? __________
8. How many years have you worked with students with EBD? __________
9. Would you be willing to participate in the interview portion of the study? There will be approximately three rounds of interviews (30-45 minutes each interview).
   • Yes
   • No
   • Need More Information
10. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name in the dissemination of this research. Please suggest one that you would like to be used (or one will be assigned to you): __________________________

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APPENDIX D

TEACHERS’ SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE
Appendix D

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

**Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale**¹ (long form)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Beliefs</th>
<th>How much can you do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. How well can you respond to defiant students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW GUIDE
Appendix E

Interview Guide

Round 1: General

1. I’m interested in learning about your day-to-day workings as a teacher at this school; could you walk me through a typical day for you?

2. As I mentioned in my letter, I am studying teachers who work specifically with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, can I ask why you picked to work with this population of students? Why you picked this school in particular?

3. Could you tell me how you typically prepare for the school day? For your lessons?

4. How do you go about implementing a planned lesson? Suppose I was a student in your [subject] class, could you walk me through a typical class period?

5. Could you describe to me what happens when your lessons don’t go as planned?

6. What is the best part about your job? Do you have a favorite moment that you could describe to me?

7. Can you tell me about a time where you felt successful in the classroom? What did this look and feel like?
Round 2: Student Engagement, Instructional Practices, Classroom Management

1. How do you envision your role as a teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders?

2. Overall, how would you explain your students’ engagement with the subject matter you are teaching? Could you describe your level of motivation to learn the subject matter?

3. How do you think you could help students become more invested in their learning? Or is this beyond your control?

4. How do you think you personally get through to your students as their teacher?

5. Can you think about the best and worst experiences you have had when teaching a lesson? How are those experiences different?

6. Can you describe to me how you know your students are learning? What kinds of things do you do when a student or multiple students are confused with what you are teaching? Can you give me an example of this?

7. If one of your students is being disruptive during a lesson, what kinds of things would happen, and what specifically would that situation look like? How does this differ based on the kind of disruption? (Verbal vs. physical)

8. Can you give me an example of a time when a student disrupted a planned lesson?
9. Do you have a favorite lesson that you have enjoyed/felt confident in teaching? What made this such a positive experience? Could you describe it for me?

10. Have you had conversations with students’ family members about students’ academic work? Do you keep in contact with other outside sources? Case worker? Probation officer?
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT
Appendix F

Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Interviews

**Study Title:** Perceptions of Teacher Efficacy: A Qualitatively-driven Mixed Methods Inquiry of Teachers Serving Students with EBD

**Principal Investigator:** Elizabeth Shevock Anderson, M.Ed.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of these interviews is to explore teachers’ perceptions of their teacher efficacy, specifically as it relates to their role teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

**Procedures**
You are invited to participate in a study that will involve 3-4 face-to-face interviews at your school or at a location of your choosing. The interviews will consist of questions related to your teaching and how you perceive your students’ successful classroom experiences. The interviews will each last 30-45 minutes.

**Audio and Video Recording and Photography**
With your consent, the interviews will be audio-taped. These audiotapes will be transcribed and used for data analysis.

**Benefits**
This research will not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders so that we can better meet teachers’ and students’ needs in the future.

**Risks and Discomforts**
There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**
Identifying information will not be included in the data you provide. Instead, you will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym during the initial survey that will be used throughout the
study. Only this pseudonym will be used to label your audiotapes and transcripts. Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Elizabeth Shevock Anderson at 814-330-5392 or my dissertation advisor, Lisa (Donnelly) Borgerding at 330-672-0614. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature

1. I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date ____________

2. I agree to allow my interviews to be audio-taped.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date ____________
APPENDIX G

NOTES FROM BRACKETING MEMO
Appendix G
Bracketing Memo

7/30/2012

Why did you pick to work with this population of students? Why did you pick this school in particular?

- Moved to a different state after teacher preparation program and did not have many options. Was teaching at a 2 year college when I was offered an interview (after applying to multiple schools). At the time, I wasn’t concerned with what kind of school I was teaching at, I just wanted to teach. I did my best to impress the administration; I wanted the job so badly. I had worked with children with behavioral issues before, so I think that definitely helped in my getting the job even though I had no “academic” preparation for the position. My degree was in Elementary Education. I didn’t necessarily “pick” to work at the school, it was just the only teaching job I could get. When I was offered the job, there was no way I was saying no. Like I said I worked with this population of students before, but not necessarily academically. I knew that they would be tough in the classroom, but I wasn’t necessarily prepared to “teach” them.

How do you typically prepare for the school day? For your lessons?

- I always put excessive preparation into my lessons. I prepared in the morning before the kids got there and after school and on the weekends. I struggled to find appropriate material for the grade level. I remember researching “hi-low” material to try to find material that would engage students but at the same time be on their level academically. I couldn’t find a lot so I created a lot of materials myself. We didn’t have a set curriculum or textbooks, so I did my best with workbooks I bought myself or lessons I found online. Administration also encouraged us to ask for samples from textbook companies to save money on actually buying textbooks.

- I remember telling a parent once that her daughter was “too smart” for this school, and how I had hoped that she would be transitioning out soon. The mother was alarmed, nobody had been this frank with her about her daughter’s schooling. She just assumed the education she was getting here was just as good as the public school. But I really felt like it wasn’t. We just didn’t have the resources to really teach the students and there were always so many things going on behavior-
wise that I felt like the students who were gifted or who were at-grade level were falling behavior. I regretted saying this to the parent immediately after I saw the alarm in her face, so I tried to backpedal my way out of the situation.

Could you describe to me what happens when your lessons don’t go as planned?

- I tried to be as flexible as possible when I was teaching. I felt like my lessons didn’t go as planned a lot. Sometimes I would just push through depending on how much time we had. Sometimes I would resort to teaching something safer that I knew they could get through.
- The kids were so used to worksheets, it’s like they wanted to finish their worksheets and be done with it. Some of the struggling kids would want to always work with a partner or with a group, even if they lacked the social skills to do it. This made a tough situation. They couldn’t get along with their partner or group members but they wanted the assistance that being part of a group provided.

What is the best part about your job? Do you have a favorite moment that you could describe to me?

- I like the informal moments with the kids. When you can talk to them about their home lives or their life outside of school and you can counsel them on that aspect of it. Students just had trouble seeing the repercussions to their actions, just like in school. Trying to get through to them during informal times that it’s not just consequences that are school-related. All of their behaviors have consequences.

Can you tell me about a time where you felt successful in the classroom? What did this look and feel like?

- When I could make real-world connections with the students. I do not even remember what the actual lesson was, but we got off topic and started talking about the real-world application of understanding economics. So a lot of the kids had no idea how much a car or a house costs. So we broke it all down, what their monthly payments would be for certain kinds of cars or living arrangements. And then how much money they would need to make at their job to afford those conditions, and having miscellaneous costs as well. Then I tried making that connection back to why school is important so that they could get a job to afford their living style. I liked when I could make real-world connections that then also served as a motivator in the classroom.
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