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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS'
BELIEFS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PERCEPTIONS
OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Brian Matthew Nutter

College of College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of School Psychology

August 2015

This Dissertation by: Brian Matthew Nutter

Entitled: *A Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers' Beliefs, Expectations, and Perceptions of Classroom Practices*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the Department of School Psychology.

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ABSTRACT

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Attribution theory in the classroom suggests that teachers search for causes to which they might attribute student behavior and or academic performance. Using a consensual qualitative research (CQR) and phenomenological approach, this research examined how teachers' beliefs, expectations, and perceptions influenced their classroom practices. Using a multi-modal data collection process, involving interviews, classroom observations, review of teacher artifacts, and collection of demographic and Likert-type scale questionnaires, nine general education teachers from three elementary schools in one school district shared their perspective on working with students, including those from diverse backgrounds. Six themes emerged from the data and were titled: (a) Connection, (b) Teacher Approach, (c) Structured Support, (d) Student Self-Regulation, (e) Perception of Student Desire for Learning, and (f) Family Support of Student. Findings from this study may help improve teacher training and provide guidance for ongoing professional development. Additionally, these results may help school district promote policies that support modification of district policies on curriculum development and disciplinary actions.

Keywords: Attribution theory, classroom practices, consensual qualitative research, diverse learners, phenomenology

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I hope you die" was one of several commonplace statements made last year by a

seventh grade student in my school. Ernest, a Latino adolescent, identified with both

severe emotional and speech and language disabilities, was angry, failing school, and

seemingly without hope aside from his grandiose dream of becoming a drug lord. These

commonplace statements were often directed towards teachers and other professional

educators, as a reaction to his overall failure to succeed in every domain of school.

If Ernest's situation were analyzed more deeply, one would see there exists a

history of academic failure with sporadic success beginning when he entered school in

his Kindergarten year. From that time on, a general pattern of academic failure, followed

by inconsistent or indifferent educator practices, were met with a negative reaction from

Ernest who then began to present with behavioral challenges. Thus, began to emerge a

cycle of academic failure, inadequate response, behavioral challenges, and harsh

disciplinary actions. Ernest has experienced many factors that could have played a role in

his successes and failures; however, none seem more important than factors directly

related to how educators have dealt with Ernest's academic and behavioral outcomes.

According to traditional and current protocol, Ernest's impudent and aggressive

statements would have elicited written referrals by teachers and inevitably led to

suspensions; however, traditional discipline reactions and zero tolerance policies were

avoided. These harsh reactions have not proven to be successful and are aimed at forcing compliance. In prior suspensions, he typically blamed the teacher/administrator who wrote the referral, resulting in another damaged relationship with a school staff member. He also came back more agitated, with increased negative behaviors at school. Now a year later, in 8th grade, Ernest has shown progress with fewer disrespectful statements towards me or other educational staff and increased time between each event. The progress in Ernest's academic and behavioral success caused me to pause and consider where he would be now if the education system had provided earlier and more effective academic support. Alternatively, I wondered where he would be now if we had responded to his impudent remarks in a manner commensurate with traditional discipline practices (i.e., suspensions) that drive students away from school and towards negative educational outcomes.

Ineffective teacher practices and zero tolerance policies have been clearly linked to poor educational outcomes including involvement in the juvenile justice system (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi, 2013; Fenning et al., 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Students who have experienced these consequences have to shoulder unsuccessful instruction and long-standing punitive discipline responses that facilitate trajectories directed toward more considerable problems such as school dropout and entrance into the juvenile justice system (Fenning et al., 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). The relationship between punitive practices and negative student outcomes has been well-established, but what is not clear is why educators continue to use these practices. What are the underlying perceptions and beliefs

of teachers that sustain the use of ineffective practices that result in negative outcomes for some students?

Theoretical Framework

Attribution theory is the idea that we all search for causes to which we might attribute our own behavior or the behavior of other people (Tavris & Wade, 1997). In other words, attribution theorists seek to understand the perception of causality, or the judgment of why a particular incident occurred (Weiner, 1972). Attribution theory has been widely debated by many as to whether or not it is a truly a theory or just phenomenology (Calder, 1977; Langdridge & Butt, 2004). Over the past few decades, attribution theory has been given direction and clarity as a conglomeration of theories, giving rise to the most popular theory related to education proposed by Bernard Weiner.

Bernard Weiner's attribution theory of motivation has been considered the most influential theory of motivation because of its completeness relative to other theories and has been the theory of choice for most educational researchers (Graham & Williams, 2009). Graham and Williams (2009) pointed out that Dr. Weiner was the first to combine attribution theory and education together especially in association with motivation. His theory is divided into two parts which include the attributional theory of intrapersonal motivation and the attributional theory of interpersonal motivation. Both divisions examine how people assign or "attribute" cause to different events, how this assignment affects the functioning of individuals or an agency, and suggests that people will search for ways to preserve their own positive appearance.

Overall, his theory is mostly concerned with how motivation is affected by explanations or justifications (Banks & Woolfson, 2008). An important assumption of

Weiner's intrapersonal theory is that people will perceive their environment in a way that will help them retain a good self-perception and maintain positive feelings about themselves. Therefore, when something good happens, people are likely to attribute it to their own effort or ability, whereas when something bad occurs, they tend to believe that it is due to factors over which they have no control and are usually external to them (Slavin, 1991). The attributions that students and teachers make about a success or failure will determine their reaction and subsequent behavior. An example of this would be when two students fail the same exam in a class, Student A may attribute failure on this exam to lack of effort and poor studying habits on his or her part (controllable) and as a result, decide to study harder for the next exam. In contrast, Student B may attribute his or her failure to a lack of ability or that the teacher created an exam that was too difficult (uncontrollable) and decides that there is nothing that can be done to get a better grade in the future.

Another component of Weiner's interpersonal theory postulates that people have a tendency to do the opposite when interacting with other individuals or in this case, when teachers interact with students. That is, teachers have the tendency to blame students and their apparent lack of motivation for academic failures in order to "save face" whereas any student successes are attributed to their own teaching abilities and rigorous instruction. Furthermore, the attributions that teachers make about the causes of success or failure dictates their reactions to students, most often meaning acting punitively towards perceived controllable factors (e.g., student effort), and sympathetically towards factors perceived to be uncontrollable, such as student ability.

In relating attribution theory of motivation to Ernest's situation, it prompts the question "What attributions were teachers using to understand his perceived level of motivation, poor behavior, and overall lack of achievement?" Teacher perceptions and decisions regarding students like Ernest have had a direct connection to teacher-student interactions. In turn, these interactions could have lead to either positive or negative academic and behavioral outcomes for students even more so than classroom environment and program policies (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Garner & Waajid, 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Whether those perceptions and decisions were faulty or true, teachers are the single most important school-based factor in student academic achievement (Doll, LeClair, & Kurien, 2009). Therefore, teachers need to be cognizant of what they attribute behavior to and how those attributions influence their own perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors towards students.

Teacher Factors that Influence Achievement

Both internal student factors (e.g., intelligence, ability, attendance, motivation) and external factors (e.g., school conditions, out-of-school learning experiences and opportunities, peer groups) can play a role in student achievement (Baker et al., 2010; Law, 2009). However teacher factors may have the greatest impact on success, or lack of success, for students than specific student factors (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Houser & Frymier, 2009). Unfortunately, those teacher factors that are most influential to student success have not been fully delineated (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). Certain teacher factors are difficult to assess because of the interaction of many different confounding factors (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). Specifically, an understanding of teachers' perceptions of their attributions and the manner in which these impact their classroom practices is

missing. Therefore, it is important to identify the underlying decision making processes associated with teacher practices critical to improving instruction and narrowing the gap in achievement for students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010, Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005).

Teachers are able to access vast amounts of data on student achievement, performance, and behavior from state and national standardized tests, district and school assessments, in class tests, quizzes and homework, classroom observations, students' cumulative files, and through opinions and anecdotes offered by other teachers. The information they receive is evaluated and filtered through their own experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. Beliefs are the convictions one has about the truth and perceptions are how one interprets observable information, both of which can have implications for how teachers affect student outcomes. In their correlational study, Jussim, Robustelli and Cain (2009) found that teacher expectations of student future achievement were 75% accurate, with the remaining 25% of the relationship reflecting a manifestation of the teachers' perceptions. These findings correspond with earlier research that found teacher perceptions highly correlated with student outcomes (Jussim & Harber, 2005). These findings have reinforced the concept that teacher perception of student performance is associated with their practices in classroom instruction and their efforts at student engagement, both important factors with insufficient research to efficiently improve teacher training.

Teacher Perception of Student Motivation

Teachers' attributions about their students are impacted by their personal beliefs and expectancies about themselves and others (Brady & Woolfson, 2008). Attributions

are the perceived causes of particular events, meaning that teachers assign or attribute causes to particular outcomes based on their own specific beliefs and expectancies such as teacher efficacy, teacher role, and attitudes towards students with disabilities (Banks & Woolfson, 2008; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). In essence, when students fail, teachers may perceive that the failure is due to lack of student motivation based on their beliefs and perceptions about that student and aspects of the student's demographic group such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and disability.

The assertion that impoverished students, students of color, and students with disabilities are more at risk is well-established in literature and these labels can influence teacher perceptions of student motivation (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). Bol and Berry (2005) found that teachers attributed the achievement gap between white students and students of color to student characteristics such as motivation and work ethic. Students of color may be consciously or unconsciously viewed as less motivated which is believed to be the cause of their failure to maintain higher levels of achievement. Thinking like this can lead to a series of conjectures a teacher can easily adopt impacting his or her overall perception of a student.

For example, if a student of low socioeconomic status fails, the teacher, based on his or her beliefs, may run through the following series of considerations, "This child is poor and poor kids tend to come from families that are less educated. Less educated families tend to place a low value on education and therefore are less motivated." Teachers are able to deny accountability for the failure and are able to reinforce their own beliefs about impoverished students being unmotivated. This attributional approach to intra- and interpersonal motivation may help to explain how teacher perceptions of

students contribute to how they ascribe failure to students and the factors they view as having led to that failure (Weiner, 2000).

Humans have a tendency to analyze failure more so than success because we often seek to solve a problem or create a solution. In the classroom, teachers seek to answer the question of why students succeed or fail, and their perceptions of those outcomes will likely lead to differential treatment of students (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013; Contreras & Lee, 1990). Whether teachers attribute failure to a controllable factor such as effort or an uncontrollable factor such as ability mediates how they will react. Graham and Williams (2009) found that teachers were unsympathetic towards students who they perceived to be lazy and unmotivated, while they were sympathetic and offered support to those who they perceived as having low aptitude. Accurate perceptions of student performance can guide teacher behaviors that promote student effort, however, inaccurate perceptions may lead to actions and beliefs (e.g., low expectancy) that negatively impact student motivation and performance (Zhou & Urhahne, 2013). In the end, "differential treatment affects student motivation which, in turn, affects student performance" (Jussim et al., 2009, p. 366). When students perform poorly, they may react and behave in ways that place them more at risk for harsh discipline practices and policies.

**Results of Poor Performance and
Zero Tolerance**

Skiba and Rausch (2006) point out that tougher discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies lead to poorer school climate, lower student achievement, and higher school dropout rates. The long term consequences of traditional and zero tolerance disciplinary practices can negatively impact social relationships, civic engagement, career

potential, and facilitate entry into the prison system (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Nationally, the academic outcomes of punitive disciplinary policies in the educational setting have been associated with grade retention, school dropout, entry into the School-to-Prison-Pipeline (STPP), delayed workforce entry, and loss of tax revenue (Miner, 2013). In 2013, the Civil Rights Project based out of the University of California held a conference to bring together researchers looking to close the gap in school discipline. This gap is demographically very similar to the achievement gap and represents significant differences in the rates of suspension and expulsion between white students and students of color (Kinsler, 2013) as well as between students with disabilities and typically developing students (Houchins & Shippen, 2012).

Typically developing and white students both have the least amount of risk for experiencing discipline practices that push students out of school and into the STPP, a term that refers to the trend in which use of harsh disciplinary policies and law enforcement referrals for students who break school rules result in suspensions and expulsions. Either through direct referral to law enforcement or because they begin to engage in illegal behaviors while suspended from school, students then become introduced to the juvenile justice system. Discussions at the conference focused on policies to incorporate prevention-oriented discipline practices such as positive behavior support and improvement of student self-discipline to reduce the number of adolescents entering the STPP especially for those students most affected such as African Americans and Latinos.

Zero tolerance systems were developed during Ronald Reagan's administration and later solidified with the passage of the Guns-Free Schools Act of 1994, whereby any individual possessing a weapon was automatically expelled (Sughrue, 2003). Unfortunately, since its introduction the policy has evolved to include a wider degree of rule violations which research has shown to be a discriminatory and ineffective means for maintaining school order (Skiba, 2000). The wider degree of rule violations that are now subject to both expulsion and suspension include drugs and alcohol, assault and physical violence, criminal damage to property, and having multiple violations (Hoffman, 2014). The long term effects of zero tolerance policies have included, but are not limited to, high costs and accelerated delinquency rates for students with specials needs or antisocial behavior. In cases of expulsion, there has been a denial of educational services, an increased rate of repeat offenders, and elevated dropout rates.

As noted, these policies have appeared to be enforced differentially leading to a widening disproportionality gap for students of color and students with special needs (Indiana University Safe and Responsive Schools, n.d.). For example, Houchins and Shippen (2012) reported that 40% of incarcerated youth have disabilities as compared to the typical 12% of students with disabilities found in the public education system. In addition, minority students including Black, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander and Latino students have represented approximately one-third of students in school but two thirds of incarcerated youth in the juvenile justice system (Armour & Hammond, 2009). Poverty has exacerbated the situation for students as they live in neighborhoods with poorer schools, are at a higher risk of being retained, and are at a much higher risk for suspensions and severe punishment (Togut, 2011). These types of factors have been

shown to result in higher rates of student involvement in the juvenile justice system and the STPP (Houchins & Shippen, 2012). Evidence of a STPP has been present since the 1970s and the trend only seems to be getting worse (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Students like Ernest who are students of color, have had low achievement, have had an educational disability, and have come from families with low SES are at highest risk for entering the STPP (Coggshall et al., 2013; Raible & Irizzarry, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). Moreover, many teachers would prefer students who have emotional disabilities and exhibit problem behavior like Ernest, to be removed from the classroom as they believe it helps teacher effectiveness and many believe they are not prepared to meet the needs of these students. In fact, based on a nationwide poll of teachers, 95% of respondents indicated that removing a student from the classroom and placing him or her in an alternative program was more effective at improving teacher effectiveness than reducing class size and improving professional development (Coggshall et al., 2013). Students with serious emotional disabilities like Ernest are twice as likely to be suspended from school as typically developing students and are six times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The positive side is that Ernest has been able to avoid suspension, the standard policy for his actions, because the teachers and administrators with whom he works have adopted differentiated academic practices and positive preventive discipline strategies. These educator practices were cited by Coggshall et al. (2013) as significant for changing the trajectory of students who are at risk for entering the STPP. Educators can influence students' trajectories towards or away from the STPP: "(1) through their relationships with children and youth, (2) through their attitudes and social emotional competence, (3)

by contributing to the conditions for learning and (4) through their responses to student behavior" (Coggshall et al., 2013, p. 436). Educators who use these practices seem to avoid ascribing the sole cause for academic and behavioral failure to students and have a vested interest in the success of the student.

<div align="center">**Statement of the Problem**</div>

Given the increased focus on educational achievement, more pressure for accountability is being placed on teachers to provide effective educational environments that improve academic outcomes for all students (Sawchuck, 2010, 2011). Effective educational environments provide appropriate structure and opportunities for learning and facilitate the educational process. Specifically, these environments provide safety, support, social emotional learning, and challenge (Coggshall et al., 2013) while also providing professional development opportunities where teachers are able to explore their perceptions of disabilities, culture, and overall ability (Togut, 2011). The goal of this type of environment would be for teachers to be encouraged to assess their perceptions of students so that they can evaluate whether or not their ideas or beliefs about the members of their class are based on faulty or accurate information. Attribution theory tells us we can ascribe cause to things that are or are not controllable, are variable or fixed, and are internal or external. The freedom to ascribe or assign cause means that our beliefs and culture will guide our perceptions and, as we gain knowledge, we will change our beliefs that will in turn, impact our perceptions (Chan, 2011). The lack of an effective educational environment and an inability or unwillingness to assess perceptions sets students up for continued failure for both short- and long-term outcomes.

As noted earlier, success in the educational setting is highly related to positive post-school life outcomes (Hanushek, 2011; Houchins & Shippen, 2012; Perin, 2013). Most importantly, the role a teacher plays in facilitating or hindering success in the educational setting is by far the most significant school based factor (Hanushek, 2011). It is imperative, therefore to provide teachers with opportunities to better understand the impact they have on their students' lives and, and then armed with this information, encourage them to apply their skills more effectively in the classroom. Teachers, along with other stakeholders, need to identify and understand those factors within their control that are related to student achievement outcomes in order to improve their own effectiveness. Knowledge of teacher factors that influence student achievement can be used to develop effective policies and provide training programs with important information to improve teacher effectiveness.

Study Rationale

Teachers are a big part of student success--or failure--and teacher behavior and actions are based in part on their perceptions. Teacher factors such as certification, years of experience (aside from the first few years), or having a Master's degree actually have had weak associations with student achievement (Hanushek, 2011; Winters, Dixon, & Greene, 2012). Instead, factors such as teacher expectancy and beliefs towards students (Fives & Buehl, 2008; Rubie-Davies, 2010) and the associated differential treatment (Jussim et al., 2009), have had a much stronger influence. However, there is limited research, largely due to the difficulties inherent in measuring these constructs, on the qualitative aspects of teacher perceptions and the relationship to student motivation, achievement, and discipline practices (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009), yet, teacher

expectancy, perceptions, and beliefs need more detailed examination to adequately place them in the attributional theory model (Hardre, Davis, & Sullivan, 2008). In assessing teacher perceptions it is important to understand the influence of student factors and how they may be perceived by teachers.

Through interviews and observations, I explored teacher attributions about the students in their classroom in an attempt to understand how teacher beliefs affected their classroom practices and decision making. Through observations, I was able to see how these beliefs were enacted in their interactions with students, their instructional decisions, and in their classroom environments. This study provided emerging insight into how teachers' attributions contribute to their classroom behaviors, the relationships they develop with their students and the decisions they make around disciplining students. The relationship between teacher perceptions and the factors that shape those perceptions about student achievement represent a critical gap in understanding student academic outcomes. Given the limitations in past research (Jussim et al., 2009) involving correlational and quantitative studies, this qualitative analysis allowed for a more sensitive and in-depth exploration delineating the influential factors in teacher perceptions and behaviors towards all students, including those who are impoverished, of color, or who have a disability.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine teacher beliefs and perceptions about their students, especially as related to motivation. Through focused interviews and observations, the goal was to draw connections between teacher beliefs, perceptions, and classroom practices in relation to student factors such as ethnicity, disability status, and SES and the potential differential treatment of students based on

these factors. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences, beliefs, and perspectives of participants, I utilized a consensual qualitative research and phenomenological approach for this study. This methodology and the outcomes of this study provided information that may be meaningful to principals, school psychologists, other mental health professionals, educators, students, as well as community members who are interested in helping to improve student outcomes.

A potential benefit this research includes the development of pre-service and professional training programs for teachers and other educators that include strategies for incorporating their beliefs and perceptions into the classroom in a manner that is positive and productive for engaging with students. Training for teachers may be an alternative method for improving student outcomes such as graduation rates, college attendance, and academic and behavioral performance. The overall goal was to help current and future teachers better understand how to develop positive relationships with their students in order to reduce the number of children that end up on the STPP.

Guiding Questions

The following overarching question were used to guide this study: What are public school teachers' beliefs and perceptions about student motivation and how does this influence their classroom practices? Although this question is designed to better understand perceptions about all students, specific attention was given to whether these beliefs and perceptions varied based on whether students had low socioeconomic status, were of color, or had a disability.

Q1   What are teachers' perceptions of what causes success and failure for students in their classroom?

Q2   What are teachers' perceptions of what motivates their students and how do they perceive these as differing among their students?

Q3   What decisions related to (a) content instruction, (b) classroom discipline, and (c) student interaction are made by teachers?

Q4   How do teachers perceive their relationships with students?

Delimitations

The research was conducted in one rural school district in the western United States. Because the sample represented a convenience sample, efforts related to transferability were limited. Elementary school teachers (grades 1-6) were interviewed and their classrooms observed. All other school personnel including administrators, social workers, school psychologists, nurses, para-educators, counselors, students, parents, and support staff were excluded from the study. Therefore, although it is recognized that there are many influences on students' achievement, motivation, and behavior, the focus of this study is specific to the perceptions of the classroom teacher.

Definition of Terms

In order to provide clarity and consistency throughout this study, the following are a list of terms that were used.

Attributional Process. The process of ascribing causes that explain the successes and failures of oneself or others, as well as, the possible outcomes of those ascriptions (Graham & Williams, 2009)

Attribution theory (of motivation). This term represents the theory that students' future successes or failures are based on the perception of what caused the outcome (Banks & Woolfson, 2008).

Discipline. This term is used to describe the consequences to student behavioral infractions as outlined in school codes of conduct, which provide guidelines for implementation of suspensions, expulsions, and other actions intended to reduce undesired student behavior (Fenning et. al., 2012).

Differential Treatment. This term describes the process in which teachers engage in relational and instructional practices based on their own beliefs or perceptions that help or hinder student progress (Contreras & Lee, 1990)

Motivation. System of self-regulatory mechanisms that includes selection, activation, and sustained direction of behavior toward certain goals. Motivation is primarily concerned with how behavior is activated and maintained (Bandura, 1977).

Socio-Economic Status- a socio-demographic construct defined by household income, parental education level, and parental occupation.

Student-Teacher Relationships. Characteristics of and degree to which a student experiences a positive and supportive relationship with their teacher.

Teacher Beliefs. The convictions the teacher has about the truth.

Teacher Perception. The way in which a teacher gains understanding or an impression of information in the educational setting.

Zero Tolerance Policies. School or district-wide policies that mandate predetermined, typically harsh consequences or punishments (suspension or expulsion) for a wide range of rules violations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Effective teaching and positive student academic performance are the main objectives for the education process and all of its stakeholders. In March 2010, President Barrack Obama's administration sent congress the Blueprint for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in an attempt to alleviate problems created by the No Child Left Behind Act. Since then, Congress has failed to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which aims to create higher academic standards, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of teaching. As a result of this inaction, states have requested waivers to enact reform on their own but each state must submit specific measures that will be used to assess outcomes for underperforming groups of learners, such as students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was designed to create educational reform because higher achievement has been associated with long term positive outcomes for individuals, such as higher SES, lower crime rates, higher pay, improved health outcomes and post school outcomes (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012; Houchins & Shippen, 2012). Furthermore, the parameters set for states has included creating systems that improve, support, and evaluate teaching practices which include classroom conditions, discipline practices, student-teacher relationships and other, more specific teacher factors related to quality.

Classroom Conditions

Classroom conditions refers to the environment and instruction that teachers provide to promote learning inside the educational milieu. Squires (2004) suggested that classroom conditions provide a framework for planning, analyzing, and evaluating teaching practices that support student learning and achievement. These practices included safety, student social-emotional competence, classroom support, and meaningful challenges (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010; Squires, 2004). These conditions have been inter-related and when they have worked well together, they fulfill the psychological conditions necessary for students to feel connected to the school community (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010).

It is particularly important for teachers to provide these conditions for students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities in order to act as a buffer against those factors that place them at-risk (Osher et al., 2010). These students have been placed at greater risk of lagging behind typically developing students because many do not possess the social emotional skills that will allow them to navigate school successfully (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005). Students who bring a number of risk factors to the school setting need to feel secure in their environment both socially and emotionally through connections to their teachers so that they can manage their emotions and be engaged in learning. If students do not feel engaged or that they belong, they often make negative choices that lead to situations that necessitate disciplinary action.

Discipline Practices

Throughout the United States, zero-tolerance policies remain as one of the most frequently used discipline guidelines applied in schools. The intent of these policies was to improve the safety of the schools, but in effect, served to push students, especially students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities, out of the classroom (Gonsoulin et al., 2012). Because of these policies, students began receiving referrals, which sometimes resulted in their encountering law enforcement agents, and getting suspended at higher rates than in previous years (Fabelo et al. 2011). Either because students came in to contact with police, or simply because they were unsupervised during their period of suspension or expulsion, the outcomes of these zero tolerance policies resulted in more serious outcomes than expected. The potential consequence of these discipline practices was that youth who were disciplined in this manner were more likely to become incarcerated in the juvenile justice system.

The outcomes of these discipline practices do not reflect rates that would be expected from the general population demographics. There is an overrepresentation of students of color, students with disabilities, and students from lower SES backgrounds. Of students of color, Black and Native American/Native Alaskan students seem to be the most impacted by school discipline practices. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) reported that Black students are three times more likely to be suspended than White students, while Native American/Native Alaskan students comprise 0.5% of the population but 2% of suspensions and 3% of expulsions. Furthermore, students of color, including Black, Native American/Native Alaskan,

Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander, make up approximately two-thirds of incarcerated youth, yet only make up one-third of the population (Armour & Hammond, 2009).

Students with disabilities are also overrepresented as 13% of these students receive out-of-school suspension whereas 6% of students without disabilities receive out of school suspension (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Youth with disabilities comprise 40% of the incarcerated youth in the United States, but only make up 12% of students in the mainstream educational system (Quinn et al., 2005). Disparities among students of color and students with disabilities are only exacerbated when poverty is introduced into the equation. Poverty relates to multiple negative life outcomes and a large and disproportionate number of incarcerated youth come from poor families (Houchins & Shippen, 2012).

Fortunately, there was recognition from federal and state government offices that zero tolerance policies do not work and may promote discrimination against these groups. A brief released by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in March 2014 has indicated the need to improve school climates and discipline policies in order to support student achievement and move away from discriminatory discipline practices (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). States, such as Colorado, has already taken steps in advance of federal government recommendations. Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper signed House Bill 12-1345, known as the School Finance and School Discipline Bill, on May 19, 2012 which eliminates mandatory discipline action for certain types of infractions (Colorado House of Representatives, 2012). School districts have been given more latitude in determining disciplinary actions with regard to factors such as the age of a child, whether or not the student posed a serious threat,

whether or not they have a disability, the history of the student, and whether or not lesser disciplinary action can resolve the violation (Colorado House of Representatives, 2012). When youth are removed from educational institutions, they become students that miss out on learning, instruction, and developing the relationships that can improve their outcomes.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive academic and behavioral student outcomes are more related to teacher-student interactions than factors such as classroom environment and program policies (Mashburn et al., 2008). Additionally, constructive working relationships between teachers and students have been associated with positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker et al., 2007; Garner & Waajid, 2008). In essence, the relationships that teachers develop with their students have a larger effect on student outcomes than other external factors.

Furthermore, positive relationships between teachers and students have had a significant impact on motivation and student achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). A positive teacher-student relationship requires a teacher to have "the ability to establish supportive and productive relationships with students and their families in a cultural and linguistically competent manner" (Coggshall et al., 2013, p. 439). Teacher praise and concern for students ranked second and third, respectively, as motivators for positively influencing students' educational outcomes (Katt & Condly, 2009). When teachers are able to provide students with recognition of their hard work and indicate genuine care towards a student that particular student's achievement and behavior outcomes improve (Coggshall et al., 2013). Teachers delivering explicit and supportive feedback indicate to

the student a positive relationship and provides them with insight into their own attributes that contribute to their success.

Beyond providing insight, a positive relationship between the teacher and the student supplies a foundation for belongingness and happiness in the classroom (Martin & Dowson, 2009). This foundation lends itself to creating trust between the student and the teacher facilitating a clearer understanding of expectations between them. A positive relationship between the teacher and the student is imperative for positive student achievement and behavior, especially in cases where there are negative parent relationships, where students are at-risk, or when the students are of color (Crosnoe, 2004; Decker et al., 2007).

Positive teacher-student relationships lead to quality social and academic interactions where teachers model good behavior and help students regulate their learning, resulting in positive student performance (Gettinger & Stoiber, 1999; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Similarly, poor student performance may suggest that teachers have not provided the extra assistance needed by students to regulate their learning and behavior. Teacher-student relationships and teacher support of student regulation has not accounted for overall student performance and behavior, but has indicated the importance of teacher behavior and social emotional competency (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The overall quality of a teacher has been impacted by their beliefs and perceptions because it drives their behavior that is reflected in the relationships with their students.

Teacher Quality

The importance of teacher characteristics in student performance has caused teacher quality to be a dominant factor when considering schools and school policy. Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) indicated that the quality of teacher instruction is a primary consideration when discussing the most effective school policies. Therefore, research into the factors that influence teacher quality is of high importance. Teacher quality research has often been measured through indirect means and has followed three main paths: (a) changes in teachers' salaries as compared to salaries in other occupations, (b) investigation of the total impact of teachers on student achievement, and (c) measurement of specific research characteristics that impact student achievement (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006).

Investigation into all three paths has provided mixed results. The arguments put forth in teacher salary research were that teacher quality was dependent upon teacher pay relative to non-teacher salaries. In other words, better opportunities to make money in other fields may have been more appealing than making less money for the same level of skill development. Relevantly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) indicated that even if there was a weak correlation between alternative employment opportunities and instructional quality, a decrease in the supply of teachers would push teacher quality in the same direction. In other words, even without a correlation, the decreased supply in teachers would lead to lower teacher quality. Leigh (2012) found an inconclusive relationship existed between teachers' salaries and teacher quality as factors in student achievement even though these variables represent aspects of supply and demand.

Investigating and determining the overall impact of teachers on student achievement is more attainable. What we have discovered from this type of research is that the teacher is by far the single most important school-based factor in student academic achievement (Doll et al., 2009). The research has also indicated that teacher aptitude has significantly declined in recent generations in relationship to both licensure exam scores and overall IQ (Leigh, 2012). What this type of research does not tell us are the specific teacher factors that have the most impact on student achievement and should guide educational policy. Some of the more specific factors that affect student achievement, behavior and outcomes include teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions.

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**Teacher Factors and Student
Achievement**

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Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) have expanded on research in aggregate teacher factors by estimating teachers' impact (overall teacher impact called teacher fixed effects) using an Education Production Function equation that predicts student achievement based on prior year student achievement, school and peer factors, family and neighbor inputs, and unknown factors. Their findings indicated that, of all the measures, teacher impact was most significant. In their review of 10 research units, the estimated standard deviation of teacher impact ranged from 0.11 to 0.36 per unit of student achievement which supports the premise that teacher quality can impact learning gains for students of approximately 0.2 standard deviations in a single year (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Additionally, educational research has highlighted the importance of the teacher's role in student social development and future success (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2009; Houser & Frymier, 2009). These assertions have emphasized the fact that teachers

and their effectiveness impact either the success, or lack of success, more so than student factors.

Institutions such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have allocated millions of dollars towards research investigating the factors that constitute effective teaching (Cantrell, 2012). The research funded by the their foundation has shown that effective teaching can be assessed through multiple reliable measures, however, they fail to identify specific teacher characteristics associated with effectiveness. Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) stated that there had not been any clear indications of why teachers have a larger impact than student factors. Teachers are the most important school-based factor that influences student achievement and yet their observable characteristics (e.g., level of education) do not significantly influence student achievement. Less observable characteristics such as teacher perceptions, beliefs, and expectations may play a critical role in teacher impact on student educational outcomes. Secondarily, the impact of teacher perceptions, beliefs, and expectations on student outcomes implies that the treatment of students may represent mediating factors between SES and achievement (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010).

Teacher Beliefs, Expectations, and Perceptions

A good amount of evidence has been gathered indicating that teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions impact student achievement (Jussim et al., 2009). Beliefs are the convictions one has about the truth. For teachers, these beliefs might be most pertinent to their teaching, student learning, students, and the educational process. Expectations are the anticipatory beliefs, and might include such preconceived ideas such as the common idea that students who do not study are not motivated. Although there

may be a myriad of reasons as to why a student does not study before a big test, this preconceived assertion that lack of studying equals lack of motivation rises to the top as the most likely explanation for the non-studying behavior. Perceptions are the observable information teachers receive that create or reinforce their beliefs and expectations. A teacher may see students do poorly on tests and attribute their behavior to a lack of motivation. Further, some teachers may be able to accurately assess student abilities (e.g., I think this student has the ability, but some other factor has interfered with his or her performance), they are nowhere near perfect. Preconceived beliefs and expectations can be skewed by perceptions which can significantly impact student achievement outcomes. As Jussim et al. (2009) pointed out, the correlation between teacher expectations and student future achievement reflects 75% accuracy, while the remaining 25% is a manifestation of their perceptions. What this means is that in one in four circumstances, teachers will have an incorrect belief of what a student is capable of achieving or will actually achieve in their classroom.

Teachers' beliefs about education and how students learn can influence the behaviors they show in the classroom in such a way that they can serve to guide students toward expected outcomes. For example, teachers might take a content-centered approach or alternatively, a process driven approach to teaching and learning depending on which model is most consistent with their beliefs. Teachers may neglect the importance of opposing beliefs and practices which may lead them to discount individual student needs and differences or, conversely, content mastery (De Vries, Van de Grift, & Jansen, 2014). Rigid adoption of these beliefs may cause teachers to develop erroneous expectations of their students, which then may lead to differential treatment in the classroom and students

reacting in a manner that confirms these expectations (Jussim et al., 2009). Additionally, De Vries et al. (2014) indicated that teachers who neglect both content and process approaches could push students to become either focused on non-collaborative/non-reflective mastery or lack of a deep understanding of subject matter, ultimately, leading to academic failure. This failure would reinforce the teachers' expectations.

Teachers may also adopt firm beliefs about their students based on knowledge of certain background information such as previous achievement, a history of behavior referrals, or even knowledge of the student's siblings. If a teacher has received previous information that a student is unmotivated, the teacher may expect less from that student and treat him or her in a way that supports this belief that the student is unmotivated. It is more likely that each tardy, late assignment, or low grade will be viewed through the lens of poor motivation rather than considering alternative possibilities. Moreover, many of these beliefs and expectations are formed well before students set foot in a classroom.

Teacher expectations were first explored by Robert Rosenthal in his 'Pygmalion in the classroom' research, whereby teachers were given manufactured information about specific students having high abilities, regardless of their true level of ability prior to those students entry into the classroom (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Rosenthal found that teachers who held these preconceived expectations about students treated the students in more encouraging ways and engaged in teaching behaviors that promoted academic performance above and beyond what would have been predicted based on the student's actual ability. Since this study, there has been great disparity and controversy between the perspective of social psychologists and educational psychologists (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Social psychologists have accepted that expectancy has a great effect in

the classroom while educational psychologists maintain that there is little effect. Current research does not seem to get us any closer to the answer. Jussim et al. (2009) pointed out that 40 years of research has yielded mixed conclusions about expectancy that ranges from powerful existence to no influence at all. In the end, most researchers seemed to agree that teacher expectancy does play some role in student academic outcomes, however, the lack of agreement is compounded by limited research investigating potential moderators such as race/ethnicity, poverty, and student disabilities, between teacher expectancy and student achievement (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Jussim et al., 2009).

Since Rosenthal's pivotal study, there have been several studies evaluating how teacher expectations and beliefs influence teacher behavior and student outcomes (Jussim & Eccles, 1992; Rubie-Davies, 2006, 2007, 2010). These studies have included both the study of erroneous expectations, often referred to as inaccuracy, and classroom teachers who have high or low beliefs and expectations (Rubie-Davies, 2010). Although research in these areas has not always been clear, it has yielded some implications worth noting. Some of the factors that affect the accuracy of teacher expectancies and beliefs are changes in the student, teacher poor memory for past performance, and social stereotypes for different demographic groups (Jussim et al, 2009). Changes in student health, development of language skills, and achieving developmental milestones can improve or worsen student classroom performance. However, if teachers do not observe these changes, they may not expect students' performance to improve or decline.

As part of their teaching role, teachers are expected to continually assess student performance and their progress in learning. Though this is a best practice, it can lead to erroneous expectations for students. Teacher memory of students' previous achievements

can be skewed (Jussim et. al., 2009) leading them to retain inaccurate interpretations of student achievement (Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). In essence, the data teachers use may be imprecise and guide them to incorrect conclusions such as high or low expectations or inaccurate perceptions. Most teachers do not have training data-based decision making and may suffer the same errors and biases that plague laypeople when evaluating data and making predictions (Jussim et al., 2009).

Furthermore, teachers' conclusions about their students may be inaccurate due to social stereotypes and educational labels (such as learning disabilities; Brady and Woolfson, 2008; Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996; Jussim, Smith, Madon, & Pallulmbo, 1998; Madon et al., 1998) for many different groups. For example, educational labels such as gifted, learning disabled, or habitually disruptive all carry certain meaning for teachers who may establish certain expectations prior to meeting these students and learning about them as individuals. These types of expectations may be especially strong when applied to students of color. Murdock (2009) indicated "the pervasiveness of stereotypes of intellectual inferiority for African American and Latino youth become the basis for teachers' expectations, creating race-based expectation effects" (Murdock, 2009, p. 436). Brady and Woolfson (2008) pointed out that teachers tended to feel bad for students with learning disabilities and may have fewer expectations for their future success. These race-based and disability based expectations can hold both positive and negative effects on student achievement depending on the types of high or low expectations held and the specific group stereotypes.

High and Low Expectation Classrooms

Rosenthal (1974) was the first to identify four ways in which teachers treat students for whom they hold high versus low expectancies. These identified differences have been supported by more recent research by Rubie-Davies (2007) who found that teachers treat high expectancy students more favorably by providing more positive emotional support, giving feedback related to performance versus behavior, providing a better framework for student learning, and offering more opportunities for higher order thinking. Taking into consideration the finer points of these four areas, teachers who have higher expectations of their students tend to engage in certain types of behaviors more often to support students. In providing emotional support, teachers frequently provide positively formed statements throughout the day. If a student is acting in a negative manner, the teacher will point out students who are performing the expected behavior in the classroom. Teachers also use statements related to performance in terms of what needs to be accomplished and what has already been achieved in order to guide students' classroom functioning. To further ensure student performance, teachers use in depth instructions for assignments and explanations of concepts, while also providing feedback for incorrect responses. Lastly, in high expectation classes, teachers provide more opportunities for higher order thinking by helping students to make connections and asking open versus closed ended questions.

In contrast, teachers of low expectation classrooms have seemed to exhibit more criticism when students are incorrect and have had lower-expectations from all of their students (Rubie-Davies, 2007). It was also found by Rubie-Davies (2007) that low expectancy teachers ask fewer questions and spend more time organizing students in their

classrooms than their high-expectancy counterparts. The results of teacher practices appear to be detrimental to the overall development of students.

Teachers' beliefs and expectancies provide the framework through which they filter their experiences; in turn, these shape their perceptions and practices (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009). Recent research has focused specifically on how teacher's high or low expectations in the classrooms affect student outcomes by assessing student perspectives. One study found that students perceived their teachers as providing more leadership opportunities, giving broader ranges of learning experiences, and interacting more positively with higher achieving students (Rubie-Davies, 2006). Students tend to be good barometers of teacher practices and classroom climate. They can clearly decipher when a teacher provides students with more opportunities to perform successfully, and provides more positive feedback. Extensive studies supported that students are sensitive and capable of perceiving and interpreting teacher cues regarding teacher expectancies for student performance (Babad, 1990; Blotem, 1995; Rubie-Davies, 2006). For instance, Rubie-Davies (2006) found that teachers give a disproportionately higher rate of positive facial and body gestures towards students they believed were high achievers. Students then interpreted these reactions as endorsements of their ability.

Conversely, when teachers have low expectations about the attributes of students, learning experiences will be narrower with fewer offerings of leadership roles, and increased criticism as compared to high achievers (Cooper & Baron, 1977; Rubie-Davies, 2006, 2010). A seemingly simpler way of describing these events is that the rich (perceived high achievers) get richer, and the poor (perceived low achievers) get poorer. The more concerning component is that many of the beliefs and expectations around low

performers have been related to students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. There has been considerable evidence suggesting that African Americans, Hispanics, students with disabilities and the poor are expected to be low in ability, lazy, and unmotivated (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Sorge, Newson, & Hagerty, 2000) by teachers. The differences indicated by SES, disabilities, and race prompts the question "Why do teachers believe these students have these characteristics?"

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions are the result of taking information from their environment and interpreting what it means. Very often their perceptions are interpreted in ways that may or may not benefit students. In essence, a Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when teachers hold certain expectations of students (Parkison, 2004) and the teachers' perception of a given event or characteristic reinforce those expectations. There have been several cases where classrooms have been studied over the course of time and teacher ideals have to a large degree influenced the behavior of their students (Rubie-Davies, 2010; Turner & Patrick, 2004). This relationship suggests that teachers have a large amount of power over students' motivation and academic achievement. It would seem that teachers need to understand this phenomenon in order to steer clear of presenting bias and low expectations that may negatively affect student outcomes.

Teacher practices are informed by their perceptions of student motivation and output performance (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Weiner's attribution theory helps us to understand how teachers react when they perceive students to be motivated or unmotivated. Studies using this framework have been able to distinguish teacher

reactions to their perceptions of failure or success (Graham & Williams, 2009). Reactions

to success are generally positive, therefore, the bigger concern in the research of

attribution theory are reactions to failure. For instance, Woolfolk and Perry (2011) wrote:

> When a teacher assumes that student failure is attributable to forces beyond the
> student's control, the teacher tends to respond with sympathy and avoid giving
> punishments. If, however, the failures are attributed to a controllable factor such
> as lack of effort (or motivation), the teacher's response is more likely to be
> irritation or anger, and reprimands may follow. (p. 477)

Woolfolk and Perry's statement explicated that there are significant consequences for

how teachers perceive and make attributions about the behavior of students. Additionally,

this application of attribution theory has helped to explain how teachers' perceptions and

behaviors might impact student outcomes and achievement.

The few studies that have explored teachers' perceptions of student motivation

have found that teachers' attributions are impacted by their personal beliefs and attitudes

about themselves (Brady & Woolfson, 2008). Attributions are the perceived causes of

particular events, meaning that we assign meaning to particular outcomes based on our

own specific beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs and attitudes about concepts such as student

characteristics, teacher efficacy, teacher role, and attitudes towards students with

disabilities have all been shown to influence teachers' perceptions and attributions

(Banks & Woolfson, 2008; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). For instance,

there has been research that supports girls being perceived by teachers as providing more

effort than boys which translates into higher grades for girls (Jussim et al., 2009). Other

studies have shown teachers using hedonic bias (seeing oneself in a positive light).

Examples of this include studies that found behavior problems were perceived by

teachers as being the result of family or student factors such as student effort rather than

school or teacher factors (Ho, 2004; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002) It would seem likely then that teachers' beliefs and attitudes have a bearing on their perceptions and attributions of all students in their classrooms.

Perceptions are the interpretations of student behavior which evolve the moment a student steps into the classroom for the first time. The manner in which student and teacher relationships develop can have significant implications for student outcomes and motivation, and have been shown to be more predictive than macro-level factors such as classroom environment quality and program policy (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker et al., 2007; Garner & Waajid, 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Additionally, Wentzel (2009) states "researchers have documented significant relations between positive aspects of teacher-student relationships and students' social and academic motivation and accomplishments at school" (p.309). Student-teacher relationships are primarily formed through direct interactions between student and teacher and secondarily informed through the teachers' perspectives or perceptions. As Dobbs and Arnold (2009) indicated, each person's perspective is influenced by objective, contextual, and subjective components, with the latter reflecting biases and interpretations of the perceiver. While it is important to understand the student's perception of the teacher, understanding the teacher's perception of the student is prudent, given that the teacher is the single most important school-based factor in regard to student achievement. Furthermore, the methods that teachers use and their behavior towards students in their classroom may be biased by their perceptions of students' skills, ability, and motivation (Wenglinski, 2000).

Many different student factors can influence a teacher's perception, however, as discussed by Graham and Williams (2009) student successes, or failures, are fundamental

in forming teacher perceptions of the students they teach. As noted before, these authors also maintain that student failure rather than success has the most impact on teacher perceptions. Failure is a much more evident outcome in the classroom because of the impact and implications it carries with it, including the growing practice of teachers being evaluated based on the performance of their students.

When a student fails, the attributional process is induced (Weiner, 2000) in the classroom. This is both an intra- and interpersonal process. That is, the teacher looks both inward (How well did I teach that lesson?) and outward (I've worked with that student for weeks; why didn't that student understand these concepts?). Equally, the student considers his or her performance (I didn't do well because I did not study for the test) as well as aspects of the teacher (The teacher didn't teach us those concepts). As Bernard Weiner's (2000) attribution theory of motivation explains, a person (in this case, the teacher) will most likely have "hedonic bias", a term coined by Miller and Ross (1975), that ascribes one's own perceived failure to an external factor (the student). In this case, the teacher will then try and assign blame to the student as the cause for failure (e.g., poor motivation, lack of ability, poor family support).

Attribution Theory

Each morning when people wake up, consciously or sub-consciously they begin the search for meaning and understanding of phenomenon that occur in our world. It is very often difficult to discern what truly "drives" someone to act in particular ways because we do not have the ability to read minds or know exactly what people are thinking. When it comes to the reactions, impulses, or behavior of others, we try to understand them by attributing the behavior to internal or external factors such as ability,

effort, luck, or difficulty of tasks. Attribution theory attempts to explain these events. Since its inception, this "theory" has been debated as both a theory and a field of study (Weiner, 2008). Consensus around the exact idea of attribution theory has been widely debated by many including whether or not it is truly a theory or just phenomenology (Calder, 1977; Langdridge & Butt, 2004).

The debate exists because attribution theory is composed of several theories developed by different philosophers. Notably, people such as Harold Kelley, Edward Jones, and Fritz Heider have contributed interdependence theory, dispositional ascriptions, and dyadic relationships, to the structure of attribution theory. Of these three theorists, Fritz Heider is considered the most influential contributor to attribution theory and its founder (Lipe, 1991; Reisenzein & Rudolph, 2008). What can be derived from their individual theories is that we are all searching for causes to which we might attribute our own behavior or the behavior of other people (Tavris & Wade, 1997).

Attribution Theory of Intra and Interpersonal Motivation

More recently, theorists have taken steps to synthesize the tenets of attribution theory and apply them beyond psychology to other fields of study including education. One such theorist, Bernard Weiner, put forth attribution theory of intra and interpersonal motivation, which has provided insight into the dynamics of teachers and students, as well as, student achievement in education. As explained above, there are several different factors that can influence student academic achievement but none is more important than the role of the teacher and how he or she interacts with students. The good news is that Bernard Weiner has helped elucidate and organize many of these key factors into a sequential and dynamic relationship. He developed the two interrelated theories that are

regarded as the "framework of choice" for researchers in educational psychology who study motivation in school (Graham & Williams, 2009, p. 11) and provide the foundation for this study. His attribution theories of intra and interpersonal motivation have explained how teacher relationships with students impact their own behaviors and could create positive or negative outcomes for students. To completely comprehend these theories and their impact on this study, it is important to understand how Weiner's attribution theory is divided into components called causal dimensions: locus of causality, stability and controllability. These dimensions are the basis and framework for research in attribution theory and provide structure for analysis.

The first of these dimensions is locus of causality which defines the attribute as an internal or external factor (Stupnisky, DaNeils, & Haynes, 2008). Some examples of internal factors can include self-efficacy, intelligence, motivation, and knowledge about strategies (Law, 2009). When teachers' (as well as students') perceptions of these internal factors are either low or high, student academic and behavioral outcomes reflect these perceptions whether correct or not. External factors can include student relationships with peers and teachers, teacher perceptions and beliefs in students, classroom curriculum and environment, and school climate.

The stability dimension defines an attribute as stable or unstable (Banks & Woolfson, 2008; Graham & Williams, 2009). The stability dimension provides quasi-measureable factors which can be compared to teacher or student perceptions. An example of a stable factor might be intelligence, because after individuals have reached a certain age, psychologists generally view it as crystallized and resistant to change over time. Conversely, an unstable factor would be effort because it is changeable. How a

person feels, the time of day, day of the week, and interest in a subject can play into degree of effort. When a student fails, both the teacher and student will evaluate the stability of the perceived cause for the failure. With cause is assumed to be stable, such as low intelligence, the teacher and student will expect failure again. If failure is attributed to low effort, they will expect improved performance with greater effort.

The last causal dimension, controllability, may have the most impact on student achievement (Graham & Williams, 2009). Controllability is whether or not a person believes that he or she can influence or change the attribute. For instance, teachers may or may not believe they can control a student's effort towards a task. Even though the attribute may be changeable, the teacher may believe that it is not and develops the belief that there is no way to influence the student's outcome because it is internal to the student and beyond their control. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive and there is overlap in that the same attribute may be categorized across the different dimensions. For example, intelligence may be viewed as internal to the student, stable, and beyond the teacher's control. Alternatively, level of effort may be seen as internal to the student, but unstable and somewhat within the teacher's control.

Weiner's attribution theory suggests that students' future successes or failures are based on the outcome attributions (Banks & Woolfson, 2008) of teachers. On the interpersonal level, the way a teacher perceives the causes of student outcomes will correspond with their responses reflecting sympathy, incentives, and/or punishment that in turn, can positively or negatively affect student motivation (Weiner, 2010). Even with egalitarian values, teacher perceptions related to factors such as race/ethnicity vary, whereas highly differentiating teachers saw African American and Hispanic students as

lower achieving than White students (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). McKown and Weinstein further indicated that when teachers' perceptions of students were biased based on race/ethnicity, the results contribute up to 0.38 standard deviations of the year end achievement gap. Supporting this research, Rubie-Davies (2010) found a positive association between the perceptions of high expectancy teachers and high achieving students. These students demonstrated large gains in learning and positive self-perception. What is most concerning is when teachers underestimate versus overestimate the ability of students. Zhou and Urhahne (2013) found that when the ability of students is underestimated by teachers, students used maladaptive patterns of attributions such as focusing on their perceived lack of ability, whereas, students whose abilities were overestimated did not. Moreover, maladaptive patterns most often occurs when students attributed their failure to uncontrollable, stable, and internal factors (Banks & Woolfson, 2008; Kistner, Osborne & LeVerrier, 1988). Banks and Woolfson (2008) found that students who believed they were low achievers also believed they had less control over their performance outcomes. Specifically, underestimated students such as students of color, are more likely to attribute success to chance and less to ability, negatively impacting their overall motivation (Zhou & Urhahne, 2013). Overestimated students were not nearly as impacted by motivational factors such as test anxiety, self-concept and lower expectancy of success.

Studies have consistently shown that most students attribute their success to controllable factors such as effort, and failure with uncontrollable factors such as ability (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Additionally, literature has indicated that students, including certain populations such as those with diverse learning needs, make the most progress

when they attribute their failures to changeable and controllable factors (Kistner et al., 1988). What this means is that students who may be described as low achievers or low in ability can make significant progress and have positive outcomes when they define the cause of their failure or success as being variable and manageable.

As noted, when failure occurs individuals tend to maintain a self-enhancing bias and search for causes that are external to themselves. At this point, Weiner's attribution theory of interpersonal motivation is induced. Typically, teachers tend to view two main causes for poor student performance on an activity: lack of effort or low aptitude. If a teacher perceives a student's failure as a result of effort, the result would be an unsympathetic response. On the other hand, if the failure is a considered the result of low ability or aptitude, the response is usually sympathy. Since students are able to perceive teachers' attitudes through their emotional and physical presentation, students may begin to understand how their success or failure is understood by their teacher. Students who receive sympathy, attribute failure to lack of ability, whereas, students who receive reprimand see the cause of failure as a lack of effort (Graham & Williams, 2009). There can be unexpected consequences from teachers' positive emotional displays. Surprisingly, Graham and Williams (2009) found that praise is sometimes a contributor to negative outcome for students. Students who are praised by a teacher for effort rather than ability (e.g., "You tried really hard on that problem") may interpret it as a judgment of their own poor ability. Achievement is an artifact of effort or ability, therefore, teacher praise for effort can easily be seen as compensatory for ability.

The reaction of the teacher is a manifestation of his or her perception of what caused the failure. Furthermore, the perceptions of these attributions are categorized

across three dimensions that are anchored by opposite descriptors (e.g., stable vs. unstable). Depending on the perceptions of teachers, these perceptions can lead to significantly different behaviors or "differential treatment" towards the students. Differential treatment can impact student academic and social outcomes in either a positive or negative direction.

Differential Treatment of Students
by Teachers

Beliefs, expectations, and perceptions lead to differential treatment of students. Whether teachers attribute failure to effort or ability has significant implications for their behaviors in the classroom. Graham and Williams (2009) pointed out teachers are unsympathetic towards and punish the lazy and unmotivated student, while they are sympathetic and offer support to those who they perceive as having low aptitude. Unfortunately, both of these reactions can result in negative consequences. Punishment frequently leads to a fracture in the relationship between the teacher and the student which can lead to negative academic and behavioral outcomes (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker et al., 2007; Garner & Waajid, 2008). For the students who receive sympathy, while sometimes this may be perceived as support, this reaction by the teacher can also inadvertently suggest to the student that he or she has low ability (Graham & Williams, 2009). In all, both punitive and sympathetic reactions can promote a climate and classroom conditions that do not encourage positive academic and behavioral outcomes.

Weiner's Theory and the Current
Study

Several specific types of factors have been attributed to student outcomes. The success and failure of students are not attributable to student factors alone, but also to

teacher factors. Specifically, teacher beliefs, perceptions, and relationships with students can significantly impact student achievement (Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2008; Rubie-Davies, 2007). While teachers are not able to control all factors related to students, beliefs, perceptions, and relationships with students are largely considered controllable by the teacher. However, it has been suggested that teacher perceptions typically focus on the internal, unchangeable, uncontrollable student attributes as being for a cause for their failure. Teachers tend to view students as and failing because of innate, uncontrollable deficits (Klassen & Lynch, 2007).

Weiner's attribution theory of inter and intrapersonal motivation provides a framework that I have used to understand how elementary school teachers' beliefs and perceptions about students influences their practices in the classroom. Specific interest was directed toward examining teacher beliefs, perceptions, and practices as related to diverse student groups with variations in SES, race, or ability.

Summary

Academic achievement and behavioral success of all students is controlled by several factors, however, no school-based factor plays a bigger role than that of the teacher. Several aspects of a teacher's education or experience have been eliminated as factors correlated to student achievement and behavioral outcomes. What has not been explored in depth is how a teacher's beliefs, perceptions and expectations drive impacts his or her practices in the classroom as related to student-teacher relationships, instructional decisions, and classroom discipline.

These elements of the educational process can be studied using attribution theory as a foundation. Teachers may neglect how their practices impact student outcomes and ascribe the success and failure to causes such as a lack of motivation, race/ethnicity, poverty, and disabilities of the student. When we can understand what drives teachers' decisions in their classrooms about their curriculum, instruction, and environment, we will be better suited to provide the necessary preparation and feedback that teachers need to improve their practice for all students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The present study used qualitative methodology to understand what teachers believe to be influential factors on achievement motivation of students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities in the classroom and the classroom conditions that promote or prevent student achievement. By examining teacher perceptions and experiences related to student motivation, I gained a rich and deep understanding of the teacher decision making process in classroom practices. The results of this proposed study has provided important information about the teacher-student dynamic as it relates to attribution theory which could have implications for teacher preparation and education (Weiner, 1972). This chapter presents the qualitative paradigm and phenomenological process including study design, research methodology, and ethical considerations.

Philosophical Assumptions

The origins of qualitative research are philosophically derived from phenomenology while also being rooted in several academic disciplines including social sciences, humanities, and interdisciplinary studies (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006). Lichtman (2013) defined qualitative research as the systematic investigation of social phenomena and human behavior and interaction (p. 4). Qualitative research is systematic allowing researchers to scientifically examine phenomenon with minimal disturbance to the environment being

observed. The overall goal of qualitative research is to understand, describe, and discover meaning in human behavior and the explanations that direct it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Furthermore, qualitative research allows for the investigation of how and why phenomenon occurs instead of just what, where, and when it happens (Filstead, 1970). Discovering the how and why for this study was appropriate because it was important to determine the factors influencing the decisions teachers make to support students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities in the classroom. It was also important to discern the background influence that drive these decisions so teacher education programs are more informed and can provide programming that guides discourse that aligns with best practices.

The guiding question for this proposed study involved understanding teacher perceptions and experiences which are by their nature difficult to quantify. Thus, through qualitative inquiry, I was able to evaluate teacher perceptions with depth and breadth. By employing qualitative methods for data collection including observation, interview, and artifacts, I was able to capture the complexity and details of each participant's perceptions and experiences which apprised each of the specific components in the guiding research question. The level of information ascertained through qualitative methods compared to typical quantitative methods such as structured surveys, or assessments allowed me to examine and define the dynamic and multifaceted nature of teacher perceptions and understand teacher attributions towards their own and their students' behaviors. This information may have important implications for pre-service teacher training, may improve the teacher-student dynamic thus reducing disciplinary

actions on students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities, and possibly drive future research related to teacher attribution.

Phenomenology

This study used a phenomenological approach which was designed to describe and grasp the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have been a part of or experienced a specific phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013). Phenomenology, from an epistemological perspective emphasizes revealing meaning rather than developing a theory (Flood, 2010). Thus, phenomenology was relevant to this study since the actions of humans (teachers) can reveal meaning through their instruction and classroom practices. In this study, it was necessary to ascertain new along with familiar lived experiences to characterize the entire picture of the specific phenomenon (Flood, 2010 p. 10). An interpretative narrative phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2012) was used to create a universal understanding of teacher perceptions under the principle of attributional theory (Weiner, 1972) specific to student motivation.

Phenomenology as a research method was first introduced by a German mathematician, Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2014) as a philosophy and methodology that determines how individuals perceive and constitute personal experiences (Creswell, 2007; Gorgi, 2005). The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is that it characterizes the perceptions of many participants about a phenomenon (Carel, 2011) in a manner which is systematic and rigorous when compared to other qualitative methods that focus on the reality of an experience with one participant. Van der Mescht (2004) wrote "Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of empirical phenomenology is the fact that it focuses on the meaning human beings make of their experience" (p. 2).

Speziale and Carpenter (2007) defined phenomenology as a rigorous descriptive research method to examine phenomena through several participants' perceptions with the objective of understanding "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000). Phenomenological research directs investigators to focus on participants' perceptions of lived experiences rather than the reality (Burns & Grove, 1999) and then to examine these data to identify similarities among participants and to derive main themes surrounding the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

Constructivism

When a researcher engages in a new study, he or she must have a paradigm which is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157) as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action." For this proposed study, a constructivist perspective was utilized because it incorporates a larger scope of vision that is varied and multiple and allows for the recognition of each participant as a unique contributor to the complexity of the whole perception of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). No two participants presented the same meaning of phenomena since individuals' perceptions are based on their own experiences and observations. Therefore, having the collective perspective of many participants allowed me to create an understanding from various experiences using an ongoing and conscious approach (Crotty, 1998). The collective experiences and perceptions of participants were aggregated to create an understanding of the general theme encompassing all participants (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). This is the essence of constructivism which does not lessen an individual's perception of a lived phenomenon but aims to understand it (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this study was based on the constructivist theory because each of the participants constructed his or her own meaning

as related to working with students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities which directed me in understanding their experience.

Reflexivity

Researchers are inherently biased by their own experiences and knowledge which need to be set aside to prevent interference with the interpretation and characterization of the phenomenological experiences and perceptions of the study participants (Creswell, 2014). Recognizing beliefs, perceptions, and experiences that can bias the research and setting them aside is a difficult yet necessary technique known as bracketing, (Merriam, 2009). Based on Patton's (2002) description, I used bracketing to identify my assumptions and biases and monitor my interview to ensure that my past experiences had limited influence on the participants' responses to questions. The key phrases were reviewed for revelations associated with the research questions and identified as recurring themes from the key phrases. I incorporated bracketing into my study by maintaining fidelity towards the scripted questions and transcribing the interviews. As a compulsory precursor to my research, I detail my background, relevant lived experiences, and knowledge of the phenomenon below.

Research Stance

As a teacher and instructor over the past 15 years, I have always been passionate about instructing and helping all students. However, my dedication especially lies with those who struggle to learn and/or have been placed into disadvantaged situations that impact their ability to learn. My first experience propelling me in this direction occurred before I ever set foot in a classroom as a certified teacher.

While I was an undergraduate student, I volunteered as a tutor at a youth detention facility constituting mostly minority and very low SES male students. I learned very quickly about the academic, economic, and life struggles of youth from disparate populations. At the facility, I worked with males aged 12 to 18 years who came from backgrounds involving severe poverty, abuse, neglect, and poor health. Most, if not all, were academically delayed or grossly behind as was clear by their inability to complete simple academic tasks. My first day at the facility, I worked with a particular student who was approximately 13 years old. We worked one-on-one in the hallway using a deck of cards with simple words on them such as "was" and "there." The student began looking at the words and writing them on a piece of paper instead of reading them aloud. When I asked him to read the word, he paused and struggled to determine the word. His strife and sense of failure in trying to read such simple words broke my heart. I felt an enormous amount of compassion and immediate drive to want to help him learn and support him. This experience was pivotal for me because it identified for me something I was very passionate about, the education of students who struggle to learn, whether due to internal or external factors. I then changed my major as an undergraduate to pursue graduate school and become a special education teacher.

As a special education teacher for youth who have significant emotional disabilities at the middle school level, my job requires that I work with a diverse population of students. Further, I must collaborate with other teachers to develop and plan for the methods, practices, and ideologies that have the greatest success in engaging these students in the regular classroom. In this time I have gained a lot of experience and

knowledge as it relates to the teacher-student dynamic relevant to the guiding research question of this study.

For this study, I acknowledged personal experience and knowledge I have developed in order to grasp the intricacies of a phenomenon at it roots (Creswell, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In essence, I attempted to understand "what" people experience and "how" they experience it in a phenomenological approach. My interest and passion about this research comes from my belief that teachers' beliefs, perceptions and experiences dictate what and how they understand students' motivation and, in turn, how they teach in their classroom. If I am to help students receive the instruction and support they need, then I first need to understand the factors influencing teachers' instructional practices. In full disclosure, I have three current beliefs relevant to this research that are based on my personal experience and knowledge. First, I believe that teachers are unaware of how their own, their students', and the interactions of the different cultures influence their teaching practices. Recently, a teacher with more than 30 years of experience was asked not to return to the school where she was substituting because students were able to cite specific and verifiable racist comments and actions that the teacher exhibited in the classroom. This teacher had previously worked at my school, and vehemently denied that she was racist. The students (including a majority group student), immediately noticed the negative impact of the teacher's actions and the degree to which her statements were discrepant between white children and students of color.

Second, I believe that teacher preparation programs do not provide the necessary teacher training to avoid negative outcomes for students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. Seemingly, most teacher training programs focus on

content driven courses versus pedagogical courses that outline instructional skills and tools for teachers that would allow them to more positively impact student achievement. Having taught at the university level, I can say with assurance that some teacher preparation programs do not provide more than one course on classroom management.

Lastly, I believe that teachers are unaware of their teaching practices in light of research advocating for change. Any time change is promoted within a school system, the system and those within it seem to react in ways that create barriers to those who promote change, causing them to remain "in line" with the status quo. In a recent event, teachers at my school were asked to journal an additional 15 minutes a month in order to work towards better equity practices; immediately after school, a standup teachers union meeting was held to contest the time that was "outside of the contract." Sadly, these teachers were happy to go out and support bond issues that were outside of contract time. It seems disturbing to me that teachers were willing to go beyond their contracts to support the acquisition of funding but not to directly support students. I acknowledged these beliefs and remained aware of them so that they do not interfere with data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

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

Guiding Questions

The objective of this proposed research was to examine teachers' beliefs, perceptions of, and experiences with students of color, students living in poverty and those with disabilities. Teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences were examined as a potential source of influence on their classroom practices. Classroom practices were defined for this study as rapport building with students, differentiation, defining rules and

procedures, and development of curriculum. The following guiding questions support this inquiry:

What are public school teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences about student motivation among students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities and how does this influence their practices in the classroom?

> Q1   What are teachers' perceptions of what contributes or facilitates success and failure for students in their classroom?
>
> Q2   What are teachers' perceptions of student academic motivation?
>
> Q3   What decisions related to (a) content instruction, (b) classroom discipline, and (c) student interaction are made by teachers?
>
> Q4   How do teachers perceive their relationships with students?

Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR)

In order to investigate these questions, I used CQR, a method of team analysis designed to gain a multi-perspectival view of the data and to reduce the potential for researcher bias. This qualitative research method was first introduced in 1997 by Hill et al., and further elucidated in a follow up article in 2005 where CQR is defined as:

> The essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in semi-structured data collection techniques (typically in interviews) allow for the collection of consistent data across individuals as well as a more in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one auditor to check the work of the primary team of judges and minimize the effects of groupthink in the primary team; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-analyses in the data analysis. (p. 196)

Consensual qualitative research methodology provides a systematic approach in qualitative research to gain an understanding of, in this case, teacher perceptions of student motivation based on a small sample size (Hill et al., 2005). While a small sample

size can be limiting in other methods, CQR includes a multi-stage consensus process

involving three or more researchers who engage in repeated discussions of their

individual interpretations of the findings over a couple of months in order to develop

cross-cutting themes in the data. To ensure fidelity towards the CQR process, these

themes are then reviewed by an external auditor to ensure that the research team was able

to identify the main elements of the data. CQR operates in manner that is complementary

to phenomenology in that both incorporate the use of open coding in the development of

themes. This research utilized several data collection tools to facilitate open ended

responses and observations (see section Data Collection below).

Research Team

Two research assistants, one qualitative faculty researcher, and I comprised the

research team for this study under the CQR paradigm. My role on the research team was

as primary data collector (only interviewer) and qualitative data analyst and the three

other research team members were experienced qualitative analysts and coders, who,

along with me, was responsible for analyzing the artifacts, observation, and interview

data obtained from the study. Prior to data analysis, I met with research team members to

outline the data analysis process and review *en vivo* coding (live recordings). Each

researcher independently coded the data and then met as a team to gaining consensus of

domains and core themes.

District Participants

General education teachers from a suburban school district were invited to

participate in this study. The Internal Review Board at the University of Northern

Colorado approved the study as exempt under human research classifications. Permission

was granted from the Superintendent of the school district prior to contacting any of the potential participants for the study (see Ethical Considerations below). The contact information for each of the four elementary schools in the district along with the roster of teachers at each school were acquired from the faculty portal, which I had access to as a district employee as a school psychologist intern. During the time of the study, I served in all of the elementary schools in the district.

Setting. This study was conducted in a diverse, suburban school district located northeast of Denver, Colorado. The suburb has a population of approximately 11,000 people and is comprised of mostly Anglo and Hispanic/Latino populations. The population living within the school district has a poverty level much higher than the proportion of those living in poverty in the state. The chief economy in 2014 was in production, transportation, and materials and agriculture.

The school district has eight schools, four of which are elementary. There were 101 elementary school teachers working with the approximately 1,400 students in the 4 elementary schools covering grades 1 through 6 in 2013-2014. The three schools with grades 1 through 4 were all about the same size in student population whereas the school with grades 5 and 6 is 43% larger. Per data from the Colorado Department of Education, the four elementary schools were similar in population served. At all four elementary schools, the student population was majority Hispanic/Latino however other minorities are represented including Black/African American and Native American/American Indian. A majority of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Other learning support staff in the elementary schools include fourteen special education teachers (including English Language Learner) and three school counselors. District-wide,

teachers are required to have a four-year degree in teaching and hold a Colorado teaching license. Each elementary school follows the curriculum developed and adopted by the district. Permission to conduct this study was provided by the school superintendent and University of Northern Colorado, Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

Participants. In this study, a two sampling structure was utilized comprising a convenience sampling method to select four elementary schools in the district from which a sample of teachers were selected using a criterion-based purposive sampling method. The criterion for participants was that they were a (a) general education teacher in grades first through sixth in one of the four elementary schools in the school district, (b) had been in the district at least one year, and (c) whose classes represented children from diverse ethnic backgrounds (making up approximately one third of the class).

These criteria were selected to ensure somewhat similar experiences in teaching practices among the participants and so that participants would have general familiarity with the curriculum used in that particular district and grade level. Having access to students who represent many different cultural backgrounds may influence teachers' approaches to students (Cole, 2013). Therefore, participants who were currently teaching culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse students were the focus on this study.

The participants ($n = 9$) represented three of the four elementary schools in the district and were distributed evenly across grades (2 first grade teachers, 1 second grade, 1 third grade, 2 fourth grade, and 3 fifth grade teachers). Participants were 78% female ($n = 7$), 100% White, non-Hispanic ($n = 9$), and 89% ($n = 8$) had a Master's degree in an education related field. The participant's length of time teaching ranged from two to twenty years. See Table 1 below for description of participants.

Table 1

Participant Educational Demographic Information

Pseudo-name	Gender	Time in school position (years)	Degrees	Major	Teaching Licensure
Charla	Female	12	BS MA	Elementary Education Curriculum and Instruction	Professional: 1st-6th grades
Elsie	Female	13	AA AA BA MA	Elementary Education Equine Management Speech Communication K-12 General Elementary Education	Professional: Not reported
Gayle	Female	15	BA MA	Elementary Education Middle Level Mathematics	Professional: K-6th
Harry	Male	2	BA MA	Communication Elementary Education	Initial: K-6th
Heidi	Female	10	MA MA	English Language Arts Linguistically Diverse Education	Professional: Not reported
Louise	Female	2	BA	Interdisciplinary Studies	Initial: Elementary Education

Table 1 (continued)

Pseudo-name	Gender	Time in school position (years)	Degrees	Major	Teaching Licensure
Nancy	Female	10	BA	Social Science/Elementary Education	Professional: K-6th
			MA	Arts in Education	
Neil	Male	1.5	BFA	Painting	Professional: Elementary Education, Linguistically Diverse, K-12th Art
			BA	K-12 Art Education	
			MA	Literacy Language Culture	
Sharon	Female	20	BA	Elementary Education	Professional: K-6th
			BS	Earth Science	
			MA	Diverse Learners	

Note. AA = Associates of Art; BA = Bachelors of Art; BFA = Bachelors of Fine Arts; BS = Bachelors of Science; MA = Masters of Art; MS = Masters of Science

Data Collection

As part of the qualitative data collection for this study, multiple methods were employed including (a) demographic questionnaires (specific to the school and teacher), (b) two classroom observations (one before and one after the interview), (c) semi-structured and open-ended teacher participant interviews, (d) artifacts from the classroom (e.g., lesson plans), and (e) Future Directions Likert Scale completed by each teacher participant to inform on the understanding of role of teacher beliefs, perceptions, and experiences on student motivation. Several data sources were incorporated in this study to gather a deep understanding the phenomenon using a method called triangulation (Creswell, 2012). This multi-modal data collected using the means above were triangulated to enhance the certainty in the data and the findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

To uphold rigor in this study, the final sample size was determined based on the quality and repeatability of the data collected from the four tools above. Repeatability of data across participants without additional gains in information related to the phenomena is saturation, which is determined based on the quality of the data and information gathered (Morse, 1994). In this study, there was 423 minutes of interview audio recording which transcribed to 102 pages of text available for coding. In addition, there was 702 minutes of video recording in each participant's classroom, eight provided artifacts, and nine completed Likert-scale questionnaires. I used the video recordings to supplement my notes taken during the observations to fill in any details that were missed.

After obtaining UNC Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the recruitment phase was initiated using the roster of teachers from each participating elementary school. In the initial recruitment e-mail (see Appendix B), fifteen potential participants from the four elementary schools were contacted with a formal letter of recruitment and a copy of the IRB approval. After the initial email solicitation, potential participants had ten days to respond before a second email was sent followed by another ten days and a third and final email. In the first recruitment wave, five participants were recruited and ten were considered non-responders after three contact attempts (three emails). A second recruitment wave of 12 potential participants were contacted from which four participants were recruited. Potential participants who responded to the initial recruitment email with interest in the study were sent a follow-up email with a request for them to complete a Participant Inclusion Questionnaire (see Appendix C) via email to confirm eligibility. In both recruitment waves there were five potential participants who were interested however were not eligible (time teaching in district was less than one year). Participants who were eligible had an initial meeting with me, as lead researcher, to inform the participant of the study, complete an informed consent form (see Appendix D), and answer any questions.

Demographic Questionnaires

All participants completed a Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix E) prior to the in-person interview. The questionnaire gathered information about the participant and school that could be relevant to the phenomenon (teacher practices involving students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities). The demographic information collected included: participant age, race\ethnicity, gender, highest degree

earned and in what field, licensure, prior relevant training, and number of years teaching as well as teaching within this district or school.

Observations (Pre and Post interview)

The next task was to conduct the first of two classroom observations with each taking approximately 30-45 minutes with one occurring prior to the interview and the second after the interview. The full sequence occurred as follows: (a) First observation, (b) Interview with teacher within two to three days of first observation, and (c) Second observation one week after the initial observation. Observing teachers in the classroom setting allowed documentation of content instruction, discipline practices, and student interaction and engagement of the participant. Observations were conducted in the winter (November through January) of an academic year at a time convenient to the participants and myself. The Classroom Observation Guide (see Appendix F) was utilized during each observation to help organize notes and documentations. These were supplemented with information from the video recording of each observation.

While conducting the observations, I situated myself in an area of the classroom that imposed the least distraction to students, but provided me the ability to easily observe the participant. During the observation period, I did not interact with either students or the participant, and did not introduce myself or my purpose to the students. During the observation, I used the TARGET framework to take notes specific to Task, Authority/Autonomy, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time. Jussim et al. (2009) pointed out that the TARGET framework provides information about teacher practices and behaviors that shape motivation and reflect teacher expectations. The second

observation followed the same guidelines and occurred within two weeks after the interview

Semi-Structured\Open-Ended
Interview

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure data capture. Participants were identified in the audio recordings using a pseudonym and only my research advisor, my research assistants, and I had access to the audio recordings and transcriptions for purposes of data analysis. For consistency and confidentiality, I was the only interviewer and observer for the study. The purpose of this task was to acquire data on teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences with students in their classrooms and to better understand how these influence their classroom practices and student interactions. As noted earlier, I employed three research assistants (one graduate student, one professional research assistant with qualitative research experience, and one faculty level researcher with qualitative methods experience).

After the first observation was completed, I contacted participants to schedule the semi-structured\open-ended interviews at their convenience. The semi-structured interview format in this study consisted of a general list of questions to ask each participant, but also allowed for flexibility to ask additional questions to probe responses further. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes and the semi-structured interview guide can be found in Appendix G. During the interview, I engaged participants in a semi-structured discussion using questions based on literature review. The three question areas were in line with the proposed research questions and included six questions which were further probed with questions regarding students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities.

Artifacts

During the first interview, participants were asked to supply at least one artifact that they believed represented him or her as a teacher. These items included lesson plans, unidentified pictures of students' work or projects, discipline policies, and project assignments. I explained to the participants that these would be utilized to supplement data collected during the second observation to better understand how their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences impact their classroom practices. Further discussion occurred upon receipt of the artifacts where teachers were asked to describe how the artifact represented them. This information was included in my field notes from the follow-up interview.

Future Directions Likert Scale/
Questionnaire

To better inform the researchers about teacher perceptions of potential training needs, a brief Future Directions Likert Scale (see Appendix H) was used following the interview. The scale asked whether a participant *Strongly Agreed, Somewhat Agreed, Somewhat Disagreed, or Strongly Disagreed* to questions related to diverse learners. Data obtained from the scale provided information regarding the perceptions of teachers training and future directions of both research and training.

Follow-up Meeting

In order to ensure accuracy, meaning, and clarification, participants were provided the opportunity to review the transcriptions, observational data, and initial codes for accuracy and correct meaning developed by the research team. When asked, most of the participants declined a follow up meeting, however, three of the participants, Sharon, Heidi, and Neil accepted the invitation. The participants indicated that they wanted to

hear about the general findings and provided additional comments that were added into the field notes and ultimately became part of the data. The three research team members also engaged in an overview of the data including looking at the codes and themes. This multi-method approach to data collection using multiple sources allowed for triangulation into common themes and increased the trustworthiness of the findings (Silverman, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

I submitted an exempt application for review to the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research study. As part of that application, I submitted the participant consent form which included all information necessary as part of the protection of human subjects mandate such as (a) preservation of confidentiality (no identifiers collected), (b) permission to record the interview, and (c) participation is voluntary and they can withdraw or end the interview at any time. Each participant read and signed the informed consent form prior to starting the interview. All participants as well as their schools were assigned a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality. Each participant was referred to by his or her pseudonym in the video, audio, and questionnaire. All hard copies of data were stored in a locked file cabinet and electronic files were stored on a password protected folder on a password protected computer. Only I (and my advisor and assistants) had access to the video and audio tapes and transcription notes along with other data. All participants were informed in the consent letters that research assistants would view these tapes. Research assistants only had access to data identified by the pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

The objective of data analysis methods in qualitative research is to find meaning through a process involving multiple steps. These analysis steps are carried out concurrently while data were being collected to determine whether saturation had occurred (Merriam, 2009). The data were organized in Excel sheets by participant to interpret meaning, make comparisons among participants, identify patterns, and determine if there were missing data, a method advocated by Creswell (2012).

In this study there were five sources of data analyzed including (a) photocopies or digital photographs of classroom artifacts, (b) field notes from my classroom observations; (c) audiotape/interview transcripts, (d) anecdotal notes (i.e., notes regarding artifacts and coding), and (e) the future directions Likert-type scale.

Data Coding

During data coding, the research team employed a protocol involving four sequential steps including (a) examining the data, (b) separating data into common topics, (c) naming each topic, d) and analyzing the topics for overlap, and (e) placing into themes. The research team then analyzed the data using methods consistent with e*n vivo* coding as described by Creswell (2007) and the CQR method (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). The research team and I read through the interview transcriptions and observations and separately coded key participant statements in interviews and notes from observations with one to two word phrases that described the data point. These methods in combination helped us develop codes for the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of participants. The research team met to discuss our individual coding and concurred on 29 double word phrase-based codes (see Table 2).

We then began to develop consensual interpretation of major cross cutting themes in our data analysis. The research team then separately reviewed the data codes and developed cross-cutting themes within individuals and then met again to reach a final consensus of overarching themes in these data. The research team used Microsoft Excel software to organize the data codes and themes including code definitions and values.

There were some data that could not be coded because it was not useful or related to the research question or phenomenon, For example, one participant made a statement and when probed further for clarification she said "it is hard to explain" and so the statement was rendered unusable. Other data that did not lend itself to answering the research questions were codes such as childhood experience. When all of the data were finally coded, the codes were placed into broad themes with supporting categories and subcategories based on the coding criteria. Data provided under each of the themes are organized based on the recommendations of Hill et al. (2005) for cross analysis. This recommendation included the use of "frequency of labels" to characterize data. The categories presented by (Hill et. al., 2005) were utilized, *general* when data codes were across all participants, *typical* when data codes were across at least 5 to 7 participants, and *variant* when data codes applied to four or less participants. The frequency labels, "General" and "Typical" are presented in Table 1 in Chapter III. After the codes where placed into a table under the representative themes, with categories and under themes they were aggregated into larger concepts representing six themes and categories identified as general or typical (see Table 3 below) representing what the participants experienced and how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations, or context.

The six themes were *Connection, Structured Support, Teacher Approach, Self-Regulation,* (perceived student) *Desire for Learning, and Family Support* (of student).

Gaining Consensus

In order to gain the best decisions regarding the data and a good approximation of the truth of the research, consensus was reached by the team regarding the domains and themes extrapolated from the data. The team was free to openly discuss disagreements and secondary questions requiring members to have good interpersonal skills and a mutual respect. Because there was generally equal status among the research team members, we were able to offer input, disagree, and handle topics or power differential in decision making. As noted above, any disagreements were discussed until resolved. If a consensus had not been reached, the team had decided that the majority consensus would be accepted and noted, however consensus was reached in all discussions. Once consensus was achieved for the overarching themes, the team met again to discuss the categories within each theme to reduce overlap and redundancy and ensure each category was distinct within the themes.

<center>**Trustworthiness and Rigor**</center>

Qualitative research methods include measures of study trustworthiness that indicate the quality of the work and rigor in the data collection similar to statistical measures (validity and reliability) in quantitative research. These measures include: credibility, dependability, and transferability and each were completed to ensure trustworthiness while conducting the study.

Table 2

Category Frequency Counts with Coding Criteria by Six Themes

Categories	Frequency	Category	Coding Criteria
Teacher Approach			
Communicative	9	General	Teachers communicate with students/parents promote success
The grind	8	General	Teaching is tough and a struggle but rewarding
Open-minded	9	General	Teachers are open minded in order to grow and help students
Learning belief	7	Typical	Belief that all people can learn
Jack-of-all-Trades	5	Typical	Teachers must be skilled in many areas to do variety of things
Content Love	5	Typical	Love the subject you teach
Unpredictable	4	Variant	Teachers don't always know how instruction/ strategies will work out
Connection			
School Support	7	General	Teachers who are supportive, communicative and caring are successful
Life-Guide	6	Typical	Teacher want to guide children
Childhood Experience	6	Typical	Teachers chose their career because of childhood experiences
School Connection	1	Variant	Student motivation is determined by school connection

Table 2 (continued)

Categories	Frequency	Category	Coding Criteria
Structured Support			
Ability Groupings	9	General	Used as a technique to meet the needs of lower and higher students
Supported Learning	9	General	Students who struggle need step by step, small group, slow paced guided practice and instruction
Structured	9	General	Teachers are structured in their instruction and discipline
Challenged Learning	6	Typical	Thriving students need independence and challenging work
Differentiation	7	Typical	Teachers need to understand learners and how to reach them with instruction and content
Prescribed Curriculum	4	Variant	Curriculum is given to teachers and expected to be completed without ability to modify it
Gender	3	Variant	Differences in boys and girls impact their ability to learn focus and behave
Student Self-Regulation			
Student Self-Regulations	9	General	Students who can regulate their attention/behavior are successful
Focused Attention	9	Gen	Student success is based on their ability to focus and attend
Cognitively Organized	5	Typical	Students success is based on level of mental organization and material organization
ELL	3	Variant	Students who are learning English struggle with learning

Table 2 (continued)

Categories	Frequency	Category	Coding Criteria
Desired Learning			
Student desire	9	General	Students who are successful desire learning
Effort	8	General	Student success is based on if they try or not
Outcomes	5	Typical	Students are motivate by rewards and consequences
Disabilities	3	Variant	Students with disabilities struggle academically/behaviorally
Family Support			
Financial Status	9	General	Dictates students background knowledge and family stability
Background knowledge	5	Typical	The more background knowledge a student has the more successful they can be
Support System	3	Variant	Family structure and support dictate level of student success

Table 3

Consensual Qualitative Themes and Categories

Theme	General	Typical
Teacher-related themes and categories		
Connection	Building Rapport with students	
	Life Guide Tools	
Teacher Approach	Teacher Flexibility	Passion for content
	Communication	
Structured Support	Classroom Expectations	
	Intentional Student Grouping	
	Deliberate Adaptations and Instruction	
Student-related themes and categories		
Student Self-Regulation	Student Attention	
	Situational Awareness	
Perception of Student Desired Learning	Student Effort	Student Confidence
	Student Excellence	
Family Support of Student	Parent Value in Education	
	Economic Support	
	Stability In Student Family	

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research requires establishing that the results are believable from the perspective of the participant. For this study I employed three methods (i.e., triangulation) that approximate internal consistency, or that the "true" experience of the participant is consistent with the experience described by the researchers (Merriam, 2009). I increased credibility by keeping a research journal which documented my reflections on the subject matter and the data collection process including interviews and observations. This study incorporated the use of triangulation to collect data from multiple participants and multiple sites, using multiple methods at different times. After data analysis I used member checking (Creswell, 2007) by emailing participants and Excel sheet with a formatted listing of their individual-level themes derived and the six cross-cutting include the subcategories and related coding criteria. I asked them to review their individual-level themes and related coding criteria to ensure we had portrayed their perspective accurately and whether they had further comments or data that provided additional support for the themes or categories. Participants were also asked to review the cross-cutting themes to provide feedback on whether the themes represented their global understanding of teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of student motivation. I did offer participants the option to review this data face-to-face which three participants accepted. Most of the participants did not request any additional meetings or felt it was necessary to provide feedback. Two participants provided clarifications. For example, Sharon indicated that even though her interview revolved quite a bit around relationships she "would agree with the themes. [However], I would also say that I hadn't thought as much about how I can control student self-regulation."

Dependability

Dependability is similar to credibility in that it aims to confirm the similarities found in data. Triangulation is used to confirm dependability along with an audit trail. An audit trail is a detailed description of the data collection methods, datasets, data dictionaries, code books, and thematic decision making process (Merriam, 2009) that allowed an outside researcher to mimic the research study. The key components of the audit trail for this study included: (a) study proposal, (b) demographic questionnaire, (c) interview audio recordings, transcription, and notes, (d) observation video, transcription, and notes, (e) anecdotal notes and researcher log, (f) code book, code databases, (g) member checking notes, (h) themes, and (i) bracketed personal perspectives.

Transferability

Transferability is equivocal to "generalizability" in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). Transferability is heavily dependent on the audiences' interpretation of the findings and how detailed the description of the research including codes and themes (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). I used a comprehensive description of the study setting, participants, and code development and thematic descriptions to interpret teacher perceptions related to student motivation and their classroom practices. The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize to outside populations but to present meaning to the perceptions of these nine teachers and their work with students, with special emphasis on the perceptions and practices as related to students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed the methodology for this research study designed to examine the influence of teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences translate to their classroom practices with students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. In addition to the methodology, the rigor of the study has been detailed in order to establish the trustworthiness of the resulting findings. By developing a deeper understanding of how the attributions teachers make towards their students affects their teaching, a curriculum for teacher education and training can be developed to help build teachers awareness around engaging students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. Using a constructivist phenomenological research design allowed me to examine and understand teacher perceptions of their experiences with students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Every day teachers make decisions about classroom practices based on their beliefs and perceptions. The outcomes of these decisions can facilitate students' entry onto trajectories aimed at long term success or failure. In order to shape a better understanding of teacher beliefs and perceptions in rural Colorado, a multi-modal data collection strategy was employed. Nine volunteer teacher participants (herein: *participants*) from three elementary schools participated in interviews, two observations, and one follow-up meeting over the course of three months. During this time, the participants also provided one or more artifacts from their classrooms. Two brief questionnaires were administered to gather demographic data and perceived need for additional training. The results of these findings are detailed below and present a more comprehensive understanding of teacher beliefs and attributions about students in general, and specifically those who represent diverse ethnic, ability, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Qualitative Data

Interview data, observations, and artifacts that were collected, coded, and analyzed, as delineated in Chapter III, producing six overarching themes presented in this chapter in a dichotomous framework under the conceptual structure of Weiner's attribution theory of motivation; *Teacher Related Themes (Intrapersonal Factors)* which in this study tended to describe those factors that teachers viewed as specific to

their own efforts, activities and decisions. Alternatively, *Student Related Themes (Interpersonal Factors)* referred to teachers' perceptions as related to student characteristics or situations that were external to themselves. The Teacher Related Themes were *Connection, Structured Support, and Teacher Approach* and are presented first followed by the Student Related Themes which included (student) *Self-Regulation,* (perceived student) *Desire for Learning, and Family Support* (of student).

Teacher Approach

The participants described characteristics they believed exemplified what it means to be a teacher and how they approached education for all students, regardless of student backgrounds or characteristics. This theme is the first one presented because it seemed to represent the overarching beliefs of participants as related to the skills and characteristics needed by teachers before entering the classroom. Three categories were identified under this broad theme. General categories under this theme included teacher flexibility and communication, while love of content reflected a typical category.

Teacher Flexibility

The first general category under the theme of Teacher Approach was teacher flexibility. Participants indicated that because the outcomes of classroom interaction and instruction were so unpredictable, they needed to be able to adapt their thinking about students and to be open to learning from others to advance their practices. Koutrouba (2012) indicated that when teachers are unable to change their thinking, they are less likely to modify their strategies in favor of more effective ones. When Sharon was asked to described her teaching using the title of a book or movie, her response reflected the

uncertainty of outcomes and the importance of adapting her thinking to make adjustments

when working with students. Her response was:

> "The Unpredictable" because I really don't know. I am one of those that think so this is just such a good idea and I just go with it and it might completely blow up in my face. I mean I truly never know from week to week. I can make plans. I can make all the plans you want me to make doesn't mean I'm going to stick to them because I don't want to be boring or be bored. And I don't want the kids to be bored. So we went straight from autobiography straight to commercials because it's something totally different. It's unpredictable around here. You never know what we're going to do.

Elsie had a similar response when asked the same question. Her response was

"'Trial and Error of [teacher's name]' because if I try things and if it doesn't work, I will

say 'scratch that' and need to try something new." It appeared to me that the participants

believed they were continually evolving, had capacity for adaptation, and had made

adjustments on the spot if necessary to help students be successful. Elsie continued by

stating:

> A teacher should always be flexible. A teacher should always look at the individual child and their needs. . . . A teacher should always be learning, changing, adapting to what the students need because each class is different, each student is different, there's different needs.

Even though all of the participants recognized a level of unpredictability in their

classroom, they seemed to also suggest that the risk can be enjoyable and challenging in a

positive way. As Heidi stated:

> Adventure [would be the name of my book], because adventure is risk. You take a risk, you have fun. You don't know what to expect but you also kind of have a perspective of your adventure. I think teaching is the same way. You don't always know what is going to happen but at the same time you expect it to be fun

Participants specified that their adaptations may need to occur based on typical everyday

interruptions to schedules and student needs. Elsie was observed providing specific

feedback to a male student of color who had missed the previous day because he was out

sick. She specifically detailed the assignments he had missed and what he needed to complete in order to catch up with the rest of the class. "You don't need to do your daily oral reading, but you need to read these two books (holds books up for the student) and another one (book) of your choice." By taking this unplanned time to speak with this student, Elsie was able to balance supporting this student who was behind without it taking away time dedicated to the entire class. She also quickly modified expectations to highlight the most important outcomes she expected (i.e., reading three books).

The participants perceived themselves as being more thoughtful about differences between students and learning styles because of their flexibility and ability to make adjustments in their classroom practices. Nancy provided her personal reflection by stating:

> Teach like you like to be taught. I guess that's my biggest thing is that I know how I am as a learner and how I learn best. I know not all people learn that particular way. It's made me more cognizant of how different people learn and I appreciate that when I go into a meeting. That it's not just going to be customized to how "teacher's name" learns. I've learned that I want to learn in a multitude of ways because sometimes I can understand the information better if I'm being shown it a different way. When I was growing up, that was never an option. You have to learn in this one way. I really like that there is choice and that and that there's different modalities that are being presented.

After that statement, Nancy echoed what other participants had said in their interviews, indicating that teachers need to not only reflect, but learn to be more open-minded and flexible by collaborating with fellow educators.

> The best teachers are the ones who learn from others and reflect on their own teaching. If you remain stagnant or closed-minded then you're really not seeing possibilities that are out there. In today's world, it's always changing. You really need to have a support system. At least I do within my school, where we can bounce ideas off of one another and share activities and what's working for one kid isn't working for this kid. So what are you doing and just doing a lot of dialoguing.

Heidi supported this statement when she expressed that, "I think we can all learn from each other and we can learn about the students here." This was supported in her actions because during her interview, we were interrupted by another teacher interested in collaborating with her to support several students who were in both of their classes. Heidi responded favorably to the request which made it clear to me that her words represented her actions.

From the interviews and observations, it appeared to me that the participants perceived flexibility and open-mindedness as a way to handle the unpredictability of students and to meet their diverse needs in the classroom. The unpredictable nature of the classroom did not seem to cause discomfort in the participants. It seemed more like an enjoyable challenge and also seemed to help promote teachers' ability to deal with student differences.

Communication

The participants' expressed beliefs in the importance of communicating well with students and their families. Strong communication was perceived to be critical so that families, especially those with diverse learners, could build a good working relationship with the school, could better understand what was going on at school, and so families could learn how to support their children as learners. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2011) indicated that communication is the life blood of every school and is a process that joins the individual, group, and the organization.

The participants suggested that communicating effectively with students was important in providing support for student motivation. The motivation of students is increased when teachers are effective at being clear, relevant, humorous, immediate, able

to adapt their presentation style, and good at listening (Webster, 2010). In her interview, Nancy indicated her perception of providing good communication by stating that her classroom was "very communicative." She went on to express that she tried to create a "collegial climate in here [her classroom]." My impression of these statements are that she, like the other participants suggested, tried to ensure that the dialogue in her classroom between all individuals occurred in a positive and effective way that enhanced students' learning experience.

Nancy's efforts at creating an enhanced learning experience for students were obvious as I entered her classroom. I noticed many colorful pictures, a palm tree made of construction paper, a number line across the wall and letters with pictures associated with them. It was clear that part of her "communication" included the provision of lots of visual information to supplement the lessons being taught. All of the visual supports in her classroom seemed to provide a sense of warmth (palm tree), support for learning (alphabet with pictures), and stimulating breadth of knowledge (many different pictures depicting different topics and groups of individuals).

The students in the classroom were seated in three areas of the classroom; one group of students was seated at their desks and two groups of students were clustered around separate tables. An adult was seated at each table, Nancy at one and her teaching assistant at the other. The manner in which she arranged her room seemed to invite small group discussions. She frequently spoke in Spanish to communicate with some of her students of her Latino students. I noticed that she also used very explicit instructions and non-verbal communication to help students understand her instructions and the purpose

of her lessons. For example, as she modeled writing notes on the main dry erase board she told her students "We are learning to take notes."

Other participants described how they tried to be clear in their communication of what was going to occur each day, including the content that needed to be learned and how specific activities should be completed. I noticed during my observations that the participants stood in front of their classes after each transition (beginning of the day, after specials, after lunch, etc.) and outlined what was going to happen during that class period. They would also ask students what questions they had so they could provide answers and clear up any misunderstandings. Heidi appeared especially adept at providing clear instructions between each transition so students knew exactly where they needed to go and what they needed to accomplish. To more clearly express her expectations (which are discussed more in depth later), she gave a direction and then used counting or tones for student transition.

Creating a shared responsibility through communication with families was a key objective for participants. They believed that it would ultimately help in meeting their classroom management goals. Participants' responses reflected their perception that a dynamic bi-directional school-home communication needed to occur. Nancy discussed the difficulty that can occur when cultural factors impact shared responsibility and communication.

> It's getting better but when we had our Somali population move in, the men don't necessarily have to respect their women. We had boys coming in, even first grade boys, who would totally not think that they needed to listen to the teacher and follow her direction. That has gotten better thanks to the communication piece. Every parent parents differently. I do think that when kids are allowed to make the decisions and run crazy, it does affect what they do in the classroom.

In this case, Nancy indicated that cultural differences impacted the classroom and how some of these differences, especially in terms of perceptions about gender, created different power relationships between teachers, families, and some of their male students. However, through communication, Nancy believed that students and their parents now had a better understanding of her expectations in the classroom.

Participants identified what they perceived to be the most efficient means for communication with individual families. Nancy described how she communicated with parents and how parents had communicated with her:

> I send home a weekly newsletter and it's pretty elaborate. . . . It talks about what we do in each of the curricular areas, what's coming up, celebrations, things that they [the families] can do at home. I send happy notes in the mail to my kids so they know what I'm proud of and what they're doing well. The parents email me. I give them a call when I'm concerned about something or just need more info.

It appears to me that Nancy attempted to communicate with parents in an efficient and practical manner, however she seemed to miss the idea that many parents may struggle to read what is sent home (i.e., the newsletter is in English) and media such as notes and letters are not bi-directional.

Neil described approaching communication in a slightly different way. He explained that he uses back and forth notebooks to communicate with families, especially when there were behavior issues in the class.

> In the back-and-forth book I also had to write something in there every day. So when his behavior started to turn around then I would talk about all the positive things that he did. Most kids don't get that. Because they're always on the right track and independent, I expect that they're on the right track. For those kids that can be that extra boost. For instance he did great today in reading or he helped out where he helped out cleaning the floor and then they take that home and the parents add to it and see school as a positive place.

To me, the back and forth notebook appeared be a better means of communication than a newsletter home. The notebook ensured that parents were notified on a daily basis of how things going with their child and it provided an almost immediate avenue (as well as a type of invitation) for parents to communicate back to the teacher. Furthermore, the notebook might serve as a screener for whether or not a parent was able to communicate through writing. If a parent did not respond, a teacher could contact the parent to explore a different form of communication.

All of the participants recounted some form of communication with families when they had a concern about individual students. Two genres of communication described were encouraging parents to talk with their children about the importance of learning and school and talking with a student's family to request support. Gayle recalled a time this past fall when she called a parent to discuss a student's recent academic performance and growth on the state achievement test. She went on to explain that she wanted to "make a point to call the parent and say 'You really need to encourage your child and talk about the tremendous growth they made.'" It seemed clear that the participants believed in the need to make an effort to go beyond their own communication with families to support bi-directional communication between the parent and their child.

Participants described their perception that families with diverse learners often did not possess the skills or knowledge to follow through with information that comes from school. Elsie explained:

> When they [families] have a cultural difference, the expectations are different. When they read the newsletters they interpret them a different way. I had a parent at a teacher parent conference where I said "I would really like to work on the home communication." Every Friday, I write a note to the parents in their [the student's] Friday folder so they know how the student did for the week. I said [to the parent] "I would really like you to sign that each week, then read what I

wrote." He said "Well, you know, we are new to this country all these papers come home and I don't understand."

In other parts of her interview, Elsie indicated that "communication with parents is important" but did not indicate any solutions to the situation described above. It is unclear to me how this situation was resolved; however, the lack of information might have indicated that it was not solved a remains a barrier to communication.

It was visible to me that the participants attempted to communicate with all parents, including parents of diverse learners, but sometimes did so in ways that may not have been as effective. In some instances, the communication was bi-directional (e.g., emails, back and forth books, telephone calls), but it is likely that some of these strategies would not work for families who did not speak English or did not have access to technology. Although participants may have sometimes tried to establish communication with families, it also appeared to me that some of them might not have understood the differences between their methods of communication and the needs of the parents of diverse learners.

Love of Content

Most of the participants indicated a love of their content area and teaching it. They also suggested that in order for students, including diverse learners, to be successful they needed to show enthusiasm for their content because they believed that doing so helped students to be engaged and trust that they could become skilled in that subject as well. Gayle reported that:

> I'm incredibly enthusiastic about math and I think my students pick up on that. Even though they may come in thinking they are not good at math, I want my students leaving thinking math is the best subject. So I think they start to pick up on that. They start to try. They started to work on that. They start to care. For one student (of color), when he started to care it didn't pay off [because of low scores

on standardized test]. It did pay off. It's an unsatisfactory (score on standardized test) in third grade and an unsatisfactory in 4th grade but it's a really high unsatisfactory. He showed great improvement. Caring paid off. "The fact that you want to learn paid off. If you do that for one more year you're going to be out of a hole."

This enthusiasm was obvious when I observed Gayle teaching a math lesson. During one activity, she modeled problems on the board and asked for help from the students to complete the problems. The tone of her voice expressed excitement when she provided feedback for students correctly answering questions by saying "Yes!" Later in her lesson, she involved the students in an activity that required them to get up and use their bodies to create lines of symmetry. She successfully engaged the students in the activity with her enthusiasm, excited tone, and use of physical movement.

In her interview, Gayle acknowledged that she did not see herself being as enthusiastic in other subjects as she is in math and consequently not having the same impact on students.

What I've discovered for myself and then watching myself teach different subjects, I truly believe that you have to love the subject you're teaching in order to do it well. Because I can even see the difference in myself. I just look at how my science plans go and how my math plans go. I like what science does for my life but I don't like teaching it. And my lessons are not as good. I don't think they're terrible. I don't think I'm ruining them but they're not as good and I don't think any of my students leave my science class thinking science is awesome. But I do have students that leave math class saying man math is awesome. You have to love what you're doing.

Most of the other participants indicated similar perceptions about love for their instructional content and some expressed that they enjoyed being able to provide students the inspiration to do activities such as reading books for pleasure or creative writing. Nancy expressed "I'm trying to give them [the students] a chance just to be creative and

write a creative story." It was clear from the interviews that the participants believed that they had to love their content to be effective in instructing students on the material.

From the interviews and observations, it seemed clear that the participants perceived their approach to include flexibility, communication, and modeling love of content as having a major impact on the success of students regardless of their backgrounds. Teacher flexibility was viewed by the participants as a necessary skill to deal with the uncertainty that occurs on a daily basis in the classroom and to adapt to the needs of the students. The participants also noted that they needed to have good communication skills with both students and families. With students, participants seemed to believe they were effective and their classrooms practices were reflective of the number of ways they communicated. However, they also revealed that they may not always be as successful in communicating with some families, especially those families who were from different cultures or had limited English skills. In addition to these approaches, teachers noted that through their love of content and modeled enthusiasm, they believed they were able to engage students in their learning of that content.

Connection

During the interviews and observations, every participant conveyed the need to connect to his or her students. All of the participants discussed the importance of building rapport with students to create both a bond and trust, as well as, to understand who they, the students, were as individuals. Furthermore, the participants saw their roles as extending beyond the classroom. They described themselves as mentors or life guides for the students and as part of this role they tried to encourage them and provide the tools needed to be successful in the future. Under the Connection theme, there were two

general categories: (a) building rapport and (b) life-guide tools. Throughout both of these categories the idea of developing trust was a commonly cited goal for participants.

Building Rapport

The interviews and observational data elucidated the perceived need and desire of participants to build rapport with their students. The ideas of building a relationship, developing a mutual understanding of one another, and trust were interspersed throughout the interviews. Rapport was indicated by the participants as something that is the foundation of their teaching and something that should happen very early in the school year. Sharon related her foundational perspective by stating, "It goes back to building rapport. It will always go back to relationships and rapport. I firmly believe that's why I have been successful as a teacher." Harry also highlighted the importance of establishing a relationship early in the school year as he stated "What I try to do is first and foremost is create a relationship with everyone." This desire to build rapport seemed to cut across all facets of teaching and was a general category under the connection theme.

Participants discussed the need to build a "good relationship" or "rapport" with students so that students would trust them and the practices employed inside of the classroom. Neil stated "I try to create a relationship and get some level of connection with them [students] so that they trust what I'm doing [in the classroom] and that I can trust them as well". All of the participants indicated that they made additional efforts to gain the trust of each of their students as a means to improve student success in the classroom as measured by both academic performance and behavior. As Elsie stated:

> Another one of my beliefs I say all the time is "try your best and I don't expect you to be perfect but try your best." If I can get students to try, I can help them to improve where they need to improve. Whereas if they don't try, I don't know where they're at and I don't know their level. Getting them to trust me, then I can help them beyond that. . . .

This sentiment was shared by all of the other participants who emphasized the importance of providing an atmosphere that encourages students to take risks and try their best without fear of the consequences.

In building rapport, the participants indicated you can maintain this relationship or connection even when disciplining a student. For example, Harry detailed the importance of speaking to the individual one-on-one and using the power of relationship to both point out the seriousness of the problem and the ability to develop a plan together to change the concerning behavior.

> [If a student committed the same offense over and over again] I would be disappointed with a student and I would sit with them to let them know that I am disappointed in them. And I would just try to get to them try to make the connection where we can fix the problem together and let the student know that.

However, from the interviews I came to see that finding the balance between discipline and maintaining a connection and trust with students was not a skill that all participants believed they had mastered and some were still "working on." It was evident to me that participants who had less experience as teachers tended to believe they might be "too easy" on students because they feared that if they were "too harsh" it was going to "ruin the relationship" with the student. The participants with more teaching experience stated that they were able to better balance making a connection with students, maintaining their trust, and imposing disciplinary action when appropriate.

In walking into Elsie's classroom to observe, it was evident to me that there was balance in her discipline as she had a large colorful behavior chart with many different

categories. Each student could move their name up and down the chart depending on how they were doing. The students seemed to respond to her well even when she asked them to move their "clip" with their name on it. For Elsie, she seemed to find this balance by using a structured system with clear expectations. Some teachers did not yet seem to possess those skills of how to approach students, make connections, and still provide good discipline.

In another example, Sharon described a situation where a young teacher did not demonstrate this balance between student relationships and appropriate discipline. She explained how she mentored and worked with a new teacher at the school who had taught some of her students from the previous year. She described how one day a student came running out of the new teacher's classroom exclaiming "I don't want to be here. He doesn't know what he's doing. He keeps yelling at us!" From the student's remarks, it seemed clear that this new teacher was struggling. In the situation Sharon described, the student obviously did not feel comfortable in the classroom and did not react positively to the teacher's discipline.

The participants viewed the teacher-student connection not only as a way to improve student compliance but a major factor in students' success. All of the participants described how this relationship was established through one-on-one interactions such as working directly with students or conducting private conversations in the hallway as necessary. I observed support for this in the participants' classrooms. In each observation, participants were seen on at least one occasion engaging with a student in a one-on-one manner by sitting down or kneeling at eye level with the student and

speaking plainly and in a quiet voice which encouraged the student to have a shared discussion.

One-on-one time with students seemed to support the idea that the participants viewed their connections as founded on trust, empathy, and understanding. Furthermore, it appeared to me that the participants viewed it as the foundation for academic success and maintaining behavior in the classroom and for encouraging students to take academic risks. Participants described how having a connection with a student supported acceptance and 'buy-in' from students about the material introduced in class and the classroom rules and expectations.

In order for teachers to build connection with students they saw themselves as needing to understand each individual student, build a mutual understanding by sharing about themselves, and when necessary, learn more about student interests. It was clear to me based on participants' statements that teachers invested "one-on-one time" and exchanged "personal experiences" or to "talk sports" to learn more about the students and show students that as their teachers, they were trustworthy. As Harry described:

> I try to get to know them. I want to know what they like. I want to know what they don't like. I want to know what their favorites are. During passing period I talk to them. I say "How is your day going?" or "What are you doing after school?" Just too kind of get to know them and that kind of gives them a sense of security and hey I can talk to you and it doesn't have to be 100% formal where you have to do this and this and this all the time. That gets tiring for them and it gets tiring for me. Just a short little conversation [helps build relationships]. Today, I was playing basketball at recess with some of the kids. They enjoy seeing that side of you too.

Harry also exhibited his desire for mutual understanding through his artifact which included a collage of pictures on his classroom wall. These pictures included student drawings of baseball, the Colorado Rockies, the Denver Broncos, and statements such as

"Mr. ----- Rocks!" Looking at this picture, it is clear to me that Harry was not only

attempting to convey his personal interests (i.e., sports), but also the degree to which he

valued his students by displaying their drawings.

Participants also believed that there were many different ways to develop rapport

with diverse groups of students. When Sharon was asked how she developed rapport with

students unlike her (e.g., students of color, students who are ELL), she explained in great

detail:

> Many years ago I had a group of boys that I just could not connect with. It drove
> me crazy. I finally said "Okay, what makes you guys click? Where do you guys
> go? What do you do after school? What do you watch on TV?" And they were
> really into the wrestling, the WWE stuff. . . . So one of them brought in a video
> one day and we sat down during lunch and we watched the video. And I was like
> "You guys really like this stuff?" Because it wasn't anything I had ever watched.
> They said "We love it!" So I started watching it just so I had something in
> common with them. . . . They would come in every day and they would talk about
> "Did you see that?" and you just kind of have to get excited about what they are
> excited about. . . . And I think that's really how you build that rapport with those
> kids… Whether I'm truly interested or not you have to do that. That's part of your
> job whether you have 10 kids or 500.

This interest in learning about her students and figuring out how to connect with them

was also obvious in my observations of Sharon's classroom. During one observation, two

girl students of color asked her if she would like to see their handshake. She replied that

she would, but also directed them to show her in between classes. Sharon's practices also

seemed to reflect the balance of maintaining classroom order, but making herself

available during lunches and breaks to learn about her students. From her statement and

the observation it seemed clear to me that Sharon wants to engage with her students even

if it was on her own time. Her artifact was a picture of a transparent brain above an open

box with the lid tipped off the side of it. The picture seems to indicate "out of the box

thinking" and her willingness to explore new ideas with students in order to meet them where they were at.

Participants believed that showing students that they cared about them as individuals would have a long term positive influence on these students. To highlight this point, Louise noted that it was the responsibility of the teacher to reach out to students:

> You have to try and connect with them and show them that at least someone cares, that someone is looking out for them. Because whether or not they reach out to you, and they may not, you try to reach out to them. At least if they want to reach out to someone, they know someone is there . . . let anyone know of their situation. But if you try to make some kind of connection with them, they may reach out to you and that's really all that you can do and I try to do that with all of them that walk in here.

Harry further described this responsibility as an imperative by saying that he needed to "Be supportive for students. The focus needs to be on the students. 100% we're here for them. I should be willing to work with any student whether they're asking for help or not."

It became apparent to me from the participants' statements that they believed that when teachers showed students that they cared, they may be providing an avenue for students to connect with someone who is a trusted adult in their life. Some participants believed that students who were exposed to difficult circumstances such as negative household environments, family culture, or poverty were often the students who needed this extra attention the most. Harry indicated:

> I definitely have a few needy kids that are just really want my attention. I was just out at recess and have three kids right there on my hip just wanting my attention and wanting to talk my ear off. Some kids need that sometimes. They just don't get that at home because their parents are working at night or not available to talk to. I know we talked about teachers roles earlier and that's one of the teacher's roles: just being there for the kid . . . [They] just need to talk or think. That's important. Let him talk to you.

It appears from this statement that Harry supports the idea of providing the nurturance students need to feel connected but that some students are "needy." Their neediness was not reported to be a reflection of culture but of socio-economics. As Nancy added, students who are impoverished surpass her ELL students in terms of seeking emotional support and connection.

Life Guide Tools

A separate, but somewhat related category under the Connection theme was life guide tools. Although it was somewhat related to building rapport, it also went beyond the immediate process of building relationships and included a more future element. It was clear to me that participants' believed that caring about students by trying to understand them on an individual level could have short-term positive implications for the classroom (e.g., students being engaged, trying difficult tasks, and showing better behavior), but they also endorsed the need to facilitate long-term positive outcomes of providing "life-long tools" for students. For example, when explaining her perspective on what a teacher is, Louise stated "Most importantly, a life guide." Supporting Louise's statement, Charla outlined how student-teacher connections were established through "striving for lifelong learning through care and compassion." Elsie reinforced these ideas by using herself as an example for students. She stated:

> I really want to instill in my students lifelong learning. I tell them that I'm still learning things. I still go to school. We are never done learning; which is another one of my beliefs.

Charla also described how she had developed a program for girls to help them develop life skills.

> It's a great program to give girls life skills and give them tools to deal with being a teenager or pre-teen. We talked about bullying, choices, what can you do if someone is being bullied, standing up for yourself, and being proud of whom you are.

Neil shared artifacts which included descriptive writing and art. The descriptive writing was about a drawing that incorporated CD's pasted onto the picture. He explained how he shared this with his students how he uses things he learned in his former teaching position (art teacher) and is adding it to his position now (general education teacher). For him, this was one way that he modeled the idea of continuing to learn and develop as a person and a professional. It was apparent from the responses and artifacts that students were not only taught about the idea of life-long learning but participants also shared their real life examples of engaging in this practice. The participants' rich explanations and artifacts highlighted how they were teaching students to use their ability to think, to have confidence in themselves, and to use their own passions as tools for emotional and academic advancement. In being a "life guide," participants seemed to want their students to discover who they were and develop their own talents.

Participants noted that being a student with a disability, an impoverished student, or a student of color may negatively impact their stance toward "life-long learning." Harry stated:

> Some students are just naturally motivated and understand that "This is what I'm going to need to be able to do later in life. So I better get it now." I think it depends on that person, depends on at home life, and the culture they grew up in.

It seemed that the participants wanted to help students become life-long learners by helping them to develop important skills such as problem-solving as well as modeling their own continuous process. Generally all of the participants indicated their belief in all students and their desire for the students to have positive futures. Charla stated, "I want

them to come here to succeed and I don't want them to come in and just not work. I want them to go out in the world and be good people."

Developing connection through building rapport and giving students life guide tools appears to be an important endeavor for all teachers and was second only to the participants' overall approach to teaching. The participants consistently indicated that they had to first build rapport with students to help develop the whole child, to build trust, and ultimately to help give them the tools to be successful. The theme of connection encompasses these categories and draws together the idea that education is intended to develop future thinkers and citizens.

Structured Support

One of the more detailed and encompassing themes was that of structured support which was the term my team gave to the participants' described strategies used in the classroom to support learners of all types. Several general and variant categories came to light under the overarching theme of structured support. The general categories included the classroom expectations that participants established for their students, their use of intentional student groupings, and deliberate adaptations and instruction. The less pervasive variant categories were student characteristics and prescribed curriculum. General categories are ordered starting with classroom expectations and ending with deliberate adaptations and instruction as the sequence of classrooms often flow in this manner. The variant categories are presented within the context of the broader themes.

Classroom Expectations

When asked about their own classroom practices and discipline, participants seemed to provide the most detail about how they structured their classroom

expectations. All of the participants indicated that they tried to set up their classroom with firm guidelines and procedures that promoted classroom order while also trying to give students a sense of a safe, supportive, and positive climate. Charla concisely supported these findings when she stated, "I try to be firm and establish guidelines as to what I expect for my classroom. At the same time, I also want them to feel comfortable when they walk in my room."

Being able to establish this structure in the classroom was perceived by the participants as necessary for student behavioral and academic progress and for facilitating successful outcomes. Clear behavioral and academic expectations have long been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement, whereas, negative expectations have lasting impacts on student opportunities to learn and achievement, especially for those who are considered diverse learners (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). In their review of the research, Sirota and Bailey (2009) found that teachers' negative expectations impacted English Language Learners and minority students by lowering their self-esteem, creating behavioral problems, and decreasing academic achievement. The participants in the present study indicated that teachers needed to consider and support diverse learners' characteristics whether they are the result of a students' language background, culture, or disability status. Heidi discussed the effects of culture and expectations by stating:

> Culture actually effects student behavior and when the child comes from a different country it's difficult [for the child] to adjust to the [new] country's behavior and expectations. They compare everything to their experiences from their previous country. I had a boy who came from Africa, neat boy, but it took us some time and we are still in the process of helping him to adjust here to the rules and those things. The parents really want to help but they have not experienced the things we have here.

Heidi not only described her interest in, but also demonstrated her desire to help students from different cultures understand expectations. During my observations in her classroom, I noticed rules posted on the wall and she readily referred to these rules when a student broke one of them. Though this example reflects best practices for teachers in general, Heidi clearly demonstrated how she tried to make these directives very concrete and concise in order to make sure learners clearly understood her expectations. On one occasion I noticed her telling a student of color, "You know this is not okay behavior. This will not happen again." Although her words were vague in terms of the violation and the expected behavior, it was noted that while she was giving her reprimand to the student, she pointed to the rule that the student had broken, which was to use kind words.

While her comments regarding rule clarity were focused on students of color, Heidi seemed to believe that the success of all students would be measured in part by students' ability to follow rules and meet expectations in the classroom. She went on to detail her belief about how this behavior would be what was expected of them "in society." Participants saw their classrooms as a type of community with rules that needed to be followed as reflected in Heidi's statement:

> Kids have to understand that if they don't follow rules, there are consequences. Society is based on that. If you follow rules you will be successful or if you don't follow the rules, there will be consequences. So it is like a small model of society [the classroom]. . . . Here in my class, all of the students have sticker charts and they have to earn stickers to complete the chart. When they complete it, they get a prize. If they get 100% on a spelling test they can receive that [a prize]. If during a lesson they receive three crayons, they can exchange them for one sticker. So they are inspired or encouraged.

In some instances, participants did specifically describe the methods they used in the context of other specific groups of students. For example, Sharon discussed the ways

that she made her expectations very explicit for students with disabilities in order to help them follow classroom expectations and routines.

> I think the kids who are labeled "sped" [special education], not all that are labeled sped, but the lower level learners are kids that. . . . I have to take them under my wing . . . I think at the beginning of the year we really have to . . . set those guidelines. Most of them [students] can pick it up on their own [classroom expectations]. "Mrs. ---- wants this or wants that" so I think that's important that we set those guidelines. . . . I think just establishing routines and structures are really important.

Sharon's comments reflected what all of the participants indicated as being important for students with disabilities. It was suggested by the participants that setting up and supporting students with disabilities with routines and structures that were clear helped them to navigate what was expected in their classrooms. Overall, it appeared to me that the participants perceived that students with disabilities needed forms of extra support and understanding in order for them to better understand the classroom expectations. However, their efforts did not stop with students with disabilities.

In creating a "small model of society", all of the participants were observed using some form of behavior system in their classrooms. The systems or charts described by the participants included ways students could receive feedback about their behavior, either through losing or gaining "points", accruing stickers, or moving a clothespin with their name on it up and down a classroom behavior chart.

Elsie noted that students with more emotional concerns were likely to benefit the most from this external structure. In describing the behavior charts in her classroom, she noted:

> Obviously, those who come with more emotions are going to need that structure. They're going to need to know, more importantly, about the consequences and the positives. I try to have my chart that says that everyone starts at good and you can go up to great or amazing and you can go down to time out and parents are called.

In my observations in her classroom, I saw a large laminated chart with seven different levels where students could place their personalized clothespin. During my afternoon observation at approximately 2:00 p.m., I noticed there had been some movement of the clothespins during the day as the clips were scattered up and down the chart. Even during my brief time in the room, students were asked to move their clips up and down the chart based on their positive and negative behavior. At least one student had moved his clip all the way to the bottom of the chart for not following the rules and another student in the class was asked to move her clip up for helping out another student. It was reassuring to see that the system was used to both reinforce and provide consequences for behaviors. Just as is true of "society," Elsie seemed to be trying to implement a system of feedback that promoted students' understanding of the appropriateness of their behaviors based on classroom rules and expectations.

It seems clear to me that Elsie, like the other participants, wanted the students to understand consequences but also to provide a system where students could monitor their own behavior. Elsie seemed to believe that using the chart helped both she and her students to share this responsibility:

> It's a big help for me and it's a big help for the students to know "Oh wow, I really excelled today and I can do even better tomorrow." Or it helps them to see "Oh, I broke a rule here, I broke a rule here" and tell them how many times and how many warnings they've gotten. Sometimes I've talked to student and I don't even realize, "Oh my goodness, I didn't realize how many times you've broken a rule today." I think it's a big help to keep track informally of the [se] things.

Though a process for monitoring behavioral progress was present in Elsie's classroom, consistency in providing corrective feedback was not. From the observations and interview, it seemed clear to me that students in her classroom, especially those students who were either struggling emotionally or were identified with emotional disabilities, may have been given feedback about their behavior but not the instruction needed to help them meet classroom expectations and improve their behavior. Her statements indicated to me that the number of disruptions and warnings were monitored but feedback was not always utilized as often as it may have needed to be.

The expectations of the participants were not only explained in behavioral contexts but in academic as well. The participants affirmed that students were provided targeted explanations about how they should accomplish academic goals. Nancy discussed her perceptions about how to accomplish those goals.

> I try to make my expectations very explicit by writing out 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, what you [the student] need to do. At the very beginning of the year, it was one step directions [given to students]. Now they're able to look at the back easel and realize "Okay, I did this. What do I need to do now, what are my choices?" Come the second half of the year it's more of a workshop scenario. I just feel like learning is all day long.

I observed Nancy being very clear about what she wanted to get accomplished in class and how she students expected students to behave in order to achieve those goals. The layout of the classroom reflected and was organized around these goals with posters, charts, graphs, and pictures that outlined how students could accomplish specific tasks. The objectives for what needed to be accomplished were written on the board and described at the beginning of her lessons. She then described how either groups of or individual students could accomplish those objectives at each of the different learning stations.

These directions and expected accomplishments were then incorporated into the instructions at each station. For instance, in one area of the room, she had an easel with a large piece of paper printed with the date and directions for what to do at the specific station. She clearly attempted to make these instruction fun and engaging. It read: "Dear Friends, Hi! We will finish our Lulu Lovebirds today. We will start a creative story about Lulu too! Love, Mrs. [Teacher's name]." Students came to the station and seemed to get right to work; most of the students seemed to know what they needed to do. However, there were a couple of students who seemed confused. In one instance, I observed a student speaking Spanish to another student and pointing to the easel. After some back and forth discussion, the student went and got the materials she needed to complete the writing. It seemed to me that even though Nancy had provided many good supports for students, a student who was Spanish speaking had to have help from a peer to understand the expectation.

Other participants provided similar types of supports to those of Nancy. Charla posted her objectives for the day and went through each activity at the beginning of class to discuss what needed to happen throughout the class period. Afterwards, she explained how students would be working with her in a small group while others worked independently, she demonstrated her monitoring of other students by providing reminders of what they needed to be accomplishing. In addition, she told students to use specific resources in the classroom in order to complete tasks. She directed two students to look at a poster on the wall to complete their writing assignment. In many ways, it appeared that she was attempting to help students learn how to learn through using visual aids within

the classroom so that they would perhaps grow less reliant on her direct verbal instruction.

In ensuring that students understood classroom expectations, it appeared to me from the interviews and observations that participants first attempted to think about how student characteristics influenced their own thinking with regard to setting up those expectations. Then the participants provided support both behaviorally and academically so the students could understand these expectations. It was clear to me that the participants tried to provide ways for students to monitor progress towards these expectations, however, some of the participants seemed to miss the importance of providing the explicit instruction that students needed to learn how to accomplish what was expected.

Student Characteristics

A variant category related to gender emerged within the context of classroom practices and discipline. Historically, gender has had a low to moderate effect on classroom disruption (McClowry et al., 2013). However, some of the participants indicated that gender may have constrained their typical practice within their classrooms. Gayle described her experience of needing to limit activities last year because of the "mix of students" which seemed to mean that she "had more boys." Further investigation indicated that she did not perceive the boys as regulating their behavior appropriately and that they did not abide by her expectations in the classroom.

Neil indicated a similar experience this year except that he did not attribute the difficulty to gender, but rather the developmental level of the students. Of note, he stated that he taught the grade following Gayle who was in the same school and he understood

the difficulty that she had encountered the previous year. He went on to explain that he believed that "…this year's group is a highly immature group, very social. So you kind of have to be on them all the time. So this year, I feel like a mean teacher instead of the mentor."

While one participant attributed the behaviors to gender differences, another saw them as developmental immaturity. Regardless, both noted that the specific attributes or characteristics of this cohort of students seemed to alter their typical practice as teachers. They found themselves offering fewer activities or engaging in "mean" behavior. Student characteristics seemed to play an important role in the perceptions of a few of the participants. They appeared to believe that male students were more immature and unregulated than their female counterparts. Further supporting this conclusion was my observation of Charla who did not seem to redirect girls at all, and redirected the boys several times even though there were fewer of them in the classroom. Her statements even included the term "boy" in statements like "Boys, please sit down" and "Remember boys, you have to be within arm's length of each other." There were no observed comments or redirections that included the term "girls." For this specific teacher, interview and observation data indicated that gender (i.e., an inalterable variable) may play a role in her perception of her students and the practices she used in the classroom.

When participants were asked how I [the interviewer] would experience learning in their classroom, they described "many different ways" of how they structured learning. However, the answers participants provided could be arranged into the two different general categories of (a) intentional student grouping and (b) deliberate adaptations and instruction. One comment by Gayle stood out as not quite fitting in either of these

categories and instead reflected the degree to which she routinely used a variety of

teaching approaches so she would not have to adapt for any one learner, but could try to

meet the needs of all students:

> Depending on the day, there would be teacher led activities. There would be
> talking with your neighbor about what you're figuring out [and] whether you
> agree or disagree. There would be independent work. You would have a chance to
> see what you could do on your own. There are a variety of types of activities. We
> do math games, we do math assignments on computers, we do paper and pencil
> activities. Students do work on the board and demonstrate their work on the
> document camera. So [I am] fully engaging in a lot of different ways that would
> hit your particular area.

These practices and others such as small group instruction were reported by participants

as a part of their general approach to instruction. However, when the participants were

asked to describe the intersection of student characteristics and their ability to learn or the

need for individualized support, they provided more specific details.

Intentional Student Grouping

Small group instruction was described by all of the participants when they

recounted how they worked with different groups of learners including diverse learners.

The participants consistently described students as "higher" or "lower" learners and

discussed how they grouped these students into multiple groups. Harry explained, "In one

class, I have three different groups at three different levels. It means I'm teaching three

different levels." The intentional grouping of students was explained by participants as a

process of using assessment and observation to meet the needs of "higher" and "lower"

groups of students. While tracking has long been identified as an illegal and inappropriate

practice (Hallihan, 1994), it appeared that teachers routinely grouped their students by

ability and it was not always clear how flexible group membership was across the course

of the academic year. However, on some level it appeared that the participants were open

to changing groups based on student need throughout the year.

In order to determine these groups, the participants indicated they used different

forms of assessment and observation. Gayle described a fairly "in the moment" process

for dividing students into groups based on completed assignments and her measure of "I

will do a pile of 'has it' and a pile of 'does not have it.'" Other participants spoke of

using a more formalized process and relying on data, such as a reading screener (i.e.,

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills; DIBELS), to group students. Neil

described his experience of grouping based on different forms of progress monitoring and

how this varied depending on the content area:

> At times we do exit tickets. For writing we do a weekly edited piece. I go through
> their writing and help them edit. So I am reading their writing every time they
> write something. In reading, we ability group. So with my reading group every
> week we're testing on our unit test and every month we do DIBELS testing. We
> do AIMS web testing for math in terms of basic skills [and] basic computation. So
> there are a lot of little checks.

When she described decisions made about lower groups, Nancy stated that students were

in "very small groups [receiving] intensive help based on testing data that we give

them, based on their daily work, based on their unit tests. We're trying to see what skills

they are deficient with." I observed every participant using small groups in their classes

to support students. All of the participants provided some type of small group direct

instruction and described a process for how these groups were created through the use of

assessment and observation. Further information was gained through progress monitoring

of these groups and with individuals within these groups. Nancy stated, "I can pull small

groups in and see right here what they are doing. . . . [In whole group] it is harder to get

that instant understanding."

Those students with higher levels of functioning also were grouped using formal assessment and observation. Gayle discussed how she observed a couple of students who she needed to move classes due to their high ability:

> At the beginning of the year I had two students who were just head and shoulders above the rest of the class. They're always raising their hands and it was always difficult because the rest of the class couldn't move at the same pace that they could. These kids could keep going everyday but I'd often have to go back and re-teach things the next day or we have to go over the concept again or we would have to correct their [the lower students] homework together as a group to see where they made their mistakes, whereas, these two other kids got it. They always had the answers. As much as killed me I had to move them to a different teacher because it put them in a class where they can move along faster. So for those kids who can move on quicker and understand the concepts, I try to push them along faster. In my writing class have done the same thing I've leveled my writing groups I have a high reading group because they are able to move along faster.

Participants described students with higher levels of academic skills as needing more independent and challenging work. Elsie stated, "I give them [higher students] more challenging work. I try to see how I can excel or expand their learning." During my observation, I noted these students being placed into small groups who worked independently in class. Harry described how he placed "higher" students into an intervention class that worked on more challenging material. Just as developmental level and gender might affect teaching practices, it was clear that perceived ability (i.e., higher vs. lower) was an important factor in how teachers provided instruction to students.

Participants seemed to believe in the necessity of placing students into smaller groups to better target their needs in terms of content and pacing as well as be better able to evaluate student progress. It also appeared to me to that intentional grouping strategies changed participants' instruction so that they could be more intentional. Being intentional means that the participants could gear their instruction so it corresponded with the

perceived needs of learners. In doing so, they believed they were able to modify their practices and provide students with appropriate content.

Deliberate Adaptations and Instruction

Throughout my interviews, I had the sense that participants believed in the need to establish good classroom expectations and group students appropriately so they could target instruction and content to each student. Beyond these strategies, participants also indicated several ways in which they provided deliberate instruction and adaptations for different groups of students such as "lower" students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.

Reaching students who were considered "lower" in academic skill was described by participants as providing adapted work that was decreased or shortened or accommodated for vocabulary. Participants indicated that students of color, impoverished students, or students with disabilities were often the students in the "lower" category and needed content adaptations. Charla described an example of how she adapted a project for students with "diverse" learning needs.

> I knew that when I put the project together, I knew I was going to have them do fewer of the requirements then the other students because I knew they wouldn't be able to handle it. For one little boy it's not only a special education issue, it's an English language learning issue. His family speaks Spanish. Then [for] another boy it's an English language learning issue. I knew I was going to need it changed a little bit to make it easier for them. With them I pull them aside and told them "I want you to do these two assignments." They were a little bit easier and a little bit more geared towards what they could understand but they could still show what they learned.

It appears to me that Charla viewed ELL as needing less requirements and lower content than that of their general education student counterparts. It was interesting to note, that as much as participants endorsed the importance of consistent behavioral expectations

because it was part of "society," similar expectations did not seem to hold for academic

expectations. This perception seemed to be shared by the other participants, as it related

to other diverse groups (e.g., students with disabilities). As expressed by Louise, ". . . if I

have an assessment, some students will have a word bank. Whereas, general ed.

[education students] would not have that. That helps with the assessment piece of it." As

these statements indicate, shortening or decreasing the requirements seemed to be a

common practice of the participants. The following quote was Heidi's statement about

her commonplace and deliberate practice.

> As a typical practice I modify the content area for my low kids. First of all,
> instead of having 20 words they will have 10 words on spelling tests. When we
> work on writing stories, I will make paragraphs smaller, simpler than when I work
> with my high students.

It seemed that participants believed that adapting the content and curriculum by having

fewer requirements fit the needs of diverse learners.

Reducing the requirements and accommodating vocabulary was not the only

deliberate type of practice used by the participants to meet the needs of "lower" students

or diverse learners. More focused interventions for these groups of students were

accomplished by providing individual support and repeated or guided practice. In

describing the way she provided individual help after school, Elsie noted,

> I have one student who comes in four times a week who is very capable but has a
> hard time focusing. He is ADD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder). . . .
> When he has to work independently, he has a very difficult time finishing his
> assignments. That is why he comes before school.

Like other participants, Elsie indicated that she tried to help students any way that she

could. Louise explained the reason for her efforts as, "…because they don't need to carry

the label of failure throughout their life. Because if they don't get it here [opportunity to learn here at school] then they carry it how many more years?"

It was evident to me from Louise's statement that she perceived the need to give diverse learners opportunities to be successful. She also shared support for her statement in her interview when she discussed an example of a strategy she used when she had a number of diverse learners fail a test.

> I had several kids [diverse learners] who failed a test. So I let them retake it or make corrections. I had them make corrections to try and bring up their grade which most of them did. . . . Because I don't think that they'd get anything from failing. I don't think that that does anything for them except give them a label that they don't need.

Louise seemed to have a lot of compassion for students and intentionally provided opportunity for students to be successful. However, in observing her classroom, some of her statements seemed incongruent. For example, during one observation Louise was working with small groups of students who were seated around a crescent shaped table, with her seated inside the crescent were she was able to access all of the students. There were five students at the table including one boy (student of color) and four girls (three students of color). I monitored the comments and the time she spent working with each individual student in editing papers their writing for a social studies assignment. She spent six minutes editing and correcting the paper of a female student [who appeared to be a typically developing white student]. The feedback she gave included the following:

> Remember, research is facts and not what is important to you. What do we do with book titles? You know what to do with first, next, last? Remember what we do with numbers? Write them out. You can include this part because it is a fact and this is a fact but it is a personal fact. So what you want to do is look at this and take out the personal. Does that make sense?

During this time, the students of color at the table sat and waited patiently. She then spent 20 seconds editing the boy's [student of color] paper before providing feedback. The feedback to this student was expressed as:

> What do we know about those four presidents? But what do we know about those four presidents? What were they to New York?" Whose research is this? (Sarcastic tone). What were they in New York? (Answer given) Yeah. Don't you think you should have included that? In your introduction you don't want to start listing stuff. For example . . . (Pulls first girl's paper as example to show him). You see how she did that? She didn't write any facts, she just talked about the standard introduction. (Yours) is great, you just talked about your facts that you will be writing about.

The comments she made to the girl appeared to be different in nature than what she stated to the boy. The comments to the girl seemed more supportive than those she made to the boy although she concluded with a confusing comment that his paper was "great." Additionally, he was there to observe the comments she made to the girl and then had her work used as a model for what he needed to do. Although her intent may have been to provide opportunities for diverse learners to be successful, she may have had some difficulty in the delivery of these strategies.

Other participants appeared to have more success in their delivery of individualized support. When I observed Nancy, her delivery to individual students in small group was very deliberate and broken down. Students appeared to be able to successfully complete the tasks she asked them to complete. She gave the students explicit, targeted steps and specific direction about how to complete them. Nancy described her success with a student in a similar situation.

I was really pleased because this one kiddo had a hard time putting his thoughts on paper. By pointing to a detail and saying "I want one sentence about this detail" and then showing him we're going to write about this detail. By having him tell it to me and then write it and having him remember the capital and end mark for him he made three really good sentences. It was again not having him think about I have to write all of these things, just one thing at a time.

Overall, it appeared that all of the participants cared about the students and provided some level of deliberate adaptation and instruction. However, some of the participants seemed to have more success in the delivery of these strategies.

Prescribed Curriculum

A variant category that arose in the follow up discussion points with four of the participants was surrounding some of the difficulties with the new prescribed curriculum identified by the school district. For certain subjects like math and reading, some of the participants remarked about the degree to which they believed they were constrained by the curriculum prescribed by the district with little room to modify or individualize in order to accommodate individual learning styles. The participants seemed to express being grateful for having the structure, but frustration with the limitations that were placed on them. One participant expressed her frustration by stating, "There are a lot of things that are mandated by people who are not in the trenches. There are people who have no idea but are telling you what to do**."**

Generally, these participants seemed to provide structured support for students in different ways. The interview and observational data indicated to me that they believed that providing clear classroom expectations, intentionally grouping students based on ability, and deliberately providing adaptations and instruction to facilitate academic success of all students including diverse learners were importance aspects of their practice. However, some of the participants seemed to struggle with their implementation

as they identified student characteristics such as gender or level of maturity as affecting

some of their decisions about the activities they would use or the ways that they would

interact with students. Furthermore, although most were able to modify their

expectations, content, or to accommodate diverse learners, others believed that the use of

the district identified curriculum hampered those efforts.

Self-Regulation

The theme of self-regulation was the first within the framework of external factors

to the teacher as related to students. It is already well-established that self-regulation is

important to student performance in school (Blair & Diamond, 2008; McClelland, Ponitz,

Messersmith, & Tominey, 2010). Isquith (2014) indicated that self-regulation has been

called many names including executive function, executive control processes, cognition

control, behavior regulation, higher order cognitive processes, and self-regulation among

others. These diverse terms and definitions result from theoretical differences as the

construct has been analyzed across a variety of disciplines (McClelland & Cameron,

2011).

The description of self-regulation provided by Wolff and Kass (2014) most

closely reflects how participants in this study described it. In their conceptualization,

Wolff and Kass (2014) divided self-regulation into "School Smarts" (i.e., task initiation,

time management, sustained attention, organization and planning, working memory) and

Social/Behavior Smarts (e.g., emotional regulation, complex problem-solving, impulse

control, cognitive flexibility, and social thinking). After reviewing the participants'

responses, the research team extracted two categories that generally aligned with the

dichotomy presented by Wolff and Kass (2014). Student attention and situational

awareness were identified as being the two most often noted subthemes within the overarching theme of student self-regulation.

A question one might ask is "How can a teacher assess a student's self-regulation?" It seemed clear to me that teachers believed they knew about students' self-regulation skills as reflected in the following statement by Sharon:

> You can tell by looking at them. You can totally tell. I've worked with those kids that aren't responsible by helping them organize, try to get them organized. Show them some techniques "Hey you do this instead of this." As far as identifying them, you can just tell by looking at them. Because they'll come into your room and have heaps and mounds of stuff. Those that are organized and have it together are organized and have it together all the time.

More simply and directly put, another participant explained what she experienced "They're not very organized in their thinking. They are not very good at multi-tasking."

Student Attention

All of the participants indicated that students' classroom performance was impacted by their ability to pay attention. One participant distinguished students who thrived from those who struggled in the classroom with regard to their ability to pay attention in class:

> They pay attention in class (thriving students). Those who are not (struggling students), they just rush through stuff to get done without really taking their time and just want to move on to the next activity. Then they struggle or they're not paying attention during the lesson or they're busy doing something else that they shouldn't be. So then they miss part of what I'm presenting or teaching or showing on a smart board or something like that.

Students' ability to attend to detail in organizing thoughts and materials was prevalent throughout the participant interviews and observed in the classroom. The disorganization students' experiences with their thoughts might be manifested in their inability to attend to classroom production and organization. Participants indicated that

students with self-regulation problems failed because they rushed through work and were unable to engage in meaningful learning. Participants seemed to believe that they were unable to engage students or help them with more complex concepts unless they had the ability to attend in the first place.

Specifically, participants indicated that diverse learners such as English Language Learners and students with disabilities struggled to pay attention. Given the demographics of this school and the classrooms of these participants, nearly all of the students who were identified as ELL were also students of color. The participants often used the term "ELL" to indicate a group of students who they saw as having difficulties with self-regulation.

Louise indicated that she groups her ELL students along with her students with disabilities at a table with her para-educator so that this person can help them focus and attend to classroom instruction. I was able to observe this practice during an observation in her classroom. The class was described by Louise as a mixed class of students that included ELL students, students with disabilities, and gifted students. During my observation, I saw that there were about 30 students in her class and every available chair was occupied. The special group at the table was located at the back of the room. Six students seemed to be crowded around a small crescent shaped table with the para-educator seated among them. Louise was at the front of the room providing instruction to the whole class as they reviewed content specific terminology. Throughout the observation, the students at the table group seemed to be disengaged and were not paying attention. However, it was also noted that many other students in the class were exhibiting the same behavior by having side conversations while Louise was talking.

Louise provided redirection for students who were not paying attention such as "[Student name], that doesn't look like anything you need to be doing!" Her directives seemed to have little follow through by either her or her students. Students continued to have side conversations without consequence as she continued the task at hand through whole group instruction. From this observation, it appeared that teacher perceptions may have been misleading. Although Louise specifically identified diverse learners as struggling to pay attention, this problem seemed to be much more pervasive in her classroom. At no time did she reflect on how she might modify her own classroom management or instructional strategies to more effectively engage all students. From her perspective, it seemed that grouping the students with "self-regulation" problems at the back table was the best she could do to manage the situation. It is not clear why she perceived these students as struggling so much more than the other students in her classroom. Louise was not alone in her perception that students with disabilities had more self-regulation problems. For example, Heidi noted: "They (thriving students) listen to every little word that you say… Those that struggle are ones that do have learning disabilities and that kind of thing."

Difficulty with self-regulation were also described as a characteristic of impoverished students. Participants generally reported that because of having "crummy" home lives or being "needy," impoverished students required extra help to regulate behavior. Participants view disrupted home life and impoverishment as things that were outside a student's control and were generally sympathetic regarding these students. They attributed the students' struggles to their home environments where they did not have the stability needed to self-regulate at school.

When Elsie was asked about the similarities of struggling students, she stated, "A lot of attention issues for sure and low socioeconomics. I see that a lot." She also had concerns about impoverished students attention and working memory.

> Are they listening to me . . .? Are they thinking about are they going to remember? Some kids don't remember things and I know that they were dealing with hard times in her life.

This participant provided an artifact that was a video clip of students performing a skit with sock puppets while they "hid" under a table. The sock puppets had faces drawn on them with a black marker. The use of these sock puppets seemed to reflect low cost resources used by students for an important class artifact showing student work. Since this district serves many students from low SES, there is not a lot of funding for teacher resources. Therefore, this participant's use of sock puppets represented a creative and low cost method for teaching a concept and engaging students. At the beginning of the clip, Elsie could be heard whispering to a student "They'll do it, they'll do it" in reference to this student's concerns about other students paying attention to and completing a specific part of the show. By saying "They'll do it" Elsie seemed to be trying to indicate her faith that the students performing the show would pay attention to their part and will be able to deliver their line when it was their turn.

During my observations of Elsie, it was noted that she provided instruction that directed students to attend to specific information. "After this, I want you to really pay attention to what a solid is (in video) because after this I'm going to ask you to go touch a solid." She also directed student attention by providing reminders to be quiet during a movie, asking students to clap if they could hear her, and saying "shh" during instructional time. On one occasion she used a sequence of directions, "Let's see if I have

everybody's eyes, we're still waiting on about 3 people. 2 more people's eyes, oh there we go."

The participants indicated the belief that even though students' perceived self-regulation was external to themselves, they could impact students' skills through establishing clear expectations and using instructional strategies that captured students' attention throughout the year. Gayle stated:

> I guess I have expectations. I will go over them at the beginning of the year and I'm pretty consistent. I'm constantly checking back with them, reminding them things like "You have to bring your supplies to class. You have to have your homework. You have to pay attention when someone else is talking. If a fellow student is at the document camera you can discontinue talking to each other." I always taught the class, "If someone is explaining, we need to pay attention to the person that is explaining." I think part of it is always reminding them that they do have time to talk. "There will be turn to your neighbor and talk time you'll get that that's not this moment. This moment is about paying attention to the person that's presenting."

Overall, it appeared that participants generally believed that certain student characteristics and environmental circumstances negatively affected their self-regulation and attention. Although some seemed to see these aspects of the students as beyond their control, others indicated that they were able to help improve or control attention at some level through their own actions (e.g., clear expectations, reminders, focusing on the positive, and engaging activities).

Situational Awareness

Under the theme of self-regulation is the category of situational awareness and as noted, was viewed as similar to the Wolff and Kass (2014) element known as social/behavioral smarts. Situational awareness was described by the participants as being able to understand the appropriate behavior for a given situation. The participants saw students as struggling with their ability to have situational awareness and being able to

maintain appropriate emotions and behavior. Having these skills was viewed by participants as important to success at school. In many instances, participants described students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities as having difficulty with situational awareness.

During one observation in particular, there seemed to be a disconnect between a participant's efforts to teach class and a student demonstrating poor situational awareness. Upon walking into Charla's classroom, I noticed the dimmed lights and soft music playing in the background. There was a small group of nine students in the class and was represented by 56% students of color and 44% white students. Charla sat behind a small crescent shaped table designed to be used to instruct small groups in close proximity. Instructions were given to the whole class regarding the activities that students would be doing that day which included independent work and group work. The group work included instruction on and an exercise in comparing and contrasting through the use of Venn diagrams. The two groups went through a couple of rotations of group instruction from Charla.

During both sessions with one of these groups, a student of color (who was also a student with a disability) was consistently given explicit instructions and redirection for behavior. He was observed moving in his chair, standing up, and crouching with his feet in the seat of the chair. In one instance, the student left the table where instruction was being given to sharpen his pencil without asking. Charla redirected him by saying "[Student name] that's enough. Please come back to the table please." Other instructions and redirections given to him by Charla included telling him step by step how he needed to work independently and where he needed to sit.

Although this observation clearly demonstrated this student's lack of situational

awareness, other participants also noted that many diverse students had the same type of

difficulties, but to a larger degree. Some students have disabilities such as ADHD

(Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) impacting their ability to be situationally aware

and self-regulate. Gayle discussed how she found a solution by stating:

> I had a kid who had a hard time keeping his chair on the floor. He'd have three
> legs off the floor and one leg on. He has one of those giant exercise balls now that
> he sits on. He's the only one in my room that has it and of course the other kids
> think that's not fair. I've not had a problem with him being out of his seat since
> he started.

Participants noted that some students struggle with situational awareness and need

support with it because of their emotional disabilities. As Elsie indicated:

> Others that struggle are ones that I think struggle with their emotions. You know
> we try to be patient. We set up behavior plans and that kind of thing. And they are
> still successful and they still learn but I feel like each day is kind of "Okay, what's
> going to happen today." Trying to feed on their emotion, "How are they feeling
> for the day? Alright, am I going to be able to get them to complete this? Do I need
> to reduce the assignment? . . . or are they thinking about all these other
> emotions?"

Through these brief examples, it seemed like participants had ideas and strategies around

how to manage some of the behaviors, but they also noted some of the continuing

problems such as perceived unfairness from other students and approaching each day

with a certain wariness because of the perceived unpredictable nature of some students.

The participants tried to support these students with behavior plans and in other

ways, as well as, such as seeking support for them. Neil noted:

> The principal has suggested a time out (as a support) so I have a timeout chart
> here. We have one student who is on a behavior plan right now. We're doing the
> back-and-forth notebook (for parent communication) and any time he throws
> something he is out (of the class). [In one instance] he got frustrated so he threw
> his pencil. I told him "No, that's bad behavior' and the principal said "Never call
> them bad but that it's bad behavior." . . . I said "You're going to sit out in the hall

and I'm going to set a timer. When you are cooled off (timer goes off), I'm going to come out and talk to you so you can come back to class." Then I said "It's time to come back in class and we discussed what happened and what we're going to do next time to change it."

Overall, the participants seemed to place special emphasis on students' abilities to self-regulate, pay attention, and behave in a manner appropriate to the situation. These were mainly viewed as problems that were external to the participants and most often, beyond their control, although some shared specific strategies used to help shape more appropriate learning behaviors. Many times students with disabilities were identified as having the most difficulty in this area. Although this might be an overgeneralization, it is also true that many students who have learning disabilities or are diagnosed with emotional disorders or attention problems, will likely struggle with self-regulation (Pears, Kim, Healey, Yoerger, & Fisher, 2015). However, it was interesting that in some classrooms, students of color who spoke another language or who were impoverished were also identified as struggling in this area.

According to attribution theory, those who view or attribute behaviors as beyond students' control will likely respond with a more sympathetic response. In some instances, this was observed (e.g., whispering to an individual student who was struggling). Other times, a participant's reaction seemed more punitive such as reprimanding a student in front of the entire class. Attribution theory would suggest that the participants who reacted punitively would perceive the ability to self-regulate under the control of the individual student.

Desired Learning

The theme of Desired Learning represented the participants' perceptions about students as learners and their motivation. The participants statements seemed to

differentiate students as self-motivators or apathetic. In fact, Sharon, when asked about students without motivation, explained, "that students come in frustrated if they [think] 'I can't learn. I'm stupid' and they're going to need extra support because trying to overcome that is just huge". All participants agreed that there are students who "thrive [and] want to learn and want to be here" and that desire drives student confidence, excellence, and motivation. Under this theme there were two general categories were derived from the data specific to perceptions of student excellence and student effort. A typical category under this theme was student confidence.

Student Effort

Participants described student effort in terms of seeing certain students do more than what was expected and understanding the importance of their education. Students who "want to learn" and "want to be here" were described by participants as initiating questions that extend beyond the content of their classes. Students who struggled were described by participants as uninterested and uncaring and having factors such as home life, emotional problems, and culture that interfered with their learning. Harry described struggling students as having:

> A certain level of apathy. I think some students just don't get the importance. Those are the students that I talked about that really struggle. They really don't seem to get the importance of what we are teaching. They get this level of "I don't need to get this. I don't really care. I'm not going to do this. It's easier for me not to try." And so it's hard to turn that around in the student. It really is. Some students are just naturally motivated and understand. This is what "I'm going to need to be able to do later in life and so I better get it now." I think it depends on that person depends on at home life and the culture they grew up in.

This quote and the statements below indicate to me that participants who perceive a lack of effort on the part of the student, struggle to interact with or engage the student in classroom activities. Harry also commented that he had students "that do exactly what I

tell him to do every second every single day" along with students "that could probably care less about what I tell them to do and that's just who they are." Gayle stated remarkably that

> The biggest difference for me personally . . . is whether or not they are trying. I think if I have a student who is trying, they are going to thrive. They may not look like they're thriving because they're low but if they're trying, I'm going to be able to help them grow. The ones that don't try, whether they are high or low, when they won't pay attention or they just won't do the work or just won't try or put down their pencil before they even try and say I don't get it, those are the ones that don't do well because I don't do well with that. I just tend to be like "ahhhh!!!"" So the ones that thrive are the ones that try, whether they are high or low. If they're trying they're going to do better in my class.

From this statement and others by these participants, it appeared to me the relationship between student effort and teacher frustration was an important one to understand and on the surface seemed complicated. The participants appeared to believe that some of the traits exhibited by students were fixed, as Harry stated "that's just who they are." However, I also saw from the data that the relationships could be simplified if the participants better connected what they also believed to be the motives behind the apparent lack of effort by students. Participants viewed student effort as negatively impacted by circumstances at home, poverty, family support, and disability. Alternatively, they also perceived student excellence, effort, and confidence as factors that positively related to student desire to learn.

Student Excellence

Participants indicated that students who thrive in their classrooms are those who they perceived as demonstrating excellence, a general category under the theme of Desired Learning. These students were seen by the participants as those who take charge of their learning and independently motivate themselves to be successful.

For the students that are thriving they are self-driven, they are self-motivated. They want to learn. They come and ask me questions even after class when they are interested. I have two students right now trying to solve this problem right here. [Points to drawing on whiteboard] It's a diagonal line they're trying to find the line coordinates and they came after school asking me how they can find a diagonal line segment. I don't have any other kids that do that in my other classes. . . . It's interesting. Every kid is different and I wish all kids would be self-motivated and want to learn but it's just not the case. And those kids that don't want to learn, I to have to do a little more explaining of why we are doing the things we are doing and try to instill that since of urgency with these kids that don't thrive because they don't have that sense of urgency.

I observed students engaging in behaviors that seemed like 'taking a risk' by asking the teacher to redisplay information that had been taken down from the Smart board, approaching the teacher during independent work to get clarification about material, and students being astute to a teachers "mistake" on a math problem and catching it. Gayle modeled how to solve a problem and purposely made a "mistake" in solving the problem. Students quickly observed and pointed out the mistake as the Gayle's gestures and tones indicated she wanted students to catch her. It seems to me that these students were engaged in the learning process and showed they desired learning by being keenly aware of information presented in class.

In describing student excellence, the participants tended to describe it in terms that students were "self-advocates", "self-driven", or "self-motivated". Many participants would actively interchange the three word phrases when describing students. It appears to me that by using these terms, participants defined these traits as fixed and internal to the student. Regardless of the term used, the participants placed high emphasis on the first part of the term "self", meaning that students who took ownership of part of their learning process and academic success and failure were more likely to be perceived as successful.

Harry provided an example of how one of his students advocated for himself and took ownership of his academic performance which led to improved educational performance:

> The student was the one who took the initiative and understood that he was low and he said "I want to stay after school at least once or twice a week so that you can help me." I've been seeing this kid consistently and he's really good about coming and seeing me for the last 3 or 4 months and he's improved in my class now which is saying something for him because based on his scores he was several grades below.

All participants described specific student actions that demonstrated student excellence. Some of the participants highlighted examples they believed exemplified their perception of student excellence. One teacher described that when students in her class did not understand a concept, they "aren't afraid to ask for help." Another participant described being "surprised when some of my shy students came and asked for help."

It is clear, however, that the participants made efforts to help students learn to demonstrate student excellence and change student beliefs about themselves when they did not demonstrate this self-advocacy. Charla tried to give students an opportunity to seek out help and demonstrate their desire to learn.

> I try not to single students out. We go through an assignment I say to them if you feel like you're not understanding something come up to the front table. You're welcome to come up here and that kind of help.

Webster (2010) indicated the importance of teachers needing to demonstrate approachability so that students feel more motivated and are willing to take more risks.

Other students were perceived as being disengaged from the activities that followed instruction or did not engage in class discussion. As noted above, these types of behaviors led to participant frustration and to some form of redirection or attempt to re-engage students in the learning process. In one instance, I observed a student in Harry's class state, "I can't do anymore." Harry then took the opportunity to encourage the

student and explain that they could by stating "Yes you can. You have me here to help

you."

Participants indicated that they encouraged students to seek excellence. In her

interview, Charla indicated that she wanted to do so before students lost desire for

learning. She noted that she used:

> Verbal praise such as "Good job" and [saying things like] "If you get to finish early, you can do this." Setting it up to where you have to get this done and then you can do this. I've been trying to do a lot more of that lately. Acknowledging that they're getting it done. That's how I try to approach that. Do an "earn and return card." When they do something I will say "Oh bring me your earn-and-return card I'll sign that." I want to focus more on the verbal such as saying hey great job so students don't turn something in and think that we should get something. I want them to understand some of this stuff you just have to do as part of your job as a student.

Student Confidence

The typical category under this theme was that of student confidence and the

important role that played in desired learning. Heidi described a difference between

thriving and struggling students when she said:

> The students who are trying most of time, they are confident. Something that helps them to move further is the confidence and they inspire it. Students who struggle are not confident and are shy. They're not taking the risk. We have to help them to feel more relaxed, feel more comfortable, and it will be the first step in their success.

The consequences of lacking confidence were apparent as participants discussed where

the critical gaps were between students who were academically successful and those who

were lagging behind. Charla also described a situation where she observed a lack of

confidence and how she intervened. She explained that she attempted to help students on

an individual level.

> A student was really having a hard time understanding a math concept and I was like I really needed to hold his hand on every assignment. [As] long as I sat there next to him and told him good job each time, he was able to get it. I told him he could totally do it on his own. He got a big smile on his face.

Lack of student confidence was observed in classrooms when students disengaged because they did not raise their hands to answer questions in group discussion, avoided leading activities, or showed reluctance to get into groups with peers. While these behaviors could be interpreted as a lack of motivation, the participants seemed to acknowledge that a lack of confidence may appear as a lack of motivation. Participants stated that it was "hard" to engage with students who do not show confidence and self-advocate. The participants found themselves telling students "I can't show you any other way else if you're not going to help yourself." The participants' statements suggested the importance of student confidence to the broader theme of student excellence and student self-motivation. Each of these elements seemed to be a key component to making teaching easier.

> I would say those [students] that thrive are those that want to learn and have the confidence to learn. . . . I think definitely that (students who thrive) are easier to teach. They listen to every little word that you say [and] try their best.

Family Support

Family support is a theme that participants indicated as being an essential factor in a student's success in the educational setting. All interviewed participants consistently noted that the stability and support provided by family members is indicative of the success students have both academically and behaviorally. Stability and support from family members can include parent and family time, one-on-one engagement, monetary resources, and emotional encouragement. Participants recognized that parents may or may not have the family stability, financial means, or the understanding of the inherent

value of parent school engagement and support to a student's academic and educational

success. Charla compared how she grew up to how she perceives family life for students

in her current setting.

> I realize that families have a lot more to do than what teachers can remember. Another thing that's really different from me is that I grew up in North Dakota where everybody pretty much had the same life. Everybody had their two parents, their cookie-cutter lives and I'm not saying that their lives weren't challenging at home but for the most part most of my friends, we had pretty good lives. We're all farm girls, so we would go home, do our chores, get homework done, play sports. Now that I've come to [name of town] my eyes have really been open to how that's not how life is. It's a lot more challenging for these kids.

However, in order for students to have good family support, the participants perceived

that families needed to value education, have stability in the family, and provide

economic support to their children.

Parent Value of Education

It was clear from the interviews that participants perceived that families who

valued education had students who performed better. Participants indicated that students

who were successful had parents at home who supported their learning through parent-

student interaction, guided their student by helping with schoolwork, or provided a

structured household environment. Participants cited "parent work situations," "family

discipline structure," and "promotion of education" as examples of conditions that

impacted the family's ability to support their student's learning and educational success.

Parental involvement was indicated by the participants as a key element in student

success at school. They perceived that things such as homework and work completion

were related to parental involvement with children at home. As Harry explained, parents

needed to support the school in order to enhance student learning.

> Parent commitment or parental commitment is a big part of it [what creates support] and just being there to kind of make sure that their students are doing what they need to be doing outside of school. Because once they leave a building there's not a whole lot going to do after we leave. So we need those parents to help us out.

Parent involvement can be difficult, as indicated by the participants, because of work schedules and other family commitments getting in the way.

It appeared to the participants that sometimes was difficult for parents to support their students because of lack of a stable home structure or because they did not have supportive attitudes towards school. It was expressed by Harry that parents may sometimes promote a culture of indifference towards school that is passed on to their student.

> I think it's huge if their home life is hard they're probably going to have a hard time here at school if there is not a good role system here at home they're probably not going to do well with a rule system here at school. I think home life and school life can overlap in that way. There's a culture at home that is kind of not caring or apathetic that shows in school too. I think it's a reflection of the parents and a reflection of who they are themselves.

It seemed clear to me that Harry believed that the behaviors he saw in students at school were a reflection of what parents modeled at home.

When the participants perceived that parents promoted education at home, they believed that it could have a positive influence on the student and how the school could support them. Heidi discussed in the interview her perspective of how parental promotion of education helps and how a student benefited from it.

> If the family actually promotes education at home and they help the child all possible ways so definitely it helps the child or student be confident, be a person who will try something new. Parents want to do that, but they may not know how to do that and don't know how to help their own children so these kids are not confident and this is what we have to do here at school. I have a girl that came from a different school last year. She did not like to be there. In conversations with mom, I've found out that she was scared all the time. I didn't know that but I

> knew that she was shy so is trying to help her be more comfortable. She's not doing great but she's doing better as a person here. She asks questions and tries to socialize with kids.

It appears that even with support, results may vary in terms of the level of success. The beliefs the participant expressed suggested that she understood that parents' level of knowledge about how to promote education and support their student was variable as well.

As part of this category, participants recognized their inability to control these factors but noted that they should be aware of them for each of their students. Heidi stated "You have to know the family situation. I'm a strong believer that the family plays an important role in the student's education in promoting and pushing the student's education."

Stability in Student's Family

The perception of family stability was indicated by participants as valuable to student academic performance and ability to maintain behavior in the classroom. When the participants experienced a student in their class successfully completing homework and fluently understanding the material, they believed it reflected parents and family members holding a student accountable for their education. A lack of success was indicated as being a reflection on the parents and other family members as not appreciating the value of education nor helping their student with key skills necessary for scholastic achievement.

Participants viewed the parents of successful students as being able to provide support and stability through the human resources of mental and emotional support. Parents of these students are perceived by the participants as providing high expectations,

personal attention to academic performance, time-management, and emotional support as needed by their students. The participants suggested that when students do not have high expectations imposed on them or attention at home, they are not able to pull things together in the classroom. Charla explained that "It seems like that they have parents who are supportive. This part at home is the biggest thing. Whether it is mom and dad at home or mom and mom or grandma taking care of them, they just have good examples."

A variant category related to the framework of stability and support was the indication of abuse and neglect. Three of the participants indicated that they knew of situations where involvement from law enforcement occurred regularly at students' homes for incidents related to domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse, and threats of violence. These situations were referred to as "crummy" or "horrendous" home lives for the students and having direct implications on the students' academic performance and ability to sustain appropriate behavior in the classroom. Sharon described a situation of a student who appeared to struggle significantly because of neglect to the level that she did not feel like she had the ability to help him.

> His dad had left; his mom was a drug addict. He had nobody. It was just he and his mom at home anywhere to watch his mom bring home guys and he would watch his mom shoot up heroin. I just couldn't get through to him. And I think I was his sounding board of I hate my mom, I hate my dad, I hate my life. I think my husband told me he is now in prison because my husband is a police officer. I do think that that child ended up messed up from all of it. I just could never get to him.

All of the participants spoke of the importance of stability in families in their interviews. They perceived that a lack of it resulted in a lack of ability to follow rules and obtain adequate achievement goals. It was also apparent to me that they believed that parents influenced how their students acted at home and at school.

Economic Support

Student success is also perceived as being a result of the financial support that parents were able to give. As Charla stated "Money, if they don't have the money they can't do it." Family financial support was defined by participants as the family's ability to buy supplies and provide basic necessities such as food and shelter. The participants indicated that some struggling students go home to "horrible" or "difficult" situations where they have to share congested living space, have little to no food, or basic home utilities and therefore do not have the environment to complete schoolwork. In her interview, Charla described the hardships she had heard some students faced:

> I had never heard of 16 people living in the house. That is so foreign to me. These kids will tell me how their uncle will live with them or their grandma or there aunt. I think the one moment that really works me up was when I was teaching sixth grade. I had student tell me about their bedroom for a writing piece. This little girl came to me and asked what if I don't have a bedroom? What if I sleep on the floor in the living room? It just took my breath away because I had never heard of such a thing in my life. To me I was very naive in thinking that everybody's life is perfect and it's not. This is one of many stories that have reminded me of what these kids are dealing with day in and day out.

It is clear to me that living in those circumstances would not have allowed students to have the support, comfort, and privacy they need to be academically successful. Students who live in those conditions may not have had a workspace available to them or have had the ability to work in a quiet learning environment at home. In addition, it appeared to me that the students would not have received appropriate basic needs such as good sleep.

Aside of from basic needs, the participant suggested that students would not have been provided the background knowledge necessary to be successful at school without family means to provide those opportunities. Participants indicated that student background knowledge is a direct result of the family's ability to expose their student to

media and life experiences. Charla described the lack of exposure of some students to

things that create background knowledge as she stated:

> When I'm in my classroom and I have a student and I am teaching about the mountains, it blows my mind that some students have never been to Denver. You can just tell those students who've had those life experiences such as going on vacation outside of state, or their parents have taken them to even a Rockies game, or have taken them to maybe overseas. You can just tell that there's a difference between two kids. I have one little girl in my room who has had a lot of experiences where her family has gone to Boston and all over the U.S., then I have kids who have only gone as far as Greeley haven't left the state. I think those life experiences make them a little bit more aware of their surroundings and other world and give them more background to make those connections

When Elsie was asked who is able to provide experiences related to background

knowledge she explained that is was:

> Those [students] that are higher socioeconomically. Those [students] that have more family involvement. Even if they haven't gotten to experience it maybe they been able to watch it on TV or have checked out a book and talked about it with a family member. Those [students] that aren't challenged by poverty. When the socio economics are low it is a lot harder for them.

Other groups of students also were perceived as not being able to obtain as much

background knowledge as higher SES students. However, even when compared to other

groups of students, the participants perceived that students who were lower socio-

economically (impoverished students) were less able to obtain background knowledge. In

a general explanation, Nancy indicated her perceptions about the differences between

ELL students (struggling students) and lower SES students. She states that he lower SES

students understand more and have more background knowledge than her ELL students

by stating:

> Definitely my kids who don't speak English [Have the least amount of background knowledge] and you don't have families that speak English. And if they are the translator for their parent (I'm finding that in Somali and families a lot). My Somali kiddos they're speaking good English a lot but their parents speak French or Somali or broken English. Definitely those kids. Those are the biggest

things, my English language learners and those that come from poverty. Even my kiddos who are from bilingual homes, I would say the poverty outshines the English language learners. Even from my kids who come from a two parent working home who come to school bathed and fed but their parent doesn't speak English but they do. They thrive in this environment I think because they have that support an emotional support. Whether or not they speak English, the families that struggle financially, those are the kids that are really hurting.

Part of what the participants perceived as background knowledge was the vocabulary to which students had been exposed. The participants stated that being able to identify vocabulary terms and make connections to the curriculum were enhanced by that exposure to life experiences and background knowledge. "When you have students that have traveled places, have a lot of communication with their family, and have read a lot of books…their vocabulary is so much better and they understand things." Participants noted that students with the most background knowledge also "have the most curiosity" and "ask the most questions" leading them to get the most extensive thinking by being able to "make personal connections on their own.

It did not appear that this lack of background knowledge disheartened the participants in their efforts to help students who struggled with poverty. From the interviews, it seemed to me that they attempted to provide other opportunities for students to enhance their background knowledge. Neil described his perceptions of what needed to occur with impoverished students by stating:

> When you're teaching academically you have to talk about more background and spend more time building that background on most stuff because a lot of the [impoverished] kids don't have a lot of experience with anything. If you are talking about weather, you have to start at the basics. You can't jump in and go. A lot of kids have experienced weather but they have never heard the weather report. They don't use that to plan for the clothing or have never heard of a hurricane because it doesn't happen here. Or they have never seen a picture of the mountains because they've never been to the mountains even though they are right there. You have to show them that kind of stuff.

In summary, I can see from my interviews data that family support structures can have a great impact on student academic achievement, confidence, and maintaining of appropriate behavior in the classroom. Participants relayed that students from "higher socioeconomically" households were more likely to have stronger family structures which indirectly supported their own and their student's understanding and participation in school. They also perceived that students from impoverished households were at a disadvantage because of the increased likelihood for minimal family support. Charla summed up the theme and the participants' experiences in her personal account:

> My first 8 years were spent in "name of different school district" and that's where I grew up. It had no poverty and had all white kids. . . . Then we decided to move to [name of town] and I never would believe how much the poverty piece plays into a child's performance until I experienced it. . . . I have two sons, one is in high school and one is in middle school. I look and I think about the support that my husband and I give to our boys both financially and emotionally, and whatever they need we provide. Then I look at some of these kids and I deliver Christmas presents to some of them at their home. . . . There's one family that I've met with a couple of times because he pretty much goes to bed whenever he feels like it, 10:30 maybe. He comes in a zombie. He has low academic performance across the board. . . . I definitely think that when a child doesn't know if they are going to be able to eat when they get home or I give homework and some of them you can feel the panic rising because there's no one to do it with them. If they are home they are A) they can't write or speak English or B) don't care.

Quantitative Data

After the interview and observations, participants responded to a short survey inquiring about future directions they believed would support them in engaging diverse learners and assessing student motivation. With respect to teacher preparation, 100% of teachers strongly or somewhat agreed that they were prepared and successful at meeting the needs of students of color and impoverished students, however, only 78% strongly or somewhat agreed that they were prepared and successful at meeting the needs of students with special needs. All teacher participants (100%) reported that they felt they had

received ample training to engage with all learners in their classrooms. When asked about future or concurrent training for teaching different types of learners, the majority (56%) somewhat or strongly *disagreed* that they would be interested in university training, however 89% somewhat or strongly agreed that they would be interested in district- or school-based professional development, development of a professional learning community, or a common reading and discussion forum.

This information suggests that the participants believed they were able to generally engage students in the classroom. However, they seemed to be somewhat unsure of their ability to educate students with special needs. The participants indicated that they would like to have some professional development in engaging all learners but would prefer having this training provided through their school district rather than a formal university setting.

Summary

Data were conceptualized as falling into two broad organizational categories as related to attribution theory. Then, different sources of information were categorized into six themes, *Connection, Teacher Approach, Structured Support, Desired Learning, Self-Regulation, and Family Support*, to delineate teacher perceptions and beliefs on student motivation, especially diverse learners with the goal of identifying areas where teacher training, support, and resources could be expanded to improve education for all students.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to learn about teachers' perceptions of what they believed to be the most influential factors on the achievement of students, including students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities. This study was conducted in a rural Colorado school district using phenomenology and the CQR method (Hill et al., 2005) for data analysis. Through the collection of interviews, observations, and artifacts, I hoped to gain insight into the classroom practices and conditions that promoted or potentially acted as barriers to student achievement. Understanding teacher attributions and perceptions as related to student motivation may help inform teacher training and professional development as well as promote more effective classroom practices with regard to diverse groups of students.

As noted previously, this study was guided by Bernard Weiner's attribution theory of motivation of which there are two parts: Intra-personal and inter-personal. The theory lends itself to describing how people ascribe causes to the outcomes (success or failure) of particular events. Generally speaking, participants were able to describe their ascriptions as to why students failed or succeeded in their classrooms, what they believed caused motivation in students, and how they perceived their relationships with students. In addition, teachers described how they made decisions in their classrooms around content instruction, classroom discipline, and student interaction and how those decisions were informed by their perceptions of diverse learners.

One of the main questions of this study was to better understand the perceptions teachers held for the success and failure of their students. In the analysis of these data, participants' accounts of their experiences aligned well with the tenets of Weiner's attribution theory. Consistent with the perspective of attribution theory of intrapersonal motivation, teachers tended to see their own personal characteristics (e.g., flexibility and open mindedness) and what they did (e.g., developed clear communication) as contributing to student success. Conversely, from the lens of attribution theory of interpersonal motivation, teacher participants tended to understand student failure as resulting from student internal characteristics (e.g., low motivation, poor self-regulation) or other factors external to themselves (e.g., unsupportive family environments, mandated curriculum). The following sections highlight the intersection between participants' perspectives and Weiner's attribution theory of motivation.

Teacher Factors that Influence Achievement Motivation

The second research question addressed participants' perceptions of what motivated their students and how these factors might differ across students from diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, language, and ability. The participants believed that specific aspects of student achievement and motivation were attributable to what they did inside, and sometimes outside, of their classrooms. Specifically, participants tended to ascribe the causes for student achievement and motivation to their own ability to be flexible and to create clear lines of communication with both students and their families, to develop rapport with students, and to create structured supports so that students could learn. Whether the participants succeeded or failed in these areas, they perceived that

these efforts were largely, though not completely, under their control and represented

things that they could change.

Controllability and ability to change are important distinctions because being able

to control and change circumstances improves the odds that participants would follow

through in continuing to support students. That is, the more likely they are to believe their

efforts would result in positive change, the more likely they were to continue with those

actions. This finding was consistent with the work of Weiner (2000) who noted that when

individuals believe they are able to impact an outcome, especially those that have

negative consequences, they are more likely to try and change that outcome. As might be

expected, participants tended to put forth specific effort into actions they believed they

could control and change such as their approach with students.

Teacher Approach

Participants' approach and emphasis on flexibility and communication seemed to

stem from their empathy towards students. They often sought to help students and assist

them in solving their problems regardless of the demographics of the student. The

intensity of need did not appear to be an issue in supporting students as long as it was

evident to the teacher that the student had a need and was willing to try. Participants

identified students' needs through their own observations, communication with parents,

or if the student requested additional support. However, participants' reports suggested

that they sometimes attributed student lack of success to a student being unmotivated and

apathetic. In these circumstances, the participants may have lacked the empathy to try to

understand the student need. Many participants also perceived this lack of motivation as

being the result of poor family modeling, a factor that was outside their control. This

cognitive shift seemed to suggest that participants now viewed the success of this "unmotivated" student as something that could not be changed, and perhaps resulted in a lack of effort (although that was never explicitly stated).

Supporting students in a flexible and communicative manner reflects important ways that teachers can promote student motivation (Kiefer, Ellerbrock, & Alley, 2014). On the occasions that the participants were aware of student need, the pattern in which the participants responded to students with flexibility and communication helped them to avoid some of the pitfalls of the attributional process. Participant reports and demonstration of adapting assignments and instruction exemplifies this ability. When teachers support students this way, they do not engage in attributional bias. Teachers may also be able to avoid some of the attributional bias that can occur if they communicate well with both their students and students' families or avoid rigid, stereotyped thinking.

Conversely, if the teachers were unable to detect student need and the student was perceived as unmotivated, attributional bias seemed to occur. The participants indicated that students showed apathetic behavior and were unmotivated. Understanding that students may not have the skills and abilities to get their needs met, or not have parents who will communicate the need appears important to avoid the notion that student inaction is the result of being unmotivated.

Participants described a number of different ways that they tried to communicate with both students and parents. The results of their attempts were mixed depending on the method used. Some of the participants communicated through the use of newsletters while others used daily home-school logs. The use of newsletters may not an effective avenue for certain populations such as Spanish speaking families or immigrant low

income families, while back and forth logs and journals help to build relationships

beyond typical school events (Coady, Cruz-Davis, & Flores, 2009; Kay, Neher, & Hall

Lush, 2010). It seemed that the participants were unaware of the mismatch between their

efforts and the needs of some of their families which made it difficult for good

communication to occur. This seemed to facilitate the attributional process in a negative

way, as some of the participants blamed the parents for a lack of school support and

communication, yet held themselves in high regard for their own efforts.

Some of the participants indicated that the success of their students could be

attributed to their own approach of showing their love of the content they taught and

attempting to deliver their instruction in varied ways. Approaching their classroom in

these ways allowed them to engage students in their learning, to make classroom and

curriculum adjustments accordingly, and to create a positive climate. Teachers who are

enthusiastic about and express love of their content area are more likely to create

environments where students engage in learning and feel supported (Watson, Miller,

Davis, & Carter, 2010). Students in these types of classrooms appear to believe in the

importance of the material view the classroom climate as more positive.

Connection

Connections that the participants made with students and diverse learners were

perceived as necessary so that students could "trust" what they do, while at the same time

provided a foundation for learning and good behavior. Hughes et al. (2005) pointed out

that developing connections with students is important in providing opportunities for

academic success, especially at-risk students. The participants believed that the

connections they made with their at-risk, diverse students resulted from their own actions

and interactions with students. They used a variety of means to convey to students their support and to develop that connection.

The participants reported, and were observed, connecting with students by highlighting shared personal interests, using positive attention, and encouraging them to take academic risks. Observational and interview data also indicated that these behaviors supported all students including those who were not very strong in a particular skill or subject area. As one participant indicated "As long as I sat there next to him and told him 'good job', he was able to get it." By definition under attribution theory (intrapersonal), this participant's description indicated her perception that the positive outcome for the student was attributable to her efforts, which resulted in a sense of pride. In this circumstance, "caring paid off." This participant's ability to connect with the student provided the encouragement she needed to be academically successful. Research supports that developing close, personal and safe relationships with students significantly support student success (Wentzel, 2009).

Participants might have experienced short term success through these brief interactions, but they also noted the importance of really getting to know their students and showing interest in them as individuals. Urooj (2013) proposed the idea that good communication between teachers and students provides an avenue for connection, but genuine interest allows students to be successful at a higher level. Participants perceived that when they gained knowledge of a student's personal story and interests, they were better able to find some aspect of the student that they could relate to and gain more of a connection with that student. One participant in the study went as far as to watch professional wrestling, a subject she had no interest in, in order to gain a common interest

with some students with whom she had not been able to connect. Students are more willing to engage in social and academic tasks when teachers show genuine interest in them (Wentzel, 2009). Participants' actions inevitably allowed them to develop more positive and deeper connections that helped their students become more engaged in the classroom and in their learning. In addition, participants believed this practice helped to fill a gap for impoverished students who were not able to get personal attention at home.

Further, participants attributed long term student success to their role as life guides. The participants wanted students, especially diverse learners, to become lifelong learners. They seemed to hold the belief that through the "care and compassion" they provided, these students would learn to strive for lifelong learning and become "good people." It is possible that this idea is the result of long term professional expectations they hold for themselves and other educational stakeholders. Teachers have long been expected to be role models for students and exhibit good decision making, moral reasoning, and desire to learn in order to provide good examples for students (Lumpkin, 2008). This type of behavior facilitates the types of relationships and connections desired by teachers, parents, and other educators alike.

In addition to the participants being able to develop a connection with individual students, they believed that the way they approached their classroom holistically produced environments that were best suited to student needs for learning and growth. Participants appeared to have the belief that conducting themselves in the classroom as supportive, communicative, and caring adults allowed students to feel safe, valued, and able to have their needs addressed. The participants were consistently observed addressing social/emotional and academic issues in the classroom and providing

expectations for students regardless of color, financial status, or ability. They also reported their sensitivity to student issues and how they adjusted their expectations and approach with students based on individual characteristics. Building relationships with students is important and even more important to students who enter school more at-risk than students who don't have risk factors (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Structured Support

Structured support was the third significant way in which the participants believed that they influenced student achievement motivation. To help structure support for students, participants saw the necessity to provide a small "society" in the classroom whereby students had to abide by certain expectations. As students learned to follow the rules, they became more successful and could become motivated by rewards for their behavioral progress. However, some of the participants indicated that gender and developmental maturity impacted students' ability to act appropriately in their small societies. Boys were perceived as less developmentally mature and capable of managing their behavior than girls. In some instances, having larger numbers of boys in the participant's classrooms resulted in fewer privileges and classroom opportunities.

One has to wonder how much the participants' own biases played a role in the perceptions of whether students were able to appropriately participate. Even when individuals hold overtly egalitarian attitudes, they are still susceptible to possessing stereotypes and prejudice that they may not be able to control (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). In the circumstances noted above, the participants' beliefs may have influenced their perceptions in ways that supported their reports of poor student behavior or even the types of groupings students were placed in.

In answer to the third research question regarding the types of decisions made by participants as related to classroom instruction, participants indicated that they used small groups and deliberate content and instruction in order to provide more academic and social/emotional structure for diverse learners. Providing targeted academic instruction along with social-emotional support is important because the targeted academic instruction may not be enough for struggling or diverse learners to benefit. Weiss (2013) pointed out that student learning related behaviors (which encompasses social-emotional supports) need to be explicitly taught along with academic instruction. Most of the participants were observed providing these types of supports, however, only a few provided these supports consistently. At times it appeared that some of the participants did not really grasp why they were placing students into groups other than deriving a designation of "lower" or "higher" students based or their perceptions or to better manage the students.

Structured support for students was also apparent in the ways that participants provided curriculum adaptations for diverse learners. Most often these adaptations involved reducing work, using adapted books and materials, providing vocabulary, and building background knowledge. Other methods, as noted above, included the division of diverse learners into groups according to their perceived abilities, both in content knowledge and self-regulation. These perceptions seemed to influence the role of these types of groups as students were very often described as being "higher" and "lower" by the participants.

Being placed into the separate "higher" and "lower" groups and providing particular types of adaptations for diverse learners could contribute to the achievement

gap present in American education. It has been proposed that teacher expectations may be a major contributor to the achievement gap between students of color including African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). The participants in this study appeared to believe they had accurate expectations and a good understanding of their students' needs and abilities but may have inadvertently promoted differential expectations among different groups of students. Participants seemed to believe that they were helping students to be successful with small groups and decreased expectations and may not have understood the potential long term repercussions of their well-intended actions.

Throughout the study, hedonic bias, the act of attributing success to one's personal characteristics and failure to external causes, consistently emerged as part of themes developed from the participants' responses. Even when asked direct questions about not being successful with students, participants' answers drifted from stories of failure to stories of success. This type of substitution is supported by Sanjuan and Magallares (2014) who found that people have a tendency to use hedonic bias (what they call self-serving attributional bias) as part of their own coping strategies to preserve self-esteem.

Teacher Perception of Student Motivation

Participants considered student factors as having a large impact on student performance and achievement at school. The principles of attribution theory (Graham & Williams, 2009) would explain these factors (e.g., desired learning, self-regulation, and family support), as part of the interpersonal division from the vantage point of the participants. Participants tended to view desired learning and self-regulation as internal

factors related to the students and for the most part, as being within students' control. Family support was considered external and beyond students' control. According to this attribution theory, if students failed due to what participants viewed as controllable factors, they would react to it with reprimand and punishment, whereas, if it was deemed uncontrollable, participants would be more likely to react with sympathy. In cases where students were successful, the attributional process is not typically induced unless the success is deemed important or unexpected.

Desired Learning

In this study, the students that were considered successful by participants were considered "self-motivators" and students who failed were described as "apathetic." Students who were self-motivated were perceived as eager to be in school, ready to learn, and as putting forth effort. These students were described as thriving and as demonstrating effort and went beyond the general expectations to take charge of their education. Consistent with attribution theory, participants believed these students would do better in the classroom, both now and in the future. Students who demonstrated effort were perceived positively, compelling teachers to treat them in a favorable manner. Being treated more favorably might result in better instruction from teachers and improved self-perception by the student (McKown & Weinstein, 2008).

Students who were perceived as not self-motivated were described as "not caring" and not being engaged in school. These students were also perceived by the participants as not being able to take initiative, lacking confidence and effort, and not able to advocate for their own needs. The consequences of being perceived in this manner placed these students at risk for achievement failure and discipline concerns. The participants

communicated a clear frustration and need to discipline students who did not put forth

effort because it was something that was perceived as controllable by the student. These

perceptions were evident in the interviews and during some of the observations. For

instance, one participant stated that she would give a student additional and different

work if the student did not stand up and participate in the group activity. In other words,

the student was punished with extra school work. This particular student happened to be a

student of color and therefore considered a diverse learner and addressing his reluctance

with punishment rather than understanding may be placing him at higher risk for failure.

In the long-term, these types of negative interactions may lead to even more severe

consequences and place students, especially students of color and other diverse learners,

more at-risk for the school-to-prison pipeline (Alter et al., 2013, Christle et al., 2007).

Self-Regulation

Participants also indicated that self-regulation was a determinant in student

success or failure at school. Self-regulation was defined as students' ability to manage

their behavior, attention, thoughts, and materials. This theme is similar to desired learning

in that it was considered something to be within students' control, but with an exception

as related to student diversity and ability. All three categories of diverse students,

students of color, impoverished students, and students with disabilities, were indicated as

having self-regulation issues.

Some of the discipline practices employed by participants, such as behavior charts

and systems, were designed to help support the students in developing self-regulatory

skills in their classrooms. These systems were present in all of the participant classrooms

indicating their beliefs that self-regulation skills could be taught and/or facilitated. In fact,

high quality classroom management practices are positively related to student development of self-regulation skills (Fuhs, Farran, & Nesbitt, 2013). From the teacher interviews, it appeared that they utilized behavior systems for this purpose, although some also voiced concerns that some students were not really able to self-regulate even when behavioral supports were in place. In this case, it appears that the participants' practices aligned with effective practices indicated in the research but did not always believe in their effectiveness.

Some of participants' disciplinary practices, however, were not aligned with their beliefs. They were observed to occasionally reprimand students in a punitive manner in response to misbehavior. McClowry et al. (2013) found that if teachers perceived students as having difficulty with self-regulation behavior, teachers tended to provide more negative feedback to those students. Furthermore, these authors found that providing negative feedback to diverse learners resulted in more unregulated student behavior. This outcome was also observed in the present study. When teachers reacted with reprimands for student dysregulation, it was also obvious to me that students who were reprimanded continued with the inappropriate behavior if the participants did not follow up or monitor the students after the reprimand. These types of practices appeared to facilitate a negative cycle of continued misbehavior and a negative relationship with teachers. This ineffective response (i.e., reprimands) may also lay the groundwork for pushing students away from school engagement and towards more negative behavior as they are ineffectual in supporting student self-regulation and achievement.

As noted, not all participants seemed to believe that all students could control their self-regulation. If a student was identified with a disability, this was especially true.

Participants sometimes reacted sympathetically towards students who were perceived as not having the ability to self-regulate. These students received additional support such as academic assistance before school. This type of support not only allowed teachers to build a stronger relationship with the student but also provided extra assistance needed to help this student succeed. Some practices, however, may have a detrimental effect on students. Participants who reacted sympathetically in the classroom (e.g., by lowering expectations) may be facilitating negative student perceptions of themselves. Graham and Williams (2009) indicated that reacting sympathetically to students may provide cues to students that they lack ability. In other words, participants who viewed students as unable to control their actions and then lowered their expectations for these students may inadvertently reinforce the idea that the student is unable to regulate his or her own behavior and hinder advancement in the development of those skills.

Of particular interest were teacher perceptions of specific groups of students who were perceived as having difficulty. The participants often identified students who were ELL (English Language Learners) to indicate a group of students who were having problems with self-regulation. It should be noted that even though not all ELL students are students of color, the ELL students in these classrooms were generally Latino or African refugees. One participant indicated that she placed her ELL students (along with her students with disabilities) at a table with her para-educator so that this person could help them focus and pay attention. By indicating that the para was there to "help" the group of students, attribution theory would suggest that this is a sympathetic response from the teacher and indicate a perception that the dysregulation was uncontrollable for this group of students. On the surface, this would appear to be a good practice as more

intensive instruction can be provided to students in these types of small groups. However, Weiss (2013) argued that when placing students in small groups, they must be explicitly taught how to regulate their behavior and that these groups are most effective in the context of providing small group academic instruction. This particular participant demonstrated the use of this grouping strategy as both an instructional and behavior management technique and used it throughout the day in her classroom. This response may suggest a more punitive rather than an empathetic approach and it was not clear the degree of control the teacher assigned to students' self-regulation in this situation.

Overall the participants did not seem to have the same punitive perceptions but more of the perception that the students did not seem to possess the ability to self-regulate. My observational data seemed to support that participants provided students of color, as a whole, more redirection and explicit instructions around behavioral expectations. Attribution theory supports that this kind of response as it means that teachers see it as an uncontrollable factor.

Impoverished students were also implicated as struggling with self-regulation. Participants generally reported that because of having "crummy" home lives or being "needy," impoverished students required extra help to regulate behavior. Participants did not convey that they believed home life and impoverishment was something that was within the student's control. The responses that the participants gave to these students were generally sympathetic. They indicated that they believed these students struggled because they came from homes where they did not have the stability needed to facilitate focus at school.

Some students had disabilities such as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) or other learning disabilities that impacted their cognitive control in many situations. Other students were seen as not able to manage themselves because they did not pay attention in class, regulate their behavior, or organize their materials. Participants reacted differently based on their perception of what caused the student's lack of self-regulation. Their reactions sometimes indicated a sympathetic response such as whispering a redirection to an individual student. Other times, a participant's reaction indicated a punitive response by saying things such as "You know that is not acceptable in my classroom" in front of the entire class. Whether participants intended to deliver these different types of interactions depending on how they viewed students' control over self-regulation could not be determined. However, it was interesting to note this definite variation in response, one that was more supportive (e.g., private discussion) than punitive (e.g., public shaming).

Both interviews and classroom observations confirmed the difficulty experienced by some students in organizing their thoughts and materials. The disorganization students' experienced seemed to manifest in their inability to manage their classroom production. Levine (2003) described these abilities as production controls which include previewing, options, pacing, quality, and reinforcement control. These controls are centered in the prefrontal cortex and are responsible for helping to structure thinking and management of materials. Participants indicated that they believed certain students had difficulty with these controls because they saw them rushing through work and being unable to engage in meaningful learning. The participants indicated some frustration with students' poor self-regulation because they believed they were unable to engage and help

them with more complex concepts. In other words, regardless of whether students had control over their own self-regulation, participants tended to view this aspect of student functioning beyond their own control and as something that was managed (e.g., by sitting students in a group at the back of the room with a paraprofessional), punished (e.g., called out publicly), or accepted with sympathy (e.g., private conversation).

Family Support

When participants talked about family support during the interviews, they seemed to express their thoughts with general sympathy for the students. This type of response would be expected based on attribution theory because it is an external uncontrollable factor for students that is unlikely to change. The instability of the home life, low financial status, and perceived lack of value for education was reported by teachers as very significant areas of concern for students, especially those who were struggling diverse learners. From the participants' perspectives, the degree of stability in the home appeared to dictate the students' ability to complete work, navigate structured environments, and gain essential learning. If students resided in unstable homes, they were more likely to have behavioral issues, struggle to complete homework, and lag further behind students who were able to access instructional support at home.

The importance of family support and involvement in their children's education is well established. Recently Fagan and Lee (2013) concluded after reviewing the literature that students who have intact and supportive families have much better social and educational outcomes. In addition, having parental support and stability provides students with the strong relationship they need that leads to improved parental involvement and student achievement (Fagan & Lee, 2013). Participants' concerns with their students'

family support indicated accurate perceptions about how important this component is to overall student outcomes.

Moreover, when families struggled financially at home, participants understood that students might not have the necessary resources for learning. Some of these students did not even have their basic needs met such as regular food and shelter, much less school supplies. When students did not have access to these basic resources, they struggled more behaviorally, cognitively, academically, and emotionally. Conversely, Kiefer et al. (2014) found that when student basic needs are met, there was a greater likelihood that their motivation would improve. It is important then for students to have their basic needs met which may call for a broader systemic response to help families connect with needed resources.

Related to a lack of financial means was the lack of exposure to experiences that would help students to gain background knowledge. Throughout their interviews, some of the participants expressed great concern over the students' lack of background knowledge. For example, they indicated that some students did not know how to describe mountains because they had never seen any. The participants then wanted to help these students gain this knowledge through other means including exposing them to books, the internet, and other media in their classrooms. Students who had travelled and been exposed to educational media were perceived by the participants as much more successful in the classroom because they had greater background knowledge.

Participants implied that with many diverse and struggling learners, there seemed to be a lack of value placed on education on the part of the parents. Students in the participants' classroom were viewed as being a "reflection" of their parents. It did not

appear that the participants were faulting the students, but instead were holding the parents accountable. The participants seemed to lack some of the empathy required in understanding that families may have parents working two jobs or may be experiencing other hardships that make them homeless. In addition to holding the parents accountable, it appears that the participants may view these difficulties as controllable by the parents.

<div align="center">**Implications and Recommendations**</div>

The findings from this study indicated that participants believe good teacher characteristics and support for students' achievement motivation involve the connections they build with students, the support, communication, and caring they exhibit in their classes, and the structured supports that they use to help students advance. The findings also suggested that participants perceive students' desired learning, self-regulation, and family support as dictating the level of academic achievement students will experience and as noted, see these variables as somewhat beyond their control. Bearing these things in mind, we can examine these using the educational struggle of Ernest, the struggling Latino student introduced in Chapter I.

As described previously, Ernest struggled with both a speech and language impairment and an emotional disability. He consistently experienced achievement failure and disciplinary action that became progressively worse from the time he was in kindergarten. It was clear that the supports and practices that had been used up to that point were ineffective. What was not clear was what teacher beliefs and perceptions were sustaining these ineffective practices over time. It was not until a supportive educational team seemingly provided more effective strategies and assistance that changed his educational trajectory.

This study perhaps began to draw a clearer picture of why Ernest's experience may have been one of failure and subsequently shifted to improved success. He and other diverse learners may encounter a multitude of problems related to some of the themes (e.g., lower expectations, punishment) and responded to some of the supports (e.g., connection, communication) presented in this study. To begin, struggling diverse learners may have teachers who have not successfully developed a connection with them. Having a connection is important so students can trust what the teacher is doing. Furthermore, relationships between teachers and students that are characterized as demonstrating relatedness, having little discord, and sharing a good perception of the relationship have been associated with positive educational outcomes (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker et al., 2007; Garner & Waajid, 2008).

The participants indicated a desire to have good connections with students and discussed its importance. However, it was apparent that not all of the participants had developed these types of relationships with all of the students in their classrooms and some struggled with the balance between establishing this type of support and maintaining classroom management. Davis (2006) indicated that teachers do not tend to have a good understanding of how important high-quality teacher-student relationships are to student motivation and achievement. Teachers should be encouraged to and provided training on developing relationships with diverse learners. A thoughtful process should be undertaken when providing these opportunities for teachers to deeply explore how to overcome differences and develop connections. It is sometimes difficult for teachers to explore their own negative perceptions, especially when it comes to

evaluating how they perceive and interact with diverse learners. In addition, it seems important that teachers learn how to authentically develop relationships with students.

In addition to developing connections with students, teachers who approach their classroom by providing a supportive, communicative, and caring environment are laying the groundwork to establish a positive classroom climate that helps meet the social-emotional and academic needs of students. Diverse learners like Ernest may not experience classroom conditions that support them and conversely are placing them at higher risk for educational failure (Osher et al. 2010). Some of the participants seemed to place a great emphasis on providing a structure for positive classroom climate, while others were not as consistent. These participants may not have checked in with students to see how they are doing, or followed up with students to communicate important information about tasks or assignments. Teachers who regularly incorporate the supportive, communicative, and caring approach provide a framework for student motivation and achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In the age of school accountability and teacher evaluation, it is imperative that teachers are evaluated on their ability to structure their classrooms in a supportive, communicative, and caring way. With these evaluations, teachers themselves should be supported through guidance and professional development related to improving their practices in this area.

Providing structured supports for students can also provide a framework that ensures student success in atypical situations. If you recall, Ernest had been identified as having an emotional disability from an early age but had not been identified with a speech and language disability until the end of middle school. After this other disability was identified, he began receiving more structured support in his learning which led to

improved academic success. Reassessing Ernest's situation allowed him to get the support he needed. Diverse learners like Ernest should be afforded that same opportunity which means that teachers need to be continually providing structured supports for diverse and struggling students regardless of their own perceptions of the reason or controllability of the failure.

Additionally, teachers should take care in providing individual structured support because e students can perceive this type of support as an indication of their inability to demonstrate specific knowledge or skills (Graham & Williams, 2009). Teachers need to become more familiar with how their approach impacts student achievement motivation. Understanding attribution theory of motivation itself can provide the foundational knowledge teachers need to understand how to best approach students.

The participants in this study viewed desired learning as a student controlled factor that impacted student success. When the participants perceived that students lacked a desired learning, they reacted punitively towards the student which is consistent with what would be expected in attribution theory (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). This was often observed in Ernest's case in that he had an unknown factor (i.e., speech and language disability) that contributed to his early failure, however, teachers perceived his lack of success as volitional. There is danger when there is a mismatch between a teacher's perception that a student is failing because of lack of desire for learning and a student who is struggling with other factors but is motivated to learn. This disconnect could lead to a sense of learned helplessness from the student.

It is possible that teachers could misperceive a student's ability to self-regulate as well. The participants believed that some of their students struggled with self-regulation

due to both controllable and uncontrollable factors. Teacher perceptions for the cause or reason for student "lack of motivation" could create an attributional mismatch. Diverse learners like Ernest who have difficulty displaying expected classroom behavior, paying attention, and managing materials could be met with sympathy or punishment depending upon teacher perception. It is important for teachers to take ownership in giving explicit instruction to help students regulate their behavior just as they would teach a student to read (Weiss, 2013).

All participants agreed that the circumstances that students were born into were uncontrollable to both students and themselves. These circumstances were clearly seen as impacting participants' actions and decisions in the classroom but were generally responded to with sympathy, especially if students were falling behind. The participants attempted to provide experiences that would help students gain background knowledge, to learn the rules of society, to act as life guides, and occasionally to help students gain access to the resources they needed for school as well as to help families access basic needs.

Beyond what this research holds for teachers and students, other educational stakeholders can benefit from this research as well. Administrators and school psychologists can help teachers to understand how their attributions might influence their relationships with students and their families as well as their practices in the classroom. This understanding might assist teachers to examine their practices and facilitate a deeper understanding of what really works for students and what may be inhibiting students' ability to progress in their classrooms. Teacher preparation programs could include courses that target attribution theory and its use in the educational milieu to encourage

teacher candidates to more deeply examine their preconceived beliefs about students, students' families, and student motivation.

In conjunction with this, school psychologists can use the ideas from the six themes to better engage with teachers to identify teacher beliefs, perceptions, and experiences that impact student achievement. Specifically, school psychologists would have a framework to discuss ways that teachers may attribute causes to success or failure and as needed provide the teacher with individualized guidance and training through consultative processes. On a district level, the findings from this qualitative research can promote modifying district policies on curriculum development and disciplinary action such as incorporating enrichment programs that enhance background knowledge or mandated policies requiring better investigation of student misbehavior such a maladaptive self-regulation.

Overall, it is important for teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and perceptions and how these lead to practices that may help or hinder the achievement motivation of students. The mismatch of teacher perceptions of their own practices can have long-term negative consequences for their classrooms. Additionally, the perception of student characteristics and motivation can have long-lasting consequences impacting the relationships and connections that help student achievement. Teachers should be encouraged gain training around diverse learners, their needs, and how their performance may be impacted by their characteristics. Diverse learners like Ernest are the beneficiaries when teachers engage in these reflective practices.

Limitations of the Current Research and
Implications for Future Research

First, because this study focused on teachers' beliefs, perspectives, and experiences about student motivation it is not possible to directly relate the findings to student outcomes. It would be valuable to collect information regarding student academic and behavior performance in the classroom using both quantitative (e.g., academic performance, behavioral referrals) and qualitative assessments. Qualitative assessments could include small focus groups, individual interviews, in-class observations, and parent questionnaires. By including the student perspective, researchers could associate the teacher beliefs, perceptions, and experiences more directly to student motivation.

Second, this study does not take into consideration the perspectives of the students or the parents. Future research could include interviews and information taken from parents and students on what teachers are doing that enhance or hamper student motivation. Having information from these sources would allow stakeholders to help improve teacher training and bridge any gaps that may and probably do exist between all those involved in education and invested in student achievement and motivation.

Specific to the Likert-scale participant questionnaire, while it provided a succinct impression participants' attitudes related to training opportunities, the responses did not provide greater understanding of the type or area of training they were most interested in nor were their enough responses to draw any conclusions. A broader needs assessment of all teachers in the school might be a better method for obtaining information on the perceived training needs of teachers.

Lastly, while there have been other qualitative studies exploring this topic, all three, including this study have been similar in their establishment of themes. An

ethnographic study where teacher student relationships are examined across the school year would provide a better longitudinal picture of instruction. Furthermore, it would provide a better understanding of the interplay of culture and instruction from the perspective of the subject of study.

Conclusion

This study could help broaden the base of knowledge about teacher perceptions of student motivation as related to their students, especially those who are considered to be diverse learners. Themes from this study generally aligned with the tenants of attribution theory of motivation and aligns with the limited research available regarding teacher perceptions and practices. The implications of this research suggest that teacher preparation and training might include curriculum for teachers to help them reflect on their own perceptions and how these may impact outcomes for all students. Further study is needed to develop a better understanding of how teacher perceptions impact their practices and in turn, affect student motivation and educational outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 12, 2014

TO: Brian Nutter, PhD (c)
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [667498-2] A Phenomenological Investigation of How Teachers' Beliefs,
                         Expectations, and Perceptions Influence Classroom Practices
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: November 12, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: November 12, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of
Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in
accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and
insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via
a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each
participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior
to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED
adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this
office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please
use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received
with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 12, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion
of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please
include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Mr. Nutter -

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear [Teacher],

My name is Brian Nutter; I am a doctoral student of School Psychology at the University of Northern Colorado. I am writing to invite your participation in my graduate research study entitled**: A Phenomenological Investigation of How Teacher Beliefs, Expectations, and Perceptions Influence Classroom Practices.**

The purpose of this study is to describe how teacher perceptions direct classroom practices with students of color, impoverished students, and students with special needs. Your perspective will add practical depth and knowledge to understanding regarding teacher perspectives on discipline practices with students of color, impoverished students, and students with special needs in the state of Colorado, an area with limited research.

I would be extremely grateful for your decision to participate in this study as your input is essential to this research. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdrawal participation at any time. If you choose to participate you will receive a gift card for $25 as a token of appreciation for your time, there are six components of the study as part of your participation:

- Completion of one short demographic questionnaire through e-mail inquiring about teacher and school demographics and teacher experience.

- Two 30-45 minute in-class observations on two separate days within a 2-3 week time frame during the school year. This will be video recorded for authenticity and times will occur at your convenience. I will be the class observer and only you, the research team (two research assistants and auditor) and I will have access to observation notes and video.

- One 1-hour semi-interview occurring sometime after your first observation which will be audio taped (to ensure note taking accuracy and authenticity) to discuss your perceptions related to diverse learners. This will be scheduled at a time of your convenience. I will be conducting the interview and only you and I will have access to the audio tape and interview notes.

- Completion of a brief Future Directions Likert Scale following the interview indicating teacher training and training needs

- A copy of a non-identified classroom artifact (lesson plan, student work, or discipline procedure)

- Review of my write up and interpretation of your interview and observation to ensure accuracy and completeness of your perceptions.

You and your school identities will be kept confidential and your responses will remain anonymous throughout the duration and conclusion of this study. All audio/video tapes and hard copies of notes and questionnaires will be destroyed or returned to you (at your request) at the conclusion of the study.

Attached is the approval letter for this study from the IRB for your review.

Please note that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or nutt4561@bears.unco.edu. I look forward to working with you.

Most sincerely,

Brian Nutter
PhD Candidate School Psychology

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INCLUSION QUESTIONNAIRE

PARTICIPANT INCLUSION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assess whether or not you meet the criteria to be a participant in this research study. Please answer each question below.

1) Are you a teacher of general education working with students in grades 1-6?

    a) Yes
    b) No

2) Do you have students who are students of color, impoverished students and student with special needs

    in your classroom?
        a) Yes
        b) No

3) Have you been teaching for at least 1 year?

    a) Yes
    b) No

4) Have you been at your current school for at least one school year?

    a) Yes
    b) No

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: A Phenomenological Investigation of How Teachers' Beliefs,
                         Expectations, and Perceptions Influence Classroom Practices
Researcher: Brian M. Nutter, MA., Special Education
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
E-mail: nutt4561@bears.unco.edu
Research Advisor: Dr. Robyn Hess, Ph.D.
E-mail: Robyn.Hess@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to describe how teacher
perceptions, beliefs, and expectancies direct classroom practices involving diverse
learners.

Participants will be asked to participate in five components of the research study,
specifically:

- Completion of one short demographic questionnaire through e-mail which asks
  about teacher demographics and experience.
- One 1 hour semi-interview occurring sometime after your first observation which
  will be audio taped (to ensure note taking accuracy and authenticity) to discuss
  your perceptions related to diverse learners. This will be scheduled at a time of
  your convenience. I will be conducting the interview and only you and I will have
  access to the audio tape and interview notes.
- Two 30-45 minute in-class observations on two separate days within a 2-3 week
  time frame during the school year. This will be video recorded for authenticity and
  times will occur at your convenience. I will be the class observer and only you, the
  research team (two research assistants and auditor) and I will have access to
  observation notes and video.
- Completion of a brief Future Directions Likert Scale following the interview
  indicating teacher training and training needs
- A review of a non-identified classroom artifact such as a lesson plan, student work,
  or discipline procedures.
- Review of my write up and interpretation of your interview and observation to
  ensure accuracy and completeness of your perceptions.

At the end of the interview and observation, I would be happy to share your data with you at your request. The audio/video recordings will be stored on a locked computer by the lead investigator (B. Nutter) until the transcriptions have all been completed. I will take every precaution in order to protect your anonymity. You will be assigned a pseudonym that only the lead investigator (B. Nutter) will know and when I report data, your name will not be used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will only be accessible by the lead investigator (B. Nutter).

In this research study there are no foreseeable risks. Participants will receive a $25 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time devoted to the study. No costs on the part of the participants will be accrued.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Brian M. Nutter, Lead Investigator Signature   Date

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1)   What is your gender? _____M   _____F

2)   What race/ethnicity do you most identify with?

        ____White/Anglo (non-Hispanic)

        ____Black/African American

        ____Hispanic/Latino

        ____Native American/American Indian

        ____Asian/Pacific Islander

        ____Multiracial

        ____Other

3)   Length of time in your current school position: _____

4)   Degree(s) held:

    a. Major _____ Degree_____

    b. Major _____ Degree_____

    c. Major _____ Degree_____

    d. Major _____ Degree_____

5)   Licensures obtained: _____

APPENDIX F

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Observation	Teacher behaviors	Student	Student behaviors	Time/Frequency
Rules and Procedures				
Tasks/Assignments				
Climate				
Teacher Responsiveness				
Value/responsiveness for student perspectives				
Behavior Management				
Productivity				
Student Engagement				
Content Knowledge				
Reasoning and Thinking				
Dialogue				
Feedback				
Closure				

APPENDIX G

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1a)   What led you to become a teacher?

1b)   Finish this sentence for me,

>   A teacher is_____?
>
>   A teacher should_____?
>
>   Teaching is_____? What are your beliefs about teaching and being a teacher?

1c)   How would you describe your teaching approach with students? If you were to describing your teaching using a book or movie, what would the title be? (Possible follow-up) What led you to choose that title?

1d)   Describe for me the differences between students who thrive in your classroom and those who struggle? (Possible follow-up questions: What occurs for those who thrive? What is happening for those students who struggle or fail)?

2a)   If I were a student in your class how would I experience learning? How would you (as the teacher) know I was learning? How do you meet the needs of the learners in regards to content instruction?

2b)   What are your beliefs about the intersection of student characteristics and their capacity to learn? Student characteristics and their need for individualized support? Student characteristics and discipline?

2c)   Tell me a story about a time, recently when you disciplined a student? (Possible follow-up) What made the discipline effective? If faced with similar behavior from the same student, what would you do? How do student characteristics impact discipline practices in your classroom?

2d)   What adjustments do you make when instructing or working with students who are failing or successful? How do you support thriving students? How do you support struggling or failing students? Describe for me a time when you were successful in supporting a struggling student. Describe for me a time when you were less than successful in supporting a struggling student.

3)   How would the parents of your students describe your relationship with their children?

APPENDIX H

FUTURE DIRECTIONS LIKERT SCALE

FUTURE DIRECTIONS LIKERT SCALE

Please respond to each statement with one of the following responses

Strongly agree
Somewhat Agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly Disagree

1)   I feel prepared to meet the needs of all learners?

   a)   Students of color

   b)   Impoverished students

   c)   Students with special needs

2)   I am successful in meeting the needs of all my students?

   a) Students of color

   b) Impoverished students

   c) Students with special needs

3)   I have received ample training to engage with all learners in my classroom

4)   I would like training in with different types of learners from the following organization?

   a)   University training

   b)   District Professional development

   c)   School based professional development

   d)   Continuing credit courses

   e)   Professional learning community

   f)   Common reading and discussion

   g)   Other _____