

Teacher Efficacy and Poverty: A Qualitative Examination from the Teachers' Perspectives

by

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## Abstract

This study provides a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers face as their efficacy develops in different conditions of SES. Nine randomly selected elementary teachers were interviewed and took the short version of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Each teacher's school's rank on the state's Top-to-Bottom list and the schools' free or reduced-priced lunch percentage were collected as contextual data. The question this phenomenological study examined is "Does the environmental factor of poverty influence self-perceptions of teacher efficacy? And, if so, how?" This study showed that as the condition of poverty increased, the quality of the environmental conditions for learning decreased, which resulted in a continuum of ease between high SES and low SES schools in regard to demands on teachers. As poverty increased, perceptions of their efficacy were encumbered. The data also presented a pattern of relatively higher levels of efficacy for the teachers new to their current positions. The TSES data, while a statistically reliable tool, proved to be only a minor indicator of the continuum but when coupled with the interview data, the continuum of ease became more conspicuous. An item analysis of the TSES instrument also supported this temporal quality to efficacy. This research adds to the current literature by providing a deeper exploration of teachers' lived experiences. The analysis provides us with a better understanding of what factors are most relevant in the development of teachers' sense of efficacy within the context of teachers' lived experiences.

*Keywords:* teacher efficacy, poverty, TSES, SES, student achievement

## **Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study**

Current debates in education often do not include the narratives of teachers who are in classrooms with students on a daily basis. The near absence of teachers' voices creates a shallow understanding for legislators and educational leaders trying to make informed decisions concerning educational policy. Researchers who have studied the construct of teacher efficacy have noted that predominantly the studies have been quantitative (Stipek, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). These studies have provided information that has focused on teachers' knowledge and beliefs but not on the cultural meaning of efficacy in terms of relevant roles, expectations, and social relations (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). The examination of teacher efficacy through a qualitative lens will allow for a deeper examination of the contextual factors involved in the formation of teacher efficacy (Stipek, 2012).

Teaching is an emotionally charged endeavor influenced by environmental, behavioral and personal variables that are interrelated, interdependent and context specific (Chang, 2009; Sutton, Mundrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). As a result of the reciprocal relationship between these variables, teachers' perceptions of their work are developed (Chang, 2009; Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998).

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory includes the idea of reciprocal causation between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors in the development of a teacher's sense of efficacy. Because personal, environmental and behavioral factors work reciprocally to influence others (and vice versa) direct causation cannot be determined (Pajares, 1996). This qualitative study examined the narratives of the teacher participants within each teacher's

particular situation in order to capture the complex social context that surrounds the development of their teacher efficacy.

Through an examination of the voices of teachers in a variety of school settings, I sought to illuminate how these factors interact with each other to develop a teacher's perception of his/her efficacy. Previous research has demonstrated that students' achievement levels are related to teacher efficacy levels (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Previous research has also demonstrated that teacher efficacy is not a static construct but changes and evolves as experiences and situations change (Bandura, 1997). This study provides a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers face as their efficacy develops in different conditions of SES. A more thorough understanding of these challenges will allow educators and educational policymakers to intentionally design policies and practices that will support an environment that promotes high teacher efficacy, which will in turn allow teachers to better support their students' achievement.

The rest of this chapter will provide a statement of the problem and will explain the study's purpose. This chapter will also explain the theoretical perspective behind the research in order to allow for a broader understanding of how this study developed. The chapter will conclude with the presentation of the research questions addressed by this study.

### **Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study**

The single most important school-related element that affects student achievement levels is the presence of high quality teachers (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Teachers with high levels of efficacy have students who do better academically, stay in the classroom longer and are less likely to fall prey to burnout (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). A better understanding of teacher efficacy may provide the field with insight that will help us create environments that are more conducive to the development and

sustainability of teachers' sense of efficacy. Through this phenomenological study, I have captured deep descriptions of this complex social phenomenon within the context of teachers' lived experiences by examining the factors that affect teacher efficacy.

**The Development of Teacher Efficacy.** Teacher efficacy is a complicated construct that develops generatively through the interrelationships between the teachers' personal experiences in their own lives, their working environments, and the behaviors they exhibit in the classroom (Pajares, 1996). Much of the research on teacher efficacy thus far has been quantitative in nature and conducted to measure levels of teacher efficacy based on teachers' beliefs and experiences (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). There have been fewer qualitative studies on teacher efficacy, which would provide a deeper understanding of the complex social interactions involved in its formation (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Stipek, 2012; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Researchers have studied levels of teacher efficacy and how high or low self-perceptions of teacher efficacy may affect student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986). As the teacher is the most important school-related factor that affects student achievement (Anyon, 2005), and research has shown that higher levels of teacher efficacy translate into higher student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986), it is important to investigate how the elements of reciprocal causation theory (personal, environmental and behavioral) are involved in developing and sustaining teacher efficacy.

The purpose of this study was to provide additional insight from teachers' perspectives to add to our understanding of which elements (or combination of elements) affect teachers' efficacy levels so that we might create working conditions for classroom teachers that are conducive to student success. This study allowed teachers to describe their perceptions of the

relationship between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors that either promoted or inhibited their sense of efficacy as a teacher.

Previous studies have shown that teachers who have high levels of efficacy have students who not only do better academically but also stay in the classroom longer, and are less likely to succumb to burnout (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Teachers' beliefs about their efficacy affect their job satisfaction and their students' achievement levels (Caprera, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). The teachers' narratives in this study provided a deeper understanding of the nature of the challenges present for teachers as their teacher efficacy develops and evolves. According to Bandura (1997),

The nature of the challenges against which personal efficacy is judged will vary depending on the sphere of activity. Challenges may be graded in terms of level of ingenuity, exertion, accuracy, productivity, threat, or self-regulation required, just to mention a few dimensions of performance demands. (p. 43)

This research adds to the current literature by providing a deeper exploration of teachers' lived experiences. The analysis provides us with a better understanding of what factors are most relevant in the development of teachers' sense of efficacy within the context of teachers' lived experiences.

**Distinguishing Efficacy Constructs.** Several researchers have made a distinction between the constructs of teacher efficacy and teaching efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Teacher efficacy refers to the perception a particular teacher has of his/her ability to affect student learning. Teaching efficacy refers to the perception of the efficacy of teaching in general, not specific to any one teacher but to the entire field of teachers and their abilities to improve student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Another type of

efficacy is collective teacher efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2004).

Collective teacher efficacy is the result of the perception of efficacy of the school as a whole.

This construct describes the overall perception teachers have concerning how well they can effect positive change as a team (Goddard et al., 2004). Teacher efficacy is the focus of this particular study. These definitions are also listed in the following table.

Table 1.1

*Clarification of Terms*

Self-Efficacy	People's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance (Bandura, 1986)
Teacher Efficacy	The extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance (Soodak & Podell, 1996; Wheatley, 2005)
Teaching Efficacy	Teachers' general beliefs about limitations to what can be achieved through education (Soodak & Podell, 1996)
Collective Teacher Efficacy	The perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

Early research on teacher efficacy began with a two-question survey from the RAND Corporation, which focused on the teachers' perceptions of loci of control (Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976). As teacher efficacy became

more widely studied, measures with a more comprehensive set of items were created in order to address the reliability issues of a two-item survey (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Following the RAND studies, researchers began to explore a number of different measures meant to capture the construct of teacher efficacy using scales that explored teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The studies reviewed in support of this study shed light on teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding their feelings of efficacy in a variety of different settings; however, the researchers did not explore the more complex social context in which teacher efficacy is generated (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This qualitative study allowed for a deeper exploration of the complex social exchange that affects efficacy rather than focusing solely on measuring teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding their levels of efficacy. By examining efficacy through teachers' voices, this study gained a better understanding of how we can use policy and practice to support higher levels of teacher efficacy, which in turn will promote higher levels of student achievement.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Teacher efficacy was born from a series of theories from the fields of psychology, philosophy and social anthropology. A brief history of how the theory evolved will better set the stage for understanding how this construct developed. Social cognitive theory arose in the 1970's from earlier research on learning theory. Miller and Dollard (1941) originally developed learning theory in the 1940's. These early researchers in psychology and social anthropology were interested in the process of learning and described the process using behaviorist terms. They found that the essence of learning is the strengthening of the cue-response connection. In order to learn, there must be a drive, i.e. something that the learner wants. There must also be a

cue, i.e. something that the learner notices and a response, i.e. something for the learner to do. Finally, in order to learn there must be a reward, i.e. something that is received.

From its learning theory roots, social cognitive theory (SCT) distinguishes itself from behaviorist views by positing that learning happens socially rather than because of environmental determinism (Denler, Wolters, & Benzon, 2014). According to SCT, learning happens in a triadic social context between behavioral, environmental, and personal factors that work together reciprocally (Denler et al., 2014). SCT also incorporates the construct of human agency, which is what makes it possible for individuals to intervene in the process of their learning and behaviors through the additional influences of other cognitive processes such as intelligence, knowledge, cultural norms and rules, personal values (Bandura, 1986; Denler et al., 2014).

Vygotsky (1930) described learning as an active, social and complex phenomenon. He believed that all learning is a complex psychological process that takes place on two levels: a social level and then an individual level. Perceptions and interpretations of social interactions determine how information will be embedded cognitively and it is inner motivations and intentions that stimulate learning based on the context of each person. This knowledge is then mediated by language and the social context where the learning took place (Cortazzi & Hall, 1998).

The notion that reality, as we understand it, is a mental construction relates back to philosophical musings regarding what makes us human. Transcendental idealism was a theory developed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Transcendental idealism states that humans experience events in space and time only by how they appear to the individual and judgments are continually confirmed through trial and outcome (Kant, 2006).

Understanding humans takes more than an understanding of mathematics according to Kant. It



requires a philosophical inquiry (Bird, 2014). Kant believed that individuals do not perceive the actual things, only their perspective-related interpretation of those things (Kant, 2006; Rohlf, 2014).

Expanding this understanding, existentialists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical movement believed that to understand humans we must do more than look at them only through the lenses of physics, biology, psychology, and sociology. The existentialists believed that to fully understand humans, we must look beyond the natural sciences (Crowell, 2010). They believed there is something more to understanding humans than what can be measured and described by scientific reasoning alone.

Existentialism became a foundation on which the concept of human agency was developed. Bandura (1977) believed that human agency is what makes it possible for people to have choices other than yielding to environmental factors. Human agency evolves generatively in this process rather than reactively because people are not merely reactionary agents. Personal determinants and socio-structural determinants interact reciprocally. Individuals produce their own actions based on their own thoughts and beliefs.

The specific judgments associated with self-efficacy beliefs of specific context-bound tasks are strong predictors of behavior (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 1996). According to research based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs guide the level of effort, persistence and perseverance necessary to execute a task successfully. Low feelings of efficacy tend to be followed by less effort towards the achievement of the task whereas teachers with high feelings of efficacy persist even when success becomes more difficult (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 1996).

The theoretical perspective of this study is grounded in social cognitive theory. Bandura's existentialist construct of human agency maintains that the individual has the ability to make choices throughout the reciprocal and continuous interaction between environmental, behavioral and personal factors. This study examines the perspectives of the teachers within their unique socio-psychological perspectives in order to examine how the environmental, behavioral and personal factors of social cognitive theory function together to create teacher efficacy.

### **Research Questions**

Taking into consideration that all three factors of triadic reciprocal causation; environmental, behavioral, and personal can influence teacher efficacy, this study focused specifically on the environmental factor of socio-economic status as calculated by the percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunch at each school. The primary question this research examined was "Does the environmental factor of poverty influence self-perceptions of teacher efficacy? And, if so, how?" In order to examine this question, this study engaged a sample of teachers to seek their understanding and perspectives regarding these variables. Supporting research questions asked,

- What is the nature of the impact on teachers' sense of efficacy when SES differs?
- Are there mitigating factors that might support higher levels of teacher efficacy in the face of challenging environmental factors?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to broaden our understanding of which factors (or combination of factors) affect teachers' efficacy levels and create working conditions that are conducive to student success. The following literature review examines what research has discovered thus far about self-efficacy, teacher efficacy and reciprocal causation theory. Close attention was given to the effect of teacher efficacy on student achievement and studies that provide information on each of the personal, environmental and behavioral factors that interact reciprocally to develop a teacher's sense of efficacy.

### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a construct that was developed by Bandura in the 1970's. Using his theory, researchers have conceptualized related constructs such as teacher efficacy and teaching efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ashton, Buhr, & Crocker, 1984; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Others have taken on a larger view of the concept and looked at collective teacher efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

Self-efficacy is about the personal judgments a person makes about his/her capability. This is different from self-esteem, which is concerned with a person's judgment of his/her self-worth (Bandura, 1997). Self-concept is also a term that needs to be distinguished from self-efficacy as self-concept is shaped by the perceptions of others and has no predictive value when self-efficacy is factored out (Bandura, 1997). Human agency is what makes it possible for people to shape the outcomes of their own lives rather than assuming that life is predetermined.

Existentialism provides a philosophical structure to the idea of human agency as it holds to the idea that humans are a work in progress and we are the engineers of our own destinies because we have the ability to choose our actions. Existentialists believe that in order to be free, our identity must be continually created and recreated. This freedom, the existentialists believed, was the path to transcendence. Our identity therefore is more than just a result of biology or our social status. It involves the choices that we make and the actions we take (Cusinato, 2012).

How people construct their perceptions of efficacy is linked to an intrinsic need or motivation people have to effectively act within their environment. As people gain experience and knowledge of their skills and capabilities, they learn to pursue behaviors that provide them with feelings of efficacy; however, self-efficacy is not about how many skills people have. Self-efficacy is about their belief of what they are capable of doing with those skills (Bandura, 1997). Persistence and a strong belief in personal capabilities and knowledge are both critical to maintaining self-efficacy. When a person is presented with a difficult situation or setbacks, he or she must have a strong sense of self-efficacy and a firm belief in his or her abilities in order to overcome these obstacles (Bandura, 1993; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

Whether it is general self-efficacy or a more specific kind of efficacy such as teacher efficacy, there are circumstances that can prevent high levels of efficacy from developing. If a person doubts his/her ability to be successful, even if he or she has a broad range of skills, these feelings can undermine his/her performance. This occurs because “efficacy beliefs affect thought processes, the level and persistency of motivation, and affective states, all of which are important contributors to the types of performances that are realized” (Bandura, 1997, p. 39). If

a person is unsure of the skills required for a task, this may also undermine efficacy. This is because without a full understanding of the demands required for the successful completion of a specific task, the person will not be able to accurately judge if he/she has the ability to complete the task (Bandura, 1997, p. 64).

There are systems that are structured in such a way that can undermine the effects of self-efficacy on task performance (Bandura, 1993). For teachers, these systems include the specific contextual factors found in a teacher's professional context. The individual teacher may experience, directly or indirectly, these factors. Teaching contexts that lack purposeful professional development, administrative support, collaborative relationships with colleagues, and access to adequate human and/or material resources can diminish feelings of teacher efficacy. Just as perceptions shape feelings of self-efficacy, perceptions of situations or events develop through different levels of experiences and shape feelings of teacher efficacy (DeNeve, Devos & Tuytens, 2015; Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014; Stipek, 2012).

**Bandura and Teacher Efficacy.** Bandura believed that efficacy beliefs (whether general self-efficacy beliefs or teacher efficacy beliefs) form through a process of self-persuasion. Individuals interpret situations from information brought to them through enactive experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1986). These experiences fall on a continuum of how much they affect the individual and will be described in the following paragraphs.

According to Bandura (1997), enactive mastery is the most powerful source of efficacy information. Enactive mastery happens when an individual has personally experienced success in a particular endeavor. The outcome of the experience helps to form the level of efficacy the individual will have to successfully perform the same task when he/she encounters it again.

Following enactive experiences in influence of efficacy are the vicarious experiences of others, followed then by verbal persuasion and lastly, physiological and affective states.

Vicarious experiences are most relevant when the person has similar attributes to other people he/she is observing doing the task. If the individual feels he/she is similar to this person, he/she will have a stronger sense of efficacy when asked to perform a task that the other person has completed successfully.

Verbal persuasion is limited in its power to influence self-efficacy however, the faith expressed by significant others in the person's ability can influence his/her beliefs in his/her ability to complete a task successfully. The verbal support of significant others is most likely to impact feelings of self-efficacy if the person already believes he/she is capable of successfully completing the task and he/she believes in the knowledgeableness and credibility of the person who is trying to persuade him/her (Bandura, 1997).

Finally, physiological and affective states are most relevant when dealing with situations that involve physical ability, health functioning or coping with stress. People are more likely to hold high efficacy beliefs if they have faith in their physical and emotional capacities to deal with a particular situation effectively. Pain, fatigue, sickness, achiness, agitation and mood can contribute to whether a person feels he/she is capable of success (Bandura, 1997).

The remaining sections of this chapter will describe how the study of teacher efficacy emerged from the study of self-efficacy. There will also be an examination of teacher efficacy and burnout followed by a more detailed description of reciprocal causation. Reciprocal causation will be described in terms of how environmental, behavioral and personal variables work together reciprocally to potentially form or break down levels of efficacy.

### **The Emergence and Study of Teacher Efficacy**

Using social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1993) teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's perception of how well he/she can help students learn in specific contexts. Teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy believe that they can have a positive effect on student performance (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Teacher efficacy is a significant construct because a teacher's perception of his/her efficacy directly influences the learning environment and the level of achievement reached by his/her students (Bandura, 1993; Ashton et al., 1984; Caprera et al. 2006; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1988; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

To study this construct, several researchers have created teacher efficacy scales to rate levels of perceived efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The tests developed thus far incorporate Likert scales that ask participants to rate their beliefs and experiences concerning how well they would be able to perform a specific task. These scales do not provide contextual information regarding the complex social phenomenon that is involved with the development of a teacher's sense of efficacy. The different scales vary in subthemes in that some scales are general to classroom work while others probe specific areas of teaching such as student discipline, planning, and instructional strategies (Ashton et al., 1984; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

**Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES).** The scale utilized in this study is the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale developed by Megan Tschannen-Moran, Anita Woolfolk-Hoy, and Wayne K. Hoy. This scale has a long and a short form. Both versions of this scale were found to be reliable tools to measure teacher efficacy, with a mean reliability of 7.1. The authors of the scale found the short form to be slightly less reliable when used with pre-service teachers in specific sub-categories found in the study (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale was developed as an integrated model that would link together the different conceptual strands associated with earlier construct-defining work. The TSES integrated the four major influences of efficacy beliefs that Bandura (1997) developed along with the concept that teacher efficacy is context-specific and cyclical (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Researchers (Ashton et al., 1984; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ashton & Webb, 1986) using quantitative methods like the TSES found that high levels of teacher efficacy are associated with higher levels of planning for instruction, organization, and enthusiasm for their work. Teachers with high perceptions of efficacy tend to be more open to new ideas and committed to teaching. They are also more persistent with struggling students and less likely to make special education referrals than their lower efficacy colleagues are (Podell & Soodak, 1993). High efficacy is also associated with higher levels of student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

**Teacher efficacy and burnout.** Teaching is a profession that loses over 40% of its population during the first four years on the job (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Today, teachers earn an average of only 64% of what the average college graduate earns (DuFour, 2015). Examining the impact of teacher efficacy can help us better understand how to support teachers in order to sustain their careers and enrich their perceptions of their working conditions. Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that lower levels of efficacy for classroom management were found in teachers who reported more stress from student misbehavior. Teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacies as teachers affect their job satisfaction and their students' achievement levels (Caprera et al., 2006).



Teacher burnout and low teacher efficacy are related constructs in that they present in similar fashions. Teachers who are experiencing burnout and teachers who have low teacher efficacy report emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization in their relationships at work, and feelings of a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Biboi-Nakou, Stogliannidou, & Kiosseoglou, 1999; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

Teachers' feelings of teacher efficacy affect their perceptions and behaviors. The reciprocal nature of job stress and motivation may be represented using the Job Demands-Resource Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands such as disruptive student behavior, low levels of administrative support, lack of material and/or human resources, and the role ambiguity tend to lead to exhaustion and burnout. Job resources may work to counteract these negatives; they include such things as positive collegial relationships, constructive performance feedback and autonomy.

Perceptions are future oriented and based on the individual teacher's perceptions of his/her own competence rather than on his/her actual level of confidence (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Teachers' beliefs are influenced by classroom situations that include working conditions, student behavior, administrative support, and school culture. These perceptions are also influenced by collective teacher efficacy beliefs (Goddard et al., 2004), which has to do with how efficacious the teachers feel they are as a whole team.

**Reciprocal causation.** In social cognitive theory, causation happens reciprocally between three different factors: personal, behavioral, and environmental with the relative strengths of these elements being dependent upon contextual situations (Bandura, 1986). The specific judgments associated with self-efficacy beliefs of specific context-bound tasks are

strong predictors of behavior (Pajares, 1996). Low feelings of efficacy tend to be followed by less effort towards the achievement of the task (Pajares, 1996). The reciprocal nature of self-efficacy within the bounds of the personal, behavioral, and environmental elements makes determining a direction of causality unlikely (Pajares, 1996). These beliefs guide the level of effort, persistence, and perseverance necessary to execute the task successfully.

Findings from other teacher efficacy research have demonstrated that higher levels of teacher efficacy are associated with higher levels of student achievement (Ashton et al., 1984; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Teachers who have higher levels of teacher efficacy tend to persist longer with students who are struggling, spend more time planning and preparing their lessons (Guskey, 1981). Teachers with higher levels of teacher efficacy are also more open to new ideas to use in the classroom (Ashton & Webb, 1986; McCormick & Barnett, 2011). These teachers also tend to use a more human-centered approach to classroom management rather than authoritarian controls (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Human-centered approaches to classroom management may include teaching children how to self-regulate their own behavior by explicitly teaching social skills. A student's relationship with the teacher can help build a value system in the child that supports academic achievement. These relationships can also help students engage longer and allow them to appraise him or herself as learners (McHugh, Horner, Colditz and Wallace, 2013). Children who are able to self-regulate their behaviors are better able to make academic gains, even in the face of poverty (Raver 2012). Teachers who provided students with intentional positive interventions meant to explicitly address self-regulation had students who performed at higher academic levels than students who did not (Raver, 2012).

High levels of teacher efficacy however do not always translate into successful performances. A person may fail at a task they felt they should have been able to be successful at and vice versa but over or underestimation of task performance can have an influence on outcomes. A slight overestimate of one's capabilities has the greatest effect on performance (Bandura, 1997). As teachers make choices on their classroom organization and operation based on their efficacy beliefs a slightly exaggerated sense of efficacy might create a situation where a teacher is more inclined to make attempts at trying new things and persisting longer if the task becomes more difficult than expected. If they have lower expectations, that may influence the outcomes in a different direction leading to less risk-taking and experimentation (Ashton et al., 1984; Caprera et al., 2006; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1988).

***Elements of reciprocal causation: Personal.*** Certain life situations that are specific to individuals are significant elements and bring to bear their own unique influences on the teacher's efficacy levels (Bandura, 1986). Life situations can include personal childhood experiences in school, the teacher's experience in his/her professional training and preparation, and personal stressors from home, family, money issues, health, and so forth.

There are certain characteristics that researchers have investigated that describe those individuals who decide to enter teaching as a career (Cooman, R., Gieter, S., Pepermans, R., Du Bois, C., Caers, R., & Jegers, M., 2007). Of the characteristics examined, the one that is consistently found is that people who enter education do so for altruistic reasons. These include the desire to work with children and to make a positive difference in others' lives.

***Elements of reciprocal causation: Environmental.*** The term 'working conditions' describes those elements unique to the specific work environment of a particular person. The environment of teaching has a vast variety of elements. For teachers, these may include student

misbehavior, the poverty level of the school and community, collegial relationships with peers, access to material and/or human resources and perceptions of administrative support (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Poverty levels are relevant due to the potential impact poverty can have on school success such as access to necessary resources and school readiness levels (Anyon, 2005; Sirin, 2005). Other working conditions include perceived levels of administrative support and the quality of collegial relationships amongst staff (Tsouloupas, Carson, & Matthews, 2014; Hargreaves, 1998; Caprera et al., 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989; Marzano et al., 2005). Student misbehavior is a variable under the larger umbrella term of working conditions that has been found to be a major cause of teacher burnout (Biboi-Nakou et al., 1999).

Stipek (2012) found that when the proportion of students of color in a classroom went up, so did the level of teachers' efficacy. This study included survey data collected from 473 third and fourth grade teachers from 196 different schools. This study did not collect narrative data from participants. The author suggests several possible explanations for this result, one of which is that when teachers work in schools where there are lower expectations for children, their sense of responsibility for academic outcomes goes down and does not influence their perceptions of efficacy as teachers (Stipek, 2012). The study also found that feelings of support from administrators and parents also affected levels of perceived teacher efficacy. When the teachers felt they had sufficient support from administrators and from their students' families their level of perceived efficacy was higher than if they did not feel they had enough support (Stipek, 2012).

Student misbehavior takes on a variety of forms. Students may be non-compliant with authority or bored and, therefore, often off task or disengaged from their learning (Tsouloupas et al., 2014; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Students may have attention disorders or hyperactivity that prevent them from successfully staying focused and not disturbing others

around them (Farah, Shera, Savage, Betancourt, Giannetta, Brodsky, & Hurt, 2006). Students of poverty are more susceptible to environmental factors that increase the likelihood of stymied cognitive development and cognitive functioning problems, which raise the probability of higher incidence of student misbehavior (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013; Young, Fox, Trush, Kanarek, Glass & Curriero, 2012; Anyon, 2005; Evans, 2004; Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008; Blau, 1999; Newacheck, Hung, Park, Brindis, & Irwin, 2003; Raphael, 2013).

Student misbehavior is one of the primary variables included in the larger term working conditions that defines how teachers judge the level of satisfaction with their work (McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). Student misbehavior has been cited as one of the primary determinants of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction for teachers (Biboi-Nakou et al., 1999; Tsouloupas et al., 2014; Woolfolk et al., 1990). Student misbehavior may also affect the relationship between the teacher and a particular student and it may also have implications for the entire class. Volatile relationships between teachers and students can impair the culture of the entire class and school environment. This not only makes school success less likely for the child but also jeopardizes learning for students across the classroom (Chang, 2009).

In addition to student behavior, a lack of resources, time, or support may also contribute to the development of high or low perceptions of efficacy. If there are roadblocks or sub-optimal conditions that prevent individuals from performing, if they lack the incentive to perform at a particular level, or if the conditions under which a teacher is expected to perform are substandard their sense of efficacy may be infringed upon (Bandura, 1997).

School administrators make daily decisions that affect the resources and support teachers get in their classrooms (Marzano et al., 2005). Teachers' perceptions of administrative support

may also be a major determinant in the development of positive or negative perceptions of the work place. Administrative support includes active listening, non-punitive feedback, and support with student misbehavior and/or encouragement (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Woolfolk et al., 1990).

Teachers' motivation to set goals, make efforts to achieve the goals, develop strong collegial relationships, and persevere correlates with levels of teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Caprera et al., 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Different levels of motivation affect the goals individuals set for themselves, how hard they will try to make the goal become a reality, and whether they will persevere if the task becomes difficult. The factors that promote or inhibit motivation can come from personal and/or environmental experiences (Bandura, 1997).

*Elements of reciprocal causation: Behavioral.* Those teacher behaviors that affect the relationship between teachers and their students are especially pertinent to student success (Chang, 2009; Hargreaves, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Those behaviors include establishing a consistent and fair discipline policy for the classroom, using a method of questioning that encourages students to think deeper, and persevering through a combination of less than optimal student behaviors (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Tsouloupas et al., 2014). Teacher behaviors also include choices of instructional strategies such as using whole group versus small group instruction, engaging students in before or after-school tutoring, or establishing collegial relationships with other staff in order to advance their practice (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

The discipline policies of teachers coincide with their levels of teacher efficacy. Teachers that are more efficacious tend to be less authoritarian (Woolfolk et al., 1990). They provide students with more choices in the learning environment and tend to give students more

chances for recovery of misbehavior. Teachers with higher perceptions of their own teacher efficacies act on student misbehavior immediately and with respect to the child's dignity (Woolfolk, et al., 1990; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Blase, 1986).

Teachers who have lower teacher efficacies tend to run very authoritative classrooms and are very strict with the students' behavior expectations (Ashton & Webb, 1986). They do not provide additional chances and tend to give out punitive consequences for misbehavior rather than making the situation a learning experience for the child to grow. There is more humor and positive interactions with the teacher when teacher efficacy is high. When teacher efficacy is low there is more sarcasm used with students and a more authoritative form of discipline (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Blase, 1986).

This literature review examined what research has discovered thus far about self-efficacy, teacher efficacy and reciprocal causation theory. This qualitative study enhances this literature base by providing a context-specific examination of teachers' narratives. The vast majority of the studies listed above are quantitative in nature. Examining teacher efficacy in terms of different contexts related to the environmental factor of poverty will allow for a fresh perspective on those environmental, behavioral and personal factors that are more or less likely to affect teacher efficacy levels.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

#### **The Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The question this phenomenological study examined is "Does the environmental factor of poverty influence self-perceptions of teacher efficacy? And, if so, how?" In order to examine this question, this study engaged a sample of teachers to seek their understanding and perspectives regarding these variables and gave each an opportunity to provide a thick description of his/her experiences. As a backdrop to the narrative data from the interviews, contextual data were also collected to assess the teacher's perceived level of teacher efficacy at the time of the interview, their schools current SES level and their schools current achievement level compared to other schools in the state. Supporting research questions asked "What personal, environmental, and behavioral elements are perceived to be the most important to teachers in developing their sense of efficacy?" and "Are there some factors that appear to be more relevant than others and if so, why?"

#### **Sites and Participants**

The participants were limited to traditional public elementary school teachers representing high SES, mid-level SES and low SES schools in this mid-eastern state. These three SES categories were delineated as follows; the high SES schools were schools that served less than 15% of their students with free or reduced-priced lunch. The mid SES schools served approximately half of their students and the low SES schools served over 85%.



A list of schools was found on the Michigan Department of Education website that had schools that was ordered by free or reduced-price lunch percentage. Schools were taken what were in the southeastern part of the state from this list and divided into the three SES categories listed above in order to locate potential participants with the Participant Search form located in Appendix A. Elementary schools on this list that fell within these three SES ranges after the list was divided were randomly chosen to send invitations for teachers to participate. There was a concern that I would not get many volunteers, so the list was very large to begin with. There were 143 schools chosen to recruit from. Academic performance was not used as a part of the recruitment. Only SES and elementary level were used to identify the schools in the southeastern part of the state that would be recruited from. Only after a participant made contact was the academic data retrieved from the MDE website.

Nine teachers were eventually recruited from seven different schools (Table 3.1). The two teachers from the high SES schools will be referred to as Rebekah and Paula. Rebekah works at school #2. The percentage of students in Rebekah's school who receive either free or reduced-priced lunch is less than 2% and her school ranked in the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile on the State Department of Education's Top-to-Bottom list as of January 2016. Paula's school is school #1, is located in the same county as Rebekah's, and is a Montessori magnet school in her public school district. Only 6.3% of students in Paula's school receive free or reduced-priced lunch and her school ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the state's Top-to-Bottom list.

The two participants from the middle of the socio-economic range will be referred to as Mitch and Barb. Mitch, the only male participant in this study, works at school #3, a traditional public school. The percent of students who receive either free or reduced-priced lunch in his school is 42%. His school is ranked 37<sup>th</sup> on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. Barb worked at

school #4, the second school in the middle SES level. Her school provides free or reduced-priced lunch to 43% of its students and her school is at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile on the MDE Top-to-Bottom list. Mitch and Barb worked in different counties in the state.

The other five participants were from low SES schools and represented three different schools. The teachers at one of these schools will be referred to as Laura and Fanya who worked at school #5. Their school provides free or reduced-priced lunch to 82% and is at the 3<sup>rd</sup> percentile on the MDE Top-to-Bottom list. Lyndie worked at school #6 that had a free or reduced-priced lunch percentage of 84% and was performing at the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list.

Sally and Theresa worked at school #7 where 95% of their students received either free or reduced-priced lunch. Sally and Theresa's school, while it was the highest poverty school in the study was at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. This performance level was significantly higher than the other high poverty schools in this study and higher than the mid-level SES schools.

Table 3.1

*Teachers and School Information*

School # / Pseudonyms	Total Years Teaching/ Years at Current School	Grade Currently Teaching	Free or Reduced Priced Lunch Percentage	State Top to Bottom Ranking
1 / Paula	28/28	½ split	2 (high SES)	89 <sup>th</sup>
2 / Rebekah	24/20	K	6 (high SES)	98 <sup>th</sup>
3 / Mitch	13/5	4 <sup>th</sup>	42(mid SES)	37 <sup>th</sup>

4 / Barb	23/18	5 <sup>th</sup>	43(mid SES)	60 <sup>th</sup>
5 / Fanya	21/5	K	82 (low SES)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
5 / Laura	26/0.2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	82 (low SES)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6 / Lyndie	20/3	5 <sup>th</sup>	84 (low SES)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
7 / Sally	19/18	1 <sup>st</sup>	95 (low SES)	70 <sup>th</sup>
7 / Theresa	8/1.5	5 <sup>th</sup>	95 (low SES)	70 <sup>th</sup>

*Note.* Free or reduced-priced lunch percentages and Top-to-Bottom rankings are from the Michigan Department of Education's Scorecard page as of February of 2016.

There were five final categories assigned and examined based on a combination of the schools' free or reduced-price lunch percentages and their performance levels on the Top-to-Bottom list. These categories were the high SES/high performing schools (Rebekah and Paula), the mid-level SES/mid-performing school (Barb), the mid-level SES/below average performing school (Mitch), the low SES/above average performing school (Theresa and Sally) and the low SES/low performing schools (Lyndie, Laura and Fanya).

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment started in August 2015. There were 143 schools chosen from the state department of education's website that met the above-mentioned criteria of being an elementary school and falling within one of the three SES ranges identified. The principals were asked to forward the invitations on to interested teachers in their buildings. With a low response rate to the emails, I began making phone calls to principals of these schools to ask them to forward the information on to their teachers. Many of the principals expressed great interest in helping; however, this still resulted in zero contacts from interested participants.

At that point, I contacted individual classroom teachers via email invitations. I obtained individual teachers' email addresses from the schools' websites. At the conclusion of recruitment, two teachers were from high SES schools, two were from mid SES schools and five were from low SES schools. Each teacher was contacted to set up a date/time/location for the interviews and surveys.

Ranking information from the state's 2016 Top-to-Bottom list from each school's Scorecard page on the State Department of Education's website was used to establish the performance level of each school. The teacher's scores on the TSES, the poverty level of each teacher's school (established by using the school's free or reduced-priced lunch percentage) and their school's ranking on the Top-to-Bottom list were collected to establish a contextual basis for the interview data. The schools were selected to represent schools from high, medium and low SES based off the school's posted free or reduced-price lunch percentage.

### **Informed Consent**

Anonymity was assured as I have used pseudonyms for each participant and assigned each school a numerical code. The site information, their efficacy scale scores, their schools' SES as indicated by their free or reduced priced lunch percentages, their schools' Top-to-Bottom ranking, along with their school's designated code are captured in the coding chart located in Appendix B.

At the beginning of each interview session, each participant was given the informed consent form and asked to read it and sign it (Appendix C). All participants read, agreed to and signed the informed consent form and these forms are kept in a confidential file in my home. The informed consent included the invitation to participate, a description of what the participant will be doing, what will be done with the data and how confidentiality will be maintained. The

consent form was signed by each participant and each participant, in their taped interview, also indicated verbally that they agreed to be audio-recorded. Permission from the authors of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale was approved for use in this study (Appendix D).

### **Data Collection**

Data collected included archival, survey, and interview data. The archival data includes SES levels of the schools and the schools' rankings on the state's 2016 Top-to-Bottom list for academic achievement. The survey data were obtained from each teacher's scores on the TSES survey. Interview data were collected through individual interviews of each participant. This study was approved through the University of Michigan Dearborn's Internal Review Board. Data was collected starting in October of 2015 until March 2016.

**Archival Data.** Two pieces of archival data came from the 2016 State Department of Education's website. The participants' schools' free and/or reduced priced lunch percentage and the most recent three-year trend data on composite third grade State Assessment scores for the teachers' school. This particular State Assessment however is no longer used and longitudinal scores for the new test being used were not available. The percentile rankings provide each school's relative achievement levels. The Top-to-Bottom ranking is a common metric used by the state on an annual basis to compare the relative achievement levels of schools. The data provided from the Top-to-Bottom ranking is included in this study to provide additional contextual information to the narratives of the participants.

**Survey data.** The survey data represents the teacher's score on the short version of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Appendix E). The short form was chosen because the participants were currently employed teachers rather than pre-service teachers (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The scoring guide and information regarding the TSES validity is located in

Appendix F. The purpose of the TSES was to provide magnitude data on the participants' current levels of perceived teacher efficacy. The information from the TSES, along with the archival data that describes the school in which the participant is currently employed, (Top-to-Bottom ranking and SES level) allowed for analysis, theming and triangulation.

For all items on the TSES, participants responded to a nine-point Likert-type scale (1=Nothing, 3=Very Little, 5=Some Influence, 7=Quite a Bit and 9=A Great Deal). Examples of items include the following: How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork; how much can you do to help your students value learning; how much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules. The results of this scale were shared with each participant at the conclusion of his/her interview. The scale took the teachers approximately 3-5 minutes to complete.

**Interview data.** The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility on the part of the researcher to probe and explore within the predetermined boundaries of the interview (Hoepfl, 1997). The first interviews took place in October of 2015. The final interviews were finished by March 2016. The interviews embraced the concept of naturalistic inquiry in order to capture themes as they emerged during the course of each interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Questions explored the personal, environmental and behavioral elements that affect perceived levels of teacher efficacy and examined how these elements interact reciprocally within each participant's lived experience (Appendix G).

**Data collection process.** After agreeing to the day, time, and location for each interview, the sessions began with each participant signing the consent form (Appendix C). After consent was given, the teacher took the TSES (Appendix E), which was followed by the interview (Appendix G). The efficacy scale rating was shared with the participant at the conclusion of the

interview. An audio recorder was used and field notes were taken to provide documentation in case there were problems with the recording devices and also to record contextual information such as relevant body language and expressions used during the interview. The total time with each participant ranged between 60-90 minutes.

**Data storage.** All data have been stored in my password-protected laptop, which has remained stored in my home. All data, field notes, and anything with identifiable information of the participants will be shredded and disposed of after the final analysis is complete.

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the data used several tools including member checking, triangulation, process coding, pattern coding, and in vivo coding. The data were triangulated by using the interview data along with the data collected from the TSES on the levels of teacher efficacy, the archival data of Top-to-Bottom ranking, and the school's SES level as determined by the free or reduced-priced lunch percentage. Examining these data sets together provided a context-specific insight into the participants' levels of teacher efficacy.

**Coding system.** The interview transcripts were coded to identify patterns through inductive analysis while still allowing for a holistic interpretation of the data (Saldaña, 2009). The coding process provided a summary of information obtained during the interviews into environmental, behavioral and personal factors. The in vivo coding that followed involved examining emotions, gerunds and values by teachers described in their own words in each of the three SES levels. The coding helped to analyze the data, but more importantly, to acquire an understanding of what it meant by examining commonalities and anomalies. Patterns were identified through several cycles of coding. The codes were generated from the data and the

analysis was a balance between the phenomenological description provided by the participants and my analysis of their statements.

First cycle coding of the text included elemental and affective methods in order to filter down the datum corpus (Table 3.2) and was based on personal, environmental, and behavioral factors as defined by Bandura (1977). I then used in vivo coding to examine the values and emotions of the participants and the relationships of these emotions within and between each teachers' particular context (Saldaña, 2009). Then the interview data were examined within the context of the archival data (SES and Top-to-Bottom ranking) and the magnitude data (each teacher's score on the TSES).

After the initial coding, the interview data underwent a second cycle of coding to seek and clarify meaningful categories of information. Axial coding was used at this stage in order to disaggregate the core themes identified in the initial rounds of coding as I read through the texts again to be sure the categories were logical for the data and all significant themes had been identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A summary of the results from the coding work are available in Tables 3.2-3.5 and lay the groundwork for the themes to emerge.

While there were some similarities between the three different SES groups found in all of these coding steps, themes emerged. These similarities brought to light a continuum of ease for the teachers from the high SES schools that declined as poverty levels of the schools increased. Table 3.2 below presents information obtained during the interviews into environmental, behavioral and personal factors.

Table 3.2

*First Cycle Coding*

	Environmental Factors	Behavioral Factors	Personal Factors
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Paula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- student's success is rewarding</li> <li>- data is important</li> <li>- affection for the children</li> <li>- no time to collaborate</li> <li>- spends a lot of personal money</li> <li>- Children are taught what the rules are and then expected to make good choices</li> <li>- I establish where the line is and then it's up to them. It's their choice.</li> <li>- There is no bussing for our magnet school so we have a different kind of clientele than the other schools because parents have to be able to drive them to the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- wants to be respected</li> <li>- handles any student misbehavior on her own but there is not much to handle</li> <li>- uses a time-out stone for the students to work out disputes independently</li> <li>- feels like a mom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a mom</li> <li>- she had a hard time getting pregnant and it took her several years to have children.</li> </ul>
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<p>Rebekah</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students like school</li> <li>- students are the #1 priority</li> <li>- students are nice to each other and inclusive</li> <li>- supportive administration</li> <li>- old material resources but still useful</li> <li>- students are intrinsically motivated</li> <li>- principal acts as an advocate for the teachers when dealing with central office</li> <li>- students are able to solve problems that arise with other students on their own without direct intervention by the teachers for every dispute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- models appropriate behavior for the kids</li> <li>- establishes a family environment</li> <li>- talks about the Golden Rule and bucket filling</li> <li>- helps students learn how to mediate their own conflicts</li> <li>- gives out character ed certificates and has a treasure box to reward positive behavior</li> <li>- tries to be the kind of teacher she would want for her own children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- being a strong communicator is important</li> <li>- teaching children that it's OK to make mistakes</li> <li>- feels like she is their mom away from home</li> <li>- worked at a daycare center during college.</li> <li>- strong communicator</li> <li>- very approachable</li> </ul>
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Barb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- seeing children being successful is important and not break down every time they have to do math</li> <li>- students are positive</li> <li>- collaboration is informal but regular</li> <li>- negotiated protected planning time in their contract</li> <li>- not a lot of parent support</li> <li>- the kids know that I am strict and that they are going to learn</li> <li>- the goal is to learn something every day</li> <li>- I think more of the young ones (young teachers) expect more from parents. Now, I don't have that expectation anymore and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gives verbal redirections when needed and uses colleagues for support for more disruptive student misbehavior</li> <li>- building relationships with students is a priority</li> <li>- uses movement breaks, humor, personal stories and tough love</li> <li>- believes respect comes from love</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- her mentor teacher had a large influence on her teaching</li> <li>- her 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher was an inspiration to her</li> <li>- feels rewarded when they are smiling because she feels they are getting over their math fears and enjoying school</li> <li>- she had worked in business administration prior to becoming a teacher</li> <li>- she had a strong relationship with her university mentor during her teacher training</li> </ul>
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	<p>I ask what else can WE do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the feedback I get from my principal isn't useful</li> <li>- they are just checking a box</li> </ul>		
Mitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- professional development is important</li> <li>- they have a bookroom but most supplies he buys himself</li> <li>- constraints on time to collaborate</li> <li>- lots of girl drama with the students</li> <li>- staff works well together</li> <li>- students are getting away with more negative student behavior than they used to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- making connections with kids is important</li> <li>- believes in teaching appropriate behavior and front-loading what the expectations are</li> <li>- you do the best you can but its hard</li> <li>- focuses on having fun but also learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relates to students who struggle in school because he also struggled in school</li> <li>- his mother had been a teacher</li> <li>- he went to several different colleges during his undergraduate work.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the focus on testing takes time away from teacher behaviors</li> <li>- not all students come to school motivated to learn</li> <li>- students are not engaged</li> </ul>		
Fanya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no time to meet as a staff</li> <li>- resources are old and outdated</li> <li>- some resources available online</li> <li>- administration is not supportive</li> <li>- lack of district follow through for promised programming</li> <li>- little or no parent support</li> <li>- school behavior management is not in place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- likes getting love notes from the kids</li> <li>- enjoys seeing them show understanding of what she is trying to teach</li> <li>- has had to carry students who are misbehaving to the office for their own safety</li> <li>- forgets to follow through on calling home</li> <li>- has the students fill out behavior sheets when they misbehave so they</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- feels connected to the children and relates to them</li> <li>- believes she can be a good role model for students</li> <li>- Christian</li> <li>- mother</li> <li>- came from an impoverished family</li> <li>- she has not felt respected by school administration throughout her career</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school improvement plan is not truthful</li> <li>- no one is comfortable speaking up during meetings</li> <li>- students are given directions to handle student misbehaviors</li> <li>- when students misbehave, the lights go out, heads down, mouths closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can reflect on their behavior</li> <li>- motherly with students</li> <li>- tries to create lots of structure in the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- had wanted to be a gynecologist when she started college</li> </ul>
Sally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lots of resources available because of Title I funds</li> <li>- gets principal support</li> <li>- principal doesn't demean your authority</li> <li>- school improvement plan is top down</li> <li>- loving and respectful relationships with students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not enough time</li> <li>- cramming too much into the school day</li> <li>- if the kids were perfectly behaved she could get more done</li> <li>- seeks out her principal's advice</li> <li>- tries to create a loving and safe classroom environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- respectful behavior should be modeled</li> <li>- tolerance of differences is important</li> <li>- worked previously as an occupational therapist, a facilitator for stress management groups and at a mental health facility</li> <li>- mother</li> </ul>

	<p>- less time to collaborate</p> <p>- teachers are afraid to speak up</p> <p>- I generally don't have a huge problem with student behavior. I have my procedures but like I'm not like – I can put my thumb on kids when I need to but like I'm not super rigid. I know that some kids need more lenience than others.</p> <p>- my biggest problem with student behavior is when kids won't take ownership of their behavior, like flat lying when in fact I saw you with my eyeballs and they're like, 'No miss. I didn't do that.' Now, are you nuts, I just saw you!</p>	<p>- uses procedures, proximity and rewards to promote positive student behavior</p> <p>- sends notes home with disruptive students</p> <p>- uses humor</p> <p>- teaches students about manners</p> <p>- does not blame the kids for their misbehavior</p>	<p>- described herself as not religious</p>
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	<p>- sends kids out in the hall or to the office so that she can take a break from their misbehavior</p> <p>- I have a really difficult student this year. I mean, really difficult. He's aggressive and he never stops yelling out. I only make him leave the room if he, you know, hurts someone and then they (the office) send him right back. It demeans your authority</p>		
<p>Theresa</p>	<p>- collaboration is important</p> <p>- very supportive principal</p> <p>- lunch ladies yell at the kids (cultural)</p> <p>- school improvement work is very thorough</p>	<p>- consistency in running the classroom is the key to success</p> <p>- talking kids through problems so they understand what they got in trouble for</p>	<p>- building rapport with students is critical</p> <p>- learning should be made to be fun</p> <p>- wants to treat her students like she treats her own kids</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- warm and loving environment</li> <li>- students work well together</li> <li>- students are talkative and active</li> <li>- they really do not get too physical with each other. It's verbal and very disrespectful</li> <li>- students are manipulative</li> <li>- If they are kept engaged and busy they will be more likely to stay out of trouble</li> <li>- AP screams at kids during lunch hour and misbehavior is handled inconsistently at the building level</li> <li>- feedback from principal is not constructive but</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lots of conversations with kids to teach them positive behavior expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- worked previously as a dental assistant</li> <li>- decided to go into education when she became pregnant with her first child</li> <li>- describes herself as having obsessive-compulsive disorder</li> <li>- has four children of her own</li> <li>- bachelor's degree in psychology</li> </ul>
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	<p>support from other teachers is very positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the principal gets me what I need when I ask for something</li> </ul>		
Laura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- parent connections are important and she feels slighted that she doesn't have more parent involvement</li> <li>- lack of materials / makes her own materials</li> <li>- parents are not allowed in the building at all</li> <li>- there are meltdown fights that happen with students</li> <li>- They're (the students) not aware of their deficits which often causes them to get squirrely because they don't recognize that they have to focus to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building kids confidence is important</li> <li>- verbal one-on-one redirections are used with students</li> <li>- with-it-ness is important for a teacher to have</li> <li>- likes to handle behaviors on her own without administrative support</li> <li>- explicitly teaches routines and procedures</li> <li>- lots of hugs and high-fives</li> <li>- student behavior is beyond her control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compassion is important</li> <li>- tries to have a positive demeanor and energy for her students</li> <li>- very regimented and organized</li> <li>- she grew up always wanting to be a teacher</li> <li>- her mother had wanted to be a teacher herself but never went back to school for it</li> <li>- she was raised in a strict European household</li> </ul>

	<p>learn what they are learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lots of reminders of expectations when there is misbehavior</li> <li>- sometimes I'll have a meltdown because it's more than I can deal with. – there's a lot of emotional stress in my district</li> <li>- I try to avoid administration as much as I can because I am the leader in that classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tries to keep a very organized classroom</li> </ul>	
<p>Lyndie</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school is semi-chaotic</li> <li>- lack of time to collaborate</li> <li>- collaboration happens informally in the hallways</li> <li>- has to buy her own supplies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tries to help them feel safe when they are at school</li> <li>- uses verbal redirections</li> <li>- constantly reiterating expectations</li> <li>- teaches manners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compassion and empathy are important</li> <li>- connection to students because her school is in the neighborhood where she grew up</li> <li>- compassion for her students home situations</li> </ul>

	<p>- students yell and puff their chests out a lot</p> <p>- very disrespectful behavior</p> <p>- lack of resources</p> <p>- many resources destroyed or pilfered during the last school closing event</p> <p>- parents don't show up to events and meetings</p> <p>- professional development is frustrating and not relevant to her needs</p> <p>- school improvement plan is dictated by the emergency manager</p> <p>- student disputes have to be mediated by the teacher when there are conflicts</p>	<p>- uses a soft voice with students and proximity</p>	<p>- feels motherly</p> <p>- wants to nurture her students</p> <p>- she knew she wanted to be a teacher since she was a little girl.</p>
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	<p>- teachers are constantly having to go back and reiterate classroom rules and telling the children that you may not like everybody but you have to get along with everybody</p> <p>- sometimes the teacher can't help because the situation becomes an office discipline situation like when a student brought a toy gun to school</p>		
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Table 3.3 examines the emotions identified from the interview data and field notes. The emotion coding led to coding for gerunds and value words in Table 3.4, followed by the values and principles coding found in Table 3.5. While there were some similarities between the three different SES groups found in all of these coding steps, a clear theme emerged indicating a continuum of ease for the teachers from the high SES schools that declined as poverty levels of the schools increased.

Table 3.3

*Emotion Coding*

High SES	Mid SES	Low SES
Affectionate	Affectionate	Affectionate
Kindness	Kindness	Kindness
Enjoyment	Enjoyment	
Passion	Passion	
Pride	Pride	
	Harried	Harried
Easy		
Zeal		
Peaceful		
		Respectfulness
		Isolation
		Aggravation
		Frustration
		Difficult
		Concern
		Sympathy
		Compassion
		Resentment
		Tense

Table 3.4 below uses gerunds and value words to code feelings regarding the participant's self, their students, support from administrators and parental involvement. The continuum of ease theme continues to emerge from this coding phase. An examination of these words from one SES category to the next illuminates how the additional challenges faced by the teachers working in the low SES schools changed their perception of their work and the children they worked with.

Table 3.4

*Gerunds and Value Words Coding*

	High SES	Mid SES	Low SES
Referencing self	Caring Loving Mothering Persistent Fair Kind Enthusiastic	Caring Loving Mothering Persistent Fair Kind Hoping Tolerant	Caring Loving Mothering      Worrying Exhausted Depersonalized Tolerant Compassionate Kind

Referencing the students	Expecting success Caring Prepared Independent	Hoping for success Caring Worrying Sometimes prepared	Hoping for orderliness Dependent Worrying Not prepared Challenging
Referencing administrative support	Appreciating	Selectively avoiding	Distrusting
Referencing parental support	Appreciating it	Seeking it	Not expecting it

There were more indications of a continuum of ease theme that arose from coding values and principles as seen in Table 3.5. There was some overlap in the areas of caring, sincerity, and reflections, but the continuum of ease between high SES schools to the low SES schools came out again when examining the teachers' perceptions of order and orderliness of their work environments and the teachers' perceptions of student independence versus self-sufficiency. Other value words that emerged distinguished the three different SES levels, as some words were present in only one or two SES categories.

Table 3.5

*Value and Principles Coding*



High SES	Mid SES	Low SES
Caring	Caring	Concern
Sincerity	Sincerity	Sincerity
Order (expecting it)	Orderliness	Orderliness
Professionalism	Professionalism	Professionalism
Reflection	Reflection	Reflection
Harmony	Harmony	
Commitment		Commitment
	Safety	Safety
	Adaptability	Adaptability
Independence		
Trusting		
Calmness		
Organization		
	Expertise	
	Teamwork	
		Self-sufficiency
		Frankness
		Resolution

As the theme continuum of ease theme continued to emerge from the data, it manifested itself into sub-themes. These included the teachers' relationships with their students, feelings of

nurturing for their students, administrative support, and parent involvement. Table 3.6 below illustrates the continuum of ease sub-themes broken down by SES levels.

Table 3.6

*Continuum of Ease Sub-Themes by SES*

	High SES	Mid SES	Low SES
Ease of relationships with Students and nurturing	<p>Relaxed</p> <p><i>The classroom is a safe and fun environment.</i></p> <p>(Rebekah)</p> <p><i>They know what the rules are. It's their choice.</i> (Paula)</p>	<p>Concerned</p> <p><i>I take on that junk because I like to work with those children because some of the same things that they've done I've done.</i> (Mitch)</p> <p><i>Not all students are motivated or engaged.</i> (Mitch)</p>	<p>Worried</p> <p><i>I'll pull them aside to talk to them and then find out, oh my gosh, they witnessed, you know, someone getting beat up. They witnessed a shooting and it really does affect them. So, just trying to be a little more understanding.</i></p> <p>(Lyndie)</p>
Ease of student engagement and classroom management	<p>Expected / Within the teacher's control</p> <p><i>If the situation happened in the classroom, I don't</i></p>	<p>Managed with assistance from others / Working to improve it</p>	<p>Hit or Miss / Managed with support for most events but not all / Extreme events</p>

	<p><i>ever recall a time where I couldn't handle it." (Rebekah)</i></p> <p><i>I've had some that daydream. I have one now that will not stop talking. (Paula)</i></p>	<p><i>There is less time to build relationships with students and explicitly teach appropriate behaviors. (Mitch)</i></p> <p><i>Barb indicated that she is able to handle disruptive student behavior on her own mostly, but also works with other teachers in her hall when necessary. The behaviors take a lot of time away from teaching. (Mitch)</i></p>	<p><i>The boys are constantly sparring and play fighting with each other. (Lyndie)</i></p> <p><i>There is a lot of roughhousing and wrestling with the boys and a lot of girls being sassy with each other. (Fanya)</i></p> <p><i>We are constantly going back and reiterating classroom rules. The teachers have to mediate between students to work out conflicts because the children aren't able to do it independently (Lyndie)</i></p>
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<p>Ease of Administrative Support</p>	<p>Taken for granted</p> <p><i>Student behavior is not a barrier but a nuisance at times.</i></p> <p>(Rebekah)</p> <p><i>Our principal is an advocate for us with central office.</i></p> <p>(Rebekah)</p>	<p>Occasional / Support</p> <p>seen as a helpful addition to other resources</p> <p><i>We try to deal with about 99 percent of it, of any issues, like just with the two of us or we have a third teaching partner.</i></p> <p>(Barb)</p> <p><i>Feedback from the principal isn't meaningful. It's like they're just checking a box.</i> (Barb)</p>	<p>Not reliable / Its absence can be an obstacle to success / Administrators may not be working to help the teachers</p> <p><i>In the past, it was like, come on! You know? We'd send them down – they'd send them right back. So this demeans your authority.</i> (Sally)</p>
<p>Ease of Parent Involvement</p>	<p>Taken for granted</p> <p><i>Students are sent to school with their homework done for the most part and prepared to do their work.</i> (Paula)</p>	<p>Sought out but not reliable</p> <p><i>I think more of them (younger teachers) jump in and expect more parent support where I've learned</i></p>	<p>Not expected / Avoided</p> <p><i>Parent support would be nice but in the district I'm at, parental support is very low and I</i></p>

		<p><i>they(the parents) will often sit here and just nod their heads, 'oh yea, we do that at home. Oh yeah, we're doing that' and you know they're not.</i></p> <p>(Barb)</p>	<p><i>understand why.</i></p> <p><i>They have a whole lot of negative issues going on. (Fanya)</i></p>
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**Member Checking.** To assure accuracy, I asked participants clarifying questions during the interview to ensure that I was accurately capturing their meaning throughout the interview. I also asked them to confirm my understanding as I restated their comments. I paraphrased their statements to them periodically during the interview to assure I was capturing the meaning of their statements correctly.

**Triangulation.** Evidence for these findings came from across all data; interview, survey, and archival. Triangulation was accomplished by examining the different data sets together. The interview data helped to identify themes across interviews. The TSES data gave an indicator of each teacher's level of efficacy, while the archival data that included the teachers' schools' Top-to-Bottom ranking and the teachers' schools' free or reduced-priced lunch percentage gave additional data that described the context in which each teacher worked. The archival and magnitude data sets were all considered during the examination of the interview data that was collected from each teacher in order to assure a more accurate analysis of the interview data.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Rapport building was important to ensure open and honest dialogue with the participants. I believe my experience working with teachers in many roles helped me to be an empathetic listener and assisted in developing trust with my subjects. I did not know any of the teachers who participated in this study either personally or professionally.

### **Anticipated Ethical Issues**

During the study, I was cognizant of my own biases as a former teacher and current administrator. I have believed for some time that teaching was a complicated social task and having worked in high at-risk schools in the region where the study was conducted. I have seen the effects of high and low efficacy play out in classrooms and between teachers and students. I endeavored throughout this study to stay neutral and hear the participants clearly without personal bias or misunderstanding. Through the course of the interviews, I took care to restate the participant's statements in order to ensure an accurate understanding of their statements.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

The primary research question this study examined was “Does the environmental factor of poverty influence self-perceptions of teacher efficacy?” Supporting research questions asked “What is the nature of the impact on teachers’ sense of efficacy when SES differs?” and “Are there mitigating factors that might support higher levels of teacher efficacy in the face of challenging environmental factors?”

A continuum of ease emerged as the overarching theme found in this study. The continuum ranged from an ease of teaching and learning for teachers in the high SES/high performing schools to an increase in complications and demands that characterized the work the teachers experienced in the low SES/low performing schools. The teachers from the high SES/high performing schools described students who came to school ready to learn, less intense and less frequent events of student misbehavior, and parent support that enriched the students’ capacity to be successful in school. Teachers from the high SES schools reported higher levels of student performance compared to other schools in the state on the Top-to-Bottom list and a greater ease in completing the tasks associated with their positions.

The teachers from the low SES/low performing schools reported additional demands and their students had lower levels of student achievement compared to other schools in the state.

The low SES/low performing schools' teachers reported more students who came to school unprepared to learn and more intense and frequent events of student misbehavior that disrupted the learning environment. Teachers in the low SES/low performing schools also reported parent interactions and family living situations that created additional obstacles for the student's academic success that the teachers felt were outside of their control.

The two teachers in the mid-level SES schools fell between these ranges of ease and challenges. The mid-SES range teachers were confronted with more students coming to school unprepared and more frequent and intense events of student misbehavior than the high SES/high achieving schools but less so than their colleagues in the low SES/low achieving schools. Their students' performance levels also fell in the middle of the range on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. Barb's school, at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list was a mid-level performing school. Mitch's school, at the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list was a below average performing school.

One school in the study (school #7), which was low SES but performed at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list, will be considered a low SES/mid-level performing school. The two teachers from this school were Sally and Theresa. There were differences in some of Sally and Theresa's narratives that distinguished them from the other low SES schools' teachers. Despite being the highest poverty school represented in this study at 95% free or reduced-priced lunch, their school scored at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list.

The continuum of ease theme emerged from the data in several areas. These areas include the teachers' relationships with their students and feelings of nurturing toward them, their perceptions of administrative support and their perceptions of parental involvement. The findings discussed in the following pages are presented by theme as a point of reference for the



narratives and discussed separately by the SES and performance level of the schools. First, the teachers will be reintroduced.

### **The Teachers**

The nine teachers in this study taught at seven elementary schools. All of the schools in this study were public elementary schools. Out of the seven schools, one was operated as a magnet Montessori program. Table 3.1 from the previous chapter gives specific information for each participant regarding their school's SES level, performance level, the grade level the teacher was teaching at the time of the interview and how many years of experience they have in education and at their current position.

The two teachers who taught in high SES schools were Paula from the school designated as school #1 and Rebekah from school #2. Rebekah had been a teacher for twenty-four years and has taught at the same school for the past twenty years. Rebekah's school had a free or reduced-priced lunch percentage of 6% and her school ranked 98<sup>th</sup> on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. She was teaching kindergarten at the time of her interview. Rebekah's average score on the TSES was 8.3 (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

#### *TSES Sub-Category Average Scores by Participant*

Sub-Categories and Standard Deviation ranges	Paula	Rebekah	Mitch	Barb	Fanya	Laura	Lyndie	Sally	Theresa
Student Engagement	7.25	8.5	6.75	6.5	5.75	7.75	5.75	7	7.5

SD Range:6-8.4									
Classroom Management SD Range:5.5-7.9	8.5	7.5	8.25	7.5	6.5	8.25	6.75	7.25	8
Instructional Strategies SD Range:6.1-8.5	8.5	9	7.75	7.25	7	9	6.75	7.5	8.5
Total Average Score SD Range:5.9-8.3	8	8.3	7.6	7.1	6.4	8.3	6.4	7.3	8

Paula had been a teacher for twenty-eight years and has spent her entire teaching career at the same school. Paula's school had a free or reduced-priced lunch percentage of only 2% and her school ranked 89<sup>th</sup> on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. Paula worked in a Montessori based school in a large public school district. Paula taught a first and second grade split class during the study. Paula's average score on the TSES was 8 (Table 4.1).

Both of the teachers working in high SES schools earned their first degrees in education. Both of these teachers expressed that they had always wanted to be teachers. Both had also earned their teacher certification through the traditional teacher education track.

Mitch, from school #3, and Barb, from school #4, both taught in mid SES schools at the time of this study. Mitch, the only male participant in this study, worked at a school that served 42% of its students with free or reduced-priced lunch and his school ranked at the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. Mitch had worked at his current school for five years but had been

teaching for the past thirteen years. At the time of this interview, Mitch was teaching a fourth grade class. Mitch scored a 7.6 on the TSES (Table 4.1).

Barb's school served 43% of their students either free or reduced-priced lunch and ranked in at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile on the state's Top-to-Bottom list. Barb had been teaching for 23 years and had served at the school she was working at during this study for 18 years. Barb had been awarded a national award for her teaching several years earlier and talked about how the trip to Washington D.C. had been a positive boost for her efficacy as a teacher. It made her feel like her work was being celebrated. Barb taught fifth grade. Barb's score on the TSES was 7.1 (Table 4.1).

Mitch and Barb took different paths to become teachers. Mitch described the first two years of his college career as difficult. He attended two different colleges and then decided to follow his mother's career path and go into education. Barb graduated from college in business administration. She became frustrated with her job and felt that it was not rewarding. With her husband's support, she returned to school to get her teacher certificate in a post-baccalaureate program.

Five teachers taught in three different low SES schools. These teachers were Fanya and Laura who were both from school #5, Lyndie from school #6 and Sally and Theresa were from school #7. The three low SES/Low performing schools were from two different counties in the state.

Fanya and Laura's school district was operating under an Emergency Manager at the time of the interviews. Their school was reconfigured in the 2015/2016 school year and many of the staff members were replaced. Fanya was one of the staff members who continued in the school and Laura had been placed there from a central office position that had been eliminated due to

the reconfiguration in the district. Laura chose to go to this school from her central office position because she had worked with the principal of this school as a district consultant in her central office role and was familiar with the school. Fanya and Laura's school served 82% of their students either free or reduced-priced lunch and the school is ranked at the 3<sup>rd</sup> percentile on the state's Top-to-Bottom list.

Fanya had been a teacher for 21 years and had been serving at her current school for the past five years as a kindergarten teacher. Her score on the TSES was 6.4. Fanya was the only teacher in the study to go through an alternative licensing program to obtain her teaching certificate. All other participants went through traditional teacher preparation programs in either baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate programs. Laura has been in education 26 years. At the time of this interview, she had been at this school for three months. Laura scored 8.3 on the TSES (Table 4.1).

Lyndie's school served 84% of the students with either free or reduced-priced lunch and her school ranked at the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. She was teaching fifth grade at the time of this interview. She had been at her current school for three years but had worked in the same district for over 20 years. At the time of her interview, her district had been labeled a priority district by the state due to their low academic performance on state assessments. There had been a reconfiguration of the schools in her district due to a district consolidation, which is why she had only been at her current building for the three years. The district where Lyndie worked had been operating under an Emergency Manager assigned by the state due to its priority status. Lyndie's average score on the TSES was 6.4 (Table 4.1).

Theresa and Sally's school served 95% of their students either free or reduced-priced lunch making it the lowest SES school in this study. Their school ranked at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on

the Top-to-Bottom list. This created another category that was found which will be referred to as the low SES/mid-level performance school. Theresa had been a teacher for eight years and had worked at her current school for the last one and a half years. Theresa taught fifth grade and her score on the TSES was 8 (Table 4.1). Sally had taught for 19 years and had been at her current school for the past 18 years. Sally taught first grade and she scored 7.3 on the TSES (Table 4.1). Their school served a high percentage (over 95%) of Arabic students in southeastern Michigan.

There was some variety in the paths that led the teachers in the low SES/low performing schools into their classrooms. Fanya originally went to college to become a gynecologist/obstetrician but struggled with passing her chemistry classes. She tried nursing school and then she worked in a daycare for several years. She substitute taught until she became certified through an alternative-licensing program through another local university. It took her ten years to complete this program while raising her family and substitute teaching. Fanya said becoming a teacher was “like a trip and fall.”

Laura had always wanted to be a teacher. She had followed a traditional track to her teacher certification. She said, “Deciding to become a teacher was just a no-brainer for me.”

Lyndie had always wanted to go into teaching, but when she entered college, there were not a lot of jobs in education. She changed majors several times in college until a friend suggested she would be a good teacher. She said, “So, I’m like, okay. Here we go!”

Sally’s professional life started in the field of occupational therapy. She did this for twelve years but found that she did not feel rewarded from that work any longer and many of the mental health institutions she had been working at had been closed down. She decided to change careers. One of her cousins told her about a master’s program in teaching and invited her to go through the program with her. She has now been teaching for the past nineteen years.

Theresa had been a dental assistant and had thought about going to medical school. Her bachelor's degree was in psychology. When she became pregnant, she thought it would be better to choose a career where she could have summers off with her children. She earned her master's degree in elementary education and then taught in Florida for eight years before her family moved to Michigan. She took the licensing exam in Michigan and has been teaching here for the last one and a half years.

### **TSES Items**

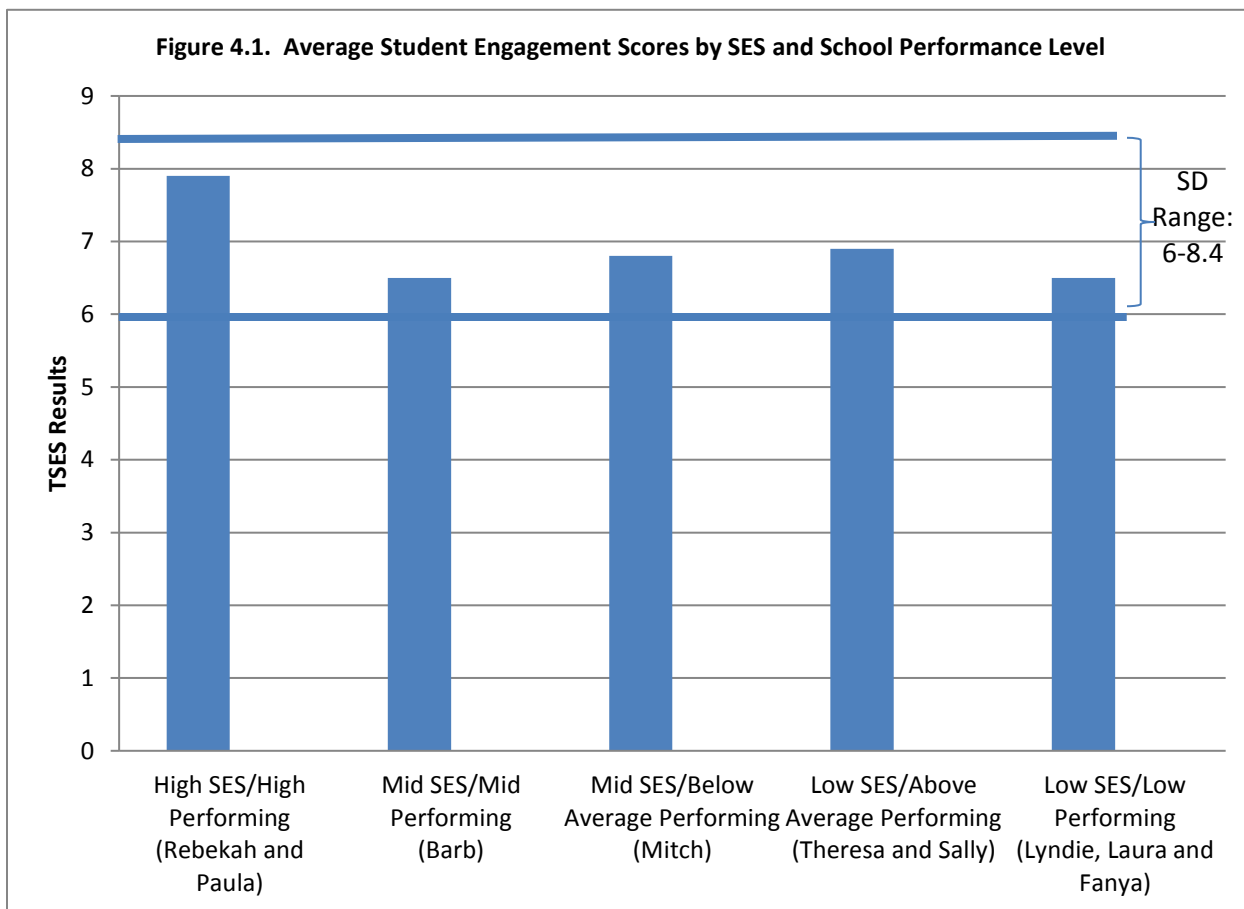
The teachers in this study each took the short version of the TSES (Appendix E). The TSES measures efficacy in three sub-categories: efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management. Table 4.2 below represents the average scores for this study by sub-category for each of the three SES groups represented. The creators of the TSES conducted a factor analysis and determined the standard deviation ranges for each sub-category. These ranges are listed in the first column of Table 4.2 (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Table 4.2

#### *Average Sub-Category Scores Listed by SES*

	High SES	Mid SES	Low SES
Student Engagement SD Range: 6 – 8.4	7.9	6.6	6.8
Instructional Strategies SD Range: 5.5 – 7.9	8	7.9	7.4

Classroom Management	8.8	7.5	7.8
SD Range: 6.1-8.5			



**Student engagement.** Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation of the average responses for questions in the student engagement sub-category. The factor analysis conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) found that the average score for this sub-category was 7.2 with a standard deviation of 1.2. Figures 4.2-4.5 provide item specific responses for the student engagement sub-category, which included questions 2, 3, 4 and 11.

Figure 4.1 shows that all scores in all of the SES categories fell within the standard deviation range in the sub-category of student engagement. The high SES group scored slightly higher than the other two groups. The difference however was statistically insignificant.

Table 4.3 shows the scores for the survey questions that related to the sub-category student engagement. The student engagement sub-category consisted of questions 2, 3, 4 and 11. Figures 4.2-4.6 that follow will illustrate score averages by survey item and SES group.

Table 4.3

*Item Responses for Student Engagement.*

	Rebekah	Paula	Mitch	Barb	Lyndie	Fanya	Laura	Theresa	Sally
2. Motivate disinterested Students	8	7	6	7	5	7	9	9	7
3. Get students to believe they can do well in school	9	9	8	7	5	9	9	9	8
4. Help students value learning	9	9	8	7	5	7	8	7	7
11. Assist families in helping their children	8	5	6	5	5	3	6	6	6



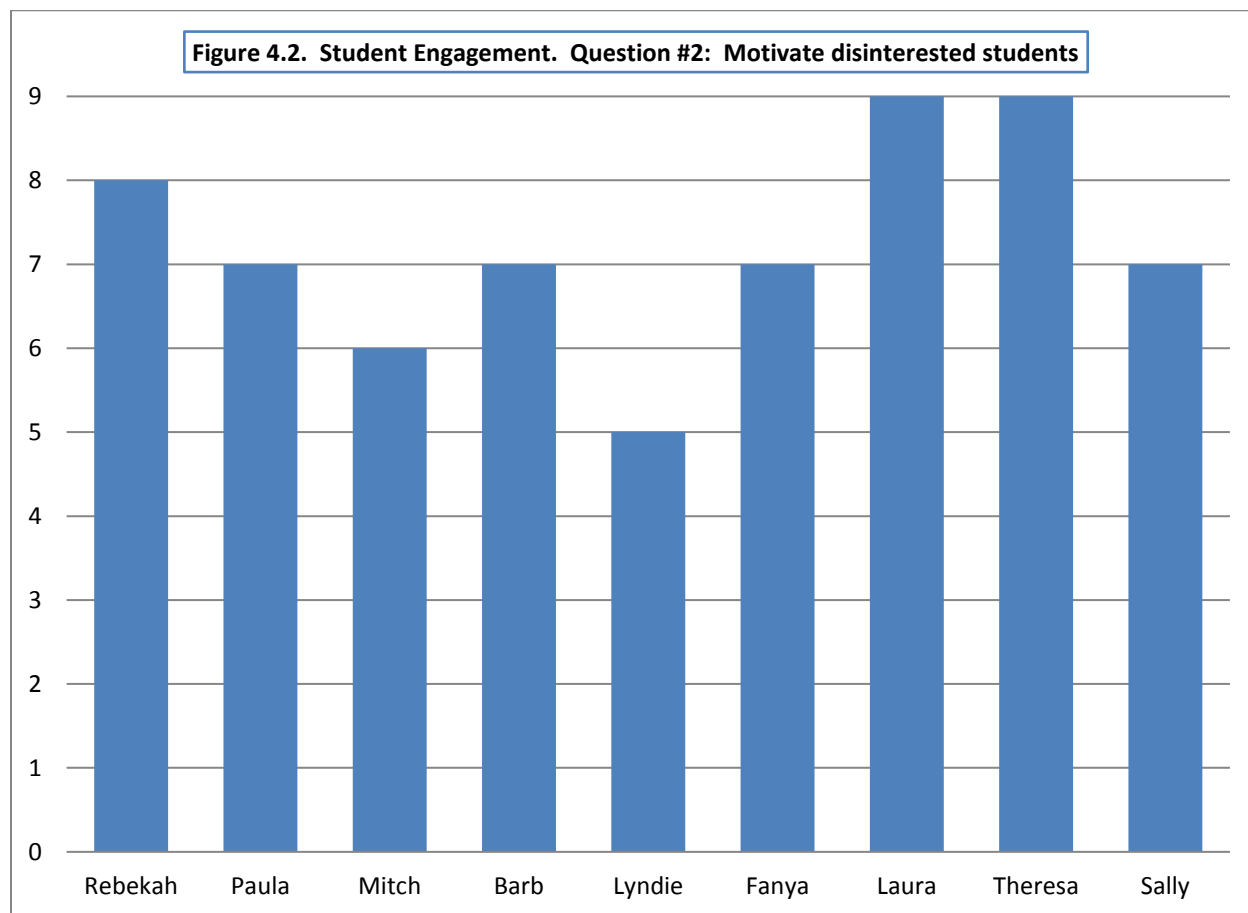


Figure 4.2 represents the item results by participant for question #2. Question #2 asked, “How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?” Laura and Theresa had the highest scores for question #2 each giving themselves a nine. Lyndie scored at the lowest at five. Laura and Theresa were the two newest teachers to their current teaching positions. Laura had been in her position after being reassigned from a central office job and had been back in the classroom for two months at the time of her interview. Theresa had only been at her current position for 1.5 years after relocating to Michigan from out of state.

Laura described how she worked to help motivate a particular student in her room. Although she gave herself a nine on this question, she still said that motivating students was “tough”. She described working with a student who seemed lethargic and her focus was to work

with him one-on-one and get to know him better. She had lunch with him and tried to build a trusting relationship with him. She felt that this would help to bring him out.

I've seen a whole different kid. A kid who had a lot to say. A kid who had a lot to talk about. A kid who was happy. You know, I can wink at him now and he gets it. I feel like he was somewhere publicly humiliated and he's just given up. That's how I feel. Like someone nailed him in the past where he just says, 'whatever'.

The lowest score on this question was from Lyndie. She commented, If it's not in the student to do it, I don't feel that I can change them to do it. I can encourage but I can't be the one. It's like, I tell them it has to be in you. I cannot get you there. I can help you but you have to want it. That's I think one of the reasons I don't feel that I can get them there. They have to have that inherently.

Barb felt that she can work to help build it, but the main push has to come from the individual. She said, "You want to build that internal motivation. I just feel like, I can't control you to be motivated. I can try to build it so you will be motivated yourself."

Sally also felt that she had limited control over motivating her students. "I can get most kids to be interested in school but getting them to work at their top level – getting them to always try their best – that's what's the hardest."

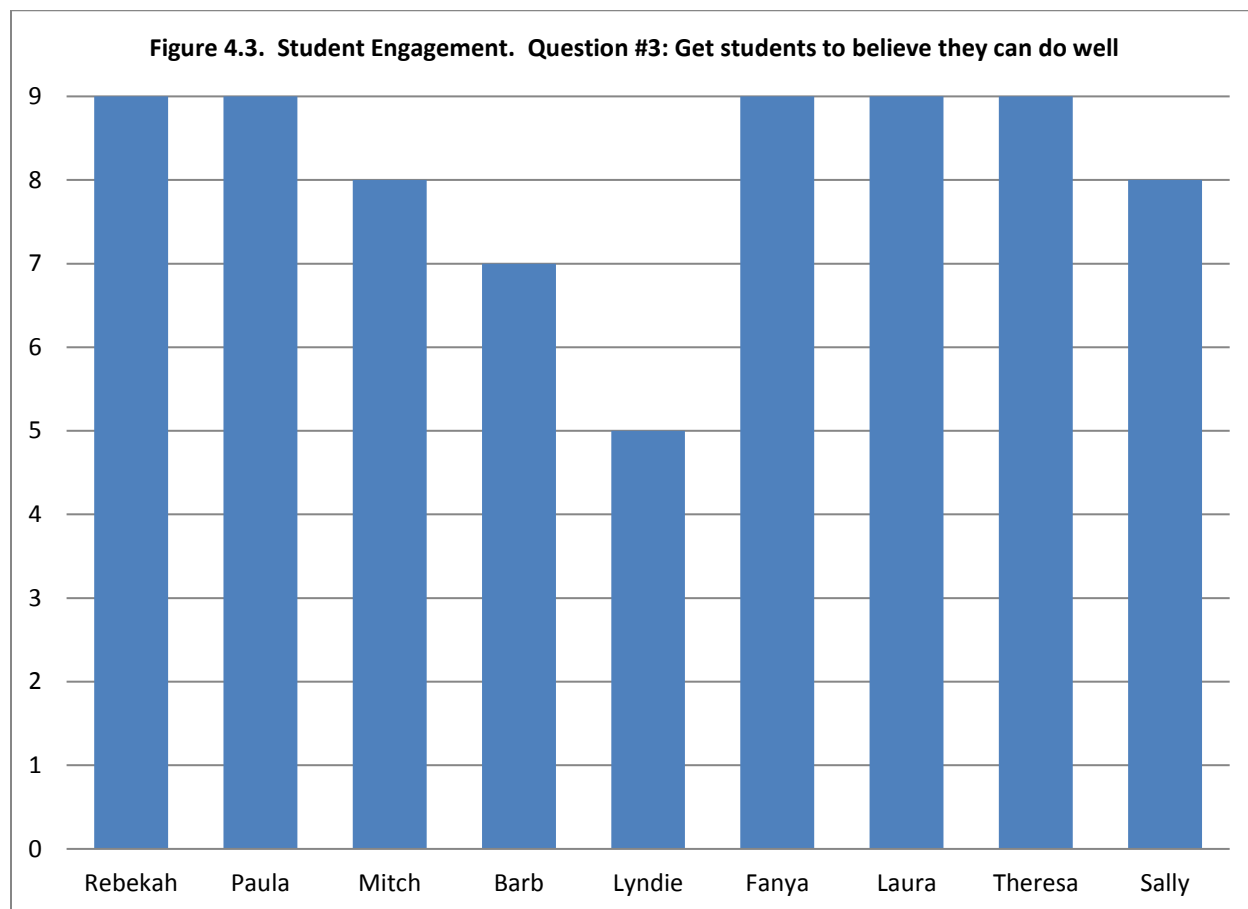
Mitch rated himself at a six on this item which was lower than most of the other participants. He said,

Unmotivated students are a little bit harder to work with in my opinion just because you have to find the one or two things that you can get the student to respond to. With unmotivated students, there's always, I do think there's

something that you can connect with them on, you just have to find that connector. Find out reasons why this student is unmotivated and try to work around it. You have to be able to spend the extra time to find out what it is and try to get a connection with them.

Mitch went on to say,

I think that in the classroom setting, you can do different things but we have a lot of outside factors that I have a hard time controlling. I do think I'm highly effective in doing that [motivating students] but on the same point, as a teacher now a days your hands are tied in a lot of ways. If I look at I how much you can motivate students who show low interest in school, it's lower than if it were given to me a few years ago. We're constricted in what we can actually do. I think I'm effective in what I can do, but I want to be able to do more and I'm just constricted by outside factors.



Question #3 asked, “How much can you do to get student to believe they can do well in schoolwork?” Results for question #3, displayed in Figure 4.3, indicate that Rebekah, Paula, Fanya, Laura and Theresa each gave themselves a nine. Lyndie had the lowest score of five. Mitch, Barb, Lyndie and Theresa taught upper elementary grades, (4-5) while Rebekah, Paula, Fanya, Laura and Sally taught lower elementary (K-2).

Barb, who teaches math primarily to her fifth grade class talked about contending with the battle of math anxiety many of her students bring with them to her class. She believes that her reputation in the school as an academically tough teacher helps children understand that her expectation is that they will learn – each of them. “Students usually come to me knowing my – [reputation]. We’re going to learn and I think that children realize I’m going to learn and I believe you can learn and I’m going to help you learn.” Her unyielding attitude that all students

can learn sets a tone in her classroom and even if she can't get the children to all believe they can learn, she is constantly giving them positive feedback and multiple opportunities so they do, in fact, progress.

Rebekah, who gave herself a nine on question #3. She indicated that she teaches her kindergarten students how to work to be independent workers.

In the beginning of the year, I think they're even more dependent on me and now I think they're becoming less dependent as they've formed relationships with each other. They don't need my support or want me to interact with them as much during their independent time.

Through intentional scaffolding and support, Rebekah's students are able to wean themselves off depending on their teacher and are able to work confidently and independently.

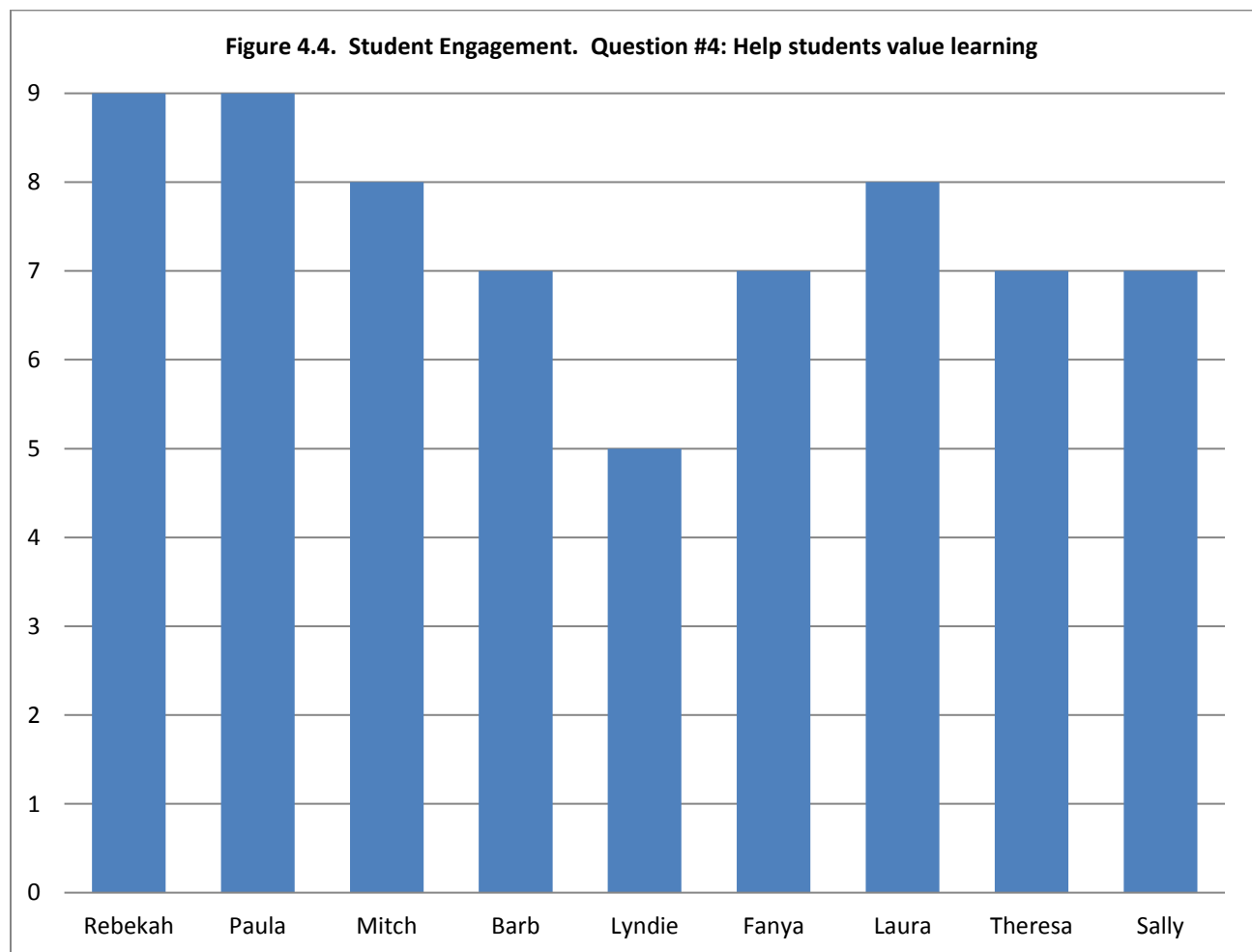
Laura, who teaches second grade, indicated that her kids, because of their young age are not really thinking about what they can or cannot do. "They're eager to learn. They are not aware of their deficits which often cause them to get squirrely because they don't recognize that they have to focus to learn." Laura also projected a great deal of passion about working with the children and expressed how important it was to her to make them feel good about themselves. She explained that every day, she enthusiastically greets them outside when they come to school and tried to make her room's culture cheerful and positive. She said, "This is who I am. It takes a lot to get me down in front of my class. It's a performance every day. I've always said that to people. It is a show every day and you decide, good or bad."

Lyndie, who scored herself the lowest of all the participants on this question, talked about encouraging her students in school while trying to make a safe place for them to talk and deal with things that were keeping their minds off their work. She said,

I know there are some days that they're off and some days that they're on. I'm just trying to figure out why they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing.

I may pull them aside and say come here. Talk to me.

Lyndie, who taught 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of this study, was more focused on meeting her students' basic needs. Getting her students to believe they can do well in school may have been perceived as secondary and possibly a more difficult task because she was teaching older elementary students who had already experienced years of school failure.



Question #4 asked, “How much can you do to help your students value learning?”

Figure 4.3 represents the item results by participant for question #4. Rebekah and Paula from the

high SES schools scored at the highest level for this item each giving themselves a nine. The lowest score was for Lyndie who rated herself at a five.

Much of the interview data related to this question indicated that participants believed getting students to value learning is something that mostly either comes with the child or it does not. Valuing learning was seen as something that might be encouraged at school, but is learned at home. The teachers who scored the highest in this category were also the teachers who indicated that they had students who were self-motivated. Rebekah and Paula for instance, had parents that helped their children with homework and who made sure they were to school every day even when there was no bus transportation as was the case with Paula's magnet school. The interest the parents took in their child's school might have imparted in their children that going to school was important and that they should try hard to do well.

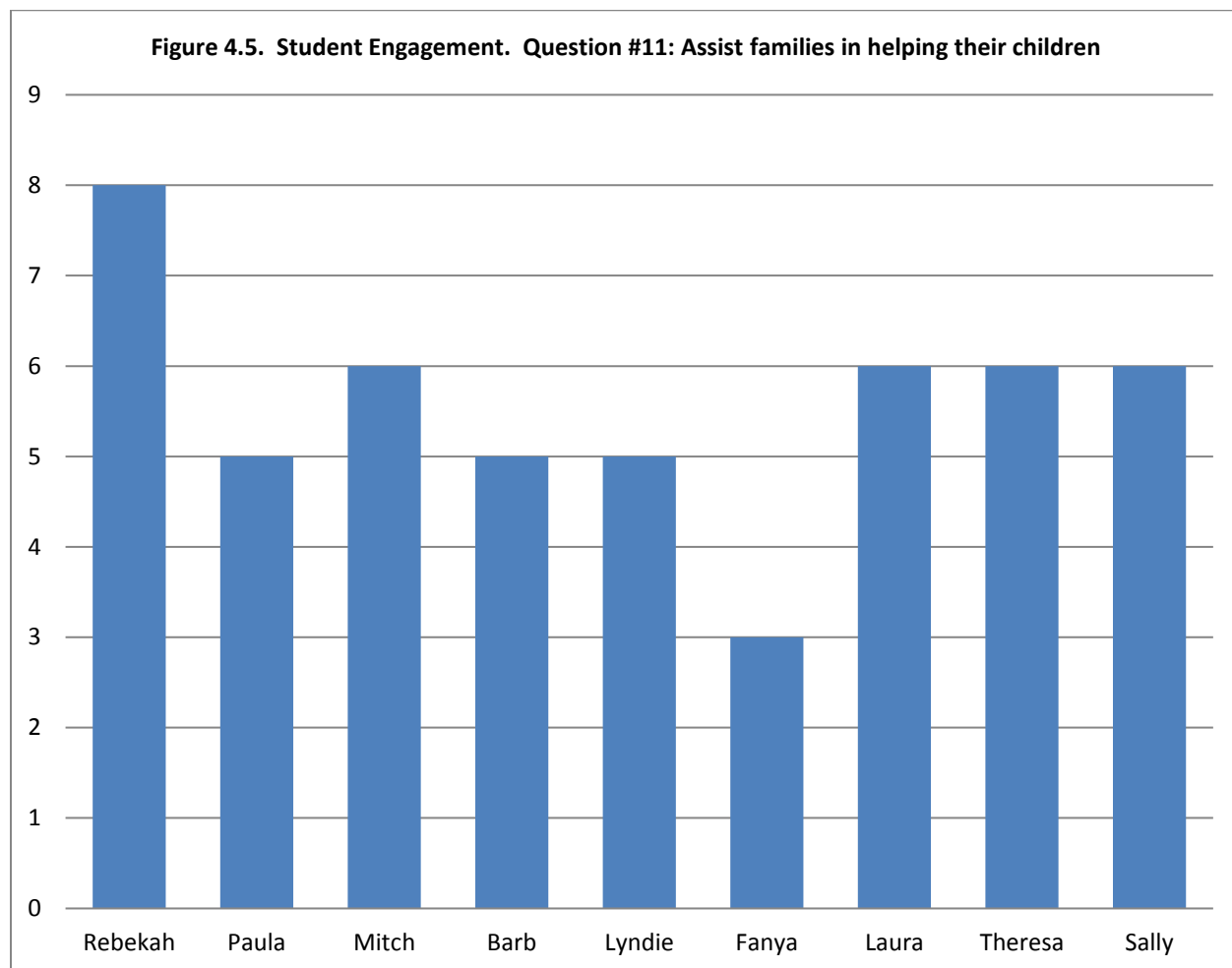
If the teachers' levels of efficacy to instill the value of learning were even partly dependent upon their perception of whether or not this value for learning had been instilled in the student from their family, then teachers working in the mid and low SES schools may have had more of a sense that the parents weren't instilling this value at home. Both the mid and low SES schools, struggled with children returning homework and coming to school prepared. Some of the low SES teachers described the need to focus on simply meeting the basic needs of their students rather than being able to focus solely on academic work. Lyndie said,

If I can make them feel that things will be OK. School is important. Know that I'm going to get you through this year, whether it be, if you just need to sit here and talk, you need to close your eyes for a bit, whatever it is, then I know they're going to be OK.

Lyndie felt that the burden for instilling this value fell on her shoulders but even knowing that she would have to do this herself, her focus was not so much on valuing learning but on valuing the child's experience and recognizing that there are more pressing needs that must be addressed for children coming to school from impoverished situations. Valuing learning came after valuing whether children felt safe and having their most basic needs met for teachers in the lowest SES schools.

Theresa said, "I can only do so much in the classroom to help them value learning. The outside has a lot to do with how they value learning." She described her class as very talkative and she used that as a tool to try to reach her students to build relationships that might help support their growth in school. Theresa spoke about having daily discussions with students and helping them discuss and process through what might be going on in their lives.





Out of all of the items on the TSES, question #11 had the largest variance between the highest and lowest score. This item also had the lowest overall average score for any item on the TSES in this study. Question #11 was, “How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?” Figure 4.5 illustrates the responses for question #11. The participant who indicated the highest level of efficaciousness for this question was Rebekah who rated herself at an eight. Fanya scored the lowest on this item, rating herself at a three.

While all of the participants expressed in one way or another that parent involvement was important for children to be successful in school, their ability to influence the quantity and quality of parent involvement left them feeling inefficacious. What was notable in the narrative data was that there was less of a need to work on increasing parent involvement in the higher

SES schools. As SES went down, however, the lack of parent involvement created a void that the teachers did not believe they could fill.

The responses to this question crossed SES lines in that relative to responses on other TSES items, the majority of the participants felt lower levels of efficacious than for any other item on the survey. The narrative data indicates that teachers felt this was the area where they had the least amount of control. Family and living situations were seen as areas outside of the teacher's locus of control. For the low SES teachers, there was a lower reports of regular positive parent contact. Laura and Fanta's school didn't even let parents in the building. Barb, Mitch and Lyndie talked about the lack contact they had with parents.

On the other end of the SES spectrum, Rebekah and Paula also felt less efficacious in this area than in other areas on the TSES. What made it different for them was that the parents that they had in the high SES schools were already doing what they needed to do to help their students be successful at schools so the need to influence and assist their families was not as great as it was for their peers in the low SES schools. Rebekah said, her students were "intrinsically motivated" and Paula explained how her students were able to "self-police" themselves to do their work.

The outside factors that Mitch and Barb described were barriers for teachers that they did not feel they could overcome. Building those relationships with students and making connections with them while at school were ways teachers could circumvent the negative effects of poverty. Barb said, "You simply have to deal with the reality of their life, which is who knows if the parents even want them? Who knows? I am their stability. Our school is their stability." She also said that when you don't get parent support, "You can't have the mindset that, oh, we'll put this on the parents."

Even though the teachers felt there were things that could be done at school to build relationships and make connections with students, all of the teachers felt lower levels efficaciousness to successfully assist families in helping their children to be successful in school. Making that connection to assist families was something that went beyond what they were able to do as teachers.

The lowest score on this item came from Fanya who worked in the same school as Laura who scored herself three points higher on this item than Fanya. Laura, who had just returned to the classroom after working in her district's central office as a consultant and teacher trainer may have not had as pessimistic of a view of the situation because she had just come back to the school. Laura did express frustration and a lack of understanding about the fact that her school did not allow parents in the building, which was also a point of contention for Fanya but still, Laura's higher perception of efficacy to impact this may have been because she was still in a honeymoon period.

**Instructional strategies.** Figure 4.6 provides a visual representation of the average responses for questions in the instructional strategies sub-category. The factor analysis conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) found that the average score for this sub-category was 7.3 with a standard deviation of 1.2. Instruction strategies was the highest scoring sub-category in this study. The mean score for participants in this study in this sub-category was 7.7.

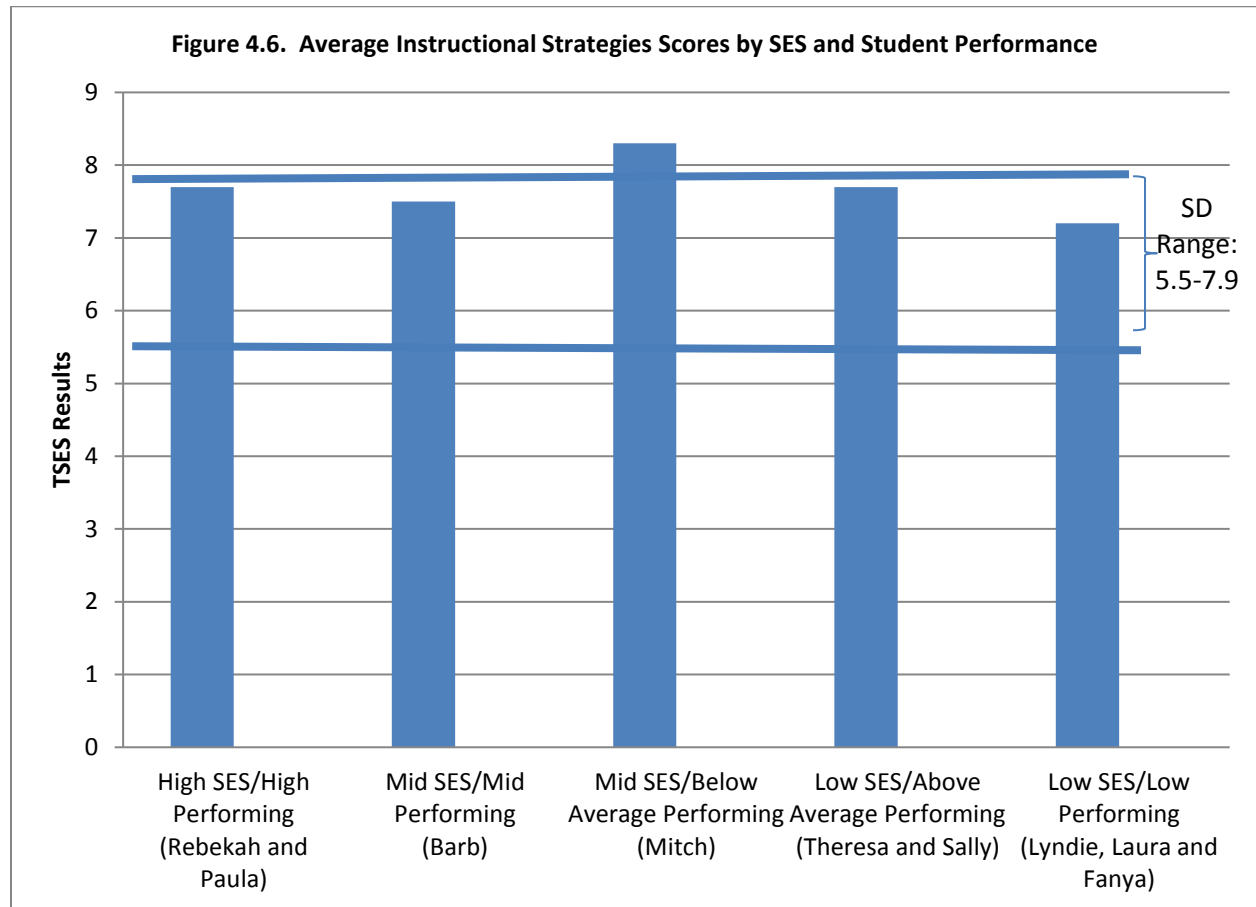


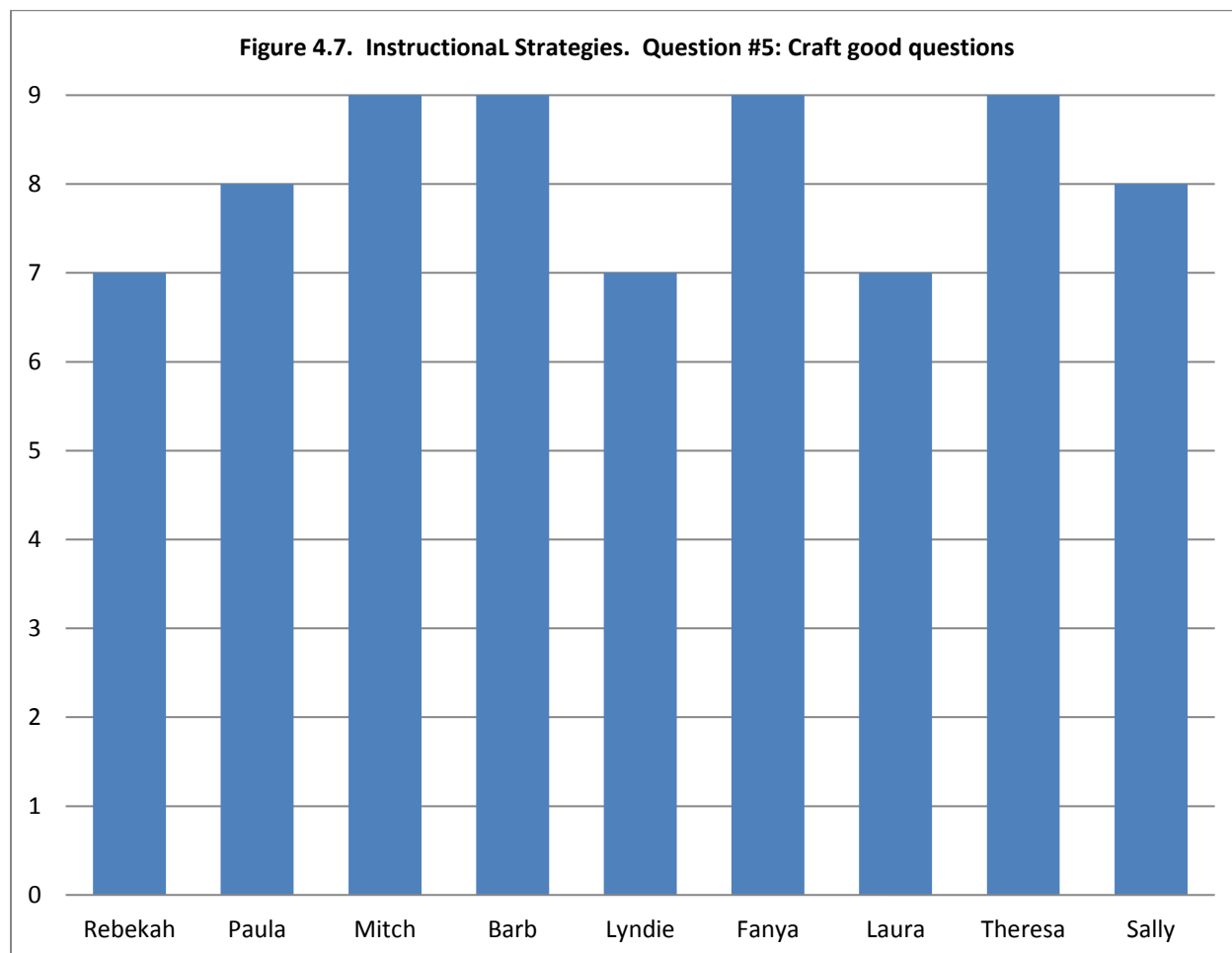
Table 4.4 shows the item scores for each participant in the sub-category instructional strategies. Table 4.4 and Figures 4.7-4.10 that follow illustrate individual item responses for the sub-category student engagement. These include questions 5, 9, 10 and 12.

Table 4.4

*Item Responses for Instructional Strategies.*

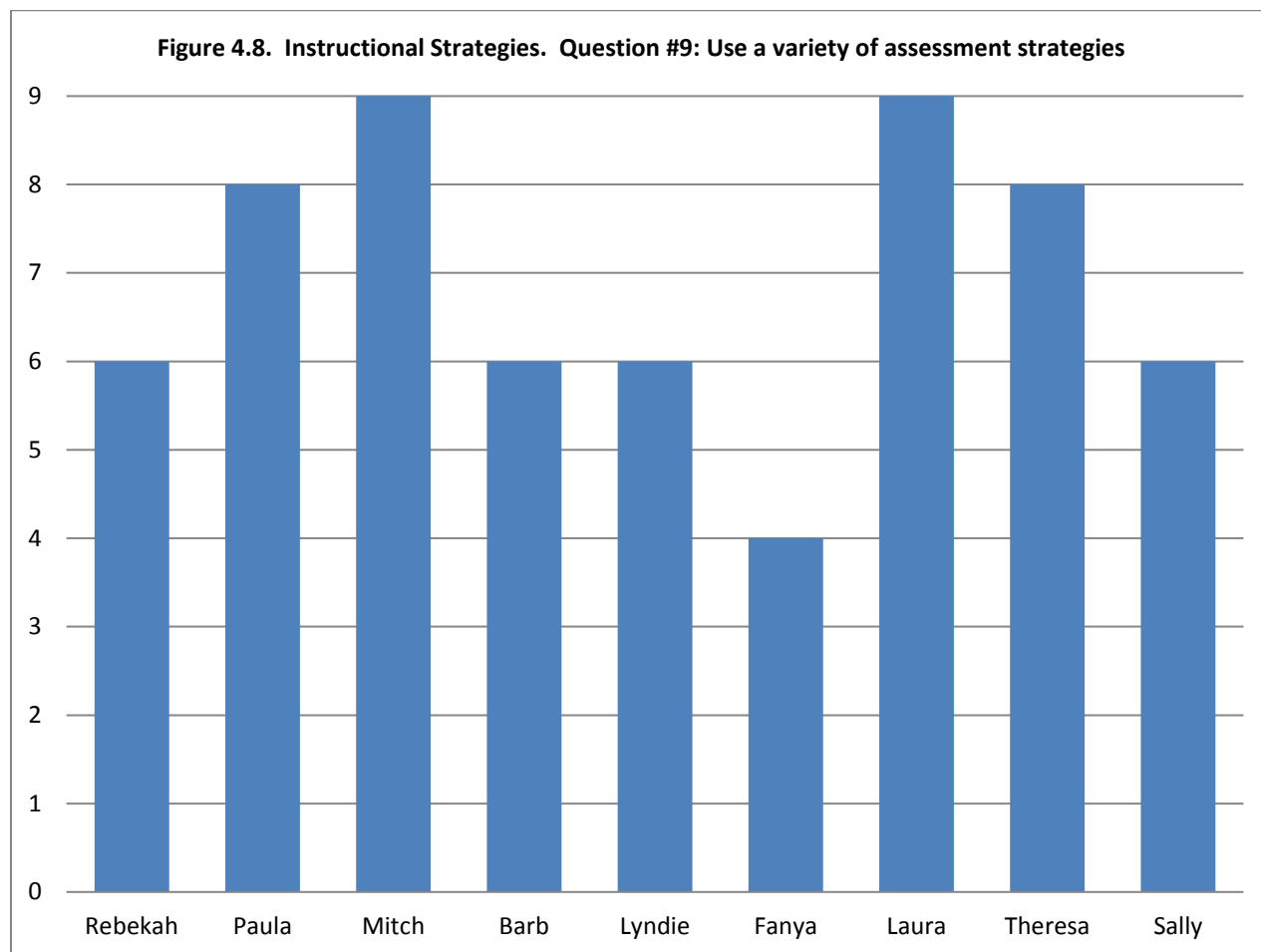
	Rebekah	Paula	Mitch	Barb	Lyndie	Fanya	Laura	Theresa	Sally
5. Craft good questions	7	8	9	9	7	9	7	9	8

9. Use a variety of assessment strategies	6	8	9	6	6	4	9	8	6
10. Provide an alternative explanation or example	9	9	8	9	7	8	8	8	8
12. Implement alternative strategies in your classroom	8	9	7	6	7	5	9	7	7

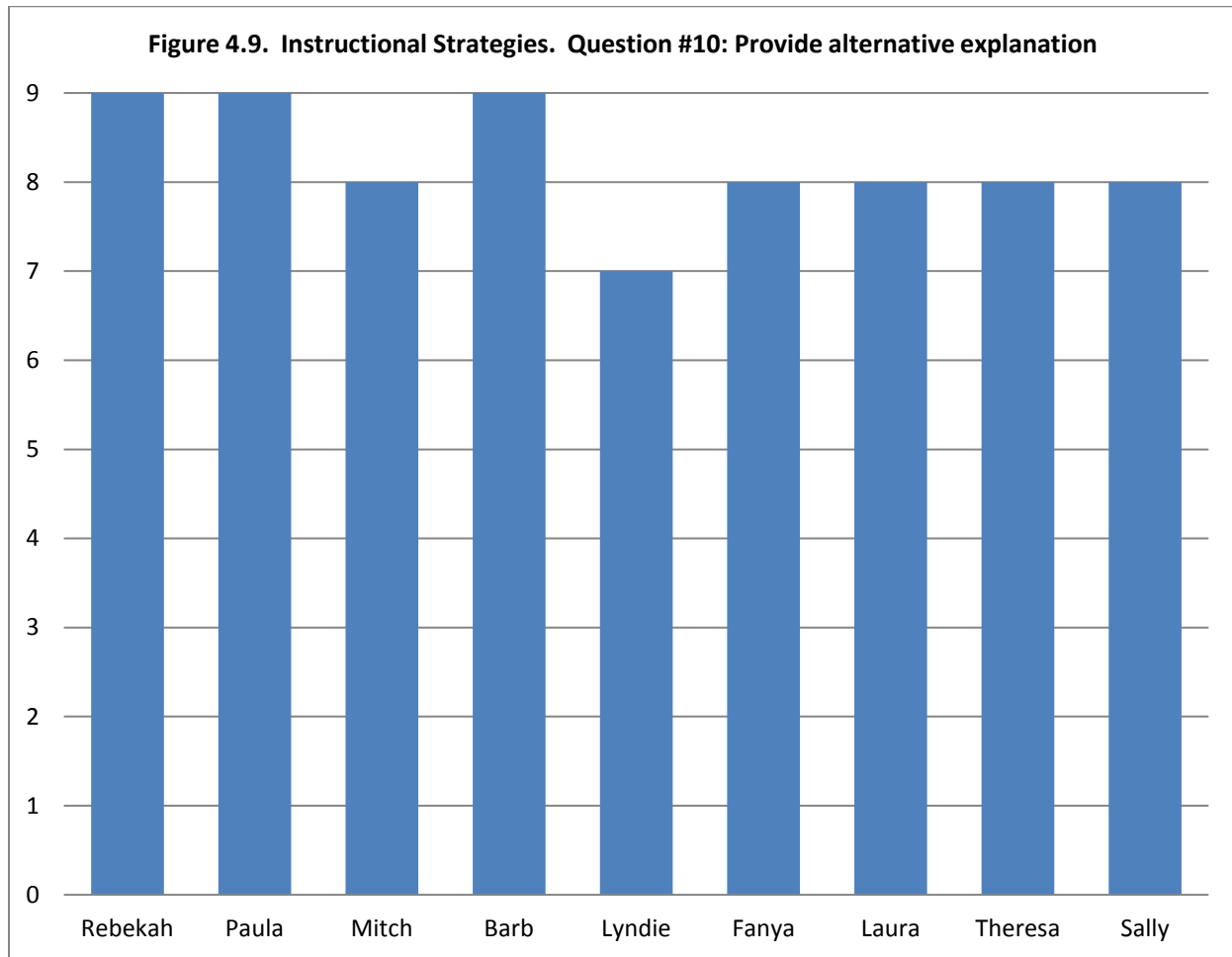


Question #5 asked, “To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?”

Mitch, Barb, Fanya and Theresa all scored a nine for question #5. The lowest scoring participants on this question were Rebekah, Lyndie and Laura. Out of the twelve questions, this was the only question on the TSES that Fanya scored herself higher than Laura had. Theresa, Fanya, Barb and Mitch rated themselves at a nine for this question, which might be related to more recent experiences in college classes. Theresa had been working on her master’s degree in education at the time of this study. Mitch and Fanya had both completed their last college degree within the last 5-7 years. Barb, as primarily a math teacher, and a recipient of a national teacher award might have seen her ability to do this as higher due to her national recognition and high level of understanding of her main content area, which was mathematics.

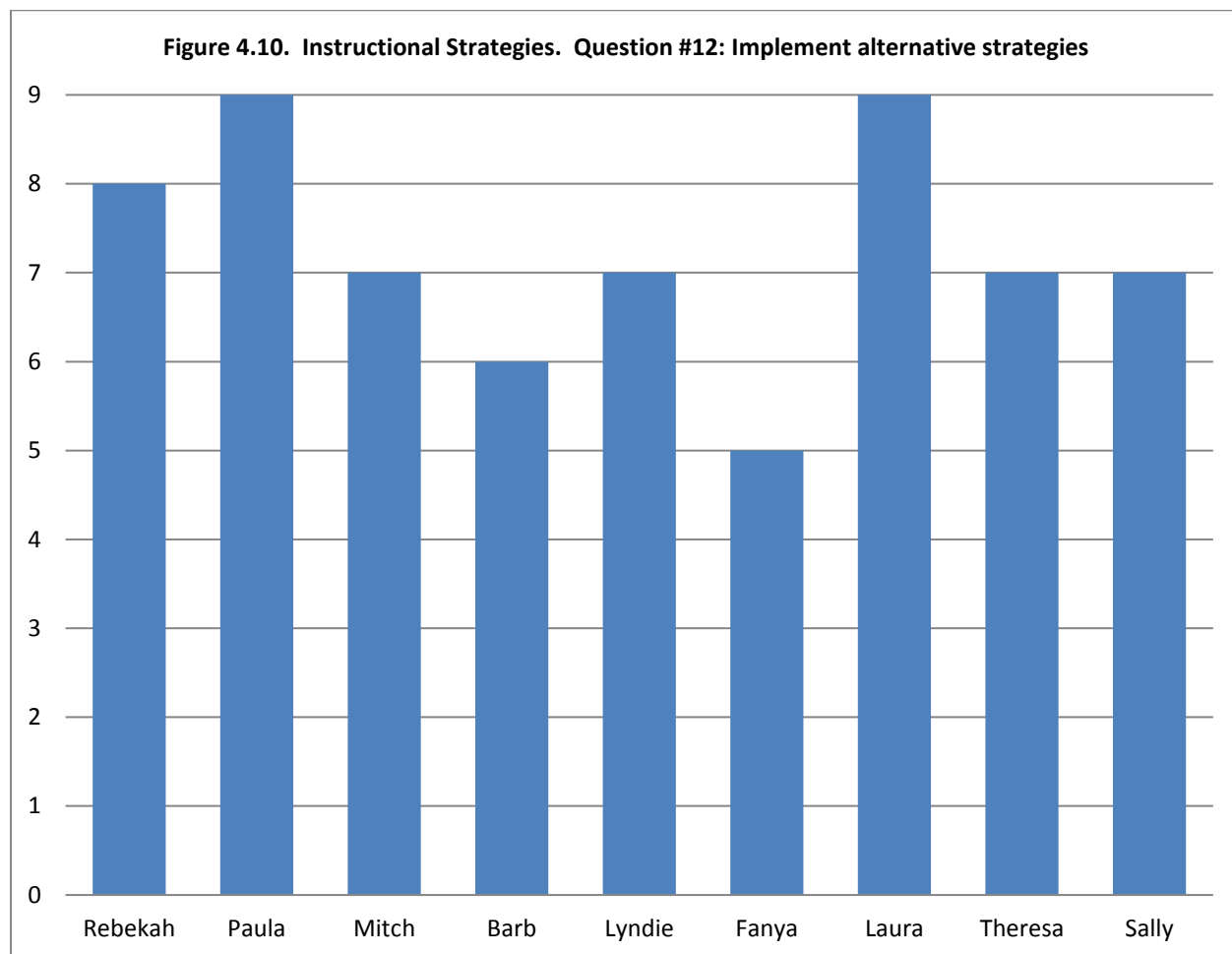


Question #9 asked, “How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?” This question was different than question #5 because crafting good questions might have been interpreted by the teachers as having more to do with questions the teachers may ask during instructional conversations, rather than about creating assessments. Fanya, scored the lowest at a 4 while Mitch and Laura both gave themselves a nine. Laura’s high score could have something to do with her recent work as a teacher trainer/consultant for her district. Mitch, who had completed his teacher training within the last 7 years might also have felt more efficacious in this area if this had been something specific that had been addressed in his teacher training. Theresa, who is currently taking master’s classes and Paula who has had Montessori training may also have higher levels of efficacy in this due to their specific university and training experiences.



Question #10 asked, “To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?” Three participants scored at a nine. Five scored at an eight and the lowest score was Lyndie’s at a seven. During the course of most lessons, regardless of grade or content area, multiple examples are often given to help scaffold students into understanding and learning. This could explain why this question elicited high efficacy scores for most of the teachers.





Question #12 was, “How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?” Fanya scored the lowest on this item at five. Paula and Laura scored at a nine and Rebekah an eight for this question.

Out of the three sub-categories on the TSES, efficacy for instructional strategies elicited the highest scores from participants. The questions in this sub-category did not seem to elicit much variety in responses based on SES level or performance level of the schools. The lowest scores that came up in this sub-category were from Fanya who was also the only teacher in the study to attain her certification through non-traditional means and/or because she felt like most of the curriculum she was using was scripted and allowed for little professional discretion to be applied by the teacher to try other strategies in her classroom.

Fanya and Laura taught at the same school, however Laura rated herself at a nine for this question. This could be related to Laura's recent experience as a teacher trainer/consultant that might have allowed her opportunities to explore more recent research on instructional strategies making her feel like she was better able to identify and use alternative strategies outside of the scripted curriculum used in her district.

**Classroom management.** Figure 4.11 below shows the average scores for the classroom management sub-category by SES categories. This Figure also shows the high SES group to have performed slightly above the standard deviation range for the TSES in this sub-category. The high SES group was again the highest scoring group. When the two teachers in the low-SES group that were newly assigned to their schools were removed, a downward decline can be seen from high SES to low SES. The factor analysis conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) found that the average score for this sub-category was 6.7. The standard deviation for the sub-category student engagement was between 6-8.4.

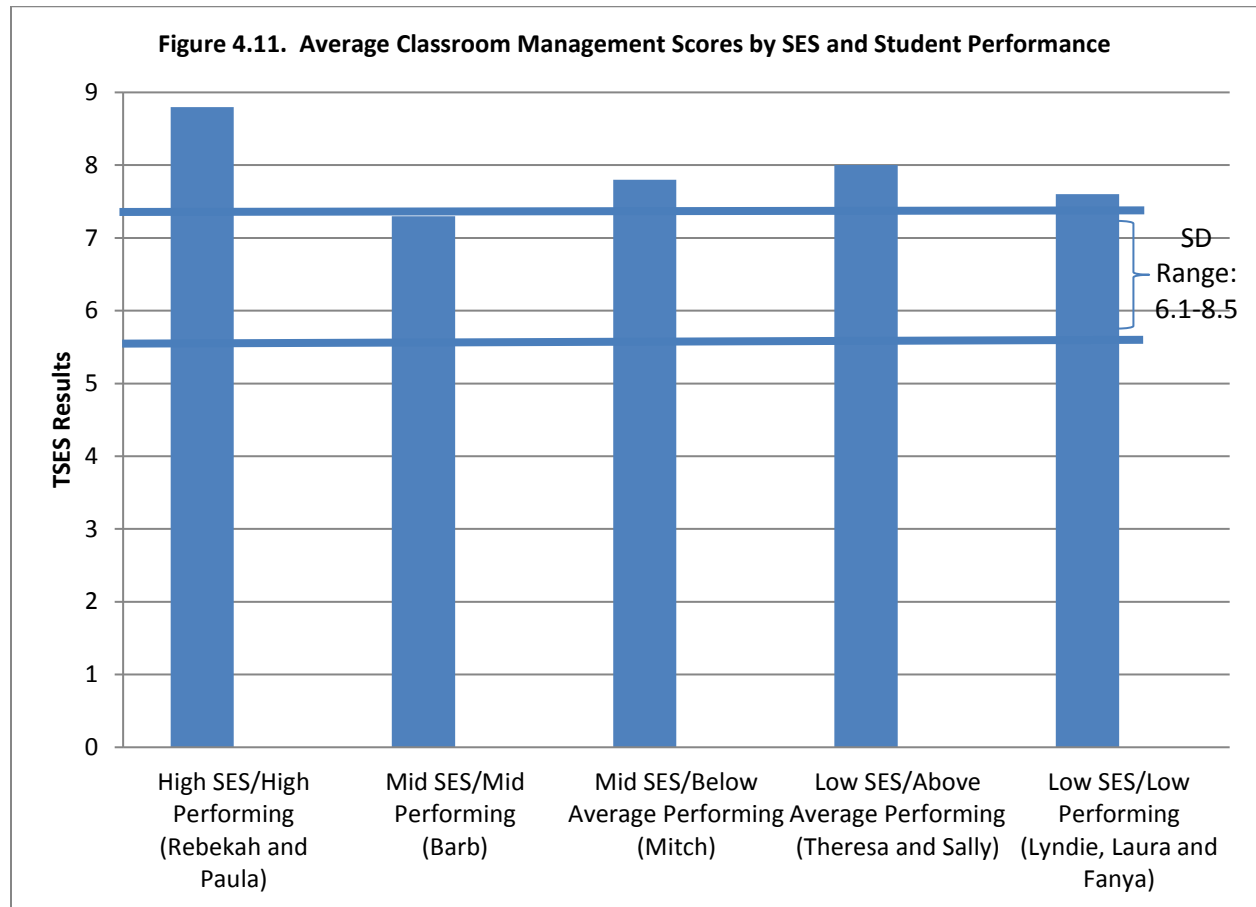


Table 4.5 below displays the results of each teacher’s scores on the questions related to teacher efficacy of classroom management. The four figures that follow this table, (Figures 4.12-4.15) illustrate individual item responses by participant.

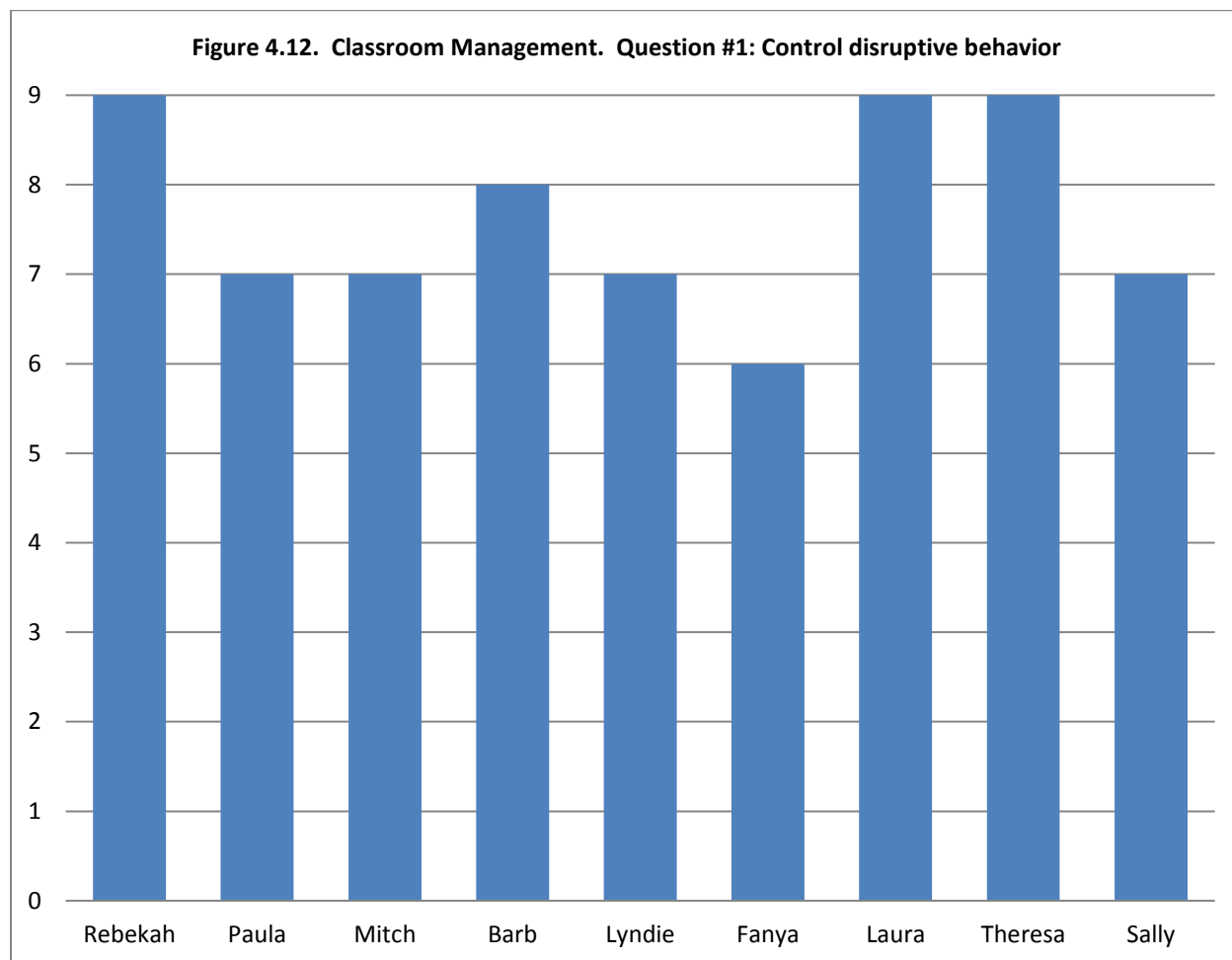
Table 4.5

*Item Responses for Classroom Management.*

	Rebekah	Paula	Mitch	Barb	Lyndie	Fanya	Laura	Theresa	Sally
1.Control disruptive students	9	7	7	8	7	6	9	9	7

6. Get children to follow classroom rules	9	9	7	7	7	7	9	9	7
7. Calm a student who is disruptive or noisy	9	8	7	7	8	6	8	8	8
8. Establish a classroom management system	9	9	9	7	8	6	9	7	8

Figures 4.12-4.15 below illustrate the individual teacher scores by question for the sub-category classroom management. The questions that correspond to the sub-category classroom management were questions 1, 6, 7 and 8.



Question #1 read, “How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?” Rebekah, Laura and Theresa each scored a nine for controlling disruptive student behavior. The lowest scores as Fanya’s at a 6. All other scores for this question fell within the standard deviation range for this sub-category.

There were a variety in responses when the participants discussed how they control disruptive behaviors. The teachers from the high SES schools described explicitly teaching behavior expectations and routines for the children to follow if a problem comes up. Paula taught her students how to use a time-out stone so that each person involved in a dispute has an opportunity to talk so they can all work together without the need for teacher intervention. Rebekah said that she teaches her children at the beginning of the year how to resolve conflicts

on their own and how to be kind to each other. Both of these teachers described situations that were easily resolved with a small amount of support from the teacher or even resolved by the children without the teacher even getting involved. Paula said,

I may have had to have the principal help, but I never gave away authority. I might have gotten advice on how to do something because I've always said there's going to be a consequence for this. I'm not sure what it is. I have to think about it, so I may go get advice on what to do but it was always me that brought the hammer down.

Rebekah talked about teaching her children how to be kind to each other using things she had learned from studying some different classroom behavior programs. Student misbehavior was rare in her classroom though. She said, "Sometimes we have a little behavior chart. I really try to use positive reinforcement." She continued, "I think when in trying to teach them that it is more important to do things because you know it's the right thing to do."

Barb had a sidewalk outside of her classroom door that she allowed the kids to use to run on if they needed a movement break. The availability of the sidewalk for children in Barb's class to blow off some energy was a tool she used to help manage some of her students who she felt had hyperactivity issues. She said,

What I try to do is allow them to do as much talking and moving in it, during instruction as possible. This year, it was a warm day and I looked outside and I went, "Anybody feel like they need to go for a tenth of a mile run?"

As SES levels went down, the need for teacher's support to work out student conflicts went up. There was still explicit instruction about classroom rules in Mitch's class and in Barb's but there were also times when they needed assistance from a colleague or the building principal to get the situation under control.

The teachers from the low SES schools described incidents that clearly needed administrative support. These teachers described severe student misbehavior that involved activities such as physical aggression, drugs, and mental illness. All of the teachers from the low SES schools indicated that they lacked what they felt was supportive administrative assistance with student misbehavior. Sally and Fanya both described incidents when they sent a child to the office for the principal to handle the disciplinary issue and instead of taking over, the child was sent right back to the classroom with nothing they were aware of being done by their administrator and no communication from the administrator about the incident.

Fanya, who had no training or information about the new behavior program her school had adopted that fall. When the class isn't doing what Fanya wants them to do, she said she turns off the lights, tells the children to put their heads down on their desks and to close their mouths. While they are doing this, she is going over what the children were doing that they shouldn't have been doing.

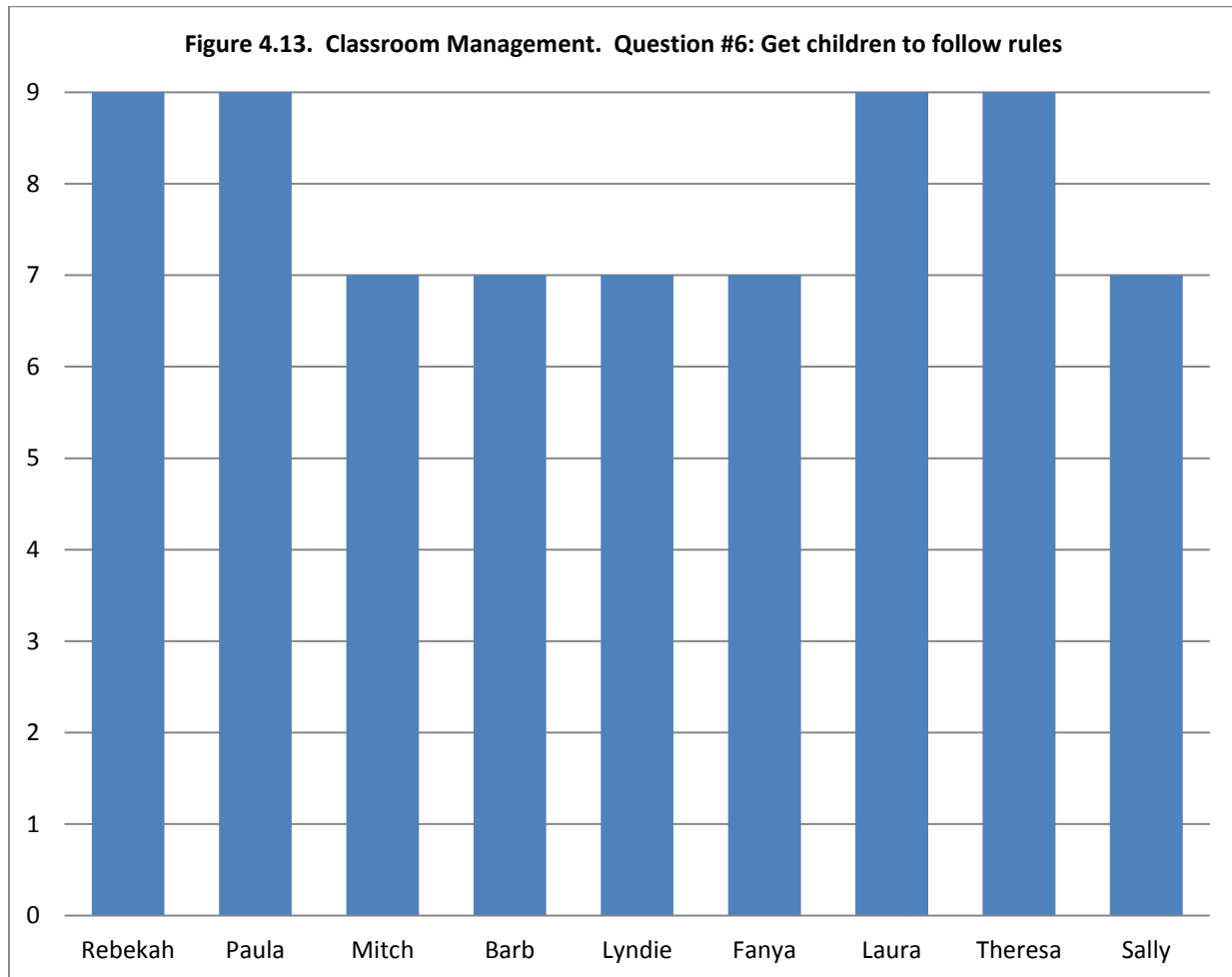
Barb talked about having the children leave the room and be with another adult until they were able to come back to class. Barb and the other teachers in her hallway had created an informal support network for when students needed a break somewhere outside of their classroom. The principal was not involved, they simply worked a routine out amongst themselves to that if a student needed a break or time away they would have another classroom to go to.

Lyndie's focus for controlling disruptive behavior was through building relationships with her students and explicitly teaching things that she felt other teachers might take for granted.

There's a lot of those basic social skills that they just don't have. I'm finding myself really delving into when you're out in the real world you need to say please, say thank you and every time they say one of those things I'm like – of course I go overboard – Oh my gosh! I love when I hear that!

Authoritarian disciplinary techniques were not discussed by the teachers from the high SES schools but in the low SES schools, more punitive consequences were discussed such as suspensions, time out of the room in the hallway, the use of physical restraints, and putting their heads down on their desks. Neither Rebekah nor Paula described using any of these more punitive techniques.





Rebekah, Paula, Laura and Theresa all scored at a nine for question #6. This question asked, “How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?” All of the other participants scored themselves a seven. Rebekah and Paula were from high SES schools and did not report many issues in getting the students to follow the rules once they have been gone over at the beginning of the year. Rebekah said,

I really view myself as their mom away from home. I create boundaries but I also want them to feel comfortable to approach me. To feel comfortable to make the mistake and know that I am there to help them. If they don't understand something, I will explain it again.

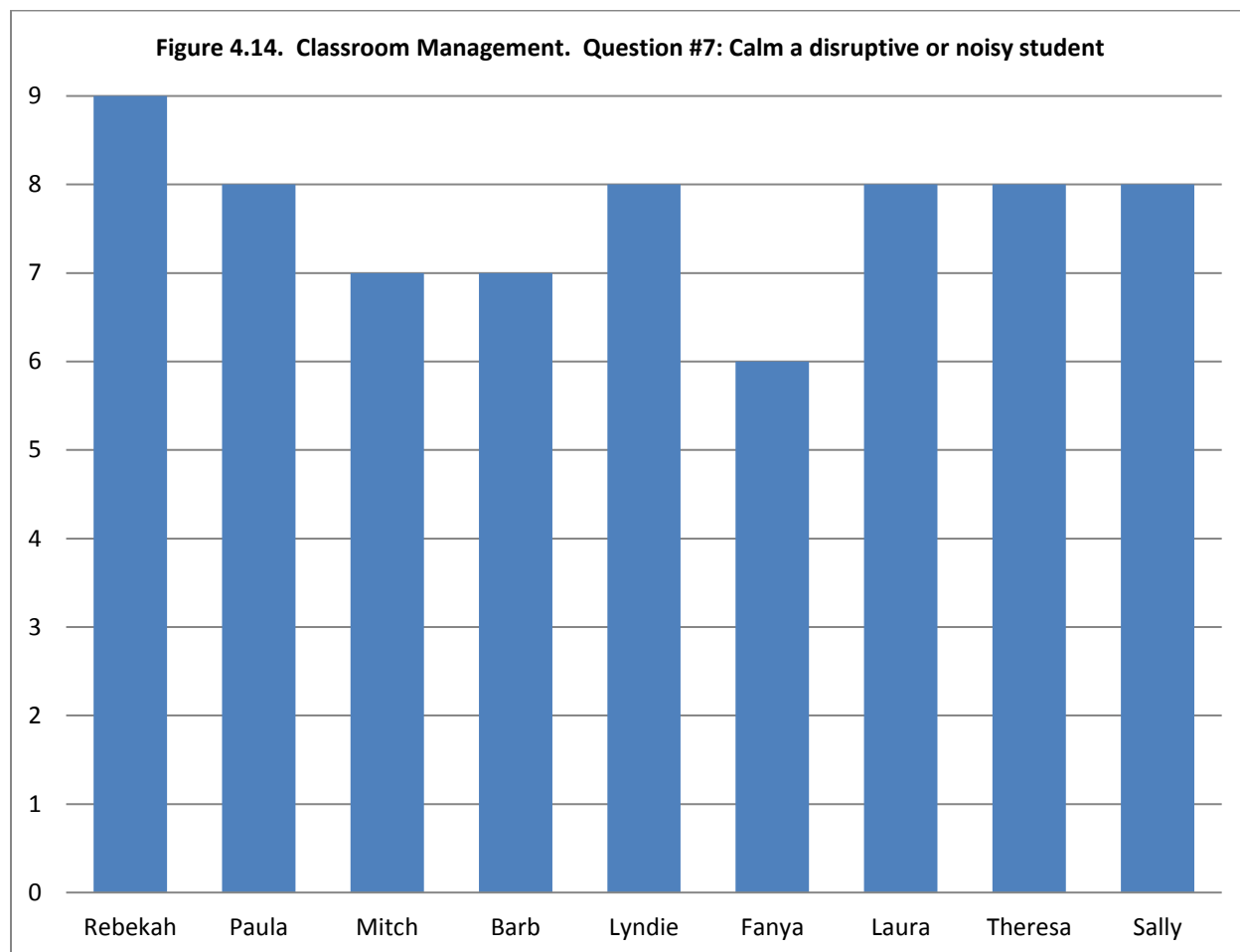
Theresa and Laura were both new to their current positions. Even though both teachers described student behaviors that interrupted learning, both remained confident that they could handle the situations as they arose. Theresa through scaffolding for her students to talk out problems and Laura by having a positive attitude and focusing on creating a very structured learning environment. Laura said,

I was raised in a European household of “follow the rules or else.” I run a pretty tight ship in my classroom. Not necessarily “follow the rules or else,” but I have a very organized system that what happens in the classroom, there’s a procedure and routine for everything and I mean everything. That helps me function. So, those organizational skills that I learned young are definitely in my classroom.

Some of the teachers described different building-wide behavior management systems that their school has adopted. Some of these programs were adopted and fully implemented across the building but others were not fully implemented and sometimes the staff was not even aware that their school had a behavior management system. This communication gap happened across SES categories and was not associated with any one SES level or performance level.

Regardless of a building-wide behavior system, there was a range in how well the teachers felt supported by their principals. For Rebekah and Paula, the principal’s assistance was irrelevant because they were able to handle whatever student misbehavior that took place by themselves. As the frequency and severity of student misbehavior increased, there was a need expressed by the teachers to have administrative support to help deal with disruptive behaviors. Barb handled the majority of behavior issues either herself or with teaching partners who would take turns watching students who were being disruptive without involving the principal. Mitch only involved the principal in severe situations. Fanya and Sally both felt that the principal was

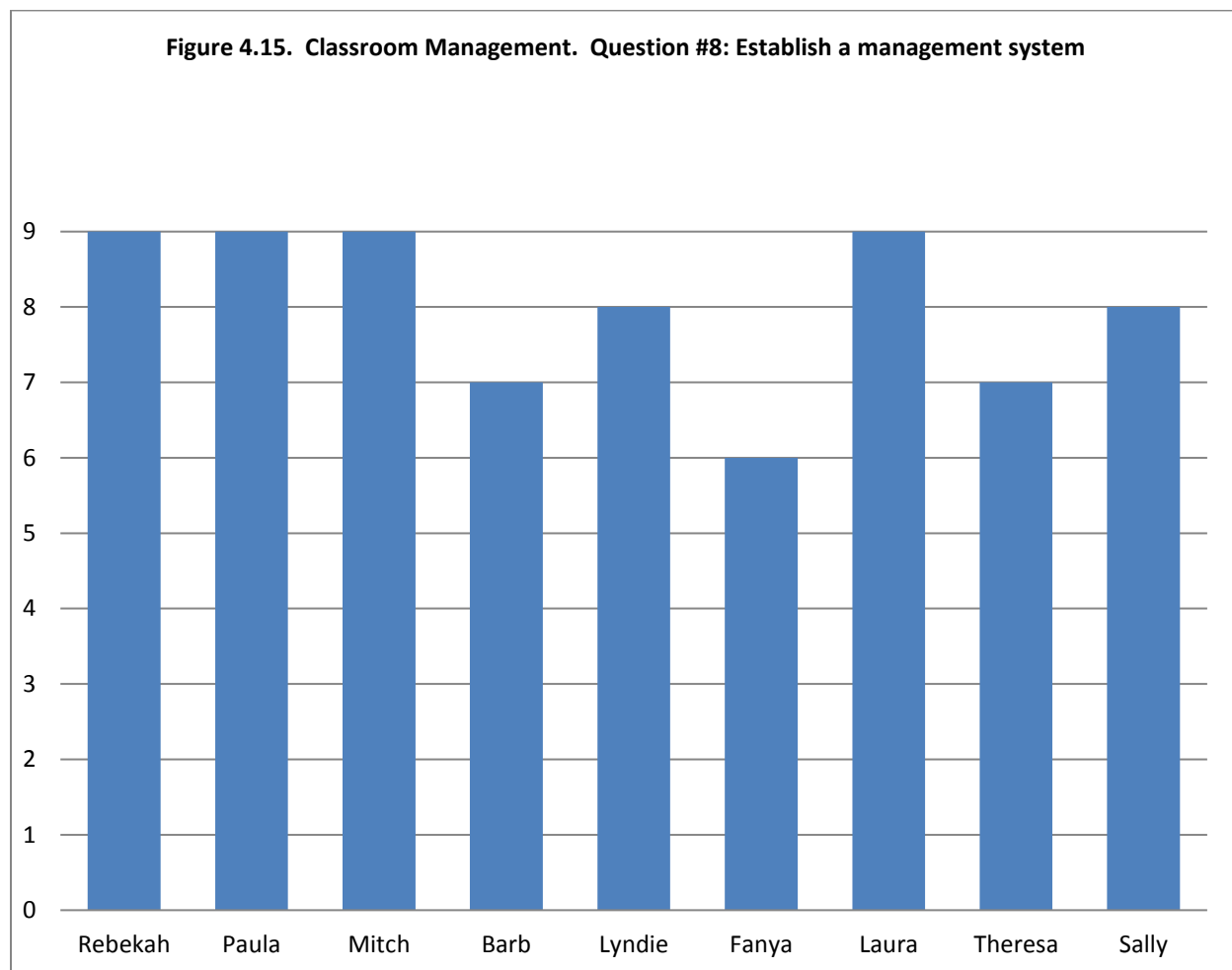
not helpful at all because they returned students to the classroom after they were just sent to the office.



Question #7 asked, “How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?”

This question was different from the rest in this sub-category in that it specifically addressed dealing with a particular student. Rebekah had the highest score on this question with a nine. Fanya scored herself at a six making her the lowest score for this item. There were specific incidents described by each participant regarding calming a disruptive or noisy student. The range of what was needed to calm the student ranged from giving them a hug in Rebekah’s case to carrying the child kicking and screaming to the office with another teacher for Fanya. The

ease of which the situations were resolved became increasingly more complicated in the lower SES schools and reliance on administration for assistance became more essential.



The highest scoring participants on this question were Rebekah, Paula, Mitch and Laura. Fanya had the lowest score on this question at a 6. Barb and Theresa each gave themselves a seven on this item. Question #8 asked, “How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?”

Fanya expressed little understanding or commitment to the building-wide behavior management system her school had adopted one this fall. She had not even been aware that her school had adopted a specific system until a student assembly took place on it. Fanya used her own behavior management techniques in her classroom when she had a problem and had

celebration Fridays each week to celebrate good student behavior. This was something that she did on her own and was not associated with any formal program. Fanya did not identify with any one classroom management system nor had she had any training on her school's newly adopted system. Her description of how she handled disruptions included turning off the lights and making the students sit with their heads down on their desks for several minutes.

Both Paula and Rebekah, on the other end of the SES continuum had described multiple behavior management systems that they were familiar with either through reading about them or through training opportunities. The same was true for Paula, Mitch and Laura. Mitch and Laura were both members of their school's behavior management team and Paula and Rebekah both described training they had had throughout their careers to positively manage and teach positive student behaviors.

Barb, Lyndie, and Fanya each said that they did not have a specific building-wide system in place at their schools and they felt that administrative support was sporadic and unpredictable as well. Laura, who worked at the same school as Fanya, however said that they did and that she was a member of the school's behavior program team.

This was the only question on the TSES that Sally scored higher than her colleague Theresa, which is noteworthy because Sally described not feeling supported in this area by her administrator. She also described not feeling like she had a full handle on how to manage certain student misbehavior events. Sally used the word "demeaning" when she explained an incident when she sent a child to the office for discipline and the child was just sent back to class. Theresa, who worked in the same building as Sally, did not express a problem with administration providing support but she also described herself as someone who handled student behaviors herself in her classroom without seeking administrative support.

### **The Emergent Theme: A Continuum of Ease**

The data presents a continuum of circumstances and events that ranged from easy in the high SES/high performing schools to what were described as more demanding or challenging circumstances in the low SES/low performing schools. The continuum of ease theme became apparent when examining the relationships between teachers and their students and feelings of nurturing. A continuum of ease also came out in the teachers' descriptions of the nature and frequency of student misbehavior events, the teachers' perceptions of administrative support and the teachers' perception of parental support.

**Ease of relationships with the students and nurturing.** The teachers in the high SES schools expressed an ease in taking on a nurturing role with their students. There were feelings of trust towards their students and the environment was depicted as calm and uncomplicated. Both Paula and Rebekah described having warm feelings towards their students and saw themselves stepping into a parenting role with them as both a responsibility and privilege of their work.

Each teacher in the study, across all three SES levels represented, expressed fondness for their children and a sense of motherliness or big brotherhood for them. Words and phrases such as "momma bear," "like a grandma," "motherly," and "motherliness" were used to describe their perception of their relationship with the children. Nurturing was a theme that emerged solely from the interview data but was expressed consistently regardless of the scores on the TSES or other archival data related to the schools. What stood out in the data was a change in the nature of how they described their feelings of nurturing for their students.

**Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.** Paula identified with her students and their lived experience outside of school. She had even gone to elementary school in the very

building where she currently worked. She described how becoming a mother helped her to better identify with her students' lives outside of school. Paula reflected,

When I became a mom and I knew what it was like to get little ones out the door in the morning and I had boys in hockey so I knew what it was like to have them come to school after school and me to work and then to sit in their room and do their homework and then warm up dinner in the microwave and take off to the rink and drag the little ones along. I had a lot more empathy for the hours after 3:15.

Paula described her interactions with her students as including “fun bantering back and forth.” She allowed her students to verbally challenge her so that they were able to develop their language and reasoning skills. She described it as a safe and fun environment.

Rebekah said she became a teacher because she had “a natural comfort with children.” She said, “I always try to be the kind of teacher that I want for my own children.” She expressed concern over the abundance of time spent on state assessments and would like to see more of a balance so the children and the teachers feel less stressed and might build stronger relationships. Her goal in her classroom is “creating an environment where the children feel comfortable, happy and confident.” She continued to say, “My greatest compliment that a child can give me, I should say that it's not about me, but then I know that they're truly comfortable when they accidentally slip up and call me mom because I know, and they're so embarrassed, because I am a mom away from home.”

Paula and Rebekah both scored a nine on the TSES question, “How much can you do to help your students to value learning?” They also both scored a nine on the question, “How much can you do to get student to believe they can do well in schoolwork? These questions speak to

the capacity of the relationship between the students and the teacher and both of these teachers' narratives corroborated their high level of efficacy in feeling they can help their students value learning.

*Mid-level SES/Mid or below average performing schools.* The two questions on the TSES that addressed the teacher's capacities to build relationships with their students were "How much can you do to help your students to value learning?" and "How much can you do to get student to believe they can do well in schoolwork? Both Mitch and Barb were from mid-level SES schools, but while Barb's school was performing at the mid-range on the Top-to-Bottom list, Mitch's school was scoring below average on the state's ranking list. Mitch scored himself at an eight and Barb a seven on both of these questions. Their narratives indicated an increase in the amount of effort needed to achieve these goals compared to Paula and Rebekah. Both Mitch and Barb described a more concerted effort needed in order to develop those relationships.

Barb, from the mid SES/average performing school said that she feels her relationship with her students is, "more of a grandma." She also talked about her connection to the community:

I develop relationships because I live in the neighborhood and they trick or treat at my house. I develop relationships with them because I'm outside on the playground with the fourth graders turning the jump rope to build rapport for next year.

She invests in intentional efforts to reach out to children in order to build relationships even before they are in her class. Barb also said, "Doing the warm and fuzzy has not always been my strength but I have come to realize that I have started to develop relationships with these kids when I had their older brothers and sisters." She also said, with a smile, "I am kind of known as



the strict teacher.” When describing her relationships with her student though she said, “I think through the years I’m probably a little bit more like a grandma, you know? The strict person but yet I will do anything for them.”

Building those relationships with her students is a fundamental belief to Barb. She reflected,

My belief is that respect comes with more love. You don’t love – you won’t love a teacher if you can’t respect them.” She went on to say that she hears new teachers talk about how much they love their students and she said, “Well, they have to know that you say what you mean - you mean what you say. Then they will love you.

Barb said that the most endearing thing to her that keeps her spirits up is “their smiles. Those ah-ha’s. That, ‘Wow, wow, is it already time to go home?’ The idea that this has been a place to want to be, and again, that’s what keeps you going on those days when the administrators and everybody above you is wanting to know what your data says and what is this and what that is.”

Mitch, from the mid SES/below average performing school is a single man without children. He expressed a sort of big brother nurturing role towards his students. He said, “I was the problem child that no one wanted to deal with probably and so I relate to the problem children per se.”

What makes Mitch feel effective when working with his students is his personal experience as a child who struggled in school. Mitch said,

When you look at the issues that a lot of children that others don’t want to work with sometimes, I take on that junk because I like to work with those children

because some of the same things that they've done, I've already done those things.

He said that he could identify with the children who had behavior problems. "I can identify with them a little bit more. I think that it helps out a little bit. Catches some kids off guard."

*Teachers from low SES/low performing schools.* For the teachers in low SES schools, nurturing looked more like protecting the children and trying to make up for unsafe situations out of school through empathy and caring. Much like the teachers who taught in the high SES schools, Lyndie stated, "I just feel that, I feel more of a nurturer. I take on that mommy role and tell the kids at school, I'm your mom away from home so don't think you're going to get away with it here if you don't think you're going to get away with it at home." She went on to describe situations in her classroom that were more about protecting her students and keeping them safe than about just having a happy classroom.

Lyndie laughed as she described playing with her children and joking around with them. Lyndie had grown up in the same neighborhood where her school was located so she expressed a connection to her students because she was from the same community. She would tell them, "Seriously? Do I need to smack you upside the head? And the kids were like, 'No don't' but then they'd be like 'Hit me! Hit me!'" She would then take a piece of paper and tap them on top of the head and tell them it was a "love tap."

Compassion was what Lyndie described as the most important personal variable for her to help her students to be successful:

Compassion, yeah. Empathy. Just an understanding of what some of these kids had gone through. It took me many years to realize - knowing is not the way to get there. You use a softer voice and close proximity and all those things they tell

you about in school that you think ‘yeah, right.’ but it really does have an effect on those kids or I’ll pull them aside to talk to them and then find out, oh my gosh, they witnessed, you know, someone getting beat up. They witnessed a shooting and it really does affect them. So, just trying to be a little more understanding.

Making a connection with her students was seen as an important first step by Lyndie to build relationships with her students:

I think making the connection with the student. Just being able to understand, letting them know that I am there for them no matter what. I think so many of these students - some have abandonment issues from ones that . . . my dad says he was going to be here and then he doesn’t. Just making them feel safe. That’s the one thing I think from working in this district I have realized a lot of these kids don’t feel safe at all.

Laura commented, “I always try to be the kind of teacher that I want for my own children and I think that is the greatest driving factor right now at this point in my profession.” She also said, “I view myself as their mom away from home.”

*Teachers from the low SES/mid-level performing school.* Sally also talked about treating her students as she would like her own children to be treated. She treats her students with respect and tries to teach them to be respectful. She said she was happy she became a mom before she went into teaching because otherwise they would have “eaten me alive.”

Theresa felt that she is able to relate to her students well and they are able to relate to her well because she is a mother of four children. She talked about having fun with the children and focusing on building rapport with each one of them. “They enjoy coming to me. They love being with me. I’m able to get them to function for me and work for me because of their desire

to please me.” She said, “I think I make learning fun and I love kids. You know, it comes from me having my own four and I treat them like my own kids.”

**Ease of student engagement and classroom management.** Two areas emerged in regard to the teachers working with their students and were also delineated in the TSES were student engagement and classroom management. Student engagement refers to the teacher’s ability to motivate unmotivated students and to get students interested and actively working in the classroom. Classroom management refers to the teacher’s ability to maintain order in the classroom so as to promote a positive and safe learning environment. Classroom management includes establishing routines and procedures and controlling disruptive student behaviors before they interrupt the learning environment.

*Student engagement.* The teachers’ average scores from the two high SES schools average score was 7.9 (out of nine) for perceptions of efficacy in the sub-category student engagement on the TSES while the low SES group average score was 6.8. This average score went down to 6.1 when Laura and Theresa’s scores were removed.

With the exception of Rebekah, all of the participants had lower scores on questions #4 and #11 which addressed helping students value learning and assisting families to help their children do well in school. This might indicate that most of the teachers felt less efficacious about their ability to help their students intrinsically value learning and less efficacious about their ability to get parents involved in assisting their student to do well in school. This lesser level of efficaciousness was documented in the interview data as well.

*Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.* Teachers in the high SES schools expressed more ease of getting students engaged. Phrases such as “self-motivated” and

“intrinsically motivated” described their students’ work ethic and motivation. The two high SES schools represented in this study were also high performing schools in the Top-to-Bottom list.

Paula and Rebekah taught in high SES and high performing schools. Paula’s school ranked at the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile and Rebekah’s school ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. Paula and Rebekah both indicated that students came to school ready and willing to engage in the classroom. Rebekah commented, “I feel like if the children are happy and comfortable and love coming to school and they’re engaged, their learning will happen.”

Paula described how her student have learned how to challenge themselves and each other even when there were opportunities to take the easy way out when doing their math practice work. “You could flip it (the card with the answers on it) over and write the answers but are you really challenging yourself? Your brain’s going to know the difference.” She continued to say, “I know the ones that have tried to flip it over but I have also heard their partners say, ‘Don’t do that. You’re not challenging your brain.’ ”

Paula said that she wants to create an environment “where the children feel comfortable and happy and confident.” She expressed that a classroom should be safe but also a fun place to be for the children. There were things that she knew she needed to do to help motivate the children sometimes, but mostly, she believed that they would figure out why they should be intrinsically motivated.

It’s learning where that carrot is. You have to figure out what the carrot is for that kids and dangle it all the time and then just the littlest bit of progress, make a big deal out of it and getting them to own it. That’s the biggest thing is they have to know it’s up to them.” She was referring to talking to the kids, Hey, you can fool

around in school and then you go home and spend four hours doing homework.

That's your choice. Personally, I'd rather go home and be able to veg.

Rebekah spoke about a family atmosphere in her classroom and described her school's culture as a family environment. "I feel like if you create an environment where the children love to come to school and you engage them in their learning then everything else hopefully will fall into place." Rebekah described her students as "really nice and inclusive of everybody."

*Mid-level SES/ below average performing school.* Mitch scored 6.8 on the TSES sub-category for student engagement. Mitch expressed a firm dedication to persistence in expecting appropriate behavior and he worked to make connections with his students to help build relationships that would support their success. "I try to help kids understand the fact that people that care most about you are the ones that are constantly working with you to make sure you're better. I just keep working for it." This statement also supports Mitch's feelings of nurturing for his students:

I like to think that students understand that some of the things I'm doing is in their best interest but they have to work towards it also. So, there's a bar that they have to reach. I like to think it's fair. Some students probably don't agree. I try to be fair across the board. Give each student, not necessarily what they want, but what they need.

Mitch struggled with finding ways to work with unmotivated students. "With unmotivated students there's always, I do think there's something that you can connect with them on. You just have to find that connector. Find out why they're unmotivated and try to work around it." He continued by saying, "You do the best you can to connect with everyone."

*Mid-level SES/ average performing school.* Barb scored a 6.5 on the TSES sub-category for student engagement. Barb said, “When I think about my students’ behaviors they usually come to me knowing – we’re going to learn. I think the children realize, ‘I’m going to learn’ and I believe you can learn and I’m going to help you learn. That does away with a lot of disruptive student behaviors.” When dealing with disruptive student behaviors, Barb described a lot of unnecessary talking that took place. She said, “I’m a believer that a lot of it comes from prevention so the very first week of school, we focus on what we are going to have as the rules of our classroom.” She went on to say, “When somebody violates, the first is like verbal reminders, non-verbals and then some verbals.”

Barb also described relying heavily on her teacher partner and her teacher partner relies on her to take a student from each other’s classroom to give the students a break so they can calm down and return to class. She also described having a table located down the hall for children to sit at if they were disrupting the classroom. She said, that her teaching partner and her, “try to deal with about 99 percent of it.” They try to talk to the child who is acting out and find out what is going on with him/her. She said, “It doesn’t usually turn combative.” There have been times when children in her class have been physically aggressive however.

Barb believes she has developed a reputation in her school as a very academics-focused teacher. She believes this reputation helps to set expectations for behavior in her class even before the children are assigned to her classroom. Even though Barb expressed a high level of efficacy in her ability to be able to motivate her students, her score in the sub-category of student engagement was only 6.5 out of nine.

Barb had a first grade student call her an “old bag” which she addressed as hurting her feelings. From that point on, she made an intentional effort to build a relationship with this

student. She said, “I would go and check on him a couple of days. I ended up sending a child down to read with him to help support him, one of my fifth graders.” Her intentional effort to develop a positive rapport with this student was done to establish a relationship with him before he came in her classroom as a fifth grader, even though that would be several years away. When this student entered second grade he was becoming better at math and Barb would invite him down to share his work with her fifth graders as a reward. She said, “He walked right up there and put it on the smart board and he starts explaining what his little picture is showing.”

Barb explained that her management took place through a concerted focus on academics, “I build relationships through academics.” Barb also talked about using humor in the classroom, making connections to students outside of school and playing with the younger students on the playground to build relationships before they were placed in her class. Barb felt she had built a reputation for herself as a teacher who was “tough” and academics focused. She explained that she used lots of humor and “tough love”.

Both Barb and Mitch talked about dealing with unmotivated students by encouraging them to participate. Barb was very enthusiastic about math and works hard to show her students that it can be fun. “Well, if I’m not enthused, how in the world could I expect these ten-year olds to be enthused?”

*Low SES/low performing schools.* The teachers who worked in the low SES schools articulated a heightened intensity of concern for student behaviors. Student engagement and the smooth operation of the classroom were important to these teachers; however, the first priority for them was to establish a safe place for their students while they were at school. The nurturing described by the low SES teachers was about empathy and concern over their students’ situations outside of school.



Laura described how her compassion for her students helped her to get students engaged in their work. “That compassion and then confidence that you can do it. Those two things because I get a lot of kids who holler out, ‘He couldn’t do that last year either.’ Like really? You just said that out loud?”

Laura had a score of 7.6 on the TSES in the sub-category of student engagement. Her scores on most of the questions on the TSES corresponded more closely to that of the teachers in the high SES group than to the low SES group. Her descriptions however were similar to her colleagues who also worked in low SES schools. Laura had been recently reassigned to a classroom position after serving as a consultant in her district’s central office for several years. The central office position had been cut due to budgetary issues. She had been in her current position for about two months at the time of this interview.

Laura described having “with-it-ness” that helped her keep her students on task. “So, my with-it-ness is pretty good and that’s what I used to work a lot with the teachers as well. You got to be aware of what’s happening out there and that with-it-ness is what’s going to keep those kids with you.”

Regarding student motivation, Laura remarked, “I do have some unmotivated students.” She described one of her second grade boys as unmotivated. “He’s lethargic. He has no confidence. He’s given up and he’s eight.” She explained that he had been retained and that she wanted to try to connect with him so she had him have lunch with her a couple of times. She said,

During those two individual times I’ve seen a whole different kid. A kid who had a lot to say. A kid who had a lot to talk about. A kid who was happy. You know, I can wink now at him and he gets it. I feel like he was somewhere publicly

humiliated and he's just given up. That's how I feel. Like someone nailed him in the past where he just says, 'whatever.'

Lyndie and Fanya scored the lowest of all the teachers on the TSES in the sub-category for student engagement. They each scored only 5.6 out of nine. These were the lowest scores in any of the categories. The narratives from Fanya and Lyndie also expressed the struggles they faced and the roadblocks that they felt kept them from engaging their students to the level they needed to for them to be successful.

Lyndie talked about making connections to students and trying to get them to understand that she cared about them. She gave an example when she described a student who kept falling asleep in her class. When she talked to him, he described hearing gunshots and a loud party that kept him from sleeping the night before.

If I can make them feel that things will be okay. School is important. Know that I'm going to get you through this year whether it be if you just need to sit here and talk, you need to close your eyes for a bit, whatever it is.

Lyndie had to try different techniques to keep the students engaged in their work. She said she would walk around the room and if they were talking off topic, she would start talking to them about what they needed to do and helped them try to get back on track. She described her role as more of a facilitator to get the children doing what they needed to be doing. She joked that sometimes she told them she was going to sit on them.

If Lyndie saw a student was "off" on a particular day and not engaged she talked to them. "I may pull them aside. Come here. Talk to me." She admitted that she sometimes lost her patience with her students. "Sometimes I do – which is a big no-no I know, it's like yell out in

front of everyone and I realize, I should not have done that and I tell my intern all the time, you're going to find that when you do that and then they get defensive it's a no win.

Lyndie gave herself a score of 5 out of 9 when asked the question on the TSES, "How much can you do to motivate a disinterested student?" Her narrative data provided evidence of several strategies she used and yet she still did not feel efficacious about being able to successfully motivate her students and keep them motivated. Lyndie described using proximity to help keep her students focused and humor to get them interested in their work or to help keep them motivated to persevere. She used different classroom configurations as well including whole group and small group instructional strategies. Lyndie also gave herself a 5 on the question, "How much can you do to help students value learning?" and another 5 for the question, "How much can you do to assist families in helping their children?"

*Low SES/mid-level performing school.* Sally expressed concern regarding her sense of efficacy. "I feel ineffective. I do feel more and more ineffective. It's because I seriously can't fit that all in and I can't take time with their little behaviors." She felt that because of the workload of the curriculum and the pacing she was expected to follow to get everything in during the school year, she is not able to take the time to help children problem-solve through disputes. Her feelings of nurturing allowed her to empathize with her students, which she felt allowed for higher levels of engagement. Sally had a score of 7 of the student engagement category on the TSES.

Theresa's and Sally's engagement strategies were embedded in their routines. The children in Sally's class had the same routine everyday when they came into the room. She tried to differentiate instruction for students when they were able to work in groups so that children are working at their independent levels. She did partner activities to help support struggling

students and gave those students who were ahead additional practice as they work with a classmate still learning the skill or information. Theresa also had morning rituals that were done to reinforce classroom expectations such as reciting their expectations list together as a class.

When students get off task, Sally tried to talk to the students to figure out what is going on. She would also have meetings with parents to see if there was something going on at home or if they could provide any support. She looked for things that would motivate unmotivated students. “What’s motivating? What do you like to do? What are your interests, okay so cool. You then pick some books about that. I know, you like cars, cool.” She kept graphic novels for her students when she taught fifth grade as a motivational tool to get some of her more reluctant readers into texts. Sally reflected, “I don’t have unmotivated students. What I do have are lazy students, like they’ll do their work quickly – that kind of thing.” When this happens she tries talking the child about it and then she talks to the parents. “Sometimes, it never changes. I mean, you know they’re just lazy. And it’s terrible. I mean like there are lazy people. I try. I just keep trying. You can’t change everything.”

Sally’s score on the student engagement sub-category on the TSES was 7 out of nine despite her description of frustration regarding motivating students. On each question on the TSES she scored herself as either a 7 or an 8 except for two questions: “How well can you use a variety of assessment strategies?” and “How much can you assist families in helping their children be successful in school?” On both of these questions, she only scored herself as 6 out of 9. Sally was the only teacher in the study to expressly say that she felt ineffective as a teacher. “I feel ineffective. I do feel more and more ineffective. It’s because I seriously can’t fit that all in and I can’t take time with their little behaviors. Oh honey, we don’t have time for that, you know?”

Theresa, who scored 7.5 out of nine on the TSES sub-category student engagement, explained that she felt it was important to have a very consistent behavior plan. She felt that the way to keep students engaged was to keep them busy. “If I give them room to be bored they’re going to act out.”

***Classroom management.*** In the sub-category of classroom management on the TSES, teachers from the high SES schools had an average score of 8.8. Teachers at mid SES schools averaged 7.5 and teachers from the low SES schools had an average score of 7.8. Please note that the TSES score for the low SES schools would be 7.1 if the outliers were not included in the average. The interview data presented below also indicate a decline in feelings of efficacy in the teachers’ ability to effectively manage their classrooms. Student behavior was an area not specifically addressed on the TSES, but much data was collected on this topic from the interviews and are included in this section for discussion.

***Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.*** The teachers in the higher SES schools expressed that they did not really have any behavior problems and if any came up they were almost always able to handle them without administrative intervention. When teachers were asked, “How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?” both Paula and Rebekah rated their efficacy level as a 9 out of nine, which was the highest score possible. Rebekah said, “I have very little students with difficult student behaviors. Pretty manageable. They’re motivated. They’re intrinsically motivated.” She also said, “The kids don’t have many problems. They can work things out between themselves verbally.” As she described how her students interact with each other she said, “I feel like they really get along well with each other. Like when I observe them on the playground or when I observe them during free choice time. They really try to include everybody.”

Paula also described the particular students that came to her school as a result of her school being a magnet school in the district:

We're not a neighborhood school. We get children from all over the district and their parents have to drive them there so we have a different clientele than most. So as bad as we think some of our behavior is, it's not in comparison to what I have heard. So maybe that's why I've been able to handle it, because it's not been terrible terrible.

Paula uses "positive discipline" with her students. She teaches her students that rewards and consequences depend on each student's behavior. It is their choice. She also said that she doesn't have to get involved in student behaviors much because she taught her students how to work out their own problems verbally by using what she called a "time-out stone." The time-out stone is an arbitrary object that the children hold when they are talking. When the person is holding the stone, he/she is allowed to talk and the other person listens. When the first person is finished saying what he/she wants to say, that person gives the stone to the other person so he/she can talk. The students learn to handle disagreements independent of the teacher and are able to self-manage problems as they come up.

Rebekah said:

I have very little student with difficult student behaviors. Pretty manageable. I mean its kindergarten so I don't have, I don't have um anything that is really concerning. They're motivated. They're intrinsically motivated. Sometimes we have little behavior charts. I really try to use positive reinforcement. Weighing out the positive things that I see the children doing as opposed to the negative. I

guess it depends on from year to year and the class that you have. . . . The school where I teach, it's pretty easy.

Paula said, "I may have had to have the principal help, but I never gave away authority." She expressed that it was not that the administration was not supportive, it was more that she would rather handle the behaviors herself to establish herself as the authority figure in the classroom rather than the principal being the one who "brought the hammer down."

Both teachers from the high SES schools established expectations for student behavior through explicit teaching activities that took place in the first month or so of school. Beyond the initial lessons, the teachers in the high SES schools said that their students followed the expectations and were able to manage issues that came up in the classroom independently.

Regarding prevalent student behaviors in their classroom, teachers from the higher SES schools described their children's behavior in the following ways. Paula said,

I've had some that daydream. I have one now that will not stop talking. I mean, from 8:15 to 3:15 in the afternoon he is talking nonstop. I feel like I'm continually playing games all day to trick them into doing what they need to do.

The behaviors Paula and Rebekah described did not stop or take away from the instructional process in their classrooms. The most severe behaviors described by the two teachers in the high SES schools seemed to be more of an annoyance than a disruption of learning. Rebekah commented, "One particular child, he just needed like just a hug just to kind of calm him down. He just needed to regroup and I can understand that." She added,

If the situation happened in the classroom, I don't ever recall a time where I couldn't handle it but I would reach out to the psychologist or social worker, the

principal for their advice. For their input. To come up with a plan. Just to make it aware so we can have some paper trail for that child.

Rebekah and Paula both indicated in their interviews that their schools had adopted building-wide behavior systems. Neither of these teachers felt their schools had a real need for a building-wide behavior intervention system though. Both Rebekah and Paula said their students came to school already knowing how they are supposed to behave and neither of these teachers felt that student behavior was a large concern in their classrooms. Other than daydreaming and chatting constancy, the most extreme behavior that was described was one of Paula's students who she said was "almost defiant." They both also felt that if they needed help with a student due to a behavior issue they had immediate access to support from either a colleague or their building principal. This also ties into the theme that will be discussed later on called administrative support.

*Mid-level SES/Mid or below average performing schools.* Both Mitch and Barb talked about disruptive behaviors happening in their classrooms. They both indicated that they had to intervene regularly with the children to work things out. The students, as a whole, were not described as being self-sufficient to manage disputes with other students independently of their teachers. Both of these teachers described specific students they have worked with who needed more intensive interventions to be able to behave appropriately in school and in class.

Both Mitch and Barb said when they are not able to handle issues themselves they use a team approach that involves colleagues and their principals. Mitch only calls the principal down when a situation has escalated to the point where they need a formal intervention put in place. On occasions when the principals were called down to help, both of the teachers at this mid SES school found their administrators to be supportive and helpful.



On the TSES, Mitch scored 8.3 and Barb scored a 6.5 out of nine in the sub-category of classroom management. The decline in their scores on the TSES in this area corresponded to the increase in intensity they described as far as the effort needed to handle disruptive students and keep the classroom managed so learning could take place.

Barb, from the mid SES/average performing school, indicated that she is able to handle disruptive student behavior on her own mostly, but also works with other teachers in her hall when necessary. The teachers worked together to provide breaks to students who needed them to avoid outbursts. A student from another room might go to the other teacher's class to give the student a break. Several teachers were involved in helping each other out like this in Barb's school creating an informal network of support. Barb described a student in her class who was certified with an emotional impairment.

We developed daily behavior plans. We worked with our gym teacher who is just phenomenal and when I had my EI student he had to do certain things in the morning. If he did those things, he would get to go down to the gym and she would allow him to do something like the warm-ups with the first graders or something like that.

If he didn't have a successful morning, Barb said, "then if you didn't do those things, you don't get to go to gym and then usually we have to have the social worker step in."

Mitch, from the mid SES/below average performing school said, "We're here to have fun and learn." He described his classroom management as embedded within the building-wide system used in his school. His focus is to front-load appropriate behavior into his students through explicit instruction of expectations at the beginning of the year and then periodically re-teach throughout the year when needed. He did express frustration with what he has seen as an

increase in disruptive student behavior in school. He said, “It seems that education has turned itself to where the students hold more power and credibility than the teachers do.”

Mitch believes this has happened because so much more time had to go into content area work. There was less time to build relationships with students and explicitly teach appropriate behaviors. He talked about how increasing expectations to cover content and get high scores on tests are leading, in his opinion, to an increase in defiant student behavior. “I think that’s made a change in student behaviors that has brought about the ease of students not knowing the procedures and I guess, testing limits throughout the year.”

Mitch, like Barb, uses a team approach when a student behavior issue gets out of control for him. He said, “There have been situations at times when we’ve had to work together as a team. Through my career. Not just this year.” He added,

We had a couple of situations where we would have to send the classroom out for their own safety. The student would start getting upset, throwing things and things like that. At that point, I would bring in a kind of team approach.

Reflecting on other events, Mitch said,

I’m able to handle some of the things in the classroom, so if there’s something that goes above and beyond, I’ve called down the principal and had her sit down with so and so. You know, spend time with so and so. At that point, I think she knows that a lot of the like small pieces were already taken care of and this student has escalated to a point where he is definitely, or she is definitely, in need of an intervention piece.

*Teachers from low SES/low performing schools.* The concern expressed for disruptive student behaviors was articulated most fervently by the teachers representing the low SES

schools in this study. Their efficacy in being able to handle these disruptions and effectively manage their classrooms was compromised by the intensity and frequency of inappropriate and disruptive student behavior. There were references made to building-wide behavior management systems that were supposed to help alleviate some of these challenges by each participant. These systems, however, had limited success in promoting behavior that is more positive for a variety of reasons. The reason given for the limited success of the building-wide behavior interventions systems was seen as a result of a series of implementation failures.

Fanya and Laura's school attempted to put a building-wide behavior support system in place but it had not been communicated well to the other teachers in the building. The result of the lack of communication created a sense of confusion and different management systems are still what are in place in each classroom rather than a single building-wide behavior support system.

Fanya said that she knew that there was going to be a school-wide behavior support system that was supposed to be used in each classroom but she did not really know anything about it other than they had to take the children to an assembly at the beginning of the year. That was the first she had heard about the new system. The result was inconsistency of implementation across the building.

Fanya admitted that her follow through with her students on behavioral interventions was inconsistent. She said that she tries to give warnings that she will call home but she sometimes forgets to call parents. She described a little girl in her classroom who is autistic and she laments that she has no idea what she can do for the child to help her. She said, "[the child] screams and cries and gets no resource help at all." She has tried to refer students to get more assistance from

the school but she said that was, “like running into a brick wall.” She said that her class has a ration of ten out of twenty-seven of her students having some sort of learning disability.

Fanya explained that she would have one-on-one conversations with students to get them back on track but sometimes she would also have to turn off the lights in the classroom if the class became too loud. When she believes her students are becoming unruly she said she tells the children, “Lights off. Heads down. Mouths closed.” Then she tells them what they were doing and they review expectations. She said this works, “big time.” There was an event that she described when a student who was throwing chairs had to be physically restrained and it took two adults to carry the child to the office to keep him from hurting himself. Fanya said there is a lot of roughhousing and wrestling with the boys and a lot of girls being sassy with each other in her class. Even after these descriptions she said, “There’s not too much unruly behavior.” She said her classroom has, “a lot of order. A lot of structure. A lot of respect. My kids are so kind to each other.”

Out of all the teachers in this study, Fanya and Lyndie had the lowest overall scores on the TSES, (both scored 6.4 out of nine) Fanya had the lowest score in each sub-category except for instructional strategies. She scored an average of 5.79 out of nine for student engagement and 6.5 out of nine for classroom management. Her descriptions of her experiences indicated that she felt she was up against great odds to help her children be successful in school.

Laura uses one-on-one verbal redirections with students to help them work through disputes. Laura said she is a member of her school’s building-wide behavior intervention team this year and from that she has learned to explicitly teach routines and procedures to the children. She said she gives “lots of hugs and high-fives.” She also commented, however, “some of the behaviors are beyond my control.”

Laura talked about the lack of administrative support she receives for disruptive students. “In the past, we’d send them down and they’d send them right back. So, this demeans your authority. I just stopped doing that.” She felt it diminished her authority in the classroom. She said, “I interact with my students in a positive playful way. Stern when I need to be.” She tends to try to handle student behaviors that come up without administrative support unless absolutely necessary.

Laura and Fanya’s school implemented a building-wide behavior intervention plan at their school but the implementation has been marred with communication issues between staff. Laura, who is on the school’s behavior team seemed to know much more about it than Fanya, (who was not on that team) did in her interview. When asked how the program was going, Laura said, “So far so good. No the best communication to the staff so that makes it a little trickier. They take kids at lunch and did a program about the expectations and the staff was like, ‘What are you talking about?’ They had no idea.” Fanya confirmed this as she described going to the same assembly and not having ever heard any of the plan before the children were made aware of it.

Laura believes she is having more success than some of the other teachers because she took time to go back and review expectations with the students. She described using a particular scripted reading program that was adopted in her school:

I run the program true to the program. Other teachers who do not run the program true to the program aren’t as successful only because – and when I say – I backed up and I taught procedures and routines. I knew that you had done this before but let’s review what we need to do and I put it on me. I’m new, so I need to learn and I know you did this last year but help me figure this out.

Laura explained that all of the students worked in leveled reading groups. Teachers work with groups of students placed at their tested reading level. She said one of her students in her reading group is a fourth grader, seven are first graders and the other ten are second graders from her own classroom. Every eight weeks they re-evaluate the students and re-group them based on their test results. Laura believed her school adopted this program in order to address issues of socialization and student behavior. It was believed by the administrators who adopted this program that this would build the children's capacity in these areas as well as help them learn how to read.

Regarding student behaviors from Laura's students, "The kids get along fine in front of me when I send them to lunch. When I send them to a special, it's a whole different world. There are meltdown fights. I've had the music teacher get hit by someone in my class."

Lyndie described her students' behavior with a smile and said their behavior was "semi-chaotic." Verbal disrespect was cited as the most prevalent disruptive behavior and yelling across the room to each other was another problem. "Generally, it's boys puffing up their chests and saying, 'go ahead, say it again' kind of thing." She went on to say, "Even though I hate to say it, some of its environmental I know but there are some kids that are supposed to be on medication and don't get it. So that's another issue that I don't have control over."

Lyndie emphasized the importance of connecting with the students as a nurturer and said that being supportive of their individual situations is a critical component of effective classroom management and student engagement. "I just think making the connection with the student. Just being able to understand. Letting them know that I am there for them no matter what. I think so many of these students, some have abandonment issues."

She had one student who told her his dad said he was going to see him and then he didn't. She expressed that it was important to be sure the children felt they were safe at school. She said, "Just making them feel safe. That's the one thing I think from working in this district, I have realized a lot of these kids don't feel safe at all.

Lyndie described another incident with one of her students who was acting out and then falling asleep in class. She asked him what was going on and he told her, "There was a party at the house last night and then there was gun shots going off and I was scared and I can't really go to sleep." Her response was not to punish the child for his behavior but to be empathetic to his situation and provide him with love and support. She said,

If I can make them feel that things will be okay, school is important, know that I'm going to get you through this year whether it be – if you just need to sit here and talk, you need to close your eyes for a bit, whatever it is, then I know they're going to be okay.

Lyndie's students struggle with verbal disrespect to each other and to adults. There is a lot of yelling across the classroom. She also said,

The boys puff up their chest and it's like 'go ahead, say it again' kind of thing.

Even though I hate to say it, some of its environmental I know, but there are some kids that are supposed to be on medication and don't get it so that's another issue that I don't have control over.

Lyndie also talked about the boys in her class constantly sparring and play fighting with each other. She repeatedly tells them they are not allowed to do it. When they tell her they were just playing her response to them is, "You don't play like that."

Building relationships between students is a tool that Lyndie has also used to help with behavior management. She described a time when she had to intervene:

I had two boys just going at each other so I said, ‘All right, we need to sit down and talk because I bet you don’t realize you have more in common than you think.’ The boys responded, ‘No, we don’t.’ We got to talk and one talked about how his mom had a new boyfriend and that was really bothering him and the other kid said, ‘Yeah, I don’t get to see my dad.’ So see, you do have something in common.

Lyndie explicitly teaches manners in her classroom along with the classroom rules. “We have our set of classroom rules that I’m constantly going back and reiterating.” She was frustrated about outside influences affecting their behavior at school. “They’re not used to the respectful way you talk to people and I think that’s due to – after meeting some of the families – that’s how they talk to others.”

Lyndie described her students as lacking in basic skills in manners. She said she told them, “Well, you know, if you do bump into someone it’s nice to say I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do that.” The students will resist apologizing if they said it wasn’t intentional touching, but she coaches them to try to help them understand that if it was unintentional you still need to apologize. She said, “There’s a lot of that – just those basic social skills that they just don’t have.” When she hears them use polite language she provides a lot of positive feedback to help support more of it in the future.

Student behaviors reported in the low SES schools were more severe and more frequent than in the high SES or mid SES schools. Many of the teachers in the low SES schools expressed a sense of frustration over the behaviors and struggled with figuring out ways to handle situations that come up as a result of disruptive and/or disrespectful behavior.



Fanya said, students' behaviors range from "horrific to calm as a lamb." She described a time when a student was throwing chairs and a co-worker had to help her carry him to the office to keep him from hurting himself. With a sense of frustration, she said,

If the principal catches a student doing something, she will send them home but that doesn't happen if it's just the teacher that sees the behavior. If you send a student to the principal's office they come right back so teachers just don't send them.

This quote also relates to the theme of perceived administrative support to be discussed in later sections.

Lyndie expressed frustration regarding a sense of exasperation of having to constantly repeat expectations:

I'm trying to get everyone on the same page. You know what, you may not like everybody but you do have to get along with everybody. We have our set of classroom rules that I'm constantly going back and reiterating. They're not used to the respectful way you talk to people and I think that's due to – after meeting some of the families – that's how they talk to others.

She talked about a lack of certain social skills that were acceptable in school that she needs to address explicitly with her students as well.

There's a lot of that – those basic social skills that they just don't have. I'm finding myself really delving into when you're out in the real world you need to say please, say thank you and every time they say one of those things I'm like – of course I go overboard – oh my gosh! I love when I hear that!

*Teachers from low SES/mid-level performing school.* Sally felt that she could be more effective if there were not so many things on her plate that she had to do.

I could spend more time dealing with these behaviors and it is not even their fault. I am rushing those kids right now. I'm rushing them because I know we don't have time to deal with this because I've got to get 90 minutes of math, 90 minutes of Daily 5.

Sally expressed frustration over student behaviors that detract from instruction. "If the kids were perfectly behaved I would feel much more effective but I'm not blaming them for the misbehavior." Sally emphasized that she tries to be "comical," "chipper" and sometimes "silly" with the children to help support positive school behavior but there was a sense of frustration over the behaviors and lack of administrative and parental support to alleviate the issues. Sally uses her feelings of nurturing for her students to allow her to connect with them to get them engaged. Generally, she said,

I don't have a huge problem with student behavior. You know, I have my procedures but like I'm not like, I can put my thumb on kids when I need to but like I'm not super rigid. Like I know that some kids need more lenience than other kids.

She said,

My biggest problem with student behavior is when kids won't take ownership of their behavior. That throws me off. Like I know, no one's perfect. You could make all kind of mistakes but you need to, you know, you need to own up to it.

That kind of thing.

She described a time when she was confronting a student, "I saw you with my eyeballs. And then he's like no Miss, I didn't do that. Now, like are you nuts? I just saw you."

Sally talked about the population at her school as being very social. She said, “extremely social.” There were times when she would send a student out of the class in the hallway because she was not able to get him or her to stop talking and disrupting the class but she found she was forgetting about the student out in the hallway. She had another student who was aggressive and yelled constantly. She tried moving him to different areas in the classroom to no avail. She would let him lay on the floor if he wanted just to get him to be quiet but then he would start disrupting again and she would have to have him leave the room so she could teach the other students.

Theresa (the newer teacher in the low SES school who worked in the same building as Sally) explained that she manages behavior in her own way. She said there is “Lots of verbal disrespect.” The kids are “rowdy” and “very talkative.” She said, “I’m a talker and I talk them through it.” The focus is not a proactive approach on explicit teaching of appropriate behavior but rather a reactionary approach to working out problems as they arise. Lessons on appropriate behavior take place following inappropriate behavior’s occurrence.

Theresa described the misbehavior as, “beyond disruptive.” She said that the behavior is more verbal than physical but they are, “very disrespectful.” She described the students as, “Talking very loud, rude, not being able to conform to rules.” She does believe that since she has started working with this group of students, (this interview took place in November and she had been working with this group since September) and she is building rapport with them this behavior is improving. She starts everyday with a class meeting where she reminds the students that they must, “act like respectful young adults. That’s our number one thing and we read it aloud every morning.”

Theresa indicated that her school has adopted a building-wide behavior intervention tool but she has never received any training on it. Her technique to deal with disruptive behavior is to be very communicative with each student and to get him/her to talk to her about what is going on. She believes that the key to classroom management is “Consistency, consistency, consistency. Because if they know for once that they can take advantage they will.” She also talks them through what they did wrong in order to help teach them how to not have the same problem again in the future.

Some of the teachers from the low SES school expressed positive attitudes regarding building-wide behavior management systems. Sally and Theresa, both of whom indicated they were on the building-level behavior support team, reported a more positive attitude toward behavior management. These more positive teachers explained that explicit teaching of expectations, routines and procedures along with positive and consistent reinforcements for appropriate behavior is an integral part of building-wide behavior management systems. Lisa said that she tries to teach compassion and tries to give the kids confidence in their ability to do well. She tries to find time to explicitly teach and re-teach routines and procedures to the children. She also said there were “lots of hugs and high-fives.”

Sally talked about using a building-wide behavior support system much like that used in the mid SES schools where Mitch and Barb worked, but she said that, in reality, it is not actually happening. “The school says they’re doing it but really every classroom is doing their own thing.” She described setting up procedures at the beginning of the year so children know what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it. She also has a treasure/prize box that she uses for rewards on Fridays and sends notes home with students who engage in disruptive behavior. Sally said, “Sometimes I get a little silly.” She also teaches them how to use

I-statements. She said that when students get disruptive she uses a card system as a visual reminder for the students to behave appropriately. She sends disruptive students to the principal sometimes but it doesn't help the children to behave better, but she does it to give herself and the other students a break from the disruptive behavior.

Theresa also uses a card system where she flips the card assigned to the students if there is a transgression in behavior. She explains to the students what they did when this happens so they understand what specific behavior was unwanted and not appropriate in the classroom. Theresa has an English Language Learners classroom so conversation is a large part of the work that she tries to get the children to engage in throughout the day to build their English language skills. She also believes that consistency in enforcing expectations is important. "Consistency is the key. Consistency, consistency, consistency because if they know for once that they can take advantage, they will."

**Ease of Administrative Support.** There were two areas concerning administrative support that stood out for the high SES, mid SES and low SES schools. These included administrative support for access to resources and administrative support for disruptive student behaviors. Access to material and human resources is generally dictated and provided by building and central office administration and is not controlled by classroom teachers. Administrative support for disruptive student behaviors is also out of the realm of control of the teacher and the teachers must rely on the administrators to provide this support.

***Administrative support in getting access to resources.*** Teachers need access to both material and human resources in order to do their work well. When needs arise, the school administrators are responsible for procuring these resources for the teachers. There was intense frustration expressed by the teachers from the low SES schools regarding not having the

resources they felt they needed to do their work. In the interviews, the teachers from the low SES schools expressed this frustration more vigorously than the descriptions provided by the teachers from the mid SES schools. The teachers in the low SES schools believed the lack of resources was preventing them from successfully supporting their students' academic growth. The teachers from the high SES schools, although they may not have had all of the resources they felt they needed, did not express a frustration from a lack of access to resources. The two teachers from the high SES schools did not believe this was an obstacle to their students' success.

*Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.* Rebekah and Paula, both from the high SES schools, did not express feeling overwhelmed due to a lack of resources although they did say that they did not have what they needed and had to purchase or somehow obtain resources on their own. They described this as a nuisance but not anything that stood in their way of being successful with their children. They expressed disappointment but they still had positive feelings that they could still make it work despite the obstacles.

When Paula was asked if she believed she had the resources she needed for her classroom, she responded,

No. We do not have math books. We do not have spelling books. We do not have handwriting books. We do not have any books except reading. I've had to spend hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of dollars on Teacher-Pay-Teacher to come up with a math curriculum because what they provide us in a folder on the Internet has been taken from Georgia and Engage New York and it's haphazardly put together.

She indicated that her district has an instruction department; however, she has found no support from that department in procuring basic instructional materials for her classroom. She elaborated on resources indicating that because the needs of the Montessori program are so unique, it makes for an additional challenge to make district-adopted curriculum fit into their program and they are forced to create their own materials. “We, two of us last year, started putting a Montessori blended curriculum together. So, we wrote, we’re in the middle of writing curriculum for our building.” She and her partner are writing curriculum for each of the content areas. She said,

Last summer our goal was math. So at first and second grade, we start, I started with Montessori and wrote it in order of the Montessori curriculum and then plugged in the Common Core that wasn’t. Montessori is really more than Common Core so it wasn’t hard to put the pieces together because we do a lot more than the common core tells us to. It’s just having to do all that and not having.

Paula and her colleagues at the Montessori have also addressed the vertical alignment of curriculum on their own.

We had a one-two, a three-four and a five-six teacher start on that and then we made sure there weren’t holes. We spent last summer and then not, this year, we’re teaching it and then we’ll meet again next summer and make sure that it’s done but, and then, there’s a paper shortage.

She also indicated that neither her nor the other teachers engaged in this work have been paid for their time outside of work to do this.

The parents purchase paper for the teachers when the year’s supply provided by the school district runs out towards the end of the year. The paper shortage was especially

frustrating to Paula as she felt this was a basic school supply that should be provided by the school district. She said,

I will spend money on Teacher-Pay-Teacher stuff. I'll spend money on pencils, but I refuse to buy paper. I refuse to buy paper. I think that that's just a mortal sin for (referring to her school district) to not be able to budget their schools with paper since they don't provide us books. How am I supposed to teach without paper?

Paula did say that the teachers had the manipulatives they needed to teach for Montessori, math and science but all of the equipment was old. Some of it was from Paula's first year teaching in the 1980's.

The district doesn't buy any Montessori materials any more. Everything in my room is twenty-eight years old. I mean, yes, I've had stuff I've added to it, but like my puzzle maps of the continents, I mean not Europe isn't even any good because it's changed. I've drawn on the puzzle pieces the new countries.

In spite of Paula's frustrations, her attitude was more that she would be able to make due. Between the work her colleagues were doing on the side to re-write curriculum so it fit their program and taking donations from parents for paper and other supplies, she expressed that they were able to get by. She even expressed some level of being positive about it. She smiled when she said,

Putting the curriculum together – that's fun for me. I mean, I must have spent, I don't know, 150-200 hours over the summer but it was fun. I know when I retire that curriculum's going to be there and I can say I helped put it together. It's kind



of like leaving your mark on the building. I figure after that long, I have to leave something.

Paula laughed about her puzzle map being out of date when she described repainting the continent on her map to show her children that it had changed and Rebekah sighed when she talked about her old materials. They felt that it could be better, but they also felt that they were able to overcome most of the obstacles to their students' achievement and help them be successful at school despite the challenges.

Regarding acquiring needed resources, Rebekah said,

I don't want to say it's unlimited but I feel like we're fortunate in the resources we have. We do have a class budget that's been limited due to budget cuts but if there's something that we really need, our district has a foundation that we can apply for a grant. They give us financial reimbursement at the beginning of the school year to get the classroom set up and then they have another program where if there's something that we really want for our classroom, like I wanted to add to my leveled library, I apply for that and I've never been declined.

*Mid-level SES/average performing school.* Barb, from the mid SES/average performing school said, "The economics of being able to afford to do this job are going to affect them (the newer teachers) because what they have in their seventh year of teaching is much different than what I had in my seventh year of teaching." She expressed sympathy for colleagues just entering the profession because in comparison to the compensation she received when she started, she believes the newer teachers are being kept from comparable increases in pay and benefits due to changes in legislative fiscal support for education and educators which may make new teachers feel that their work is under-valued. Reflecting on her own history of compensation,

When we were coming through in the late 90's and early 2000's, we had our raise every year. We had out steps. Some of these younger ones have not had an increase in six years and some of them, it is (their) second careers. And so, I'm concerned that they feel that they are not valued by our own district, by our state. I mean, okay, you'll invest in all these computer programs but you didn't invest in your people.

Barb also talked about the frustration she feels about some of the requirements that are now a part of her job, which may be taking away her time from other tasks she feels might be more directly related to instruction. She was talking about some paperwork that she had to do for her administrator and she commented, "Really? I'm going through all of this so you can check a box?" She was frustrated about the teachers' professional development not being relevant to their particular school's situation as well. She talked about her district providing professional development that will meet the needs of each of the schools in the district, "but then they've got all these stipulations from the state on them as to what can count as professional development and all kinds of things." While attempts were being made to provide meaningful professional development, she felt that there were forces fighting against putting the things in place that they might need the most because it didn't fit into a pre-determined category created by someone higher up in the system.

Barb talked about how she valued the time that was provided by her district to collaborate with her colleagues. She felt that building the capacity of the teachers was an important responsibility of administration and she recognized the effort that her union had made to work with her district in order to create contract-protected time to collaborate. "Our district, I will give our district credit for this. I've been told other districts do not do this but since I started, we

all have, every teacher K-12, has a one hour plan time every day.” She continued to say, “When at all possible, it doesn’t always work when we have splits, but when possible we have common planning time for our grade level.” Barb explained that this time happens every day during the first hour of the school day.

*Mid-level SES/below average performing school.* Mitch, from the mid SES/below average performing school also talked about collaborating with colleagues. He acknowledged that they had time each Monday morning to work in collaborative groups with other teachers but he felt there should be more. “There’s not as much time for collaboration in education in general. I think that’s the downfall piece of it that we need to work on and need to fix. There’s a societal piece in education. So, I don’t think that it’s necessarily our school directly. I think it’s an overall problem.”

Mitch also talked about material resources. A lot of the supply stuff we kind of pick up on our own almost. We do have a few things in the closet but budgets are budgets and they are what they are.” He expressed displeasure with how the state was managing the funding of education. His perception was that “the state – they’re doing a piss poor job of funding education.

*Teachers from low SES/low performing schools.* There was a distinct difference in tone when the teachers from the low SES schools described their frustrations. They talked about a lack of support from building and central office administrators. Even Theresa and Sally, who generally expressed gratitude for the quality of their building administrator, were frustrated when there were dealings with their central office. The teachers were frustrated with dealing with student behaviors that were disruptive and disrespectful and the lack of support from administration for handling situations when they came up. They were frustrated about the

amount of work that is being expected of the teachers and students with the limited amount of time and resources available to them. The frustrations in this SES group led to feelings of disenchantment in their work and a sense of hopeless exasperation and exhaustion. Sally remarked about the increase in documentation required of teachers,

I was like, oh god. I have to take notes to justify what I do. What? And that takes time and it all takes time away from good teacher planning and that's, you know, that's what you have to do. So that's how I feel ineffective. I am working my butt off.

This statement summed up the experiences expressed by most of the other teachers in the low SES schools.

Fanya expressed exhaustion from a lack of “non-existent” parent support, lack of administrative support with disruptive student behaviors and no time for communication with peers. She was exhausted from the stress of working with students who came to school without any skills and the overabundance of professional development expected from the teachers due to her school's restructuring. She said, “It is over-exhausting.”

Other teachers in the low SES schools expressed similar sentiments of exhaustion and disenchantment. There was concern about being able to get through the curriculum while also having to contend with constant disruptions of the learning environment. The behaviors were so severe in some instances that the teachers explained that they had to stop instruction to deal with behaviors. Fanya described turning out the lights and making the children put their heads on their desks when the class became too noisy. Lydia talked about allowing children to sleep in class because she knew they did not get any sleep the night before. Theresa spoke about stopping instruction multiple times a day in order to have class discussions to deal with conflicts

that arose between students. The students' misbehaviors were an obstacle the teachers from the low SES schools were constantly maneuvering around in order to be able to teach.

The overall lack of access to necessary resources in Lyndie's school and in Laura and Fanya's school was another source of contention. They felt that they were not being given even the most basic tools they needed to do their jobs well. Laura and Fanya did not have any teacher guides or student books. When Laura started at her school, she said she walked into a room that was literally empty. Lyndie talked for several minutes during the interview about her frustration over not having access to paper from the school. She insisted that she should not have to be responsible for buying paper for her classroom and that the school should provide paper for students to use.

Not only were these teachers not being provided with the time and materials they needed but they also felt stymied due to the lack of parental support they received. Fanya said that she felt parent support "would be nice" but indicated that she felt that she had none. Laura, Fanya and Lyndie each described students coming to school without their homework completed on a daily basis. Fanya said "Without parent support there is only so much you can do." When asked about having necessary resources, Lyndie scoffed and said, "You mean the ones that I buy?" She continued to say,

We have to beg for paper. Our office supply for this year wasn't even enough to buy paper for the year. The parents have been buying paper. I told the principal, I said, I will spend money on teacher-pay-teacher stuff. I'll spend money on pencils, but I refuse to buy paper. I refuse to buy paper.

Lyndie also described the failure of the district's administration to protect valuable resources that were being moved during the course of a consolidation several years ago.

It was just a huge mess when they closed so many schools and we had to pack up buildings and one of the schools I had been in the longest, we were very careful about packing up all this grade level materials there and then marking the box of the books and how many were there. Other buildings were sub-checked. They didn't care and they just put junk in boxes and then it went to a storage area, which was an old middle school and it was not really well kept.

Laura, who had recently started at her current school, said she walked into her freshly painted classroom and it was,

literally empty. Not a manipulative, not a crayon, not anything. I asked for some things like a rug and crayons and I was able to get those things. I guess what I didn't ask for was the actual textbooks and consumables that I needed. So, at week six, I am still without academic materials. I'm making my own stuff like crazy.

*Teachers from low SES/average performing school.* In regard to administrative support for material resources, Theresa and Sally, both from the same low SES school, expressed a mutual feeling that they were lucky to have access to the resources they needed and attributed their access to the good work of their principal. Sally said, "I don't want to say it's unlimited but I feel like we're fortunate in the resources we have." The teachers from this school both expressed that their administrator made every attempt to procure the resources and materials they needed for their classrooms.

Sally partially attributed their access to the resources they needed to their school being a Title I building. With the Title I money, Sally and Theresa's school could afford to get the resources they needed and they did secure them. Teachers in the study from the other low SES

schools that were also building-wide Title I buildings did not express the same level of access to up-to-date and useful resources.

*Administrative support for disruptive student behaviors.* Administrative support in regard to helping teachers with the management of disruptive students was presented differently in the narratives of the teachers across the SES levels. The teachers' expressions of need to have direct administrative support with student misbehavior increased as poverty increased.

*Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.* Paula and Rebekah expressed little or no need for their principal to intervene with disruptive students. They consulted with the principal about ideas for interventions but did not feel they needed her to provide direct interventions with students. Paula indicated that because her students came from more high SES homes, her school did not experience too many severe behaviors. She said, "We're not a neighborhood school. We get children from all over the district and their parents have to drive them there." When asked if she ever needed help from a disruptive student, either from her principal or from another teacher she said,

No. I may have had to have the principal help but I never gave away authority. I might have gotten advice on how to do something because I've always said there's going to be a consequence for this. I'm not sure what it is. I have to think about it, so I may go get advice on what to do but it was always me that brought the hammer down.

Paula explained that her school had several different programs that taught positive appropriate behaviors to students and mostly, the children learned from the lessons they received from their teachers and behaved appropriately.

Rebekah also expressed very little issues with disruptive students and likewise said she did not require her principal to intervene other than to get advice or to help document the child's behaviors. She said,

If the situation happened in the classroom, I don't ever recall a time where I couldn't handle it. I would reach out the psychologist or social worker, the principal for their advice. For their input. To come up with a plan just to make it aware so we can have some paper trail for that child.

*Mid-level SES/Mid or below average performing schools.* Mitch and Barb both indicated that they needed more support for behaviors, but often went to colleagues first before going to their principals. Barb's school did not have a building-wide behavior management system, but Mitch's school did and he was an active member of the building team for the program.

Barb, from the mid SES/average performing school used an informal team approach if she was not able to handle a situation in her classroom. She emphasized that she worked on putting preventative measures in place to prevent issues of disruptions in her room. She explicitly taught students her expectations and worked with students to help them be successful but there were times when she needed help and when she did, she used her teaching partner. She said, "We try to deal with about 99 percent of it, of any issues, like just with the two of us or we have a third teaching partner but she just hasn't been in our building as long as the two of us have." She continued, "So, the three of us help each other. We have a fourth teacher across the hall. If she has issues with kids, if we have issue, we try to go out, talk with them." They will ask the child from the other teacher's class, "You're frustrated. What's going on? Want to talk with me?" Barb said this system between the teachers in her hall came about on its own. She



said, "I think it evolved. Those of us who have been around awhile, we have the idea that they are all of our kids."

Barb indicated that they would only call the principal down to help if they felt it was absolutely necessary to handle the situation. "Usually, I think because we try to handle so much of it ourselves, we tell the social worker, we need the social worker or we need the principal. We're not crying wolf here." At that point, a behavior intervention plan would be developed and put in place for the child to help him/her be successful.

Mitch, from the mid SES/below average performing school, explained that when he was confronted with a disruptive student he would follow the protocols of his school's behavior intervention system. He would use proximity, try to find out what was causing the behavior and try to alleviate the problem himself. He said, the kind of intervention he makes, "kind of varies on the situation and the student." When a situation escalated, Mitch said,

We had a couple of situations where we would have to send the classroom out for their own safety. The student would start getting upset, throwing things, things like that. At that point, I would bring in kind of a team approach.

Mitch described one particular situation where he pulled in other teachers to assist him, I had one teacher watch the corridor who took the student in her room. We had one teacher that would just kind of watch at the door, do some recording pieces and administration would come in and assist if needed.

Mitch felt that he had a good relationship with his principal. He felt that when he did ask her to intervene, she would know that Mitch had already tried every other avenue before calling her in for assistance.

I'm able to handle some of the things in the classroom, so if there's something that goes above and beyond, I've called down the principal and had her sit down with so and so and you know spend time with so and so. At that point, I think she knows that a lot of the like small pieces were already taken care of and this student has escalated to a point where he has definitely or she had definitely in need of an intervention piece.

*Teachers from low SES/low performing schools.* The teachers in the low SES group expressed a frustration about the specific lack of administrative support for disruptive students. Even Sally and Theresa, who otherwise indicated their principal was very helpful, expressed dissatisfaction in the past with how their principal handled disruptive students who were sent down to the office by their teachers. Sally said, "In the past, it was like, come on! You know? We'd send them down – they'd send them right back. So this demeans your authority." Sally acknowledged that there may be teachers in her school who send kids to the office without first trying to handle the situation in their classrooms, but because the kids were just being sent back to her room, she said, "I just stopped doing that."

Fanya and Lyndie had the lowest overall score on the TSES. They also had the lowest scores in the sub-category of student engagement and the sub-category of classroom management. Fanya described getting help from another teacher when a student started throwing chairs. "He was crying, yelling, pushed over chairs. A co-worker across the hall came to talk to him and calm him down to keep him from hurting himself, we had to carry him to the office." As far as principal support, Fanya felt it was frustrating to her. She said, "If the principal catches a child doing something, she will send them home but that doesn't happen if it's just the teacher

that sees the behavior.” She felt that this behavior by the administrator made her feel like she was not being listened to when she asked for help.

Fanya also described her building-wide behavior system was inconsistently implemented across her school. She indicated that she and several others of her colleagues didn’t even know the school had adopted a system until it was explained to the students at a beginning of the year assembly. She knew nothing about it at that time and said she still has not received any training on it.

Lyndie generally expressed an ability to be able to manage her students’ behaviors without intervention from a colleague or principal. She recalled an incident from last year, however when a student was being attacked by a student on the playground. “A kid like totally went after - so we had to call for someone to come and get him because he goes from zero to, you know.” She said, “He went after one of the teachers and run after her.”

Lyndie’s school has people who were hired specifically to assist with behavior issues. “We’re lucky to have, social workers or people that are there to help with the students that have those behaviors.” Lyndie said her school currently has two behavior interventionists that work full time to help teachers and staff with disruptive behaviors. When asked about a building-wide behavior plan however, Lyndie said, “We’re kinda like all over the place right now.”

Laura was in her second month at her current teaching position. She described some of the behaviors she has witnessed in just the two months she had been back in the classroom from a central office position. Laura’s building principal eventually addressed both the situations with the placement of the autistic child and helped her deal with the situation of the child trying to sell marijuana in the lunchroom.

*Teachers from the low SES/average performing school.* Neither Theresa nor Sally expressed having significant student misbehavior events that constantly interfered with instruction and the safe operation of the classroom. Theresa and Sally both saw the majority of disruptive behaviors being verbal disruptions rather than physical altercations, although both described some isolated situations with physically aggressive student behavior. Theresa said her students are, “Beyond disruptive. You know what I have to say, they really do not get too physical with each other. It’s verbal. Very disrespectful. Talking out very loud, rude, not being able to conform to rules.”

Sally explained, “My biggest problem with student behavior, like my biggest issue, is when kids won’t take ownership of their behavior. That throws me off.” She described situations when children lied to her face, telling her that they didn’t do something when Sally had actually seen them do it. She was exasperated by this behavior. Sally, unlike Theresa, described several times when she would give students a time-out out of the classroom in the hallway when they became too disruptive. Sally said,

I mean, you have to leave the room. I can’t teach. And so they would go to the principal and it doesn’t you know – doesn’t help them that much but it’s just for my – I’m gonna lose my mind. You have to go.

Theresa said that the beginning of the year was much harder but since then, she has been able to build a rapport with her students which she feels has helped to alleviate this situation somewhat. When asked if there was ever a time when she was not able to handle a disruptive student she said, “No. Not with my class now.” Theresa explained that she hands out candy to students at the end of good days when all students stay on green on her behavior color chart and they call them “Smartie Days”. She said she has a very consistent behavior plan but explained

that most importantly, she kept them actively engaged. She said, “If you give them room to be bored, they’re going to act out.”

Even though Theresa described feeling like she can handle the situation in her classroom, Theresa felt that administration in her building handled student behaviors inconsistently across the building. She described one lunch period, “I walked down to the cafeteria where the AP (assistant principal) is supposed to be monitoring and all she’s doing is screaming. I mean just screaming where the actual cafeteria ladies now have bought ear plugs.” She laughed and said, “So maybe then you wonder why the kids are loud.” Theresa said that her administration has tried to put in place a school-wide behavior management system but it has been implemented sporadically and she, as of yet, has not received any training on it.

Question #8 on the TSES addressed how efficacious the teachers felt regarding their ability to establish a classroom management system. Sally scored herself higher on question #8 on the TSES. This was the only question on the 12-item survey that Sally scored herself higher than her colleague, Theresa did. This could be related to the amount of training that each teacher had received on behavior management systems while at their current school. Sally explained that she felt there wasn’t “commonality in how we train staff, what we say to kids, how we say it, things like that.”

Sally explained that her school had talked about having a school-wide behavior management system but then decided not to because “It’s too much work. Too much paperwork.” This was interesting because Theresa said that their school had adopted a specific school-wide behavior plan but she hadn’t received any training on it yet. Even though they worked in the same school they had a completely different understanding what whether or not their school had a school-wide behavior plan.

Sally and Theresa described how there were staff that constantly yelled at the kids. Sally said that the lunch ladies screamed at kids and talked about kids in front of them like they're not even there. Theresa described once witnessing the assistant principal also yelling at kids. Theresa then jokingly commented, "So maybe then we wonder why the kids are so loud!"

The need for and understanding of administrative support differed from school to school. The high SES schools' teachers in this study needed less direct intervention than did the teachers from the low SES schools. As need increased without a corresponding increase in administrative support for student misbehaviors, teachers expressed more frustration and dissatisfaction with their jobs. Theresa and Sally's school, that academically performed above average, was distinguished from the other high poverty schools in that they reported less physically aggressive student behavior and cited their main issue as chattiness and loudness.

Administrative support for disruptive student behavior was described differently from the different categories of teachers. The teachers' need for administrative support and they type of support they needed changed as the schools' SES levels changed. Just as the quantity and quality of administrative support changed for teachers as SES increased or decreased, so too did the teachers' perception of parent involvement.

**Ease of parent involvement.** The third theme was regarding the teachers' perceptions of parent involvement. As poverty went up, there was a decline in the descriptions regarding the quantity and quality of parent support that the teachers felt made it possible to help their students be successful. There was also a change in sentiment regarding its presence or absence.

There were three questions in the TSES that were particularly relevant to parent involvement. The first and most relevant question was question #11, which asked, "How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?" Another question would be

question #4 regarding, “How much can you do to help your students value learning?” The third most relevant question would be question #3 that asked, “How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?” Questions #3 and #4 allude to a need to make a personal connection with students that some might find to be more in the realm of what parents should be contributing to the enterprise of education. Question #11, is directly related to the teachers’ perceptions of their ability to enact a positive change in regard to something the parents are either doing or not doing to help their child be successful.

Question #11, regarding assisting parents in helping their children be successful in school was the lowest scoring individual item on the TSES in this study. Questions #3 and #4 both had high scores for the teachers in the high SES schools but there was a difference in the scores for these questions when examining the high SES schoolteachers, particularly Laura and Theresa. Laura, Theresa and Fanya all gave themselves a nine as did their high SES peers on question #3 regarding getting students to believe they can do well in school. This was different for question #4 that talked about getting children to value learning where all of the teachers, except for Rebekah, scored lower. It could be argued that getting students to value learning is something that should come from the home with support from the teachers. The teachers’ responses to these questions may provide some insight into how the teachers see their roles and scope of their agency to enact change. More discussion on this will follow in chapter five.

*Teachers from high SES/high performing schools.* When asked on the TSES, “How much can you do to assist families in helping their children?” Paula rated herself as a five, while Rebekah rated herself at a nine, the highest level. Rebekah had the highest score on this question out of all of the participants, which was also the question with the lowest overall rating in this study.

Paula's own children played hockey, which she felt connected her to her students and their family life outside of school through hockey. She talked about times when, now that her own children are grown, that she has even gone to watch her students play hockey after school hours to support them. For Paula, the hockey was a link between her personal life and the lives of her students. Her children's involvement in sports taught her to be more empathetic to her students' parents. She remembered,

Before I became a mom, it was like, I knew school was the most important thing and there was really no excuse for not getting homework done or you didn't have breakfast or your hair, you know what I mean? When I became a mom and I knew what it was like to get little ones out the door in the morning and I had boys in hockey so I knew what it was like to have them come to school after school and me to work and then to sit in their room and do their homework and then warm up dinner in the microwave and take off to the rink and drag the little ones along. I had a lot more empathy for the hours after 3:15. It made me more aware of the children and what could possibly be going on in the life outside of the seven hours I had them.

Paula continued,

I think it's important to know them outside of school too. I've gone to hockey games, I guess hockey mostly because my boys were in hockey so that seems to be a big thing and they love when my kids come to school. So, they know a lot about me.

Paula believed that this connection with the students and her students' parents helped prevent many behavior problems that might otherwise arise and if a situation did arise, it would



make it easier to handle. Paula said, “I really don’t have parents complaining about such and such and such and such doing this.”

Paula described students being sent to school with their homework done for the most part and prepared to do their work. Paula had frequent contact with her students’ parents. Paula’s school is a magnet school in her district so parents who want their children to attend the Montessori school in their district have to provide their own transportation. Paula said, “Because the parents have to drive their children to school, we see the parents a lot more. Parents are more involved in their education.”

Paula also said that all three of her own children went to the school she is teaching at as well. This helped her link her children’s experience to her own practice.

My three children went to . . . [name of school] and there’s this brick wall that kids hit when they get to third grade and it’s hard. I cried through third grade with all three of my kids and I thought, OK, now I’m a first and second grade teacher. I’m the grade right before this. What can I do to help make that better?

There was a need Paula was able to identify for third graders to better prioritize their work so they were able to get the work done in school that they need specific Montessori materials to complete. She went on to say,

My kids would like get their spelling done but then they didn’t get like a rug work done that was with Montessori material that they couldn’t take home for homework. And so they didn’t get that. I came up with starred obligations, which were the things you can’t take home. The starred obligations have to be done first. It was kind of like that first step in prioritizing work. The starred things are the things you need to get done because you can’t take them home.

The starred obligation system eventually became a building-wide initiative to help students in each grade level across the school understand that certain assignments must be completed at school because the materials they needed to do the work was only available to them in the classroom and not at home. The system evolved into a homework binder that required a daily signature from the parent in order to assure the children took their work home and completed it. Parents could also write a note to the teacher in the binder to the teacher, which helped provide additional parent communication options.

Rebekah described her school as welcoming to families and children.

We really try to establish a family environment. It's their home away from home so it's warm and inviting. I teach in a very old building that has a lot of charm, as well as my particular classroom, so when you walk in you feel very welcome.

There were no serious behavior problems in either Rebekah's or Paula's class that would require a parent contact. Rebekah described contacting a parent only once during the interview and that was to talk to her about a concern she had for one of her student's academic performance. Both of the schools Rebekah and Paula worked at were high achieving schools. Rebekah's school was ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile and Paula's was ranked at the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list.

Paula indicated in the interview that her students were prepared for school and there were no serious behavior issues. She did, however describe dealing with a situation when she had to deal with a very talkative child. When she tried to discuss it with the girl's parents, she did not feel like she had the support she needed. Paula's assessment of the situation, after not getting the level of support that she felt she needed to remedy the situation, was the little girl was being spoiled at home because the parents would just give in to her tantrums. Because of this, the girl

behaved as she wanted at school rather than following the teacher's direction. Paula also felt that she did not get the parent support she needed when she contacted a parent to discuss an academic concern or if the child study team was being asked to help to discuss interventions and possible special education placement. She said, "Sometimes, it's really hard. Parents help, hopefully." Parents, were seen as an obstacle to Paula in some situations. When asked what behavioral variables she felt were most important to helping her feel like an effective teacher she said, "Respect." She said she wanted respect from, "...the state, the parents, the district. I mean, I can't even hold a child back unless the parents give permission."

When Paula was asked about her score on the TSES regarding assisting families she said "If they're willing to listen. If the family's willing to listen, I mean, a lot of them sit there and then nothing changes." While she was saying this, she was demonstrating a blank look with her face that she has seen parents do. She continued to explain that parent involvement and support was something that she felt she had little control over so that affected her feelings of efficaciousness in that area.

*Mid-level SES/Mid or below average performing schools.* Mitch and Barb both indicated that parent involvement was inconsistent in their schools. Barb and Mitch both expressed a desire for more parent support but they described a kind of resignation to the fact that it was not always there, to the fact that it was out of their control and that it was up to the teachers to try to put compensating interventions in place for students if needed. On the question on the TSES regarding efficaciousness to assist families in helping their child, Barb rated herself as a five and Mitch rated himself as a six out of nine possible. Both Mitch and Barb described taking on the responsibility of trying to compensate for a lack of parent involvement rather than taking actions to get the parents more involved in assisting their children with school.

Barb, from the mid SES/average performing school, felt that the younger teachers expected the parents to do more to help. Barb was reflecting on something a younger colleague had said,

I think more of them jump in and expect more parent support where I've learned they will often sit here and just nod their heads, 'oh yea, we do that at home. Oh yeah, we're doing that' and you know they're not.

Barb said that she encourages parent support but doesn't expect it.

I think a lot more people, she [a teacher she works with] said the parents won't read with them. The parents won't read with them. I said, stop. We cannot do a thing about that. You can't have the mindset that 'oh, we'll put this on the parents but when you don't get that, you simply have to deal with the reality of their life which is who knows if the parents even want them? Who knows. I am their stability. Our school is their stability.

Barb described connecting to her students because she lived in the school's neighborhood. She said she saw her students at the grocery store and they visited her house to trick-or-treat. She did not mention how this built a connection between her and the students' parents, just that it built up the relationships with her students.

Mitch, from the mid SES/below average performing school talked about the importance of making connections with his students in order to help them to learn to value learning and motivate them to do their work. He explained that he believed there was only so much a teacher could do to effect change in how the student values education but by developing relationships with students and making connections between himself and his students he felt he might be able to help at least some of the students to do better in school.

Mitch reflected that he believes there are outside factors that seem to be brought to school with the kids that cause problems. Mitch said,

There might be parents that don't get along outside of school and that comes in the building. It's not my business outside the school but you know what do we do inside the school here? We're respectful and we're responsible.

*Teachers from low SES/low performing schools.* The teachers in the low SES schools referred to student behavior and parent support with a great deal of frustration and helplessness. Fanya, who rated herself as a 3 out of 9 on the question on the TSES regarding how well she felt she can assist families in helping their children described her assessment of parent involvement as follows,

If there's not parental support I don't know how far you can go. Parents are supportive but some of them seem to have psychiatric disorders. One dad acts like he's drunk. Doesn't sign in and plays his music loud from his car in front of the school. There is another parent who never smiles.

Fanya went on to say, "Sometimes I'll have a meltdown because it's more than I can deal with, you know? It's more – there's a lot of emotional stress in [her district's] schools. I think it's just the household comes to school." She feels like some of the behaviors are beyond her control.

Laura rated herself as a 6 on the question regarding assisting families in helping their children with school. Laura taught in the same school as Fanya, which serves 82% of their students either free or reduced-priced lunch and is at the second percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. She described a student who came in on the second day this school year.

She was a late arrival enrollment. She was registered into school and came to the door with the slip of paper. No parents. No anything. I welcome her in. I got her to her seat. Three days later, after being in the classroom noticing that there was something that wasn't quite right meaning academics were low, focus was off, attention span was not there at all. She came out of the restroom with her hand down her pants. When I asked her what she was doing she just stared at me. I gently guided her hand away and said no, we don't do that in school and the next thing I knew she fell to the floor and began to have a whole show meltdown on the floor. Pleasuring herself on the floor in front of all the kids in the hallway.

Laura discovered later on that the child had an IEP that had not been provided to the school by the parent or previous school district. The child should not have been placed in a general education room. While records requests are an administrative duty usually carried out by the school secretary, Laura remarks indicated frustration that the parent never even came to the classroom to make sure her child arrived safely to class or to meet the teacher. Since the child had an IEP, the parent would have known that there were concerns about her ability to be successful in school and Laura felt that the parent might have been apathetic.

Laura described an incident earlier this year when one of her students (kindergarten) tried to sell marijuana to a lunch lady for a dollar. "He wanted a bag of chips that were 50 cents. So, he knew he could get some quick cash by selling this little baggy of something he had." She described trying to talk to the child's parent, "He had come in with two cigarettes behind his ear and he couldn't understand why, when, where this came from. So, you know, yeah." It was not clear why the parent came to this meeting, but it is not uncommon for administrators to require a parent meeting prior to allowing the child to return to school for drug or weapons offenses.

With already low levels of parental involvement, Laura expressed frustration over her school's access policy for parents and families. Regarding unscheduled entry to the building, Laura said,

The couple of interesting things I've never understood in this school, parents are not allowed to enter the building – period. We greet children at the door, outside on the sidewalk, wave to their parents and bring them in. Class by class, grade by grade. Makes for an interesting culture to me, so I'm not sure.

Fanya expressed concern that some of her parents have mental disorders. She said, "Parent support would be nice but in the district I'm at, parental support is very low and I understand why. They have a whole lot of negative issues going on."

Lyndie, whose school was at the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list and served 84% of their students either free or reduced-priced lunch, felt cheated about not having parental support for her students. She said, "I think the parent connection is a huge part that I feel most slighted on."

***Teachers from low SES/average performing school.*** Both Theresa and Sally said that they struggled with language barriers with some of their families. Their school was the highest poverty school included in this study, with 95% of their students receiving either free or reduced-priced lunch. Their school, however scored at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Top-to-Bottom list. Both Theresa and Sally rated themselves as a six on the TSES question regarding assisting families in helping their children at school.

Sally talked about the cultural differences she noticed with the families and that about 99% of her students were Arabic and had families that did not speak English in the home, but she identified with them as parents. She said, "I get along well with the parents cause no matter how

different and strange I might think they are, you know they love their children like I love my children.”

Sally felt that her students, like their parents were just a talkative group of people. She said,

It’s a very social population. This population is extremely social. I mean, parents we – it’s hilarious – when we have like assemblies and stuff their kids are up there performing and the parents are walking around, talking, kids are running around. It took a long time to get used to that because it’s not a culture like you sit down and you watch the performance but it’s their school. It’s their culture. It’s their kids. They want to talk, what do I care. You know?

Theresa, who taught an upper elementary classroom also talked about how communicative the students were but she did not talk explicitly about parent involvement in her school.

## **Conclusion**

The primary theme found in this study is that there is an ease for teachers to be able to do their work in high SES schools that is not present in low SES schools. This theme emerged as teachers described their relationships with their students and feelings of nurturing toward them. It also came out when the teachers talked about the quality and amount of administrative support to get the resources they needed to do their work. Teachers in high SES schools were able to build relationships and were able to simply care about their children and enjoy being with them. These feelings presented differently for the teachers working in the mid SES schools and even more so in the low SES schools where feelings of nurturing and caring turned more to concern and feelings of wanting to protect the children while they have them at school.



Access to needed materials were perceived differently depending upon the SES context of the school. The teachers in the high SES schools, while they did not feel they had everything they needed, expressed that they were able to make do with what they had and still felt confident that they will have high levels of student achievement. This sentiment was not expressed by the teachers in the low SES schools who were concerned that they were not going to be able to be successful in teaching their children because of the lack of resources and lack of administrative support with disruptive students.

Finally, the two teachers in the study who were new to their current positions had scores on the TSES that were more similar to the teachers from the high SES schools than to the low SES schools where they worked. While the study did not provide sufficient information to investigate this finding, longitudinal research might uncover if there are relatively higher levels of efficacy expressed by teachers first starting at a new school which, depending on contextual features of the school and school community, might go through a honeymoon period that declines over time in low SES schools and if so, what factors might help prevent that decline in efficacy from happening.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Interpretation and Recommendations**

This study examined "Does the environmental factor of poverty influence self-perceptions of teacher efficacy?" "And, if so, how?" Supporting research questions asked, "What is the nature of the impact on teachers' sense of efficacy when SES differs?" and "Are there mitigating factors that might support higher levels of teacher efficacy in the face of challenging environmental factors?"

### **Delineations and Connections of Personal, Environmental, and Behavioral Factors**

In order to address the specific research questions, it is important to revisit the construct of reciprocal causation between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. First, in regard to the development and sustainment of teacher efficacy, personal, environmental, and behavioral factors are to be viewed from each individual teacher's perspective. Each individual has his/her own set of personal, environmental and behavioral factors that are unique to him/her and that interact reciprocally throughout his/her life (Bandura 1997).

The results of this study showed an overlap of the influence of these areas in the creation and sustainment of teacher efficacy levels. This supports the work of Bandura (1997) in that there is a reciprocal causation that occurs between a teacher's personal life, the particular environmental conditions of the teaching situation, and the behaviors that were self-reported by the teachers. Although personal, environmental and behavioral factors are relevant and play a part in the development of teacher efficacy, this qualitative study brought to light the salience of specific environmental factors that affect levels of teacher efficacy. The environmental factors identified in this study that arose as most relevant were linked to levels of SES of the schools.

This study found that as SES changed from low to high there was a corresponding change in teachers' perceptions of teaching. An important finding of this study was that the continuum of ease was identified in the narrative data provided by the teachers but did not show up on the TSES.

An examination of the TSES data showed an insubstantial relationship between SES and efficacy but interview data provided a richer description of conditions related to and perceptions of efficacy that indicated there were other intervening factors that impacted levels of efficacy. These included professional development experiences and continuing education that seemed to, when present, boost levels of efficacy in certain sub-categories of the TSES. On the other end of the efficacy spectrum, stress due to changes and ongoing instability reflected lowered feelings of efficacy in certain sub-categories of the TSES. The following pages will explore and discuss specific findings from this study and examine how certain conditions and experiences might affect efficacy in ways that are not measured on the TSES.

**Demands and the continuum of ease.** Similar to what Bandura (1997) found, this study showed that as additional demands were perceived to have increased and corresponding supports were not perceived to be in place, the level of ease teachers felt to do their work decreased. As tasks involved with teaching were perceived as more difficult, teachers' levels of efficacy were lower. These demands ranged in effect from high to low SES schools and corresponded with a continuum of ease for how much teachers felt they were able to perform their duties and provide a healthy positive classroom environment for their students.

In line with Klassen and Chiu (2010), this study found that there are additional burdens placed on teachers working in low SES schools that are a result of SES-related stressors such as increased frequency and intensity of student misbehavior and an increased need for certain

administrative supports. These stressors negatively affected the classroom environments by raising the amount of effort needed to educate low SES students. The additional challenges decreased the ease teachers used to describe their jobs. This was also similar to what Evans and Rosenbaum (2008) found. Additional stressors created additional demands on teachers as they worked to address those factors related to low SES while still attempting to achieve the same student success expectations as children from the high SES schools who were not burdened with the hardships of low SES.

**Nurturing relationships.** The continuum of ease was represented in the nature of the nurturing relationship between teacher and student. It was also represented in student engagement and classroom management. This study found, as did McHugh, et al. (2013) that additional stressors faced by teachers in low SES schools created increased levels of challenge but that these stressors could be mitigated by building strong teacher-student bonds to help students value education and sustain engagement in school.

Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet (2015) showed that positive student-teacher relationships can and do effect higher levels of student achievement and that the relationship between teachers and students plays an important role in the emotional experiences in a classroom. This is relevant to this study as all of the teachers expressed caring feelings for their students but these feelings presented in much different ways depending upon the SES level of the school where each teacher worked. The nature of the relationships between teachers and students in high SES schools as opposed to low SES schools may be substantively different and depending upon the nature of their complex relationship, may impact student achievement differently.

This study illustrated that, because of environmental factors related to SES, there were increased challenges for teachers working in low SES schools to nurture their students that were

not experienced by teachers working in high SES schools. As found by McHugh et al. (2013), healthy teacher-student relationships are foundational for a supportive successful learning environment. The conditions related to low SES created context-bound tasks and stressors that were not present for the teachers in the high SES schools. The context-bound tasks and stressors related to low SES could potentially undermine teachers' abilities to easily perform their duties in the classroom. This finding corroborates the work of Pajaras (1996) who found that emotional exhaustion is counter to building healthy teacher-student relationships.

The teachers in this study all sought to build positive relationships with their students. This is in line with Lee and Bierman (2015) who argued that positive teacher/student relationships are essential to school success. All of the teachers in this study described feelings of nurturing toward their students but concern for their students' safety outside of school replaced nurturing as the schools' SES level went down.

The teachers from the low SES schools expressed the necessity to create and sustain positive relationships with their students in order to provide a successful school experience for them. For example, Lyndie talked about how important it was to make personal connections with students and letting them know that she will be there for them, especially those children who have faced abandonment issues in their homes. Making her students feel safe when they are at school is a priority for her as she believed that it would help students be more engaged in their schoolwork and more successful. This is in line with McHugh, et al. (2013) who also found that building strong teacher-student relationships has positive effects on student behavior and student engagement.

Similar to what Pajaras (1996) found, teachers in this study who worked in the high SES/high performing schools experienced less challenging roles as nurturers and found it easier

to build positive relationships with their students than did their colleagues in the low SES/low performing schools. Teachers in the high SES/high performing schools talked about having fun with their students. Rebekah explained that her role as the teacher was, “Just creating an environment where the children feel comfortable and happy and confident.” There was less urgency for teachers in high SES schools to build relationships with students. The descriptions of the teachers’ relationships with students from the high SES/high performing schools centered on developing a happy classroom where children will want to learn. There was less emotional exhaustion when student behavior was better which protected the teachers from the same level of demands and their ability to successfully deal with them than their low SES peers experienced.

**Job demands and resources.** Pajaras (1996) also found environmental factors that change depending upon the SES level of the school and create more challenging situations for teachers. The teachers in the low SES schools in this study who experienced a more stressful work environment without corresponding additional supports had relatively but not statistically significantly lower scores on the TSES. This could mean that their ability to persevere through tough situations is weakened if additional supports are not put in place to support their work. This was also similar to what Bakker and Demerouti (2007) found in the Jobs/Demands Work model. The two teachers in the mid-performing/low SES school, Sally and Theresa, who described their principals as supportive had higher TSES scores than the teachers from the low SES school who did not describe their principals as supportive.

Previous research has demonstrated that the presence of poverty in the low SES schools fosters emotional exhaustion in teachers. Exhaustion negatively affects a teacher’s ability to build healthy relationships with students that are conducive to learning (Biboi-Nadou, et. al., 1999; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Fernet et al., 2012; Hakanen et al., 2006). Similarly, this study

also found that the effort needed to develop teacher-student relationships took more work in the low SES schools because the children did not come to school with school-related social skills already in place. This study shed light on the need for additional supports for teachers working in low SES schools to help the teachers to create and maintain emotionally supportive classrooms needed for children to thrive. The teachers in the high SES schools found this task easier because the children in high SES schools were more likely to come to school with school-related social skills and school-readiness skills already in place. This study did not specifically examine teacher exhaustion; however, the data from the interviews did allude to expressions of feeling overworked due to insecure feelings of supports. As the teachers felt they needed to do their work effectively, their perceived need for specific administrative supports became more relevant to their feelings that they could effectively teach their students.

**Student engagement and classroom management.** Both engagement and management are necessary components of an effective classroom and both require positive teacher-student relationships in order to be implemented successfully. McHugh et al. (2013) found that positive relationships between teachers and students can help to sustain classroom engagement. Relatedly, this study illustrated that there were more challenges for teachers in low SES schools to build these positive relationships and successfully engage students in their schoolwork.

This study found that teachers in the low SES schools were faced with handling additional and in some cases extremely difficult circumstances in which to build positive relationships with students. This relates to the work of Raver (2012) who found that relationships between students and teachers might be used to increase a child's capacity to self-regulate behaviors. The emotional effort that had to be exerted by the teachers in the low SES

schools was greater because the emotional, psychological and physiological needs of the students were greater (Anyon, 2005; Evans, 2004; Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008).

In the area of student engagement, the teachers from the high SES/high performing schools described students who were prepared for and understood how to engage in school. As SES went down, the teachers described students who did not come to school with the same school-readiness skills as the children from the high SES schools. Like other researchers have found, the amount of effort described by the teachers in the low SES schools demanded greater effort the teachers were attempting to make up for what the children did not come to school with in order to reach achievement goals similar to their high SES peers (Anyon, 2005; Evans, 2004; Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008).

**Teachers new to their current positions.** Situational factors related to the environmental context of the school are relevant to the development and sustainment of feelings of teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In regard to this study, that would mean that the environmental context of the school would translate into similar levels of efficacy to be found in teachers who work in similar environmental contexts. Bandura (1997) posited that there is a temporal quality to efficacy, meaning that as situations change over time, or the person's perception of the situation changes, efficacy levels adjust to the new perceived conditions of the environment. This study demonstrated that teachers working in the same low SES schools who were new to their positions had higher efficacy scores on the TSES than their colleagues who worked in the same schools but had been there for multiple years. This was true even though the narratives of both of these teachers more closely resembled the narratives of the other teachers from low SES schools who had been at their schools longer. If these higher efficacy levels were



to go down over the course of time as teachers spent more years in their low-SES school, this might demonstrate the temporal quality of teacher efficacy that Bandura posited.

This study brings up the possibility that even an experienced teacher who is simply moved to a new teaching situation acclimates to his/her new school or teaching position and his/her efficacy levels may rise or fall as a result of his/her new environmental context. Bandura (1997) had the idea that teacher efficacy is susceptible to changes over time. Other studies have also investigated changes in efficacy through the course of a teacher's career and how changing contextual and temporal factors may affect teacher efficacy levels (Bandura, 1997; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). This study illuminated the possibility of a temporal quality of teacher efficacy that could be examined better through longitudinal studies and also raises the question of not just the impact of temporal changes but how contextual changes in a teacher's position may affect efficacy levels.

This study showed a dissimilarity between the TSES aggregate sub-category scores between teachers who were new to their current teaching environment versus teachers who had been in their current position for many more years. In all three sub-categories, Laura and Theresa had aggregate sub-category scores that were more similar to those of the teachers in the high SES schools. Even though the TSES scores all fell within the standard deviation range of the TSES instrument, what was compelling was that the teachers' narratives from the low SES schools also revealed low levels of perceived administrative support and high levels of disruptive student misbehavior.

The students' behaviors and home situations described by the teachers in the low SES schools were similar across all of the low SES schools regardless of achievement levels of the students or efficacy scores of the teachers. This is an important finding when considering the

that the TSES scores from teachers in the low SES schools who were new to their current positions were more closely aligned with the scores of teachers from the high SES schools even though their descriptions of student misbehavior was more similar to what their peers in the other low SES schools described. Adapting to both a new work environment and to a new principal, both Laura and Theresa expressed more positive feelings about their principal's level of support for student misbehavior but because of their shorter time in these positions, they had less actual experience with how the support from their principal would actually turn out.

Noting that efficacy can change over time depending upon contextual factors, the scores Theresa and Laura had on their TSES might change as they spend more years in their current schools to more closely resemble the scores of their colleagues from the same schools who have been there longer. Interestingly, despite their higher average scores on the TSES, Theresa and Laura's narratives expressed similar experiences to their peers in the low SES schools during their interviews such as describing children engaging in inappropriate and disruptive behavior including physical aggression, classroom disruptions and severely disrespectful behavior.

Regarding perceptions of administrative support, teachers like Laura and Theresa who had not been in their positions very long may have simply not adjusted their level of efficacy to match their new work context and new administrator. If the teachers had preconceived ideas of the support they would receive from their new principal coming into their new work context, those feelings might change over time to more closely reflect how their peers in other low SES schools conceived of the support they received. This qualitative study, utilized the TSES as only a way to gain additional contextual understanding of the teacher's situation. Although the scores of the teachers both new and old to their low SES schools fell on the high end of the efficacy

TSES scale, there may be more to examine in addition to looking at solely TSES results when seeking the nature of teacher efficacy.

The question this raises is how might we sustain high initial levels of efficacy for teachers who may be newly assigned to work in challenging school environments? If efficacy levels drop over the course of time in a challenging school environment, the teachers may be less able to provide effective instruction or an effective instructional environment that will promote school success. Systems and supports, such as those described by Stipek (2012) include such things as active listening, non-punitive feedback and encouragement or support with student misbehaviors. Sustaining higher levels of efficacy, in low SES schools involves the need to be identify those systems and supports that are most likely to help teachers who are re-assigned or new to working in low SES schools to maintain their initial higher levels of teacher efficacy. As efficacy is in a constant state of change because of reciprocal causation between behavioral, environmental and personal factors, keeping the flux of change toward maintaining higher levels of efficacy can have positive causal effects on other factors. As Laura and Theresa came into their current positions in a state of high efficacy, identifying those factors that will maintain that high level of efficacy may be beneficial to raising student achievement even in challenging environments such as those found in low SES schools.

Previous research supports the finding that the quality of collegial relationships, like supportive administrative support, can work to mitigate the negative impact on student misbehavior on teacher efficacy (Tsouloupas et al., 2014; Hargreaves, 1998; Caprera et al., 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989; Marzano et al., 2005). Barb talked in detail about how important her collegial relationships were to her feeling she is effective in the classroom. Her long-time teaching partner was referred to as a major support to her as she dealt with challenging behaviors. Even

though Barb described her current administrator as not supportive and not understanding how to best support the teachers with student misbehavior, Barb knew she was able to count on her teaching partner or several other teachers who worked in the same hallway and provided support to one another with students by providing them alternative locations to have the students work when they were struggling with appropriate behaviors.

**Administrative support.** This study showed that when there was not a corresponding increase in administrative support for student misbehaviors or for providing needed material and human resources, the teachers' descriptions of their efficaciousness were lower in the low SES schools. These supports did not similarly effect levels of efficaciousness for teachers in the high SES schools where the supports were not seen as necessary to their students' success. This was much like Stipek (2012) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) who also found that the teachers' perceptions of administrative support affects teachers' views of their work environment as either supportive or non-supportive and influenced levels of teacher efficacy. The teachers in the high SES schools in this study had a perception that their administrators were supportive, but they also expressed a lack of need for administrative support so, for teachers in the high SES schools, administrative support was not pertinent to their feelings of efficacy as a teacher. In contrast, the teachers in the low SES schools expressed that administrative support was necessary and important for them to be able to do their work effectively.

There were some differences in the descriptions of what supportive administrative support is. The teachers in the highest SES schools did not see low administrative support as a problem or hindrance to their students' learning. The high SES teachers did not feel they required additional administrative support for student misbehavior and they felt the materials and supplies were sufficient for ensuring student learning. Rebekah, for example, talked about being

able to handle student behavior issues that came up easily in her classroom. As SES went down, descriptions of the necessity for consistent reliable administrative support took on a more relevant role in whether or not the teachers believed they could help their children to be successful. Both Fanya and Sally described the frustration of lack of support when they would send a child to the office for administrative intervention and the child was just sent back to their room without any known intervention provided.

### **Professional Development and Continuing Education**

The data from the TSES results and the observations indicated there were connections between levels of efficacy in certain sub-categories. These differences were based on individual teacher's experiences with training and continuing education. Those teachers in the study who scored above average in one or more sub-categories described additional experiences in either professional development they had received to help them build skills and knowledge or involvement in continuing education at a university.

Paula, from the magnet Montessori public school had extensive training when she started work 28 years ago. Her district had sent her to training in Chicago on the Montessori method. Paula explained in her interview that the Montessori program emphasizes student exploration in learning and allows students to learn at their own pace. The Montessori method supports students' learning through exploration in an open area classroom with many different manipulatives and supplies at their disposal. Paula has worked in this same Montessori school for her entire career and her colleagues at this school, who have also been trained in the Montessori method, share a building-wide community ideology that embraces student learning through exploration.

The Montessori training set Paula apart from the other participants in this study who have not had this same training and career experience. Paula scored above the standard deviation in two of the three sub-categories of classroom management and instructional strategies. Both of these areas, according to the information she described in her interview were areas of focus during her Montessori training. The one sub-category that was still within the standard deviation range for Paula was student engagement. Paula described being able to handle any student behavior issues that came up on her own and also acknowledged that there was not much to handle since the children generally followed the behavior expectations of her classroom. She used a time-out stone for students to work out differences, which meant that after some instruction, the students in her class were able to handle disputes between themselves without involving their teacher in the conversation.

Paula's extensive training and experience permitted her more confident about her efficacy to manage her classroom and provide instruction that would support her students' success. Her efficacy regarding her students' engagement was within the standard deviation range indicating that she had an average feeling of efficacy in this area, but her efficacy was not as high as it was in the other two categories. She was most efficacious in the two categories that were related more specifically to her skill set and less efficacious in the one category that involved the students' individual motivation to do well and work hard on their own. This could mean that her efficacy level was impacted by not only the length of her experience as a teacher but her length of teaching as a Montessori trained teacher. If professional development has the potential to support positive efficacy, additional research would be needed to look at supporting professional development specific to instructional strategies and classroom management as these were the two areas she felt above average feelings of efficaciousness.

There were four teachers who scored above the standard deviation in two sub-categories. These were Paula and Rebekah from the two highest performing schools and Laura and Theresa who were both new to their positions and working in low SES schools. Academically, Laura's school was very low performing and Theresa's school was a mid-level performing school. The interviews from both Laura and Theresa described school situations that were similar to their colleagues who worked in the same schools with them. Fanya and Laura worked in the same school that was low SES and low performing. Sally and Theresa worked in the same school, which was low SES and mid-level performing.

Although Laura and Theresa both had efficacy scores that more closely resembled the higher scores of Paula and Rebekah from the high SES schools, it is possible that over time, as they become more acclimated to their current positions in low SES schools, that it might change to more closely resemble the scores of their peers in their schools in the low SES schools where they work. Since Laura and Theresa were both new to their positions, they may be more hopeful that they will be able to be successful in their new positions. Laura, as a teacher leader in her previous position in the district, may have felt more empowered by her knowledge and experience as a teacher of teachers. Future research may find that being a teacher leader boosts levels of efficacy as teachers learn more about effective practices and help other teachers improve their practice as well.

Mitch scored above the standard deviation on the TSES in one category: classroom management. Mitch was the leader of his school's positive behavior intervention team and he spoke extensively about this in the interview. He expressed confidence in his ability to manage student behavior in his classroom in order to help the students get along better with each other and to help them deal with misbehavior that manifested from poor home lives. His scores in the

other two sub-categories of student engagement and instructional strategies were within the average range. Perhaps the additional training and time spent on working with the school's adopted management system built up his feelings of efficacy in this area.

At the time of her interview, Theresa was working on her master's degree. This might also have positively impacted her feelings of efficacy in two of the three sub-categories on the TSES. Perhaps the additional support she was receiving from her learning experiences at the university helped her to feel more efficacious about her ability to be successful with classroom management and to use appropriate and effective instructional strategies.

Laura was a teacher trainer for several years before she was re-assigned back to the classroom. Her efficaciousness in the areas of classroom management and instructional strategies could have been higher because she saw herself as a teacher of teachers in these areas and had spent additional time over the previous several years teaching colleagues about effecting instructional practices that they could use in their classrooms.

For Mitch, Theresa, Paula and Laura there were additional experiences they had regarding training and professional development in the areas where they scored above the average range. The only other teacher who scored in the above average range in two sub-categories that did not have recent professional development or training was Rebekah. From a high performing/high SES school, she described having very engaged students with very supportive families who overtly supported their children's education and their child's teacher. Rebekah's perception of family support may have contributed positively to her feelings of efficacy as previous research indicates that supportive family involvement promotes higher levels of teacher efficacy. Stipek (2012) found that when teachers felt they had sufficient



support from administrators and from their students' families their level of perceived efficacy was higher than if they did not feel they had enough support.

The two teachers who scored in the average range for all sub-categories were Barb and Sally. Both of these teachers were very experienced teachers who had worked in their current schools for long periods of time. Both Barb and Sally expressed confidence in their efficaciousness but both also talked about the coming possibility of retirement, which was not brought up by any of the other teachers in the study. Barb had been nationally recognized for her teaching and she expressed that she had a successful and fulfilling career as a teacher. Barb had a very special bond with her teaching partner and she felt that the support they provided each other made it possible for both of them to be more successful. Sally and Barb both expressed frustration with the changes that have occurred in education with the additional emphasis on state assessments and accountability. Sally and Barb also expressed concern about what they felt were deteriorating behavioral issues with students that had not been present with students earlier in their careers.

### **Change, Stress, and Lowered Feelings of Efficacy**

Fanya and Lyndie were the only participants who scored below the standard deviation range in one sub-category, student engagement. Fanya and Lyndie both worked in low SES schools and both had worked in multiple different schools within their districts before being assigned to their current positions. Both Fanya and Lyndie worked in districts where school closings were a prevalent event and both had experienced displacement in their building assignments due to district-wide consolidation efforts. This additional movement could also affect the students in their districts as well.

Change is stressful for adults and children. While both Fanya and Lyndie were dealing with their own displacements, the students in both of these districts were also coping with adjusting to new teachers and building administration. Fanya's and Lyndie's below average scores in the sub-category student engagement could be related to low student morale brought on by significant changes in their school environments and having teachers who might also be experiencing low morale due to unanticipated changes in their positions. The interplay between teachers' and students' feelings of trust and stability might be a factor in their lower than average feelings of efficacy regarding student engagement.

### **Implications**

There are several implications of this work. Previous research on teacher efficacy has demonstrated an association between higher levels of teacher efficacy with higher levels of student achievement (Ashton et al., 1984; Ashton & Webb, 1986; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Understanding the relevance of teacher efficacy to achievement levels, there needs to be a better understanding of how the context of poverty changes certain features of schools and how teachers and administrators should best address poverty in order to maintain higher levels of teacher efficacy and concurrently higher levels of student achievement.

The TSES results of this study showed that even though all of the teachers' scores fell in the upper half of the TSES indicating high teacher efficacy, the scores also fell on a small but measureable continuum related to the SES level of the school where the teachers worked. Even though the TSES results showed overall high efficacy levels for all of the teachers, relatively, teachers from the high SES schools scored higher on the TSES than the teachers from the low SES schools. Detecting this subtle continuum of scores would have otherwise been considered

inconsequential without the interview data that accompanied it. The interview data allowed for a contextual examination of the teachers' efficacy levels and thereby provided a deeper investigation into the nature of feelings of teacher efficacy. The TSES data, while a statistically reliable tool, proved to be only a minor indicator of the continuum but when coupled with the interview data, the continuum of ease became more conspicuous. This supports the work of Chang and Engelhard (2016) who found that although the TSES items created an easy way to examine teacher efficacy, by themselves, the TSES results did not allow for a reliable interpretation of what the scores meant.

Specific supports and resources needed for teachers to support higher levels of teacher efficacy need to be further examined. Research that would investigate the longitudinal changes in efficacy over time and the changes of context relative to varying levels of SES would allow for a better analysis of what needs to be addressed by administrators and policy makers when making decisions regarding supports and resources for low SES schools.

When examining individual item responses, experiences with professional development and continuing education were found to be associated with above average scores on the TSES. Experiences of instability in the work place were associated with lower scores in some categories. Gaining a better understanding of what supports and experiences are most relevant to building teachers' perceptions of efficacy and what conditions are likely to cause a decline in efficacy are highly relevant to school administrators and policy makers as increasing teacher efficacy may in turn increase student achievement.

We know from previous research that perceptions develop through different levels of experiences and shape feelings of teacher efficacy (DeNeve, Devos & Tuytens, 2015; Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014; Stipek, 2012). We also know that teacher efficacy levels

directly influence the classroom and student achievement (Ashton et al., 1984; Bandura, 1993; Caprera et al. 2006; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1988; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). With this being the case, when examining the TSES data that showed higher levels of efficacy for the teachers in the high poverty/mid-level performing schools whose perceptions of administrative support were described as more helpful, and the ease of doing their work was seen as higher, it behooves school and district administrators to search for ways that will maintain conditions that will support or even boost teacher efficacy in low SES schools.

Educational leadership programs might employ this work by teaching future school administrators to seek out specific feedback from teachers in order to provide professional development and continuing education opportunities that specifically address the needs of their teachers. The teachers' voices provide invaluable information to guide this work. Administrators would benefit from learning how to develop set pathways to support the free flow of information with teachers in order to intentionally support and build teacher capacity. Administrators should not assume they know the teachers' needs without first explicitly seeking out teachers' input. There is a tremendous amount of untapped energy waiting to be used from the teachers currently working in the field who are best capable of guiding administrators in the directions that will support higher levels of student achievement.

Policy makers must enable school administrators to provide teachers in low SES schools with the additional necessary resources of time and support in order for the teachers to be able to raise student achievement. Policy makers must also understand that there are additional challenges to the work teachers encounter when they are in low SES schools. Central office administrators and building level administrators must work together to make sure implementation is coordinated with the support of the larger district.

We must acknowledge that there are systemic societal issues outside of the field of education that alter the environmental context of the schools children attend. Maintaining higher levels of efficacy in the face of environmental factors that are outside of the teachers and school's control is a more pertinent point of attention if we want to remedy the negative correlation between income and student achievement that we face in schools today. These issues affect the level of ease teachers of low SES students have to attain the same level of educational success as their high SES peers (Anyon, 2005; Evans, 2004, Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008).

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study. First, the sample size of this study was small. A larger group of participants would provide richer information regarding teachers' TSES scores and their narrative data. A larger sample size might also shed more light on how poverty levels coincide with teachers' self-ratings on the TSES.

Another possible limitation of this study could be that the short, as opposed to the long version, of the TSES was used. The longer version might have given more information regarding the discrepancy in scores found between the teachers in the low SES schools who had been in their positions for many years as opposed to those teachers who were not new to teaching, but new to their current work context. The longer version of the TSES was designed to be used with teachers who are new to the field, but there also may be relevance in the validity of teacher's TSES scores on the long verses the short version of the TSES based on how long the teachers have been teaching in their current teaching situation.

This work raises question about the sensitivity of the TSES and how accurately the instrument captures more nuanced elements involved in the development and sustainment of teacher efficacy. Originally, the TSES was included in this study to provide additional

contextual information about the participants in order to frame their interview responses. This study does not provide the answers to this question, but it does provide some insight into what a teacher efficacy tool must additionally capture in order to glean the most accurate recording of teacher efficacy within and across a variety of contexts, including SES.

### **Future Research**

Future research should more closely examine and observe teacher behaviors rather than relying on self-reporting. Observations would provide more reliable and objective data on teacher-student interactions and the classroom environment. Future studies should also include data from the administrators to see what they are actually doing or not doing in regard to supporting teachers with student misbehavior and procuring resources for their school.

Another line of future research would be to more intentionally examine the personal factors involved in triadic reciprocal causation theory in order to inform practice in teacher preparation programs. This line of research would also be beneficial to educational leadership preparation programs. Understanding individual teacher's personal backgrounds might allow administrators to make better informed choices for professional development and supports needed by individual teachers and may also work to negate the high turnover rate we are experiencing in education today.

Longitudinal studies would help to explore whether teachers' sense of efficacy increases or decreases as they spend several years at a particular school depending upon the school's poverty level. Levels of efficacy may adjust to the teachers' current context. It might take time for efficacy levels to adjust to a new school environment when a teacher is reassigned to a different school. Longitudinal research could also investigate how teacher efficacy in low SES schools may remain high in the face of higher levels of demand. Research would need to

examine what specific resources are needed to meet those demands, maintain high teacher efficacy and promote high levels of student achievement. This study does not provide evidence of temporal changes in levels of efficacy as teachers remain in the same position for multiple years, but future longitudinal studies might investigate if there is a honeymoon period experienced by experienced teachers when they enter a new teaching position that may fade over time.

### **Summary**

The call for additional qualitative studies on teacher efficacy came from a field of study that presented mostly quantitative research (Tschannen-Moran et al, 1998). This study provides a qualitative examination of efficacy in relation to different poverty levels found in schools. Through an examination of the teachers' narratives framed within the backdrop of contextual data and data from the TSES (Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001), this study revealed a continuum between ease on the high SES end and an increase of demands on the low SES end.

This study showed that as the environmental conditions for learning became encumbered for the children, the environmental conditions to build and sustain high levels of teacher efficacy were also impeded. A continuum of ease was found between high SES and low SES schools in regard to demands on teachers. The high SES schools' teachers described an ease in working with their students and helping them to be successful in schools. When SES was low, teacher reports of ease to do their work was also low.

The increase in job demands on the teachers who worked in low SES schools, when not met with corresponding increases in resources or supports to meet these demands, appeared to decrease the ease of their work. As the level of ease declined so too did the schools'

performance levels. The teachers in the low SES school that described supportive and responsive building administration that made their work easier reported higher levels of teacher efficacy than their peers who worked in other low SES schools who did not describe having those same supports. The two teachers who came from the low SES/mid-level performing school described their administrator as supportive. Identifying specific administrative supports most pertinent to teacher efficacy will require further examination.



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## Appendix A

### Participant Search

Dear teacher,

I am conducting a study on teacher efficacy and I need your help. Efficacy is a concept developed by Albert Bandura that describes how much a person feels they can be successful at completing certain context-specific tasks. I am conducting a research study on how different personal, environmental, and behavioral variables work together to promote or inhibit teachers' perceptions of their efficacy as teachers.

Your participation will be completely anonymous. The study will include taking a short Likert scale survey to investigate your current level of efficacy followed by an audio-recorded interview that will last between 60-90 minutes. All identifiable information of participants will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

If you are interested in getting more information about this study, please fill out the information below and I will contact you.

Thank you and I hope to speak to you soon.

Sincerely,

Sandra Hofman-Kingston

Doctoral Candidate, University of Michigan, Dearborn

---

### Participant Contact Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**  
Coding System

TEACHER	School #	Pseudonym	Top-to-Bottom Ranking	F/R %	*TSES
			<i>0-100</i>	<i>000-100%</i>	<i>SE/IS/CM=total</i>
<i>Name</i>	1	Paula	98 <sup>th</sup>	6	7.3/8.5/8.5=8.1
<i>Name</i>	2	Rebekah	89 <sup>th</sup>	2	8.5/7.5/9=8.3
<i>Name</i>	3	Mitch	37 <sup>th</sup>	42	5.3/8.3/7.8=7.1
<i>Name</i>	4	Barb	60 <sup>th</sup>	43	6.5/7.5/7.3=7.1
<i>Name</i>	5	Fanya	3 <sup>rd</sup>	82	5.8/6.5/7=6.4
<i>Name</i>	5	Laura	3 <sup>rd</sup>	82	7.8/8.3/9=8
<i>Name</i>	6	Lyndie	2 <sup>nd</sup>	84	5.8/6.8/6.8=6.5
<i>Name</i>	7	Sally	70 <sup>th</sup>	95	7/7.3/5.5=6.6
<i>Name</i>	7	Theresa	70 <sup>th</sup>	95	7.5/8/8.5=8

## Appendix C

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study Teacher Efficacy: A Reciprocal Causation Analysis

**Principal Investigator:** Sandra Hofman-Kingston, University of Michigan, Dearborn  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Martha Adler, Associate Professor, University of Michigan, Dearborn

#### Invitation to participate in a research study

Sandra Hofman-Kingston invites you to participate in a research study about teacher efficacy. This study represents my dissertation for the doctoral program in Metropolitan Education through the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

#### Description of subject involvement

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill out a short Likert scale that estimates your personal sense of efficacy as a teacher at the time of the interview. After you complete the scale, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will cover a range of questions concerning variables that may affect your sense of efficacy as a teacher. This interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy and professionally transcribed. I will also take notes during the interview.

At the conclusion of the interview, you will be asked to review the notes the researcher has taken to assure their accuracy and you will be provided with the results of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (short form). If you would like to learn the findings of this study, please email me at [chels@umich.edu](mailto:chels@umich.edu) and I will be happy to forward that information to you.

#### Benefits

Although you may not directly benefit professionally from being in this study, others may benefit because of your candid participation.

#### Risks and discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study because all data collected will be kept completely anonymous. Codes will be used to represent any identifiable information and the coding sheet that I will use to keep the codes organized will be shredded and destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

#### Confidentiality

I plan to publish the results of this study, but no identifiable information whatsoever will be included in the results. There are some reasons why people other than the researcher may need to see information you provided as part of this study. This includes members of my dissertation committee who are responsible for making sure the research is done properly and the University of Michigan government offices.

#### Storage and future use of data

The data you provide will be stored on a password-protected laptop that will be stored in a secure location in my home at all times. All hardcopy information will be stored in a secure location in my home as well. The study should take approximately two months to finish, at

which time all identifiable information on the coding sheets will be shredded and properly disposed of. The data and transcripts will be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research, but it will not contain information that could identify you.

### **Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, all data obtained will be shredded and properly disposed of.

### **Contact information**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact Sandra Hofman-Kingston at (734) 330-1865. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the University of Michigan-Dearborn IRB Administrator in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 1055 Administration building, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Evergreen Rd., Dearborn, MI 48128-2406, (313) 593-5468; the Dearborn IRB Application Specialist at (734) 763-5084, or email Dearborn-IRB@umich.edu.

### **Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later. Thank you for your participation in this study.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

---

Printed Name

---

Signature

---

Date

*I give my permission to audio-record this interview. All identifiable information will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study.*

---

Signature

## Appendix D



ANITA WOOLFOLK HOY, Ph.D.

PROFESSOR  
PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dear

You have my permission to use the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* in your research. A copy of both the long and short forms of the instrument as well as scoring instructions can be found at:

<http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/ahoy/researchinstruments.htm>

Best wishes in your work,

Anita Woolfolk Hoy, Ph.D.  
Professor

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## Appendix E

### Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale1 (short form)

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

How much can you do?

Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite A Bit	A Great Deal				
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

#### Teacher Beliefs

#### How much can you do?

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 2. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 3. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 4. How much can you do to help your students value learning?   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 5. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 6. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 7. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 11. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 12. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

## Appendix F

### Directions for Scoring the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale1

#### Developers:

Megan Tschannen-Moran, College of William and Mary  
Anita Woolfolk Hoy, the Ohio State University.

#### Construct Validity:

For information the construct validity of the Teachers' Sense of Teacher efficacy Scale, see:

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing and elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.

#### Factor Analysis:

It is important to conduct a factor analysis to determine how your participants respond to the questions. We have consistently found three moderately correlated factors: *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management*, but at times the make up of the scales varies slightly. With preservice teachers we recommend that the full 24-item scale (or 12-item short form) be used, because the factor structure often is less distinct for these respondents.

#### Subscale Scores:

To determine the *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* subscale scores, we compute unweighted means of the items that load on each factor. Generally these groupings are:

#### *Long Form*

<i>Efficacy in Student Engagement:</i>	Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22
<i>Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:</i>	Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24
<i>Efficacy in Classroom Management:</i>	Items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21

#### *Short Form*

<i>Efficacy in Student Engagement:</i>	Items 2, 3, 4, 11
<i>Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:</i>	Items 5, 9, 10, 12
<i>Efficacy in Classroom Management:</i>	Items 1, 6, 7, 8

#### Reliabilities:



In Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing and elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805, the following were found:

	Long Form			Short Form		
	Mean	SD	alpha	Mean	SD	alpha
OSTES	7.1	.94	.94	7.1	.98	.90
<i>Engagement</i>	7.3	1.1	.87	7.2	1.2	.81
<i>Instruction</i>	7.3	1.1	.91	7.3	1.2	.86
<i>Management</i>	6.7	1.1	.90	6.7	1.2	.86

1 Because this instrument was developed at the Ohio State University, it is sometimes referred to as the *Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale*

## Appendix G

### Teacher Efficacy Study Interview

“Thank you for participating in this study. As you know, I am going to audio-record this interview to assure accuracy. The purpose of this interview is to examine teachers’ lived experiences in the classroom. Your participation and answers are anonymous. Please provide as much detail as possible for each question. If at any time during this interview, you would like to stop or you are not comfortable answering a particular question, just let me know and we can skip that question or discontinue the questioning. If you choose to discontinue your participation at any time during or after the interview, your information will be destroyed and it will not be included in the final analysis. There are no consequences if you do decline a question or decide to end the session. This interview will take about 60-90 minutes to complete. I will ask questions and paraphrase for you to verify that I am understanding your responses correctly throughout the interview. Do you have any questions before we get started? *[take time for them to answer the question]* Do you agree to be audio-recorded during this interview? *[If the response is yes, then proceed; if the response is no, then thank the student and end the process]*. Ready?”

Interview Questions:

#### Personal

1. Tell me about how you decided to become a teacher.
2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught at this school?
3. Tell me about your university experience when you were preparing to become a teacher.
4. Does your personal history and beliefs guide your work in the classroom and if so how?

5. What personal variables do you think are the most important to you to help you feel like you are an effective teacher?

### **Environmental**

6. Describe each of the following in the context of your classroom and work environment.
  - a. Student behaviors
    - i. Tell me about your students' behavior in your classroom.
    - ii. What do you do when there is a disruptive student or students?
    - iii. Tell me about the assistance you get from administration for behavior issues.
  - b. Classroom culture
    - i. Tell me about your classroom culture.
    - ii. Describe the students' relationships with each other.
    - iii. Describe your relationships with your students.
  - c. Administrative support
    - i. Tell me about the feedback you get from your administrator/s.
    - ii. Describe the access you have to necessary resources for your classroom.
    - iii. Tell me about the professional development you have received.
  - d. Collegial support
    - i. Tell me about opportunities you have to collaborate with other teachers.
    - ii. Tell me about your relationship with other teachers at your school.
7. What environmental variables do you think are the most important to you to help you feel like you are an effective teacher?

**Behavioral**

8. Tell me about how you interact with students.
9. Tell me about how your students interact with each other.
10. Describe a time when you had to control a disruptive or unmotivated student.
11. What do you do if you have a student who is not motivated to do their work?
12. What behavioral variables (yours' and/or your students') do you think are the most important to you to help you feel like you are an effective teacher?

Conclusion: Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you thought of since we began this interview?

“Thank you again for participating in this interview. At the conclusion of the study, your Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale score will be sent to you with an explanation of how to interpret it. How would you prefer that information be sent to you, (email, standard mail, other)?”