Strategies used by educators when faced with children’s challenging behaviours amidst limited parental involvement: A socio-ecological approach

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements For the degree of Master of Teaching
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Abstract

Addressing the negative behaviours of children within the classroom can be a difficult task for teachers. When compounded with additional variables, this task can render itself extremely challenging for even the experienced teacher. This study has explored the strategies used by educators in the Greater Toronto Area who have dealt with the negative behaviours of children whose parents lacked involvement in their education. The data derived from the semi-structured interviews revealed four main themes, which are explored. The themes are: (1) the relationship between families and teachers; (2) explanations and understanding of behavior; (3) children’s needs that are absent from their lives; and (4) the systemic, structural, social and cultural barriers. These themes were further explored and extended to focus a discussion on their implications, in both the broad and narrow sense. Furthermore, recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study and are given a discussion. The socio-ecological perspective has been chosen as an appropriate framework from which to explore this topic and has been utilized to gain a better perspective of the interconnected elements and variables within this subject area.

Key Words: behaviour, parent involvement, strategies, socio-ecological perspective
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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank the continuous support from my mother who has stood by me my entire life and always ensured I took steps in the right direction to succeed. I could not have made it through without the help and encouragement from Rita and for that, and many other things, I wish to sincerely thank her.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

Educational research has slightly younger roots than more traditional social science research. While there are numerous areas of focus, research in education has often concentrated on forms of student learning, teaching methods, teacher training, and classroom dynamics (University of Texas, 2011). The behaviour of children in the classroom setting has been of particular interest to various parties involved in education. As one of the goals of social science is to seek an understanding of a particular phenomenon, many researchers have focused their attention on explaining why children behave the way they do in their learning environments.

It is of great value to seek an understanding of children in the classroom in order to enhance the learning environment for all stakeholders, including children, teachers, administrative staff, parents and members of the community at large. Schools, boards, government agencies and partners have invested a great deal of resources into this research and have created initiatives focused on the improvement of the learning environment for all those involved. Within the mandate of the Ontario Ministry of Education, Premier Kathleen Wynn wrote “As Minister of Education, your top priority will be implementing Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario. This plan will take public education in Ontario from great to excellent by continually improving learning, so that young people have the talent and skills they need — and are prepared to lead in the global economy” (Government of Ontario, 2014). While larger initiatives such as a Ministry’s mandate or a school board’s agenda take a broader approach to attain general goals and a direction for progress in education, smaller and more specific challenges are being met within individual schools or classrooms.

Educators constantly face barriers and challenges in the course of their duties and, more specifically, in regards to enhancing or maintaining a positive learning environment. When children exhibit negative or antisocial behaviours in the classroom, it places a strain on the teacher and learning environment, thus requiring the teacher to implement various strategies in order to improve the classroom climate, or address the behaviours of the child. In searching for methods to effectively deal with difficult behaviours of children, some teachers have turned to parents for assistance or guidance in
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this regard. Studies have shown that parents vary in the type and quantity of involvement in their child’s education and school which has shown to produce different results towards the child’s achievements or emotional well-being (Hamilton, Marshall, Rummens, Fenta & Simich, 2011; Hunsinger & Jose, 2009; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Research has also found that parental involvement in a child’s education has an effect on a child’s academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999) as well as their emotional adjustment and behaviours (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In an effort to further understand these dynamics, this study focuses on strategies teachers have used when experiencing difficult behaviours from children ages 3-12 within their classrooms. The specific focus is on parents who have not been involved or who have been unwilling to assist the teacher’s efforts in behaviour management. While this general topic is not new in the field of educational research, the unique contribution being made by the current study is to better understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the teacher, thus aiding other educators by providing them with resources and tools to deal with similar situations.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Extant research has shown that parental involvement can have effects on the achievement and behaviour of children; Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) have defined parent involvement as “the dedication of resources by the parent to the child in a specific domain” (p. 238). Their early, multidimensional model of parent involvement included the following categories: parent behaviour (contributions toward school activities), personal involvement (within a child’s affective environment), and cognitive/intellectual involvement (exposing a child to stimulating activities) (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris (1997) redefined the dimension of the parent behaviour category by including parent participation in activities both at school and at home.
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The most logical fit to examine these factors within the current study is from the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1989), which maintains that the interaction between home and school is critical for supporting positive child outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009). The ecological framework posits that there is an independent influence of both home and school on the child, as well as an interactive influence of both that operates in a way to further affect the child’s development (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). It has been noted that parental involvement has rarely been examined in the context of teacher practices with students in their classrooms (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013). A recent study of parental involvement found that while involvement did not predict increases in academic achievement, it did predict declines in problem behaviours (El Nokali et al., 2010). However, one particular dimension of parental involvement, direct interactions between teachers and parents, has been shown to relate to poorer behavioural outcomes (McNeal 2012). Similarly, Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprw, and Fendrich (1999) found that direct communication between teachers and parents in first grade predicted increases in student behaviour problems in third grade, which has given rise to the theory and thoughts about the frequency of parent involvement increasing when students act out in school. Therefore, it is important to look further into the variables of parent involvement and problem behaviours from children, as will be addressed through the current study. This examination has been made from the perspective of teachers who can provide insight into the type and frequency of interactions with parents, while discussing how and why these interactions were initiated.

The purpose of the current study is to explore the various factors involved in the strategies used by educators when dealing with children displaying behavioural challenges in the classroom when parents are not involved. Knowledge from this study can aid teachers further in finding effective ways to create and maintain a positive learning environment, and therefore alleviate unnecessary stress and strain in their work. The aim of conducting this research is to add to the existing body of knowledge, while additionally providing personal insight from teachers who have experienced difficulties
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in their duties. Some of the information being sought after, such as details about
strategies employed and their effectiveness, could only be obtained through a qualitative
analysis. This data fills a void in the existing literature. One of the goals of conducting
the current study is to assist existing and future teachers by enhancing their knowledge of
what strategies and techniques have been found to be effective as well as what they may
want to avoid in their future interactions with parents. Providing personal accounts within
the current study can also aid educators by promoting a sense of community between
participants who share similar experiences. Lastly, the current study allows educators to
reflect on their own practices and may assist them in developing future strategies based
on their own inventories of strategies and techniques employed.

1.4 Research Questions

The main research question fuelling the current study is: what strategies are being
used by teachers to address or correct difficult behaviours of children ages 3-12 when
parents lack involvement in the child’s education? To guide and support the main
research questions, the following sub-questions have been developed:

1. What difficulties have educators faced in dealing with challenging behaviours in
   the classroom?;
2. What beneficial and problematic strategies (such as behaviour modifications,
   accommodations such as IEPs, assessment and diagnosis suggestions) have been
   used by educators when parents have not been involved?;
3. What barriers have educators, who have been faced with this situation, overcome
   and how was this achieved?
4. Have educators noticed differences in terms of the ages, ethnicity, gender or
   socio-economic-status of children when applying strategies toward children and
   what effect have those had on correcting behaviours when parents have not been
   involved?

In order to effectively investigate the research questions, the current study is a
small-scale qualitative study that incorporates elements of the phenomenological
approach. Teachers in the Greater Toronto Area have taken part in an interview with the
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researcher regarding their experiences working with difficult behaviours displayed by children aged 3-12. The interviews focus on the strategies employed in order to evaluate their effectiveness. A strength in using a phenomenological approach is that discussions can focus on why teachers with similar experiences thought their strategies worked, and they may provide their thoughts on what barriers existed for them and why (Creswell, 2013, pp. 76-82). The interviews focus on their experiences without parental involvement in order to provide further insights into this area. Questions incorporated in the interviews have been developed with the aid of current research in the relevant areas and findings developed as they relate to the research questions of this study. Participants for this study have been recruited and drawn from elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area as they are available to the researcher. Greater weight was given towards educators who have more years of experience teaching as they most likely have additional situations to discuss in the interviews. Once all of the data was collected, it was transcribed and organized into relevant themes for discussion as they became apparent. The author has been mindful of ethical considerations throughout the study and has made all possible attempts to ensure that they have been strictly adhered to throughout.

1.5 Background of the Researcher

Throughout my career as a martial arts instructor, I have encountered multiple situations of difficult behaviours from children in the programs I have taught. In attempts to correct or adjust such behaviours, I made efforts to include families within the process. On numerous occasions, I have witnessed reluctance from parents to assist, and have faced limitations in my efforts to utilize strategies I felt would be best suited for the children I was working with. More recently, having spent time in a kindergarten classroom as a teacher-candidate, working towards my Masters of Teaching degree, I came across a number of situations where teachers attempted to implement strategies to effectively deal with difficult behaviours of their students. These circumstances have motivated me to investigate what other educators have faced in similar contexts, and how they have effectively addressed them.

I presently have a desire to inquire into what strategies teachers use when faced with stress or additional strain in the classroom, especially when this stress stems from
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negative behaviours of children whose parents lack involvement in the attempts to correct such behaviours. My goal in conducting the current study is to explore the view of educators toward the behaviour strategies they have employed in order to assist others who may face similar situations. I hope to gain valuable insights into what strategies have been effective and discover the reasons as to why. I believe that I will carry the knowledge gained into my future career as an educator. Additionally, I will find value in gaining such insight and promulgating it to others. I have made all attempts to identify researcher bias wherever possible while conducting the current study, however I have remained cognizant of my role within the research and the study as a whole.

1.6 Overview

The following paper takes the structure of 5 chapters. Following this introduction will be a thorough review of the relevant literature in this field. An examination has been made of findings from studies that have explored and analyzed child development, teaching strategies for behaviour problems, and the involvement of parents and outcomes of children when various factors have been employed or withheld. The third chapter specifically focuses on the methodology and procedures utilized within the current study and how they affect the study. This third chapter also includes current literature regarding qualitative methodologies, theoretical perspectives, research design, and techniques. Information will be made available in this chapter regarding the sample participants and data collection. The fourth chapter will analyze and discuss the findings of the research. Within this chapter, information has be brought forward regarding the data that has been gathered from the interviews conducted and discuss the various themes that have emerged in relation to the research questions. The fifth and final chapter will be a conclusion of the study. Within this chapter, a review of the study and its limitations have been outlined. Remarks and recommendations have been made in relation to the findings and there is a discussion as to where to go from here, and what future research should focus on. Following the fifth chapter is a list of the references used as well as appendices referred to in the current study.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction to the Literature Review

The current study is an exploration of the various factors involved in the strategies used by educators when interacting with children displaying behavioural challenges in the classroom. Specifically in the case when parents are not involved, for which there has not been extensive research conducted to date. While negative behaviours and academic achievements have been studied a great deal, in terms of their relation to parental involvement, perspectives of educators and the strategies they used have been neglected in the research. It is my intent to explore and better understand this phenomenon from the perspective of the teacher in the Greater Toronto Area. It is my belief that the best way to explore these factors is within the social ecological perspective as it takes multiple factors into account to explain the reciprocal interactions of the individual and the environment.

This literature review comprises three main sections. The first reviews selected studies that have focused on the correlates and factors of: negative behaviour in the classroom from children aged 3-12; strategies used by educators to address negative behaviours; and parental involvement within their child’s education. This section does not be look at broad theoretical explanations; rather, it outlines what has been found regarding the three variables under investigation. The purpose of this section is to frame the discussion as to what knowledge exists in order to situate and understand the concepts for their use in the current study. In the second section, I look to the social ecological perspective. To begin, a trace of the theory’s development has been made. Following that, the theory as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979;1989) is be presented. Some of the research that has utilized or criticized the social ecological theory has been reviewed and an explanation of how the theory has been used in the current study is made. In the third section of this review, we will look to current research on the variable of parental involvement that has been conducted or that have utilized similar concepts or variables as in the current study. As there were no studies found that have explored this topic in the same manner as desired in this study, those that bear the most resemblance have been included within this review.
2.1 Factors and Variables in the Current Study

2.1.1 Negative Behavior

There have been numerous definitions posited for negative behaviours displayed by children. Frick (1998) has defined antisocial behaviour as “behaviors resulting from an individual’s inability to respect the rights of others (assault, vandalism, setting fires, theft), conform to social norms (prolonged runaway, crime), or meet the expectations of authorities (opposition, defiance, arguing)” (in Fortin, 2003, p. 669).

Negative behaviours have been studied in great length within previous literature; however, here we will limit the focus to previous definitions and connections with the current study in order to keep the focus of the current topic. The scope of the current research is limited to behaviours of children in the classroom thus does not require extending to define antisocial, aggressive and deviant behaviour as well as mental health issues or conditions. It will incorporate, instead, a broader definition of all negative behaviour to be included. Hindshaw (1992) distinguished between externalizing and internalizing behaviours such that the former includes behaviours “marked by defiance, impulsivity, disruptiveness, aggression, antisocial features, and overactivity” (p. 127), whereas the latter includes behaviours such as withdrawal and anxiety. Externalizing behaviours have been found to be more resistant to intervention attempts than internalizing behaviours (Hindshaw, 1992) and has been focused on within the current research. For the purpose of this study, we will use the term ‘negative behaviour’ to capture any behaviours displayed by young people that are disruptive, aggressive or otherwise go against the smooth operation of the classroom.

There are numerous causes and explanations for negative behaviours of children, but they will not all be discussed at length here. It is, however, important to mention some of them in order to highlight what has previously been found, and frame these causes for further discussions. The fields of sociology as well as social and developmental psychology have made vast contributions to offer an understanding and explanations for negative behaviours of children. Two categories that can be used to distinguish and understand negative behaviours of children are: individual characteristics, and environmental factors. Individual characteristics include the variables of difficult temperament (Moffit, Caspi, Dickson, Silva & Stanton, 1996), low intellectual potential
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(Hindshaw, 1992), learning disabilities (Fortin, 1996; Moffit, 1993), and other biological
determinants such as ADHD, developmental disorders and ASD. Environmental stimuli,
such as family and parenting (Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992), low socio-economic
status (Aguilar, Sroufe & Carlson, 2000; Farrington, 2001; Patterson, Forgatch, Yerger
& Stoolmiller, 1998), peer relationships and pressures (Coie & Jacobs, 1993; Dodge &
Coie, 1987) have also been found to be predictors of negative behaviours in children.

The variable of negative behaviours has been explored in numerous studies within
varying contexts. We will focus our attention of this variable to the setting of education
and the classroom. Many studies have found that negative behaviours are associated with
lower academic achievement (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Jordan, Orozco & Averett,
2001; Mc Cord, Spatz Widom, Bamba & Crowell, 2000; McLeod, Uemura & Rohrman,
2012; Siennick & Staff, 2009; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Smith & Porter, 2003;
Tremblay, R.E., Masse, B.,D. Perron, D., Leblanc, M., Schwartzman, E. & Ledingham,
E., 1992). One such example is the study conducted by Hindshaw (1992) who found that
inattention and hyperactivity were strong correlates of academic problems in children.

2.1.2 Strategies used by Educators to Address Behaviours

While various methods and strategies have been developed to effectively address
negative behaviours of children in the classroom, the current study is more interested in
the perspective of the teacher. The discussions with educators in Ontario has been
centered on what methods they have found to be successful within the current framework.
Further discussions of this have been made within the fourth chapter to follow and as
such will not extensively review literature on this topic here. One study worth mentioning
draws our attention to an ecological approach, of Fox, Dunlap & Cushing (2002). In their
discussion of the family-centered approach, Fox, et al. (2002) mention that its aim is to
strengthen and empower the family unit and intervention efforts are focused on “(a)
providing the supports, resources, and services the family needs to support their child and
(b) enhancing the developmental and behavioral progress of the child” (p. 150). This
particular approach is of interest to the current study as it not only takes into account the
behaviours of a child but also addresses the environment of the child utilizing the
involvement of families within its approach.
2.1.3 Parental Involvement

The variable of parental involvement in a child’s education has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) have defined parent involvement as “the dedication of resources by the parent to the child in a specific domain” (p. 238). Their early, multidimensional model of parent involvement included the following categories: parent behaviour (contributions toward school activities), personal involvement (within a child’s affective environment), and cognitive/intellectual involvement (exposing a child to stimulating activities) (ibid). Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris (1997) later redefined the dimension of the parent behaviour category by including parent participation in activities both at school and at home. More recently, Epstein (2001) developed a framework that contains six types of family and community involvement (parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community). All of the models in the research presented share the conceptualization that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct and should not be measured or studied without this understanding. The current study has utilized this information and has differentiated between the various types of parental involvement in its usage.

Studies have shown that parents vary in the type and quantity of involvement in their child’s education and school which has shown to produce different results towards the child’s achievements or emotional well being (Hamilton, Marshall, Rummens, Fenta & Simich, 2011; Hunsinger & Jose, 2009; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Research has also found that parental involvement in a child’s education has been shown to have an effect on a child’s academic achievement (Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005; Izzo et al., 1999) as well as emotional adjustments and behaviours (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor & McClowry, 2013). In exploring the different dimensions of parental involvement, Hunsinger and Jose (2009) found that European American parents involved themselves more by volunteering while Chinese American parents focused more on systematic teaching at home. Differences in ethnicity toward parental involvement are of merit and will be briefly explored within the current study. McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor and McClowry (2013) found a moderated negative effect between parents’
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home-school communication and teacher emotional support on student behavior problems in kindergarten, as well as negative associations between school-based involvement and behavior problems. As the distinct types of parental involvement have been found to produce varying results toward a child’s behaviour and academic achievement, they will be explored as separate phenomena within the current research.

2.2 The Social Ecological Perspective

The most logical fit to examine the above factors is within the social ecological perspective. This perspective has been developed in order to better understand the relationships between personal and environmental variables and has been utilized to gain a better understanding of socialization and education. Specifically, the underlying assumption of the model is that individuals and social environments mutually affect one another through their interactions. The theory makes a distinction between the micro-, meso-, exo-, maxo- and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

2.2.1 History and Background

The term, ecology was coined by Ernest Haeckel in 1873 (Tudge, Gray & Hogan, 1997) and while the term was originally used in biology, numerous other disciplines have since utilized it. The development of the social ecological perspective can be specifically traced to the work of Kurt Lewin in *A Dynamic Theory of Personality: Selected Papers* (1935), which described the relationship between the individual and the environment.

Bronfenbrenner’s work went further by accounting for the complexities of individuals within the system, noting that there are influences of development to one another as well as the individual within the system (Harkonen 2007). Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the influence of many scholars such as Kurt Lewin, Lev Vygotsky, George Herbert Mead, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, and others, and suggests that the significance of his contribution is the manner in which he conceptualized these ideas in a systemic form (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner 1989).

2.2.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Contribution

Bronfenbrenner is now referred to as one of the world’s leading authorities in the
field of developmental psychology (Harkonen, 2007). In his work, Bronfenbrenner (1979) commented that developmental psychology was “...the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time” (p. 19). His perspective would tie together multiple disciplines to offer a better understanding of human development. He stated, “The ecology of human development lies at a point of convergence among the disciplines of the biological, psychological, and social sciences as they bear on the evolution of the individual in society” (1979, p. 13). He went on to argue that little attention was being placed on theory and research of the environmental influences toward human development. He offered a solution within his perspective of human development defined as: “The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these setting, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.” (p. 21). Expanding on the perspective, he conceptualized the setting and context as structures within a microsystem. Bronfenbrenner emphasized the phenomenological nature of the microsystem by discussing the significance of the environment as it is perceived by the developing person, which is significant toward development and behaviour. More recently, the theory has been renamed the bioecological system theory as it regards the child’s biology as the primary microenvironment within development (Harkonen, 2007).

2.2.3 Current uses and New Developments in the Theory

There have been countless studies that have used Brofenbrenner’s work as either a starting point for their research or an explanation for their explorations. Patton Hong, Williams & Allen-Meares (2013) utilized the social–ecological framework as a entry point to investigate the accumulation of risk contributors and the presences of protective factors in relation to school bullying and peer victimization of African American youth. They examined the risk and protective factors occurring in the “micro- (i.e., parents, peers, school, and community), exo- (i.e., parental stress), and macrosystem levels (i.e., hypermasculinity, and gender role beliefs and stereotypes).” (Patton, Hong, Williams &
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Allen-Meares, 2013, p. 245). Meehan, Zhang & Collie (2005) drew on the social ecological theory and empirical studies on the role of school context in aggression within their argument that school adversity is an important consideration in choosing selective interventions for aggressive children. Swick and Wiliams (2006) mention that Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological perspective lends insight to understand and support families facing stressors during the early childhood years, and make applicable uses of the perspective in their development of strategies to assist families.

Recently, some have taken the work of Bronfenbrenner toward developing further perspectives and theories to offer explanations toward particular phenomenon. Building on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, Krishnan (2010) proposed a model that takes individual and environmental factors into consideration. Krishnan (2010) incorporated a broad range of factors, multiple pathways by which they interact, and a multilevel approach which can potentially address issues of socioeconomic inequality that can be at the core of programs and policies targeting children, at the community level (Krishnan, 2010). Berkovich (2014) spoke to the need for development of a socio-ecological perspective to repair injustices in the area of education, noting that social justice discourse in education is currently limited in its focus on actions by individuals and schools in an isolated manner, and does properly recognizing the interdependence between social subsystems and levels. In the area of child and youth care, the onion model developed in 1991 by Ferguson, Pence & Denholm (1993) drew from the work of Bronfenbrenner and stated that their model “...reflects an ecological perspective, wherein consideration is given to the reciprocal interactions between human development and the multiple environments in which it occurs” (p. 9). The onion model has the various ecological systems as layers of an onion, each representing the systems of a child’s ecology. In discussing predictors of the behaviour of children, Poulou (2014) mentions that classrooms and teachers are important factors in the proximal process while mentioning that the environment and person reciprocally interact. Numerous other authors have utilized the work of Bronfenbrenner as his model can benefit many disciplines and offer explanations for interconnected systems and subsystems.
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2.2.4 Criticisms of the Theory

While the social ecological theory has made a great impact in the field of developmental psychology as well as other disciplines, some criticisms have been made and are with merit to mention here. First, it has appeared to some that the theory is a difficult model to apply. As the model takes into account various systems that interconnect with one and other, it requires that substantial details are gathered in order to apply it and the scope can be rather extensive. The model allows for, and accounts for, anything that may influence an individual’s development and thus can be rather difficult to apply (Watts, Cockcroft & Duncan, 2009, p. 511). Bronfenbrenner’s model has also been critiqued as it lacks aspects of intra-level understanding and entrepreneurial factors since it does not see an individual as an independent actor. Secondly, it has been noted that individuals have a resilience capacity and entrepreneurial skills that can define their own space and they have the ability to reflect on the interplay between different levels in their surroundings (Christensen, 2010). Christensen (2010) argued that the inclusion of an individual’s resilience and entrepreneurial skills in a social context would strengthen the model and offer a greater understanding of development.

2.2.5 Choice of Framework

For the purposes of the current study, this theory has been chosen as it offers an understanding that can successfully incorporate the variables under investigation. The theory maintains that the interaction between home and school is critical for supporting positive child outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor & McClowry, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009). The ecological framework posits that there is an independent influence of both home and school on the child as well as an interactive influence of both that operate in a way to further affect the child’s development (El Nokali, et al., 2010). It is believed that while the criticisms of the social ecological perspective do have some merit in terms of explaining the developmental process of the individual, the current study is exploratory in nature and seeks to understand a particular phenomenon with various interconnected factors that can best be understood using this particular model.
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2.3 Current Research Related to the Current Study

It has been noted that parent involvement has rarely been examined in the context of teacher practices with students in their classrooms (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005; McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor & McClowry, 2013). A recent study of parental involvement found that while involvement did not predict increases in academic achievement, it did predict declines in problem behaviours (El Nokali et al., 2010). However, one particular dimension of parental involvement, direct interactions between teachers and parents, has been shown to relate to poorer behavioural outcomes (McNeal 2012). Similarly, Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) found that direct communication between teachers and parents in first grade predicted increases in student behaviour problems in third grade, which has given rise to the theory and thoughts about the frequency of parent involvement increasing when students act out in school. Epstein (2001) argues that there is an overlap between home and school that influences a child’s development and academic achievement, and has an impact on the degree to which positive relations are maintained between educators and family members. Therefore, it is important to look further into the variables of parent involvement and negative behaviours of children, as well as the practices of teachers, as is addressed in the current study. This examination has been made from the perspective of the teacher who can provide insight into the type and frequency of interactions with parents, while discussing how and why these interactions were initiated.

2.4 Summary and Conclusion

Above, a review has been made of relevant literature as it applies to the current study. We have looked to current research on the factors that have been used, such as negative behaviours of children, strategies used, and parental involvement. Following that, we explored the social ecological perspective through: tracing it’s history, development by Bronfenbrenner, current research that has used the model, and criticisms that have been made of it. The third section looked briefly at recent research that utilizes similar concepts and factors to the current study. As no studies have been found to date that explore the same variables as the current study attempts to, it will add to the literature in this field. It is the author’s aim to make a contribution to the existing knowledge by
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offering insights into what strategies have been found to be useful by educators to address the developmental needs of children.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the research methodology that has been used in the current study. This study is qualitative in nature as it explores the strategies and techniques employed by elementary school teachers in their attempts to correct negative behaviours of children amidst a lack of family involvement of the child. A qualitative study design was used to understand the shared experiences or similar strategies used by the individual teachers (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach has been chosen in order to effectively gather data on why teachers with similar experiences have the belief that specific strategies were effective and they may provide rationale as to barriers that have existed for them and why. The interviews have focused on their experiences without parental involvement in order to provide further insights into this subject area.

The framework of the current chapter is as follows: an outline of the research approach and procedures; the instruments of data collection used; information on the participants of the study; a discussion of the data analysis; the ethical review procedures; the methodological strengths and limitations.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The current study utilizes a qualitative approach in order to gain an understanding of a group of individuals with a shared experience. As the interest of the current study is focused on the perspective of teachers who have employed tactics and strategies to address negative behaviours of children in the classroom setting while family members lacked involvement, greater emphasis was placed on recruiting teachers who have more years of experience. The current study takes the form of data collection from two main sources: a literature review and face-to-face in-depth interviews.

Qualitative methods have been used quite extensively in educational research and have focused a great deal on teachers’ experiences, perspectives and strategies (Hammersley, 2000). The qualitative research method is valuable for the current study as it allows the desired data to be accessible to the researcher. Within the current study, I seek to understand the feelings and meaning making processes of participants regarding
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the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches to managing children’s negative behaviours with the added difficulty of having a lack of parental involvement to support their attempts. Sallee and Flood (2012) mention that the goal of qualitative studies need not be to inform theory or policy and could be instead positioned to help a more specific population. Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales (2007) state that phenomenological studies are valuable as they describe a common experience of participants as it is shared rather than attempting to reduce it to theoretical explanations or models through the researcher’s interpretation. As the current study is not focused on generalizing its finding or having a wide reaching audience, the qualitative phenomenological approach allows for the best in-depth data retrieval that can be shared with a specific population of interested parties to assist in their pedagogical undertakings. This practical application of the knowledge derived from the current study is one of my aims and is best achieved through the framework as it has been designed.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The instruments used to collect data in the current study are sources of literature relevant to the topic and interviews conducted with teachers. The literature review was conducted using various sources of academic texts (from scholarly journals and reference materials). The topics of negative behaviour, parental involvement and strategies used by educators to deal with such behaviour were thoroughly searched using university library databases as well as internet search engines to produce the materials found in Chapter 2 above.

The second method of data collection was face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. One of the values of the semi-structured interview is that it allows the interviewer to pose questions as they relate to the research questions while also leaving room for participants to elaborate within their responses. The semi-structured interview format has also allowed the interviewer to redirect and maintain the focus participants on the desired topic within their responses. The interviews have focused on the participants’ experiences in attempting to apply solutions to deal with children’s negative behaviours when that child’s family lacked involvement in their education. The questions used in the interviews were developed
using this study’s research questions as a framework and expanding on the desired information to be obtained from the participants. These questions can be found in ‘Appendix B’ of this study.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and later transcribed into text. Participants were given an opportunity to review their responses once transcribed to ensure that their replies are accurately reflected or have the ability to revise them as they see fit. Interview responses have been coded by grouping together similar key concepts, themes and interesting statements as they arise. The data collected from the interviews is presented in Chapter 4 of this text.

3.3 Participants

Within the current study, two participants were recruited and interviewed. In the following, I have outlined the sampling criteria that were applied, the procedures that were followed to recruit participants and describe who the participants are that were selected.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The current study aims to gain insight about the strategies used by elementary school teachers to deal with negative behaviours of children when there is a lack of parental involvement. Three criteria have been chosen to be applied in order to select the sample for the current study. The first criterion is that the individual be currently employed as a teacher in Ontario. There is value in recruiting an individual who is currently teaching as they have the most recent and relevant information and insights to share that speak to the current population in Ontario. The second criterion is that the individual has at least five years of experience teaching in the primary/junior grades. It is important that greater weight be given to teachers who have more years of experience as they would generally have more examples of strategies they have used over the curse of their employment. A teacher with more experience would most likely have used various strategies and have adopted different methods in their course of dealing with negative behaviors of children. The third criterion to be applied is that the teacher has had at least one encounter of a family lacking involvement with their child’s education who has
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displayed negative behaviour in the classroom. A participant can only qualify for the current study only after it is known that they can speak to the main research question, otherwise, the interview would lack the insights and details that are so required.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

There are various methods to qualify and recruit a sample of participants within a qualitative research study. Convenience sampling is used when a researcher requires a broad sample of the population under investigation and can recruit participants that are available to them. Whereas the current study is phenomenological in nature, it is necessary that the participants each share the experience of dealing with a child’s negative behaviour while a family has lacked involvement. It is therefore necessary that a more narrow sampling approach be applied. Criterion sampling is used when all participants have experienced the same phenomenon. The current study utilized a mixed sampling approach, using both convenience and criterion sampling. Due to the small sample size required, a widespread call for participants has not been used and the researcher has relied on recruiting teachers that were available to be interviewed. The criterion sampling strategy was employed, as only individuals who match the sampling requirements were selected for participation in the current study.

Potential participants were recruited after initially making contact with teachers of a few local elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area. They were informed of the study and given an overview of the aims, purpose and criteria for inclusion. These teachers were given a copy of the letter of consent to review. Initial recruitment attempts were made in networks that I have already established in schools where practicum placements were completed. Once qualified with the specific criteria, teachers were asked if they would be willing to volunteer to participate in the study and were accepted as participants after they expressed their willingness.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data obtained from the interviews was first be transcribed and recorded from the voice recordings made. The responses have then been coded according to appropriate themes as established in the research questions. Once the data was organized and
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categorized, key concepts and interesting statements that arise have been highlighted. Upon reflection of the data derived in the interviews, previous finding and theoretical work in this subject area was considered in order to present the data retrieved. In order to limit researcher bias and enhance the strength of the study, all findings have been presented, including any variations and conflicting data that may have arisen. Transcripts of the individual responses to the interview questions have also be analyzed through comparing similarities and differences of the participant responses and synthesized. For the presentation of the data gathered in the interviews, some conclusions have been drawn regarding the significance and implications while referring back to extant research and theoretical relevance.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

While working with human participants in any research study, ethical issues are always important to consider and be cognizant of. The current study did not have to go through an individual formal review process from an ethical review board as blanket coverage has been granted to the Masters of Teaching program at the University of Toronto OISE for all MTRP studies as long as they follow the procedures and protocol as established and approved for. All participants in the current study are over 18 years of age and not considered to be vulnerable member of society.

The following issues have been considered throughout the current study and have been briefly discussed below: consent; risks of participation; participant’s right to withdraw; member checking; confidentially; and data storage and destruction. Prior to participating in the current study, all candidates have been informed of the intent of the study, explained their rights and asked to sign a letter of consent (see Appendix A). The letter outlines the purpose of the study, addresses ethical issues and allows for them to give their consent to be interviewed and audio recorded. The letter also contains contact information for the principle researcher as well as the course instructor should they wish to contact anyone for further information. As participation in the current study is completely voluntary, it is extremely important that all participants are aware of and understand all of their rights and how the data they generate has been used and presented. There are no known risks in participating in this study and as such, none have been
disclosed prior to or following participating in the interviews. All potential and qualified participants have been informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research. Any data derived from a participant who withdraws from the study would have been destroyed and excluded from data analysis and presentation. All participants have been given an opportunity to review their transcribed interview to ensure that their responses were accurately reflected and could have made any modifications or retractions prior to the data being analyzed. The identity of all participants has been kept confidential. All identifying information regarding any individual has been excluded and each participant was given a pseudonym for data presentation purposes. All data derived from the interviews has been stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed after the successful completion of this study (or up to five years following the interview) or once a participant notifies the researcher or course instructor of their desire to withdraw from the study.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Every research study has its limitations and delimitations, regardless of how well it is designed. One of the most important things a researcher can do is to recognize where a study’s design can be limited and work to strengthen it and reduce any potential flaws that may arise. Below, a discussion has been made of the limitations present in the current study as well as highlight some of the strengths of its design.

The first limitation that is worthy of mentioning lies in the nature of the study’s design such that the MTRP ethical guidelines state that only teachers can be interviewed. This created a considerable limitation on the scope of the study as well as to how the study could be designed regardless of the desired subject matter under investigation. Should there have been a desire to gain the perspective of parents, children or to be extended through gaining quantitative data, the study had to conform to the guidelines as they had been previously established.

The current study is limited in the fact that it has a small sample size. Due to the nature of the project and working with the restrictions of having limited time and resources, the current study has only recruited 2 participants from which it has drawn its data. The small sample limits the researcher’s ability to generalize its findings and also
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limits the ability to compare many samples in the data analysis. While it is not the intent of this study to be able to generalize the findings, this limitation is insignificant. This small sample size is also somewhat overcome in the fact that a great amount of detail can be derived from the in-depth interviews that were conducted. The research questions of the current study are limited in their scope; however, the aim of this study is toward a particular phenomenon and is thus required to be limited as such. The literature that was chosen to be included in the literature review chapter of this study is selective, however, all attempts were made by the researcher to reduce bias throughout and present all applicable and relevant information that was found to be of use. It could be argued that a limitation of the current study is selection bias among choosing participants to be included in the interviews, however, the researcher has relied entirely on convenience and the availability of participants and has disclosed this fact. A general limitation of qualitative studies is that it requires additional time to collect and analyze data; nonetheless, this is understood and accepted by the researcher. In regards to researcher bias or subjectivity that may arise in any research study, all attempts have been made to either reduce or eliminate them and it has been a consideration throughout the study.

The current study has numerous strengths in its design and implementation that will be briefly highlighted here. There are many benefits in studying limited numbers of cases in depth such as having the ability to conduct cross-case comparisons. As a researcher, I find value in gaining a greater understanding of what meanings participants have made of their situation and how they have overcome difficulty in this particular phenomenon; not just gaining information on how they responded, rather why and what it meant to them. This type of knowledge can only fully be grasped in a qualitative study design. Another strength of the semi-structured face-to-face interview is that participants have the ability to respond for however long they please and provide as much information as they like for any given question; they are not limited or face restrictions as with some other types of study design. Qualitative studies in general have a larger degree of flexibility and tolerance within their design and allow a researcher to construct a project as they see fit (Griffin, 2004). For this particular study, one of the most interesting strengths lie in the fact that by having teachers explore their practices and reflect on the strategies they have used, they can gain a further sense of empowerment and increase
their self-worth. Through sharing their ideas with others regarding what they have found helpful or problematic, participants may achieve a heightened feeling of purpose and benefit in being able to help others in their community. The process of thinking and responding to questions about activities in their lives may also be beneficial to participants as it allows them an opportunity to reflect on their practice and have a feeling of confidence in their endeavors.

3.7 Conclusion

Within the current chapter, a trace has been made of all of the methodological matters as they relate to this study. The current study is qualitative in nature and is comprise of data gathered from an extensive literature review as well as semi-structured interviews. Participants have been recruited through a mixed-method sampling structure consisting of convenience and criteria-based sampling. Once qualified, 2 teachers in the Greater Toronto Area have participated in an interview with the principle researcher and the data derived has been analyzed and prepared prior to it being reported in Chapter 4 to follow. Numerous ethical issues have been considered throughout the study from its inception to its publication. All participants have granted informed consent, have had a right to withdraw, have had any identifying information remain confidential and all data retrieved has been stored and will be destroyed in a manner consistent with ethical standards. Various strengths and limits of the study have been realized and presented above. Within Chapter 4 to follow, the data retrieved from the interviews has been presented as sorted into key concepts, themes and interesting statements. The research finding have been reflected upon as they relate to previous research and theoretical findings as presented within Chapter 2 of this study.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report on the findings derived from the face-to-face interviews conducted with teachers. In order to identify their unique responses, they will be herein be referred to as ‘Participant 1’ and ‘Participant 2’. The data presented here has been organized into themes that were generated from the responses and serve to inform my research questions. Once the data was collected, it was reviewed, coded and organized into themes and sub-themes. The themes that became apparent and which are discussed in detail below are: (1) the relationship between families and teachers; (2) explanations and understanding of behavior; (3) children’s needs that are absent from their lives; and (4) the systemic, structural, social and cultural barriers.

4.1 The Relationship Between Families and Teachers

The involvement of families in attempting to correct troublesome behaviour was described by the teachers interviewed as being paramount to a child’s level of success within the classroom. Both teachers identified this relationship as being of utmost importance to them – crucial for a child’s performance and for their ability to teach and complete their work related tasks. While both interviewees expressed how important the relationship was to them, they raised two opposing observations of the product and properties this relationship can take. Families were either described as partners or barriers toward their successful attempts at correcting negative behaviours. The relationship a teacher has with a student’s family can then be either an additional barrier or a beneficial partnership.

4.1.1 Families as Partners

Both teachers interviewed expressed the importance of having a strong relationship with parents, as parents and teachers strive to achieve a common goal in the best interest of the child. The qualities noted by the interviewees to make this partnership successful included: teamwork; being in it together; supportive; relationship building and strengthening; and working together.

Participant 1 brought up that sometimes in this relationship, like any other
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partnership, there may be some push and pull. In discussing placing a child on an IEP or moving them into a behavioural classroom, Participant 1 said:

   We need to push a little just to get them to sign this paper or type of thing. And sometimes if they call up then they will kind of without basically saying it but they will come back and try this and try that … that will buy them a couple of weeks and you know just like here we go okay. Then it becomes a battle with the parents that you are trying to get to sign the paper and…

   Negotiation must occur until both parties are satisfied with an agreeable outcome. This teacher would give families a choice between what she felt was the best option to help the child versus a more difficult and painful one that would not help the child yet would occur if they resisted. “I will be very blunt and say to them this child is now going to suffer because you don’t want to make that move”. As described by Participant 1, sometimes within this relationship, a battle would occur and she would have to treat families as if they were children; using tough love.

   Participant 2 was more compassionate towards parents and tried to put herself in their shoes, concluding that they might have too much on their plates at the given moment or that they may have other pressing priorities in their lives. She mentioned that this difficulty could be minuet in comparison to other things they could be dealing with:

   I know many parents are overwhelmed and that can just be a factor in itself where they don't have time to deal with what they might consider this is very minute compared to something catastrophic that they're dealing with in their lives because it's how they have prioritized this instant or situation (Participant 2).

   Participant 2 constantly emphasized how important it was to have the parents involved, even if just to be updated. When asked how her attempts to involve family members have worked out, Participant 2 said “They work very well especially when the parents and the teachers are on board. I feel that's a very strong partnership when things are mirrored from school and at home.” Any strategies that were implemented at school, should be mirrored at home to serve as reinforcement in building positive behavioural patterns in a child. Even if parents are not actively involved, at least they can understand
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and acknowledge what happens to their child outside of the home and work in conjunction with the teacher as partners.

So once you establish a relationship with the parent and you know that you're not here to just dog on their child; just letting the parent know that you're in this together looking for a solution. Sometimes it can just be I'm noticing this at school, do you notice that at home? And if so, what do you do to correct that behavior? (Participant 2).

Research regarding parental involvement can help us to better understand this dynamic as described by the teachers interviewed. Home-school communication and teacher emotional support were found to have negative moderating effects on a student’s behavioural problems in kindergarten (McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor and McClowry 2013). By adopting the practice of maintaining communication and developing positive relationships with families, the findings were supported by the teachers interviewed through their continuous interactions with families in regards to the child’s conduct and behaviour. The ecological perspective also helps us to better understand this belief by arguing that the interaction between home and school is crucial for supporting positive outcomes of children. This view was widely supported by both teachers interviewed.

Having teachers utilize and uphold the view of families as partners helps to inform this project’s main research question of what strategies are beneficial to reduce negative behaviours in children when parents are not involved. After conducting these interviews, I feel that holding a concrete belief of the importance of this relationship is a strategy in itself. As my interviewees outlined, maintaining a positive view of the teacher-parent partnership does make a difference by encouraging educators to continuously make an effort to keep the lines of communication open amongst all parties involved. This in turn reinforces expectations, places everyone on the same page and blurs the lines between the home and classroom. It also allows educators to make a greater effort and fight to foster these crucial relationships, even if their viewpoints are initially met with resistance by the parents. In the end, this belief system allows everyone to act in the best interest of the child.
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4.1.2 Families as Barriers

The relationship teachers have with families can also be viewed in a negative light; that of the family members being barriers to successfully assisting students at school. Participant 1 mentioned that parents could stand in the way of successfully addressing challenging behaviours. Characteristics given of these families were: defensive, challenging, manipulative, passive aggressive, taking it personally, not wanting to deal with the situation and absent. Participant 1 stated that when calling a parent about a child’s behaviour, the response was “…well that’s his responsibility, not mine, why are you calling me … or that’s your problem, not mine.” This not only highlights how a family lacked involvement in a child’s education but also shows their reluctance to assist the teacher. In her attempts to correct a student’s behaviour, Participant 1 commented on how families can complicate the process and be a barrier to success. She said that “they try a little bit but then they go home and it’s a disaster. So, you go one step ahead and they’ll come back two steps back.” She continued to say “…then they’ll go home for a long weekend and come back and we’re at square one again.” This viewpoint outlines families acting as barriers to the fulfillment of this teacher’s role of correcting problematic student behaviour. Participant 1 indicated that she could do a better job at this task if parents simply distanced themselves further from their child’s education. She went on to strongly affirm that parents should “…stop getting in my way basically get out of my way so we can try to do something.” These responses from families could have come about from them feeling embarrassed, proud and unable to accept that their child could behave as described by the teacher. Regardless of the reason, Participant 1 would view their actions as barriers to her success in carrying out positive strategies pertaining to a child’s behaviour.

Participant 2 chose to dig deeper to explore the root cause of these negative responses while doing her best to remain positive, supportive and understanding throughout. Participant 1 did recognize that a negative emotional response could play a role in families being barriers and mentioned these characterises: denial, fear, feeling alone, embarrassment, lack of knowledge, disbelief and taking it personally. Whereas Participant 1 took a more punitive response to families, Participant 2 seemed to be more compassionate and continued to work on the relationship regardless. Both of these
teachers were coming from the same place, that of helping the student to best succeed, yet applied different approaches in the relationship with a student’s family when they seemed to be uninvolved.

Research has shown that parental involvement has an effect on a child’s academic achievements and behaviours (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013). When families are seen as barriers to teachers, issues could be compounded further. El Nokali et al. (2010) found that parental involvement directly correlated with a decline in problematic behaviours in children and that by attempting to maintain a positive relationship with families, as was done by Participant 2, would produce a more beneficial strategy for all parties involved. In contrast, numerous other studies found poorer behaviours in students spanning from direct interactions between teachers and parents, therefore supporting the viewpoint and strategies of Participant 1 (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich, 1999; McNeal, 2012). These contradictory findings muddle the picture as to which perspective is more effective to take on as a teacher and highlight that there is no single or ideal way to deal with this topic.

As research has shown varying results of parental involvement on academics and behaviour, it is interesting to explore teachers’ perspectives on this. Teachers play a large role in controlling the quantity and quality of the interactions between their students’ families, thus, their insights, reasoning and rationale highlighted in this study become quite interesting to dissect. Both teachers interviewed believe it is extremely important to involve families, and each seemed to feel more confident that a child could succeed with limited parental involvement as long they had a loving, caring adult in their lives. This theme shows first hand some of the difficulties faced by teachers in determining whether to deem parents as barriers or partners in aiding their child’s behavioural management. It also helps to build an understanding as to why there is such a wide array of strategies being utilized by teachers to deal with problematic behaviours. With contradictory research and continuous studies on this topic, it becomes very difficult to stand unanimously on a single strategy. Everyone has the child’s best interests in mind, however, how they achieve these goals will always be as diverse and unique as the teachers themselves.
4.2 Explanations and Understanding of Behavior

One such way to best address challenging behaviour is to know and understand the root cause of it. The different types of challenging behaviour that were described in the interviews ranged anywhere from being disruptive and chatty, up to very aggressive actions and those hazardous to the safety of themselves and others. Both teachers offered some insight as to why they believed children can behave negatively, as being either: an individual characteristic and emotional response characterized by one’s innate behaviours; or as a choice and triggered from environmental factors.

4.2.1 Behaviour as Individual Characteristics and Emotional Response

Participant 1 described negative behaviours of children as an emotional response, saying “…a lot of times it’s emotion. They are emotional. They don’t get up in the morning with the intent of going to smack somebody but it’s going to happen because something stayed with them. They need to be in touch with what’s triggering them.” Here we can see the view that children can lack control of their actions. Participant 1 further described why negative behaviours can occur stating “They don’t necessarily have control of it… So, it’s not always under their control.” This explanation of behaviour allows for an understanding that children might be subject to forces beyond their control and should not be punished as a result. Participant 2 commented on how best to help children who fall into this category. She said that “…sometimes it's as simple as figuring out what the child needs that they're not able to communicate to you.” From these two perspectives I began to understand that something could be missing in children’s lives that could help explain why they are acting out and that it is the job of a teacher to find out what that underlying cause may be. This explanation of negative behaviour relies on the view that something is deeply rooted within a child and their actions are beyond their control.

4.2.2 Behaviour as Choice and Triggered by Environmental Factors

An opposing explanation to individual characteristics and emotional responses being the cause of negative behaviour is that of choice and environment. In explaining why negative behaviours can occur in the classroom, both teachers described a cause and
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effect relationship. Within this perspective, a teacher’s role goes beyond addressing
behaviour as a reaction but rather taking a proactive approach and implementing
preventative measures on responses that children freely choose to take on. Giving
students choice after setting up expectations were addressed by both teachers. Participant
2 said, “I truly believe that it is all about prevention. Prevention and setting up
expectations where students know cause and effect.” It is therefore the role of the teacher
to set up the environment and appropriately address behaviours in order to correct them.
Participant 1 stated that “If not dealt with, will escalate and become progressively
challenging.” The triggers that could lead to negative behaviours in the classroom were
spoken of frequently by both teachers. Behaviours as a result of triggers were described
by Participant 2, saying “… [they are] usually driven by something else, a trigger of some
sort but it would be things like calling out or moving about when you should be sitting
and listening and focused, fidgeting, making noises in the desk.” Taking this perspective,
for teachers to be successful in addressing negative behaviours, consistency in its
treatment is key. Once a negative behaviour has occurred, Participant 2 said “…and that's
when I need to be very consistent in my ways of, you know, "That's not welcomed here."
In explaining negative behaviour in this light, it seems that setting up expectations, letting
children know of the cause and effect, and following through consistently to curve
unwanted behaviour are the best practice strategies outlined from the teachers
interviewed.

Previous research also provides a dyadic explanation of negative behaviour from
children. The two categories that can be used to distinguish and understand negative
behaviours of children are individual characteristics and environmental factors.
Individual characteristics including the difficult temperament, low intellectual potential,
learning disabilities, and other biological determinants (Fortin, 1996; Hindshaw, 1992;
Moffit, 1993; Moffit, Caspi, Dickson, Silva & Stanton, 1996) that are beyond a child’s
control, as echoed in the responses from the teachers interviewed. In terms of the best
strategy to address this type of behaviour, both teachers expressed that getting to know
the child, gaining their trust and being there for them works best. The second category,
environmental stimuli, includes variables such as family and parenting, low socio-
economic status, and peer relationships and pressures (Aguilar, Sroufe & Carlson, 2000;
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Coie & Jacobs, 1993; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Farrington, 2001; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger & Stoolmiller, 1998; Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992). These variables were discussed by the teachers interviewed as being behaviours that were more of a choice rather than individual characteristics or biological determinants. The best strategies provided for choice and positive environmental influences on behaviour to establish and reinforce expectations.

This theme speaks directly to the main research question of what strategies work best with children when their parents lack involvement as well as the sub-questions of the difficulties and barriers faced by teachers in the aforementioned situation. If we can better understand why children act in a certain way, we will be better prepared and equipped to correct such behaviour and help them to succeed. If the behaviour is out of their control, teachers must work hard to determine the underlying cause and gain the child’s trust in order to take steps to effectively mitigate the problem and utilize resources to aid in their success. If the behaviour is due to environmental stimuli or is derived by choice, it is up to the teacher to clearly outline expectations and display consistency in addressing negative behaviours.

4.3 Children’s Needs that are Absent from their Lives

One theme that emerged in both interviews was the concept that children whose parents are not involved in their education may have something missing in their lives. This view was explicitly stated as well as inferred throughout both interviews. So what are the missing ingredients that these children need? Quite simply put, the children that were referred to required a loving and caring adult in their lives. The main piece of advice that was provided by Participant 2 to new teachers captures this belief well by her stating “Fall in love with your children. Don't give up on them.”

As expressed by both teachers, the most important component of this relationship is trust. Some of the comments made regarding this from both interviewees were:

- “They got to know to trust you.” (Participant 1)
- “They need to trust somebody.” (Participant 2)
- “So they try a little bit harder. They need to trust you. You need to have their back.” (Participant 1)
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• “I think the biggest thing even those that need treatment and stuff like that honestly the biggest thing is can they trust you. That’s got to be the biggest thing. If they don’t feel it you are getting nothing from them. If they don’t see that you are honest and sincere…Kids will read you like a book.” (Participant 1)

• “Honestly they are the ones that need the most love. Those ones you never forget. The ones you spend the most time with they give you the most satisfaction. Honestly they just need somebody to trust.” (Participant 2)

According to both teachers interviewed, it is the role of the teacher to figure out what is missing and do whatever possible to provide that to them. “Know that every child can succeed. It's up to you to figure out how.” And “I think the biggest thing is learning the child and what their currency is and why they're doing what they're doing.” And “So sometimes it's as simple as figuring out what the child needs that they're not able to communicate to you.” The teachers also went on by saying “Well then I just need to figure out what can I do to help this child while they're at school.” From these responses one can derive that teachers must be attentive to the behaviours displayed by their students and attempt to understand them. Teachers need to become caring adults in the lives of children, especially when filling voids or needs that go unfulfilled within the home. Especially in cases where parents may be overwhelmed by stressors within their own daily lives, children’s needs may go neglected or unheard.

Teachers must therefore step in and pay attention to various indicators children might display. Teachers must then implement strategies to understand the problem and work towards solutions to mitigate them. Like both teachers interviewed clearly said, every child can succeed even those that show the toughest behavioural problems. Teachers have to gain the trust of their students and make them believe that they are genuinely there for them instead of taking the easy way out and ignoring the problem or making someone else deal with it. Sometimes parents take on this negative strategy and expect teachers to deal with their child’s behavioural issues while the child is in their care. As Participant 2 stated in regard to one parent’s response, “Well that’s his responsibility, not mine, why are you calling me kind of thing or that’s your problem, not
mine… Isn’t that why he goes to school…I can’t manage him from the house, ok…” At the end of the day, teachers take on a much greater role than simply being the child’s instructor. In theory, they often become the child’s educator, psychologist, and role model. The roles of a teacher are very diverse and in terms of behavioural management it starts from a simple willingness to be there for the best interest of all children involved.

Within the interviews, it was also briefly discussed that children need clear expectations and routines in their lives to foster positive and healthy behaviours. As some parents look to tend to their own needs, they sometimes fail to set positive routines and expectations for their children. This could be as simple as encouraging children to read for an hour before bedtime, putting time aside to complete homework or following through on consequences as a result of negative behaviours. As Participant 1 mentioned “So very quickly you’ll find there is no follow through many times as routines not in place.” Children thrive by following routines and take comfort in the familiarity of schedules on a day to day basis. By not having set expectations put in place by parents, those aspects of children’s lives will become unclear and may cause problematic behaviour as they look to explore how to appropriately react to novel situations. This can in turn also explain problematic behaviours at school as children are not accustomed to functioning according to clear cut routines and get two different messages in their home and school lives. As Participant 2 stated “I think it might send a mixed signal to that student or child, and that's when I need to be very consistent in my ways of, you know, ‘That's not welcomed here.’” Teachers must yet again take on a more diverse role and fill in the gaps that are visible to them in regards to a child’s behaviour. By doing so they create more trusting, loyal, happier and functional students while mitigating their negative behaviours. When teachers clearly set standards and expectations, they enable a child to be comfortable and feel safe in knowing what comes next. If a teacher says, “That is not welcome here,” then a child knows that if they engage in that behaviour again, they will have to deal with certain pre-set and clearly outlined consequences. Helping a child establish a functional routine can go a long way and can, in and of itself, help mitigate some problematic behaviours that teachers witness within their classrooms.

The social ecological perspective maintains that the interaction between home and school is critical for supporting positive child outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998;
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McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009). This interaction has been highlighted in the responses given by the interviewees of this study and demonstrates how this perspective helps to explain the complexities in the relationships between teachers, students and their parents. The ecological framework holds that there is an independent as well as an interactive influence of both the home and school that has a direct impact on a child’s development and behavioural patterns within the classroom (El Nokali, et al., 2010). Being cognisant of this research allows teachers to gain valuable insight on their students’ behaviours and can aid them in the course of their work. Teachers can also develop more meaningful relationships with parents and work as a tightly knit unit in regards to the well being of their children.

This theme highlights that one of the strategies teachers use to correct negative behaviours in children whose parents are not involved is doing something that they would generally do in the regular course of their work. It requires a teacher to get to know and be in touch with the needs of all students in order to guide them in displaying expected behaviours on a more consistent basis. When teachers discover a void within their student’s life that is perhaps missing from their home, they try to adopt strategies to be there for the child in a way that they need. For example, a child may spend the vast majority of their after school evening in the care of a nanny and may be missing certain interactions on an emotional level. In turn, this child may act out and seek attention within the classroom. The teacher then needs to pick up on the negative cues that the child is displaying and devise strategies to investigate its cause. The teacher can start by pulling the child aside and explaining his or her expectations within the classroom setting. If this child continues to act out, the teacher may choose a strategy to implement or put a behavioural plan in place. Life within the home and classroom are intertwined and often far from separate, as this viewpoint helps us understand. Teachers must continuously be attentive to what is absent in the lives of children and do their best to address those issues. Only then can teachers hope to mitigate negative behaviours that may appear within their classroom setting.
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4.4 The Systemic, Structural, Economic and Cultural Barriers

The teachers interviewed expressed that there were numerous barriers and limitations that made it difficult for them to most effectively help their students. The most frequently discussed barriers within this study were systemic and structural barriers as well as cultural and economic barriers.

4.4.1 Systemic and Structural Barriers

The teachers interviewed were surprisingly forthcoming about their thoughts on where some of these challenges came from. Participant 1 stated, “Sometimes there are obstacles as well as our own system can work against us.” She was referring to policies and procedures that exist within the school system in Ontario that can sometimes be restrictive and slow moving when moving cases through the system in order for them to be adequately addressed. She went on further to say:

Given all the other factors I stated … our system itself is not timely. It’s very drawn out. Sometimes like when you get to my point 30 years in the system I can figure them out faster… So I start to act. Then you get this probably we need to gather the data. I get the fact that you need data but am not spending three months worth of data. Sometimes the way our system processes is very slow. It does not necessarily. However sometimes there is something to be said for. Sometimes it’s just an open and shut case. Sometimes it’s just that easy. Parents are there. They are ready. They are good and we need to wait three months and am like really. Sometimes the process itself can act as a challenge in a way. We have to make sure we keep the parents engaged while we wait for this process time to go through. Sometimes that become challenging because they may get discouraged and then think that you have lost interest or it’s never going to happen why do we bother. This kind of stuff. Sometimes it can work time wise it can work against you.

The system standing in her way created frustration for her, as she wanted to help children yet had to operate according to the policies and procedures that were in place. She expressed that while many of the guidelines made sense and may work for some, there are times when help could be much simpler, especially when the luxury of time may not
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be available. She continued to express concern of the structural barriers and said “Sometimes your system does the same thing sometimes when you want to push they won’t allow you to push… and then you have got your system who is kind of lags basically buying time.” The structural barrier of time that was brought up is also coupled with limited resources that might be available to teachers in this situation. In discussing bringing up a behaviour case to the school board and asking for additional assistance, the teacher was told “We don’t have the resources for that we just don’t.” Limitations such as resistance from principals or school board personnel to implement higher level modifications or a lack of resources to adequately accommodate a child who may require support can be deemed as tolerable as they are so deep embedded within our system. They might be frustrating or sometimes difficult to navigate through for teachers, yet, to influence positive change in this regard would require a systemic restructuring of the education system itself.

4.4.2 Economic and Cultural Factors as Barriers

Parents might be uninvolved or have difficulties being involved due to socio-economic realities of their lives which create a limitation to teachers who are attempting to better aid their students. Participant 2 stated that: “Parents are overwhelmed”; “don’t have the time”; “minute compared to what they deal with”; and “have prioritized their lives.” This obstacle illustrates that, as parents are required to work and provide for their families or might be in difficult financial situations, a further limitation can be placed on a teacher. Sometimes the socio-economic barrier can be seen in how little time a family may have to spend with their child. Participant 1 explained:

Parents are coming and going so who’s working late, who’s coming home, child’s alone a lot in the morning for example, fed for themselves alone after school, by the time parents get home, so there’s a lot of unaccounted for time where they’re kind of on their own.

This lack of time spent with children creates an issue for teachers as expectations and routines are not being followed or mirrored at home as desired by a teacher. This view was also echoed by Participant 2.
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The social barrier can also be illustrated in how families relate to a teacher which can cause a barrier to them. In some cultures, it could be common for a family to not be involved in a child’s education. Some parents might have had negative experiences in their own education that would prevent them from being involved in their child’s education. Regarding this, Participant 2 said

Just as much as the child is not trusting neither is the parent. Whether they have had their own issues I don’t know but they are also very non trusting. Probably because they have had bad experiences. They are not very trusting of the system. And they don’t what to be blamed. Or they think they are going to be blamed.

Here, the partnership and relationship building that was discussed earlier is crucial. Teachers can consistently work towards involving parents in their children’s academic lives and reinforce the idea of partnership between parents and teachers. Only then can some of the paradigms regarding schools and the education system be altered.

Research has shown that parental involvement can predict declines in problem behaviours (El Nokali et al., 2010). The teachers interviewed firmly expressed having a strong desire to involve families as a strategy to cope with negative behaviours. Participant 2 genuinely fosters this belief and attempts to involve parents at all times even when parents are reluctant or unable to be involved. Participant 1 on the other hand, would eventually avoid involving parents after realizing their lack of involvement. While both teachers have a similar intent, it was interesting to see how they diverged once there was resistance. Epstein (2001) argued that there is an overlap between home and school that influences a child’s development and has an impact on the degree to which positive relations are maintained between educators and family members. It would be interesting to further explore any differences in children’s adjustment when teachers maintain positive relations or distance themselves after unsuccessfully attempting to foster them.

This theme impacts the current research project insofar as to highlight some further limitations teachers face in the course of performing the duties of their job. Not only do they have to attempt to implement what they feel will be the best strategy to correct negative behaviours in children, the issues become even more challenging when they face additional obstacles. The barriers highlighted within this theme are deep rooted and are
not issues that could be adjusted or modified easily by any means through the work of an individual teacher. If recognized on the larger scale, it could be possible for some of these barriers to be reduced such as time for implementing strategies that require board approval or increases in funding for assistance to teachers. It is interesting to see within this theme how two differing opinions on the same issue have been brought up and highlight a different mindset shaped by the experiences of the two teachers interviewed. Participant 1 stated that she noticed a difference in the involvement of parents based on SES whereas Participant 2 did not. Participant 2 was much more understanding and continued to foster a positive relationship with parents whereas Participant 1 was much quicker to give up on it once she noticed that they became difficult. This highlights how our experiences can shape our opinions and for the intent of this study, have an impact on the strategies used and the rationale for using them.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings of this study derived from the interviews with teachers have been analysed and organized into themes to describe and discuss what came about. The themes that were generated and examined above are: the relationship between families and teachers; explanations and understandings of behaviour; children’s needs that are absent from their lives; and systemic, structural, cultural and economic barriers. Each of these themes assist in furthering our understanding of the research questions within this study and have been connected to current research in this area.

The teachers interviewed described the relationship between them and parents as being paramount to their successful support of children in their classrooms. Families were discussed as being in a partnership with teachers as both strived to achieve what was best for the child. Even though the two teachers interviewed described the ease of developing and maintaining this relationship differently, both fundamentally shared the view that families could be beneficial partners to them. This belief is supported in current research and can also be understood easily through the social ecological perspective. The opposing view to families as partners also came up during the interviews and can be characterized as them being barriers. During attempts to resolve or correct student behaviour, the teachers interviewed described situations where families would stand in the way and
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cause them further limitations. The two teachers interviewed expressed different outlooks and ways in which they deal with this situation as it arises which can effect the outcome of this dynamic. This theme highlights how there are numerous difficulties faced in the teaching profession and various ways in which teachers have chosen to act when facing this challenging situation.

There are several distinct explanations and understandings of negative behaviour from children and some of these were discussed by the teachers interviewed in this study. The explanations for behaviour provided by the teachers mirror those in current research and were categorised as being either individual characteristics and emotional responses or stemming from choice and environmental factors. Understanding where the behaviour is coming from aids teachers in their strategies and attempts at correcting it. This theme contributes to the current research as it highlights the path a teacher can take when deciding on the best fit strategy to deal with student behaviour, being that of either support and understanding or explicit attempts at correcting it.

Surprisingly, both teachers interviewed shared a similar observation regarding what might be missing in the lives of children; that of a loving and caring adult. Taking on this role, teachers would be required to set and maintain expectations for the child as well as establish a relationship built on trust with the child. This theme is supported by current research through work in the social ecological perspective which suggests that a child would need a comprehensive foundation of their fundamental needs in order to be well adjusted. This theme highlights an approach that is deeply embedded into the role teachers play and could be expanded to be understood as a strategy in itself for addressing negative behaviours in children.

Numerous barriers and limitations in addressing negative behaviours of children in the classroom were discussed by the teachers interviewed. Some of these barriers have been categorized above in order to discuss and explain them. Systemic and structural barriers were explained as being issues and concerns the teachers have faced that were in place through either their schools, school boards or governments and placed limitations on how these teachers were able to implement strategies as they thought best. Cultural and economic barriers were described as being deeply rooted problems affecting families that prevented teachers from being as effective as they would like to be in their course of
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their jobs. All of the barriers discussed above are not ones that can be easily changed by an individual teacher as they are so imbedded into our social and cultural realities, however, the attitude, approach and responses to such barriers can be altered and was demonstrated through the difference in the two teachers interviewed in this study.

In the following chapter, a discussion has been made regarding the implications of the findings that have been highlighted above as well as the significance they have. Specifically, we look at how the themes derived from the current research may have an impact on the professional practice of teachers. Recommendations regarding teacher approaches and strategies to address negative behaviours when parents lack involvement will be made as well as suggestions given for further research on this topic.
Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 begins with a synthesis of the implications of the current study and an overview of the key findings and their significance. Following that, the implications found throughout this study will be shown and have been organized into two main categories: broad implications for the education community and narrow implications that have had a direct impact on my teaching and research. Furthermore, the next section includes recommendations that have been established as a direct result of these discussed implications. In conclusion, areas for further research have been suggested as well as concluding remarks and comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

The current study has uncovered four main themes from the data derived from interviews with participating teachers. The findings that became apparent and discussed in detail above are: the relationship between families and teachers; explanations and understanding of behaviour; children’s needs that are absent from their lives; and the systemic, structural, social and cultural barriers. Each of these themes will be briefly discussed below in relation to how they are significant in framing the implications and recommendations of this study.

As teachers and parents come from the two most crucial roles in the development of a child, the relationship they have is of great importance. In order for each to function effectively in their roles, the cooperation and support of each can strengthen their efforts. When teachers are presented with parents as partners, their roles can be made easier, whereas, when faced with parents who are barriers to their success, they can experience greater difficulties. The findings of this study mirror current views on the causes of behaviour that can stem from individual characteristics and emotional responses or by choice and environmental stimuli. When those who work with a child can determine the causes of their negative behaviours, they are better suited to be able to effectively address them. The current study also revealed certain aspects that may be absent in a child’s life that could impact their behaviour and the ability of a teacher to be able to successfully address them. Providing the students what they require or referring them to the
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appropriate support may lead to positive outcomes for the child. The final theme that was brought to light within the current study is that there are other barriers to success present within our school systems and society. The barriers discussed were systemic, structural, economic and cultural. Each of these barriers may present themselves at any point in an educator’s experience and could be particularly difficult to overcome. All of these themes form the basis for the implications and recommendations to follow and will be discussed in relation to each other.

5.2 Implications

Within the following section, I will examine the significance of the data that arose throughout the interviews with participants, in relation to current discourse on education as revealed in the literature. These implications stem from themes as they presented themselves and are intrinsically tied to research questions and previously reviewed literature. The implications discussed below have been subdivided into two main categories: broad implications for the education community and narrow implications as they affected me personally as an educator and researcher.

5.2.1 Broad Implications: Findings for the Education Community

The data derived from the interviews revealed that parents could be seen as either partners or barriers to an educator. This makes it clear, that in many cases, it is the role of an educator to mitigate or facilitate that relationship and strengthen connections wherever possible. This task is not limited in its scope and reach to children who may be experiencing difficulties in a classroom, but in a broader sense can be looked at strengthening the relationship between teachers and families in multiple facades of life. As family involvement has been shown to have an effect on a child’s academic achievements and behaviours (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprov & Fendrich, 1999; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2013), the relationship between teachers and families should be given serious attention and be made a priority in the education community. Since El Nokali et al. (2010) found that parental involvement was directly correlated with a decline in problematic behaviours in children and that by attempting to maintain a positive relationship with families, would produce a
more beneficial strategy for all parties involved. Hence, when a teacher is experiencing difficulties in addressing a child’s behaviour, it may be of benefit to turn to the solution of strengthening the partnership between the child and their family. When it seems as though parents are becoming barriers to success, educators should find methods to include them and create a positive environment. One particular step that might be used is looking into the reasons why the family fails to be included and have become a barrier. For example, one particular explanation could be feasibility and inability to be included or could stem from differences in their beliefs. After determining causes, educators can work toward finding meaningful ways to include a family which may involve adjusting their own practices.

The second implication realized throughout the course of this study was that looking at the causes of behaviour is of great significance for educators to understand in order to address it. As there are various factors to explain why a child may behave in the way they do, it is beneficial to explore why the behaviour may persist. Negative or anti-social behaviour could be explained as being caused by either individual characteristics or from choice, emotional response or environmental factors. Through gaining perspectives of what the root cause of negative behaviours are, an educator can strengthen their attempts at correcting it or helping the child receive the support they require in order to succeed. Simply addressing all instances of negative behaviour in similar manners regardless of what the explanation is for that child could cause further damage and certainly not address the child’s needs. This reactionary approach may help to correct behaviours of some children some of the time, yet never explores or addresses any of the underlying factors that may exist.

The current study also revealed that teachers might come across students whose needs are not being met in their everyday lives. As teachers are generally the adults who spend the most or second most amount of time with a child, they are privy to acquiring a great deal of knowledge of that child. In some cases, teachers are realizing that there are children whose needs are absent from their lives. There are many cases of children missing a loving and caring adult in their day-to-day routines. While this may be a sad reality, it is definitely the case for some children. There is only so much that we can do in the education community to affect change in this regard. While one solution might be for
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the teacher to step in and provide that child what they may need, it only serves to address the problem temporarily, if at all. To positively affect change in this scenario would require a greater spanning approach from the education community along with addressing other aspects from outside of the schools such as from services provided by governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The forth implication discovered through conducting the current study is that certain additional obstacles exist that make it difficult for teachers to effectively address some of the negative behaviours of children. The systemic and structural barriers were found to be widespread and were discussed by the participants as being something that stood in their way of properly doing their jobs. These barriers are set in place through the structures of the school boards or realities of society that, if removed, would strengthen their abilities to address negative behaviours. Cultural and economic factors were also discussed as being problematic issues that created frustrations for teachers. While these barriers were considered from the perspective of the teachers interviewed in relation to students, they can also have an effect not only the child, but on the entire family and community. As educators, these insights offer us further perspective on the individual and communities we serve. The role of the teacher can be further defined as to include ensuring the facilitation of the most equitable methods of instruction for every child, yet there is very little that can be accomplished by a teacher alone in terms of addressing the systemic or economic barriers as they exist. Inclusion strategies and cultural sensitivity knowledge and training are beneficial areas for individual teachers and will be discussed within the recommendation section to follow. The wider education community bares the responsibility of ensuring that the needs of every child are met, thus larger reforms would be required to that end.

The two previous implications speak directly to point made by Berkovich (2014) regarding the need for development of a socio-ecological perspective to repair injustices in the area of education. It was noted that social justice discourse in education is currently limited in its focus on actions by individuals and schools in an isolated manner, and does properly recognizing the interdependence between social subsystems and levels. Addressing the individual requirements of a child who lacks the foundation of family to support their needs could be accomplished by taking more of a social-ecological
approach. While it was noted above that many of the systemic or economical barriers would be difficult to overcome by a teacher, if the larger education community widened its scope to include a multilevel approach, as mentioned by Krishnan (2010), it could have the potential to address issues of socioeconomic inequality that can be at the core of programs and policies targeting children, at the community level. The discussion of particular approaches and methods that could strengthen our abilities to support children will be further addressed in the recommendations section to follow.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications: Personally as an Educator and Researcher

Here, I will discuss how the implications of the current research project have and will continue to make an impact on me personally as an educator and lifelong researcher in the field of education. Through conducting this project, I have had substantial learning experiences and have been able to outline the path I wish to take as I continue to grow. The main implications of this study have helped shape me in two distinct ways: toward my practices inside and outside of the classroom and the acquisition of knowledge I carry forward and share with others.

As a future classroom teacher, I will be cognizant of my actions toward my students and their family members. Knowing that the involvement of families within a child’s education can effect their academic as well as social and emotional adjustment, I will strive to create a dynamic environment with strong partnerships with the families of my students. This will only allow them to be involved but can also create a positive climate for all. Some of the steps I will take are to initiate contact through positive introductions, informing them of who I am, what our goals will be, and welcome their feedback and constant involvement. I will be in the habit of regular communication and if or when issues present themselves, include them and be appreciative of their input. I will ensure that families are aware that we are all on the same page of achieving what is best for the child and that will be the driving force.

As I have learned of the potential barriers toward full inclusion of families through conducting this study, I will remain aware of these and look for ways and means to reduce or eliminate them as best as I can. To address barriers prior to them presenting themselves or once I have learned of them, I will make every attempt to gain an
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understanding of each families’ particular situation; their positions, realities and what difficulties or limitations may exist for them. Include them as best as I can and make them feel a part of the process. Through sharing my experiences and reaching out to other educators regarding theirs, I will continue to collect and analyse data regarding best practices of approaches and strategies for supporting children whose families are not involved, thus, carrying the main research question of this study into my future research and practice.

Having gained the knowledge of the benefits of understanding underlying causes of a child’s behaviour, I will continue to ascertain information in this area and in particular, what cues to look for, best practice strategies to addressing specific explanations for behaviour and collaborate with other educators. Learning about how and why children behave in the manners they do has been a major focus of most of my academic pursuits and professional experiences. I will continue to take these understandings and the desire to further comprehend children’s causes of behaviour into the classroom. I will utilize a variety of resources and strategies and constantly look for improvements to my own practice for what is best for the child. Furthermore, I will share my understanding and expertise in this area with other educators in the hopes of them receiving valuable information to support and assist children in their work.

Conducting this study has also helped to shaped my opinion of the limitations that may present themselves for teachers. There is not much that I can do personally to address systemic or structural barriers that exist for individual families or within society as a whole. I have come to the realization that for substantial changes to be made in these areas, widespread efforts must take place and be done in conjunction with multiple systems. The small accomplishments that can be made on an individual basis are not without merit, however, do not address the bigger picture or the underlying causes to some of the tribulations within society. As one of the themes presented itself in this study of the absence of a child’s needs being fulfilled, I wondered throughout the study, what I would be able to do in order to assist children in these situations. I have come to realize that as a teacher, my role may be quite limited, however, I would be able to be there for them and be a supportive role model in order to help them temporarily and allow for further development of other healthy relationships in their lives.
5.3 Recommendations

Based on what I have been explored and the knowledge gained throughout the current study, recommendations for the education community have been synthesized. These recommendations fall into three main categories which will be discussed in detail below: teacher education and training enhancements as well as professional development; establishment of committees, support systems and assistance within the ministry and boards; collaboration of schools with outside organisations; and more widespread use of initiatives, programs and services that utilize a socio-ecological approach.

The first recommendation stems from the findings of the current study that there is a shift to include certain components or modules that speak to family involvement and behaviour strategies within teacher education programs. From my own experience, I have only witnessed the mention of family involvement on one or two occasions within my teacher education program and have had little training on strategies and methods to address behavioural issues within the classroom. In general, both of these topics deserve a great deal of focus insofar as service teachers will be dealing with these issues on a daily basis, and they are two of the more difficult topics to address.

While there are resources available to teachers to assist and support them in conducting their duties when behavioural issues arise, by not having the specific training, knowledge or confidence to utilize the best methods available, teachers are not provided an appropriate education within their preparation programs. It would be beneficial for a classroom teacher to have the knowledge on how to deal with behaviour issues effectively and prior to calling for support from a school’s SERT or otherwise. As per my own teacher education regarding behaviour management, it is more of a guessing game than it is applying what has been learned.

The specific recommendation that is made here is that teacher education programs increase their focus on classroom behaviour management with the inclusion of family involvement strategies, proven methods and techniques to address behaviours and knowledge on the root causes and explanations of negative behaviours. The inclusion of these areas should incorporate current research, benefits and specific methodologies to address negative behaviours. These lessons could include simple classroom management practices, elevating strategies when behaviours persist and putting strategies in place with
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the inclusion of the family and school support systems. As discussed earlier, involving the child and family within these strategies could have many positive benefits such as taking ownership and establishing a support network for all parties involved. I will also be recommended that current teachers enhance their knowledge by looking into current research for the causes and explanations of negative behaviours to depart from any misconceptions they may hold as well as use best practice strategies to most effectively address problem behaviours, reduce further harm and reduce or eliminate any barriers that the family may have in their inclusion.

The second recommendation that will be made is that committees, support systems and assistance be established or more available to teachers through the Ministry of Education and school boards. In 2010, the Ministry of Education amended regulation 612/00 which established the creation of Parent Involvement Committees for school boards (Education Act, 2010). In theory, these committees could play a major role in shifting the dynamics of family involvement within schools and toward that with teachers and could be a positive step forward. The role of the Parent Involvement Committee in the TDSB: “Consult and work with parents, staff, and community to identify issues related to parent engagement for discussion and information” (Toronto, 2016). The problem here is that these committees will not address the issues of inclusion on the school level or assist the classroom teacher toward including families. The purpose of these committees as stated in Ontario Regulation 330/10 made under the Education Act is “…to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement and well-being” (Education Act, 2010). The benefit of these committees is therefore going toward the school board and not to individual teachers or schools. It is hereby recommended that committees, support systems and resources be made available by the school boards in order to aid current teachers to establish or strengthen bonds they have with families and communities they serve.

The next recommendation is that there be increased collaboration between schools and outside organisations that serve children and communities. While it may be difficult to measure the extent to which these programs and services are being utilized by teachers and schools, there should be an enhanced awareness and availability of their use. Through strengthening the connections between schools and external organizations and service
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providers, the education community could increase its effectiveness of addressing the needs of children who lack a loving and supportive family. There are specific organizations and community outreach groups who make it their missions to provide children relief when they are lacking the fulfillment of specific needs in their lives. In many cases, it would be the role of a family member to recognize this void in a child’s life, however, for those who do not have that support network established, they may go without this. Teachers could have the ability facilitate contact with external organisations or community groups could extend their reach to have an impact on children who require their services. The application of this recommendation would require further investigation as to how it could be best accomplished. One possible way would be to first establish connections between schools with outside partners and service providers, then to make teachers and schools aware of their functions and how they could be contacted when thought to be beneficial.

The final recommendation made through the findings of the current study is that there is more of a widespread use of initiatives, programs and services that utilize a socio-ecological approach toward the education of children. Addressing persistent negative behaviours and reducing barriers that may exist for family inclusion are very complicated issues. There are many limitations placed on a teacher or school to effectively address some of these problems as they are ingrained into our education system as well as socio-economic and cultural systems. The socio-ecological approach recognises how each of these systems are intertwined and looks to how each of the subsystems effects the other within its approach. Thus, in order to make a substantial impact toward improving the quality of lives of children and those that work with them in the education community, a dynamic approach that utilizes all aspects of what touches these areas should be employed. Utilizing a socio-ecological approach is not necessarily difficult, rather, it requires a shift in the way we think about and address problems that exist. Teacher education programs do have components of gaining an understanding of the social realities that exist for the communities they serve, however, more attention and focus of the interconnection between systems and subsystems should be given at all levels of the education system. We should focus our attention on what we can do between the board level to the classroom and within the entire community we serve in order for all of the
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efforts being done to actually see benefits reaching the child and entire communities.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Through the research conducted in the current study, some major themes that exist in the education community have been identified. Through a review of the existing literature and discussions with current teachers, this study has allowed for the discovery of some of the issues that surround negative behaviours in the classroom and perspectives as to why some families lack involvement in their children’s education. Upon completion of this study, there is still a desire to learn more about the specific strategies that would best address negative behaviours when parents lack involvement. Insight has been gained as to what options are available when there are negative behaviours and families are not involved, however, have there is still room to better understand what the best practices in this area are. We know the courses of action that teachers can take in Ontario to address the behaviour of a child when it has escalated and what limitations exist for them, however, are these practices the best possible courses of action available to address the underlying issues? Further attention should be given to this area in future educational research. The main research question of this study has produced some insight yet is limited in scope. As this topic could become the reality of many educators, research focusing on this area would be ideal to better prepare pre-service teachers as well as those currently practicing.

Scholars should also focus their attention to the barriers that exist for some families in society to be included in the education of their children. These factors have been found to be difficult ones to address as they are entrenched in society and challenging to address on an individual basis. Research could look into what strategies could be viable in order to mitigate the issues that surround this topic. Subsequent research should also focus on how it would be best to accomplish a socio-ecological approach to identity and address the inter-related issues between systems and subsystems that effect the well-being and development of children within and beyond the education system.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The current study has been an investigation of the strategies and rationale to be
used with children who display negative behaviour when their families lacked involvement in their education. The data derived throughout this study has uncovered four main themes: the relationship between families and teachers; explanations and understanding of behaviour; children’s needs that are absent from their lives; and the systemic, structural, social and cultural barriers.

The above mentioned themes have been further explored and extended to form a discussion on the implications and recommendations made. The data derived from the interviews revealed that parents could be seen as either partners or barriers to an educator. The second implication realized through the course of this study was that looking at the causes of behaviour is of great significance for educators to understand in order to address it. The current study also revealed that teachers might come across students whose needs are not being met in their everyday lives. The forth implication discovered through conducting the current study is that certain additional obstacles exist that make it difficult for teachers to effectively address some of the negative behaviours of children. The last two broad implications have been shown to be best understood through the lens of the socio-ecological approach.

This particular study is significant to me personally as I have been able to gain substantial knowledge that will lend itself to be included into my own practices as a future classroom teacher. The main implications of this study help to shape my life in two main ways: toward my practices inside and outside of the classroom and the acquisition of knowledge I carry forward and share with others. I also wish to extend the benefits I have derived from this study toward other educators whose path I cross in the future.

Four recommendations have been made based on the knowledge derived throughout conducting this study. The first recommendation that has been made here is that teacher education programs increase their focus on classroom behaviour management with the inclusion of family involvement strategies, proven methods and techniques to address behaviours and knowledge on the root causes and explanations of negative behaviours. The second recommendation made is that committees, support systems and assistance be established or more available to teachers through the Ministry of Education and school boards. The next recommendation is that there be increased collaboration between schools and outside organisations that serve children and communities. The final
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recommendation made through the findings of the current study is that there is more of a widespread use of initiatives, programs and services that utilize a socio-ecological approach toward the education of children.

Areas for further research were suggested that include taking the main research question of this study further, on a larger scale and exploring ways for teachers to be most effective in this area. Scholars should also focus their attention to the barriers that exist for some families in society to be included in the education of their children. Subsequent research should also focus on how it would be best to accomplish a socio-ecological approach to identity and address the inter-related issues between systems and subsystems that effect the well-being and development of children within and beyond of the education system.

The outcome of this study has and will continue to have a substantial impact to me personally in my future teaching practices and I hope to promulgate its importance to other educators I will meet and work with. The findings from this research and in this specific area are important to all classroom teachers, school administration and support staff and also have implications at the board and Ministry level. Having an increased focus of the well-being of children through appropriately addressing their behaviours and attempting to involve their families further through acknowledging and reducing barriers, the education community would be more effective in all of their endeavors. A system-wide shift to a more socio-ecological approach at attempting to find best practice strategies could prove to be beneficial and would address the multiple levels and complexities that were uncovered and discussed throughout this study.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Joshua Drury and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on strategies used by educators to deal with children’s negative behaviours. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience in implementing strategies and techniques to effectively deal with such behaviours and think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor ________________. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Joshua H. Drury
(416) 829-4501
joshua.drury@mail.utoronto.ca
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Course Instructor’s Name: __________________________

Contact Info: ________________________________

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Joshua Drury and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

A). Background information.

What grade are you currently teaching?

How long have you been teaching?

What is your educational background?

Do you have any additional qualifications or other training?

B). What/how: Factors of negative behaviour, parental involvement and strategies used.

In your own words, how would you define negative behaviours?

How often would you say that children are disruptive or display negative behaviours in the classroom?

What types of behaviours do children display that you would consider negative (examples)?

What do you feel are some of the difficulties in dealing with negative behaviours of children?

Have you ever had to contact family members of children who display negative behaviours? How was their response to you contacting them?

Have you ever witnessed family members not interested in assisting with your attempts at correcting negative behaviours? Could you explain what happened?

What type of techniques and strategies do you use when children display negative behaviours in the classroom? (Such as behaviour modifications, accommodations such as IEPs, assessment and diagnosis suggestions).

What do you do when behaviours continue following your initial interventions? Trace steps/stages.

Have you ever tried to involve families within your strategies? How did these methods work out?

At what point in your interventions do you attempt to involve families?
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Have you ever witnessed families not eager to participate or disagree with strategies? How has that made you feel?

What steps would you take after realizing that a family does not want to be or refuses to be involved?

What types of strategies have you or could you use when families lack involvement?

C). Why. Why do you think that families might be reluctant to be involved in dealing with behaviours?

Which techniques have you found to be effective or ineffective?

Why do you feel that certain abovementioned strategies have been found to work or not work in this situation?

Do you think that there are any factors involved in determining the level of a family’s involvement? If so, what might they be and why? Have you noticed a difference in involvement of parents from different ages, ethnicities or SES?

Do you think that a family’s involvement in assisting in your strategies to correct negative behaviours has an impact on your ability to eliminate or reduce such behaviours? Please explain.

D). Barriers, limitations and next steps. What barriers or limitations do you feel exist for you to be able to be most successful in dealing with children’s negative behaviours in general?

What barriers or limitations do you feel exist for you to be able to be most successful in dealing with children’s negative behaviours when families lack involvement?

What advice would you give to a new teacher in terms of behaviour management and specifically in terms of parental involvement?

What else could you share with me about your experiences or strategies for dealing with negative behaviours of children?