Teacher Perspectives on the Consequences of Informally Labeling Children as Delinquent

By

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Abstract

The present study examined teacher perceptions of informal labeling. Research studies of labeling have either focused on the effects of formal labels on the lives of children with exceptionalities and mental health issues, or the effects of informal labeling by parents, peers and teachers. This study adds to the growing research by examining how teachers work to mitigate the harmful effects of students who have been ascribed a label. Data were gathered through semi-structures interviews conducted with 2 teachers who have personally experienced informal labels when they were young. The results show that teachers conceptualize delinquency as behaviour that is different from the norm and they recognize it as being something that requires additional attention. The implications of the study for policy makers and parents are discussed as well as some recommendations for parents and practitioners are offered.

Key Words: Informal labeling, delinquency, behavioural, teacher perceptions, children
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

Rules govern the lives of people in all civilizations. The enforcement of such rules leads to the categorization of certain behaviors as deviant when rules are not followed. Social stigma is the disapproval of those who do not fit the required social norms.

Researchers and theorists in the field of deviance have suggested that the label “deviant” is assigned to a person as a result of the reaction to another person’s behavior (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 1973) or to borrow the words of Simmons (1969), “deviance, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder” (pg. 4). This implies that a person is labeled only when another person perceives his/her behavior as deviant. Labels are ascribed formally through agents of social order or control and informally through the interactions between people who adhere to common rules (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). There is a need to investigate the negative effects on children informally labeled as deviant and how they are perceived.

Although many researchers in the field have examined the issue of labeling of children extensively, this study adds to the research by examining the long-term effects of negative childhood labels. A growing number of studies on formal labeling have been focused on children with exceptionalities or disabilities and mental health issues and the effects of such labels on the lives of children (Gates, 2010; Macharey & Von Suchodoletz, 2008; O’Reilly, 2007; St. John, 1991; Suchar, 1978). For instance, Urquhart, Sinclair, and Fraser (2007) conducted a study with children to determine their attitude and behavioral intentions towards their peers exhibiting symptoms of ADHD and whether a diagnostic label would influence their attitudes and intentions. The results
indicated that the children’s attitudes were generally negative due to the characteristics shown by the children with ADHD and not the addition of a label. In short, this study suggests that labels do not influence the children’s perceptions of each other formal labels have a negative impact on interactions with peers. Less attention has been given to the impact of informal labels.

With deviance comes the concept of informal labels, which are labels applied to individuals by someone without the official or professional authority to distinguish between deviant and non-deviant behaviour (Liu, 2000; Ray & Downs, 1986). Informal deviant acts have been seen as behaviours that might raise an eyebrow but will not encourage a person to call the police. Examples of deviant acts include behaviours like belching loudly or standing unnecessarily close to another person. Studies of informal labeling have established correlations between the effects of informal labeling by parents, teachers, or peers on children’s deviant behaviour and their engagement in delinquent acts (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray & Ray, 2003; Matsueda, 1992). The results revealed that labeling by significant others negatively impacts the lives of those individuals. These studies have primarily focused on adolescents and youth and have not considered childhood labeling. This is a matter that requires the acknowledgment and attention of all educators, as the needs of these students are being ignored, and their invisibility from the curriculum can result in their feeling that schools are an unsafe place to learn. When informal labeling is the focus of research, much of the emphasis is placed the effects of informal labeling on delinquency. Fewer studies have examined the negative perceptions and reactions of parents, teachers, and peers. This study will address this gap.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

Societal reactions of peers, family members, and educators’ will eventually define the nature and extent of the delinquency associated with perceptions, identities, and actions that reinforce the delinquent label. Edwin Lemert (1976) may have stated the case best when he noted that “labeling seems to be largely an invention of its critics” (p. 244). For instance, let us assume a teacher, who expects a student to be slothful, is likely to treat that student in such a way that it draws out the very same response he or she expects. In view of this problem, the goal of my research is to learn what teachers’ perspectives are on the effects of informal labeling for students, and to learn how they mitigate informal labeling. The focus is to unravel what delinquency looks like to teachers and the different connotations of the word ‘delinquency’.

This study contributes to the growing literature on labeling, and more precisely, informal labeling of children. This study is a novelty in the field as there is a paucity of information regarding how children form their self-conceptions for which they attach negative labels. In this context, the purpose of this study is to learn how a sample of teachers work to mitigate the labeling of children in schools, whether by the system or their teachers and/or peers. More specifically, from the perspective of my participants and from literature, I hope to explain the implications for children who are stigmatized as juvenile delinquents leading to a negative self-image. I will focus on learning from teachers what behaviours they look for as indicators of delinquency and how they conceptualize it, recognize it, and respond to it. This study will be useful to parents, teachers and other professionals working with children.
1.2 Research Questions

The main question guiding this research study is: What are the perspectives of teachers on the effects of labeling, and how do they work to mitigate these effects while supporting these students?

Subsidiary questions include:

- What does the label “delinquent student” mean to the participants’? Who are these students’ in their view, and what are some of their needs?

- What range of factors and resources support educators in their capacity to support students who have been labeled as “delinquent students”?

- What are the educators’ goals when working with students who have been labeled “delinquent”? What are the range of instructional approaches and strategies they enact to meet these goals?

- What range of challenges and barriers do educators confront in this work? How do they respond to these challenges? What would help them further in meeting these challenges?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

As someone who has experienced the stigmatization, rejection, and social distance related to being labeled delinquent, I have developed a strong desire to challenge this paradigm. I was labeled as an English language learner (ELL) student immediately because Italian, not English, was my native tongue. Over the years, I felt shuffled from place to place, from room to room, away from other students. As the detachment grew stronger, and the criticisms became louder, I began to form an identity of self-worthlessness. I was isolated from most learning experience that my peers comfortably
enjoyed. It was a struggle for me to “fit in” with other children as their identities reflected the cultural norm. My junior years were full of stress and anxiety as I was unable to express my feelings to others. The feeling of insignificance impeded my strength to succeed and be resilient to life’s challenges.

Informal labeling, meaning that the student is not identified as having a specific disability outlined by state education regulation, was troubling for me as it generated teachers’ expectations and shaped their beliefs of what I was capable of achieving. This also was the beginning of a preconceived notion that peers had about me, which were held onto for years to come. This isolation persisted into the junior and senior grades where I was increasingly looked at as an outsider. I felt labeled as slow, anti-social, and lazy, all of which were incorrect. Although those words were unfitting, I was certain that individuals’ judgments about me were accurate. My future did not look bright, as I became involved in deviant social groups and behaved in nonconforming ways.

In secondary school, I rebelled and made my discomfort with being marginalized known. Despite years of reform efforts, academic underachievement, and other numerous factors that contributed to my delinquency, I continued my search for identity. Being marginalized was instrumental in my commitment for further deviance. My adolescent years turned out to be menacing, as I was vulnerable and experienced peer pressure. These dissociative groups of friends convinced me to take certain actions in order to be accepted into their social clique. Peers played an increasingly important role if my life at the time as I was able to explore my identity and develop a sense of belonging. Nothing else mattered to me but to conform to reckless behaviour and live up to the identity that was unjustly given to me as a child. According to Brezina and Aragones (2004):
To the extent that an individual is branded a “‘delinquent’” by authorities, and to the extent that significant others share and reinforce this view, the labeled individual may come to internalize his or her deviant status—to see the negative label as a valid description of his or her essential character—and behave accordingly (p. 514).

I needed inspiration from others to reach my potential but felt that the encouragement was not there. It was only when my high school science teacher told me that I would “amount to nothing” that I reached my breaking point and decided to take my learning experience and growth into my own hands. Regardless of my past, I analyzed this particular situation and made an appropriate decision that changed my life forever. This science teacher, who obviously lacked one of the most important traits of being a great teacher, motivated me to become a better person. He sparked something within that I did not know existed. I was determined to not only prove others’ perceptions wrong, but also to challenge the delinquent labels I imposed on myself.

As someone who has experienced feeling excluded from classroom learning because of others proposed assumptions, I have experienced many consequences throughout my years of study. Who I am, what I believe, and the experiences I have had inevitably impact my research. I hope this brief description of my personal location in the research, and my lived experiences and desires that brought me to it will provide readers with a context within which they can understand why and how I have conducted the studies and interpreted the findings.

1.4 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I have conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 2 educators about their strategies for integrating students who have been informally labeled as delinquent into the school
curriculum. Polkinghorne (2005) defines qualitative research as an inquiry-based method of conducting research where the purpose of data collection is to provide evidence about the detailed depiction of human experiences. Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature, looking particularly at the labeling theory, developmental theories related to schemas, deviancy among the adolescent years, the implications of stigmatization, and the role of educators/caregivers surrounding this topic. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. In Chapter 4 I report the research findings and discuss their implications in light of the literature. Finally, in Chapter 5 I make recommendations for practice, and I identify further reading and study. References and a list of appendixes follow.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

**2.0 Introduction to the Literature Review**

This literature review will begin with defining key terms in this study and will then move on to addressing the issues related to labeling children as behavioural. In this context, I will at times refer to behavioural as deviant acts expressed by those ascribed an informal label. Furthermore, the literature review will look at studies that address the reason for increase of deviant behaviour in adolescents. In order to construct a clear picture of the obstacles that labeled students face within classrooms, I examined how teachers perceive delinquency and how the expectations of the labeled changes. Lastly, I will examine how a direct response to labeling an adolescent changes his or her behaviour in accordance to the label.
2.1 Understanding Labels

In order to understand how the labels given to individuals may impact their lives, it is wise to understand first how the labels are created and reinforced within societies. In this section, I explain how what is deemed deviant is determined, reinforced and integrated into society and why what is termed deviant may vary within and between societies. This will serve as a precedent for further exploration of labeling theory.

Although most members of a society normally adhere to rules, there are some rules constituted by specific groups and organizations that vary from what is deemed desirable by all. Hence the compliance to one set of rules could very well be the infringement on another set of rules within the same society (Becker, 1963, Simmons, 1969). For instance, a child born into a deviant community within a larger society will grow up having been socialized with the morals and values of that sect which will most likely infringe on the rules of the society at large (Lemert, 1951). His/her violation of the moral code of the society is a result of the different cultures existing within the same location. The labeling literature points to the idea that societies create rules for behaviour; what is considered as deviant or conforming behaviour is culture-specific (Schur, 1971). Durkheim (1938) referred to deviance as any behaviour or action that affronts the collective conscience of individuals within a society, which as a consequence attracts punishment. Further, the environmental context should be taken into consideration (Simmons, 1969) since what may be labeled deviant changes across time and places or locations. Brown (2010) explained that mobility through various social contexts revealed differing acts considered to be undesirable or deviant. Hence, anyone at any point in time can be labeled as deviant depending on the society in which he/she finds himself/herself.
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(Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010; Lemert, 1951; Simmons, 1969).

2.2 Social Construction of Labels

The notion of how society creates rules for behaviour is embedded within social constructionism or social constructivist thought. Social constructionism is referred to as a method of studying the production and maintenance of social order among human beings in society (Glass, 2007). While there is no one specific theory or school of thought of social constructionism, there are some central features identified as belonging to it (Glass, 2007; Lock & Strong, 2010). These tenets will aid in understanding of how societies make rules that differ from each other.

According to Lock and Strong (2010), one of the main tenets of social constructionism is the focus on meaning and understanding as the principal trait of human activities. With regards to meaning, the interest is on how language, which is symbolic, provides varying social experiences for people who speak the same language as compared to other people who do not share the same language (Lock & Strong, 2010). Another feature of social constructionism is that meaning and understanding are embedded in social interactions such that through communication, meanings attached to symbols are agreed upon (Ibid). They further explained that meaning–making is embedded within the sociocultural processes of particular societies and that it varies across time.

An individual’s knowledge or understanding of a thing is shaped through interactions with others and through the norms and values constructed socially and historically governing a person’s life (Creswell, 2013). Through socialization and our interactions with others we learn and get ideas about things and gain experiences. Harris
(1995) refers to socialization as the process through which an individual becomes approved of in his or her society and further explains that through socialization individuals within a society tend to become similar to each other. A society or group connotes a culture. In a broader sense, individuals within a culture or group have their lives shaped through socialization by learning norms and values that are constructed historically.

In 1963, Becker wrote in *Outsiders* that “modern societies are highly differentiated along social class lines, ethnic lines, occupational and cultural lines and therefore do not often share the same rules” (p.15). He further elaborated that the challenges people encountered in their environments, their personal history and traditions encouraged the formation of different rules. Therefore the idea that language is symbolically based allows people within the same community to communicate over time and agree on what meaning to attach to an idea or object, and explains how what is deemed wrong or deviant in one society and within one society differs from another society and also how such ideas or views persist over the years.

Glass (2007), on the other hand, expanded on how social constructions, which are ideas that have been communicated, agreed upon and their ensuing meaning attached, contribute to the maintenance of social order in a society. He introduced the idea that social construction is intangible in that the social construction could refer to either notions or objects and these only gain meaning within a community as a result of interaction between members of that society who attach that meaning to the notion or object. Glass (2007) depicted a process through which the social order of a society is
attained and maintained, following the tenets of social constructionism aforementioned identified by Lock and Strong (2010).

The noteworthy addition by Glass (2007) that explains how social constructions within a society are adhered to was the introduction of the concept of “rewards” and “sanctions/punishments”. Through interactions between members of a community, meanings are attached to ideas and objects through socialization or the continuance of the interaction. Over time, new members of that community, that is children, learn these shared and agreed upon ideas, values and beliefs. However, in order to ensure that these socially determined constructs are obeyed, rewards and sanctions are applied. This view of rewards and sanctions further expands on how behaviours regarded as deviant differ from community to community and also how the labeling of others comes about. It shows that in maintaining the social order, those of a particular society will sanction people who do not adhere to the agreed upon or shared ideas and beliefs through the labeling of individuals as deviant.

Having explored literature that is focused on deviance as a social construction, and how one comes to be labeled, the following subsections will explore labeling theory in greater depth. This will allow the examination of the sequential process of labeling, which outlines a reciprocal relationship between the labeler and labeled, explain how a person adopts a deviant label conferred on him/her, which then becomes his/her primary means of identification, and the ensuing negative consequences for the labeled person. Additionally, the role of power in the labeling process is discussed to show the extent of influence of people in authority.

2.3 Defining “Deviancy”
Although there has been extensive research into deviant labels, Howard Becker is identified as the creator of the labeling theory. Founded in the book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1963), it is this labeling theory that is perhaps his most important influential contribution to sociological and criminological knowledge. Becker’s research was influenced by Cooley’s “looking-glass self”, Mead’s theories on the internalization of the self, and Lemert’s “social constructionism”. Among these pioneers, Howard Becker deserves ample credit. Possibly the most frequently quoted statement of the labeling position is Becker’s proclamation in *Outsiders* (1963) that deviance “is created by society … social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders” (Becker, 1963; pg. 114). From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender”. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied.

Deviant behaviour is behaviour that people label based on reactions and responses of others’ labeling an individual as such. Becker (1963), states that no particular act is inherently deviant until a group with socially powerful statuses or positions label it as deviant. For instance, in Beckers’ words, “in addition to recognizing that deviance is created by the responses of people to particular kinds of behaviour, by the labeling of that behaviour as deviant, we must also keep in mind that the rules created and maintained by such labeling are not universally agreed to. Instead, they are the object of conflict and disagreement, part of the political process of society” (Becker, 1963; p. 18). From this, one can understand that labeling another as deviant is publicly wrongdoing as the
definition of deviancy is a product of societies conventional norms and institutions.
Exploring Beckers’ views on labeling and deviancy, it is clear to see that the deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied and deviant behaviour is behaviour that people label.

2.4 Labeling Theory

Labeling theory suggests that labeling occurs when the behaviour of an individual is identified by another person as deviant or wrong (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 1973). It connotes a reciprocal relation between the actions of an individual and society’s response to that act. In other words, labels are ascribed formally through agents of social order or control (e.g., police) and informally through the interactions between people (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) who adhere to common rules (Becker, 1963).

Research on deviance indicates that once an individual is labeled there is a greater likelihood that the person will become more deviant as a result of being labeled (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). This view is expanded on in the Sequential Model of Deviance. This Model indicates that there is a process through which an individual adopts a deviant status, which Lemert (1951) referred to as “self-defining junctures” (p.274). From the instant that an individual is labeled deviant, he/she forms the basis of a continuing pattern in deviant behaviour (primary deviance). Additional stages, called secondary deviance, result in the person internalizing the label and integrating the label as part of his/her identity. This integration forms the foundation of Lemert’s argument for primary (first occurrence) and secondary deviance (subsequent occurrences).

Brown (2010) explained that there is usually a “downward mobility” once a label is attached to a person. For instance, an individual who engaged in a violating act that
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Zhang (1997) addressed the issue of the informal labeling process and delinquency in his work on “Informal Reactions and Delinquency” and, consistent with Matsueda’s (1992) labeling theory, found that informal labeling negatively influenced the life of the youth. The probability of a parent labeling his/her child was based on a prior delinquent behaviour of the child and this was most likely among Non-White younger youth whose parents had lower levels of education. A greater likelihood of self-labeling and self-degradation among youth was found due to youths’ own delinquent actions and labeling by significant others, resulting in a negative impact on their self-perception or self-identity (Zhang, 1997). Another pattern identified in the literature was that the youths’ perceptions of their parents’ labeling created feelings of social rejection or isolation from family, friends and school (Zhang, 1997). However perceived labeling by friends or teachers resulted in feelings of isolation from the labeler. That is, if a teacher
happened to be the labeler, the labeled experienced isolation from friends as a result of being labeled by those peers and being rejected from school. Consistent with labeling theory, labeling by parents and teachers showed a significant increase in successive delinquent behaviour and perceived labeling by the parent led to higher involvement in delinquent behaviour among males than females (Matsueda, 1992; Zhang, 1997).

There has been plenty of empirical research around the effects of formal labeling on delinquency, but fewer studies have examined the effects of informal labeling on delinquency. Parents, teachers, and peers play an important role in the labeling process and although this focus has been overlooked, questions still remain as to how teachers perceive and handle situations where labeling is an issue. In order to understand the nature of deviance itself, one must first understand the reasons behind the label and why some individuals are labeled and others are not. The overview above reveals that mostly people in authority give formal or informal labels which suggests that power plays a significant role in labeling. Therefore, understanding how individuals gain power over others is necessary.

### 2.5 Power

The process of labeling indicates that specific individuals within a society are represented above most and therefore hold authority to make and enforce rules. For instance parents make rules for their children and likewise, in the classroom, teachers make rules for their students to comply with (Becker, 1963). There is a general idea that certain people within society make rules to which others must adhere and it is these individuals who determine what act is a norm violating behaviour (Becker, 1963). Brown (2010) explained that through social interactions among members of a community there
are social comparisons that produce feelings of inferiority or superiority. Individuals then begin to differentiate between themselves and others based on a quality which they feel one possesses or the vice versa.

A recurrent theme in the literature reviewed so far is the negative impact of labeling. Therefore, further discussion is needed to grasp the depth of the impact of labeling. Consideration will be given to how a label creates a stigma for the labeled person resulting in isolation or rejection from others, lowered expectations and further increase in deviant behaviour. Also how individuals with a deviant label may not continue on to further deviance is discussed.

2.6 **Effect of Labels**

Labeling is a phenomenon that is prevalent in society and people are labeled for various reasons. This can be a direct response to their behaviour while others may be due to certain stereotypes attached to them based on looks, race or illness and these names often have a negative impact on the labeled individual. Research has shown that the labels given to people become the primary means of identification of the person by others. This often results in the stereotyping of such persons and has negative consequences on their lives (Gates, 2010; Simmons, 1969).

Deviance and labeling imply that labels are ascribed to individuals who are perceived by others or members of a larger society as having violated the rules or on the basis of being different. Becker (1963) explained that a labeled person often gains a master status (primary means of identification) on the basis of having broken a rule. This person is perceived as different and considered capable of repeating the offence and therefore become stigmatized. Goffman (1963) referred to stigma as the undesirable traits
or characteristics associated to a person as a result of a label. Similarly, Brown (2010) stated that children with imprisoned parents are labeled and this becomes their means of identification. This depicts the notion of labeling and stigmatizing people on the basis of their differences and this is highlighted in the work of Brown (2010). Brown (2010) expounded that stigmatization of people within a society occurred as a function of differences between people. She indicated that in order for people to feel superior to others, they make comparisons on the basis of difference in anything, such as physical features or capabilities, and attribute undesirable characteristics to them.

The identification of a person by the deviant label leads to the creation of secondary deviance (Lemert, 1967) or the self-fulfilling prophecy (Brown, 2010) through a process of isolation/rejection, lowered expectations and role expectation. The label implies a role ascription to the individual because a stereotype is given to the label. For instance, if a person commits a theft, his master status becomes ‘thief’; hence there is a role expectation of him. This may result in the exclusion of such a person in society because there is the view that he will commit the earlier offence again. Brown (2010) expanded on the notion of role expectation and stated that the stereotype connected with a certain stigma results in the lowered expectations of the labeled person. These individuals likely have low self-esteem as they are not encouraged nor expected to be successful (Brown, 2010). The expectation of a specific behaviour from a person due to a label may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy because individuals have their own ideas of how one with a specific label should behave.

Labeled individuals who experience the social rejection/isolation unfortunately identify with and respond to the ascribed label (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010; Simmons,
1969). An early study conducted by Lemert (1951) found that as a consequence of internalization, children tended to regard themselves as the negative meaning associated to the label, e.g., “child of incarcerated parent”. He also explained the internalization process through the depiction of the formation of secondary deviance. He described the creation of secondary deviance as a continuous mutual relationship between the individual’s deviant behaviour and societies reaction. In his illustration of how one initial deviant act of a boy resulted in him becoming more deviant, Lemert (1967) explained that when the teacher associated a deviant label to him, it created some anger and enmity that may have led to a perceived role expectation for him.

2.7 Effects of Teacher Expectations on Student Achievement

Early in the school year, teachers intuitively develop clear expectations for the performance of each student early in the year. According to Reis (1989), most students confirm teachers’ expectations as they create self-fulfilling prophecies, create perceptual biases, and impact student performances. The self-fulfilling prophecy is sometimes produced when teachers evoke a certain expectation that may then lead to biased evaluations of student’s performance (Reis & Jussim, 1989). Furthermore, teachers’ expectations may also lead to perceptual biases in which is identified as “the tendency to interpret, perceive, remember, or explain students’ actions in ways consistent with their expectations” (Reis & Jussim, 1989; p. 469). Perceptual bias means that teachers view students as performing more consistently with their expectations than is warranted on the basis of students' achievement (Reis & Jussim, 1989). Therefore, teachers' expectations should correlate more strongly with their own judgments of students' performance (e.g., grades) than with independent assessments, such as standardized test scores (Reis &
In other words, perceptual bias represents a teachers’ accuracy at predicting a students’ in-class performance rather than the performance on assessments criterions. Not only can teacher expectations affect student performance, but they can also affect student self-concept of ability (Reis & Jussim, 1989). Research indicates that if teachers develop erroneous expectations, self-fulfilling prophecies may be the outcome (Reis & Jussim, 1989).

2.8 Sense of Self and Identity

A general overview of the literature on effects of a label on an individual highlighted so far indicates a potential influence on the sense of self/identity of a stigmatized person, therefore creating the need for further exploration and understanding. This section covers ideas on how an individual realizes his/her self-concept and explains how this concept is greatly influenced by the views of others.

Ross (1992) explains that self-concept can be defined as the notion one has about himself/herself or how a person perceives himself/herself. Through interactions or experiences with the physical and social environment, individuals gain their sense of self and this gained self-concept impacts their behaviour (Ross, 1992). The formation of an identity develops from infancy and becomes more definitive with the introduction of language and the development in cognitive abilities. For instance, Ross (1992) explained that children become conscious of themselves between the ages of 12 to 18 months by making inferences from the observation that when a child is placed in front of a mirror, he or she is able to identify himself/herself. He further elaborated that though the sense of awareness gained by a child is perceived by the recognition of himself/herself in a mirror
or picture, it remains unknown what he/she thinks of himself/herself. The introduction of language allows such ideas of self-concept to be expressed by the child.

Two distinctions can be made in the conceptualization of the sense of self, namely, the “existential self” and the “categorical self” (Lewis, 1986). The existential self is the self-awareness of an individual as a subject, the ‘I’ self, the idea that one exists unique from other individuals. The categorical self, the ‘me’ self, is how one knows himself/herself to be like which is gained over a period of time (Lewis, 1986). This includes features such as skin colour, age, gender, occupation, traits, status, etc. (Lewis, 1986). This category is the means by which people classify themselves or people classify other individuals. This concept of the categorical self sheds light on the reason or means through which a label has an impact on the sense of self of an individual.

The categorical self is reflected in Cooley’s (1902) concept of the social self, which describes how labels can influence the identity of a person. He defined the social self as an idea or a set of ideas understood from communicative life. According to Cooley (1902) there is no sense of “I” without its corresponding sense of they, them, him, her, or you. For instance, one cannot feel humiliation without a thought to others. He elaborated on how the “I” that represents an individual functions in the social world through his looking-glass self-concept (Cooley, 1902). The looking-glass self-concept refers to how an individual would see his/her image reflected in a mirror and be either pleased or displeased based on the scale of judgment held in his/her mind (Cooley, 1902). If the judgment scale is influenced by a person significant to the individual, the perception of the individual’s beliefs, values, and behaviour are more likely to become internalized and part of the individual’s sense of self (Cooley, 1902).
INFORMALLY LABELING CHILDREN AS DELINQUENT

The ideas gathered from literature indicate that societies create rules for behaviour and those who violate the rules are labeled. The label becomes the main means of identification for the labeled person due to stigma associated with the label resulting in isolation/rejection from society, lowered expectations, self-blame/guilt and emotional distress. The labeled individual tends to take on the identity of the meaning attached to the label. An individual cannot think of him/herself without a thought to others; therefore whatever he/she would think of him/herself would be influenced by what others would say he/she is. Also, it is not clarified that all who are labeled will act into further deviancy behaviours as some circumstances, or resiliency, can cease further involvement in deviant activity.

2.9 The Impact of Teachers’ Expectations

A gap in research exists between deviancy and how adolescents actually become known as “deviant” and what behaviours they exhibit. There are many factors that impact children’s behaviours and contribute to their educational success. Unfortunately, children’s academic outcomes are strongly influence by teachers’ perceptions (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Educators must know that regardless of whether their views are positive or negative, they are influencing students’ learning outcomes and self-perceptions (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). According to Sirota and Bailey (2009), teachers’ expectations between minority and non-minority children vary and the outcome of this “cultural mismatch” affects the quality of education that a child is likely to receive. My experiences as an English language learner (ELL) are mirrored in the research findings as the outcomes reflect how I was referred to as a child needing special attention to an adolescent who is deviant. As the article mentions, teachers prefer to refer to children with linguistic
differences to special classes and thus classify them as learning disabled (Sirota & Bailey, 2009).

2.10 **Associating with Those of Similar Status**

When the act of deviance is publicly announced, the “stereotypical” images of those being labeled are highlighted. Bernburg (2006) has found that those stigmatized feel comfortable with others of similar status rather than associating themselves with the non-labeled groups. One of the reasons why labeled adolescents may withdraw from interactions with conventional peers is because they become aware of stereotypical beliefs obtained in their communities. Bernburg (2006), points out that the individual stigmatized may think that certain beliefs exist based on their learned perception of what people think of criminals which in turn makes them fear rejection and feel most comfortable associating with delinquent peers. Bernburg (2006), explains that social interaction between “normal” people and the stigmatized is often characterized by uneasiness, embarrassment, ambiguity, and intense efforts at impression management, and that these experiences are felt by those who bear the stigma as well as those who do not. In order to avoid feeling uncomfortable, the non-labeled and labeled adolescents may tend to avoid one another (Bernburg et al., 2006).

2.11 **Conclusion**

Current research shows that the consequences of labeling children are profound and it is the teacher’s responsibility to foster the development of not only the bloomers, but of those who require more attention. Through research, I learned that the shaped perceptions of teachers affects the self-concept of those labeled as deviant. It was interesting to learn that most children who violate a cultural norm do not all become
defined as deviant. It is sometimes underestimated how a label can be so powerful that it greatly changes a child’s self-concept and social-identity. Research is limited in regards to ways in which a negative label influences a students’ education and motivation to learn and prosper. In chapter 3, I describe the research methodology I discuss my research approach and procedures along with the instruments of data collection used. I also introduce the participants and review the sample criteria I applied, as well as my recruitment procedures. I will present ethical review procedures and also methodological limitations of the research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approaches that make up this study. It begins with an overview of the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments before elaborating specifically on participants sampling and recruitment. I have then explained data analysis procedures and reviewed the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. This chapter continues with identifying a range of methodological limitations, but also speaks to the strength of the methodology. Finally, it concludes with a brief summary of the key methodological approaches and my rationale for those decisions given the research purpose and questions of the study.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study draws on characteristics from phenomenology. Phenomenology has been defined in general terms as an inquiry to determine the essence of the shared experiences of people (Kupers, 2009). This idea was also captured by Creswell (2013) when he stated that the focus of phenomenological research is on detailing the common
experience shared by the participants of a phenomenon. Phenomenology highlights the notion that this approach is concerned with interpreting the experiences of individuals of a specific phenomenon in order to capture the essence of their experiences to derive a better understanding of the phenomenon or concept.

The qualitative approach to research is the position from which to conduct research that fosters particular ways of asking questions and particular ways of thinking through problems. My research study has been conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) state that those who engage in qualitative research are often employed to answer the whys and how’s of human behaviour, opinion, and experience. Researchers in fields as diverse as anthropology, education, nursing, psychology, sociology, and marketing regularly use qualitative methods to address questions about people’s ways of organizing, relating to and interacting with the world (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The primary purpose of a qualitative study is to understand a real-world problem, to build knowledge/ theory, to develop intervention/ program, to evaluate something, and/ or to inform a larger study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Engaging in qualitative research is for those who feel the need for certain information to be illuminated. As Creswell explains, “qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013; p. 44). Qualitative research is valuable for researchers who want to focus on eliciting people’s stories through conversation, written texts, or
through visual forms (Creswell, 2013). Hancock and Algozzine (2006), mention that the goal in qualitative research is to have an understanding of the situation being investigated primarily from the participant’s perspective rather than the researcher’s perspective. From this kind of approach, provides a textual description on the effects of labeling students as “behavioural” and to hear from educators how they work to mitigate these effects.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Interviewing is used very widely in qualitative research, and takes many different forms. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have differentiated qualitative interviews as unstructured, semi-structured and structured. These interviews were fairly informal, focused, and rather short. The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). In semi-structured interviewing, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered that take between 30 minutes to several hours to complete (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). This kind of interview provides the opportunity to hear about participants lived experiences as they volunteer to share such personal information and lives experiences (Creswell, 2013). This instrument of data collection is important as it allows for the interviewer to design and plan an interview that attends to the research focus and questions while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even redirect attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer (Creswell, 2013). Interviewing is an especially important means for data collection because, as Robert Weiss (1994) explains, interviewing not only gives us a window on the past, but it also provides great opportunity to learn about settings that would otherwise be closed to us: foreign societies, exclusive organizations, and more.
Key informants have volunteered to participate in this study and have been selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience, and role in a school setting, as it relates to the research purpose and the questions that I have.

Many researchers use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). This allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Semi-structure interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Using this approach, researchers “ask predetermined but flexibly worded questions, the answers to which provide tentative answers to the researchers’ questions” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; p.40). Forming a positive relationship with an individual who will be sharing personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred, it is necessary to include a set of questions at the beginning of the interview to develop rapport. The process of establishing rapport is an essential component of the interview as it involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

A mix of both planned and unplanned follow-up questions can be carefully considered to continue the conversation. While spontaneous, these should be as non-directive as possible (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The first set of interview questions were asked with the intention of learning more about the participant and their role in the education system, and their perspective on the topic of labeling in relation to behaviour. I probed what these educators knew about this issue, what their goals are when working with these students, and what challenges and barriers they have confronted in this work.
Given my research purpose and questions, the semi-structured protocol is appropriate as categories and themes emerge from the interviewees’ responses. Next, I will be addressing all methodological decision-making that pertains to my research participants.

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment and I review the strategies that I used to recruit participants. I have also included a section where I introduce each of the participants and provide a brief description of their professional background.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The participants in this study were selected based on the following criteria:

Criteria 1:

At least at one point participating teachers must have had at least one role in a behavioural support program so that they could speak to having been immersed around the discussion around labeling and behaviour. Participants must have had incorporate proactive strategies in their practice for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviour to create positive classroom environments. This criterion is valuable to my study, as insights will be shared as to how participants instructionally respond to the students needs and what opportunities for learning they created for those who exhibit delinquent behaviour.

Criteria 2:

Teacher participants have have a minimum of five years teaching experience. The rationale behind this specification is to ensure that participants have a wealth of
experience to share in the interviews in regards to education and delinquency. This specification is valuable towards my study as the insights about linking school performance and delinquency will not be limited.

Criteria 3:

Participating teachers have demonstrated leadership and/or expertise in the area of child development and behaviour. This may be in the form of providing professional development for colleagues, having completing a graduate degree with this focus, having written curriculum support material toward this end, or having completed workshops based on education and delinquency. This criterion makes sense for the study I am conducting, as participants will have experience working with children who demonstrate delinquent behaviour.

Criteria 4:

At least one participant must be a secondary school teacher who is aware of and/or has experienced the possible effects of informally labeling children as “delinquent” or “behavioural”. This criterion makes sense for my study because the participant will have a deeper understanding/ connection with the effects of informal labeling in childhood and its implications in later life or for one’s career choice.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/ Recruitment

Qualitative researchers must think purposively and theoretically about sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain, “sampling choices within and across cases are powerfully determinative of just which data will be considered and used in analysis” (p. 441). Generally, it is a researchers responsibility to determine which and how many people to select for their study; however, as a
student, it is my responsibility to follow the MTRP guidelines, which states that my study population must consist of 2 to 3 teacher participants. In order to justify my decisions about what criterions my participants must follow, I needed to adopt a sampling method. Creswell states that researchers may choose more than one sampling strategy in a single study (2013). Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research for the selection and size of participants and the location of the study (Creswell, 2013). There are several different purposeful sampling strategies to consider and in many cases on or more sampling approaches might be present (Creswell, 2013).

Maximum variation sampling is a popular approach in qualitative studies as it “…consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiates the sites and participants” (Creswell, 2013; p. 157). This approach was suitable for me, as I have established 3 sampling criterions for participant recruitment. According to Creswell (2013), the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives increases when the researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study. Given the small-scale nature of the study, I relied convenience sampling. This type of sampling advantageous to me because of the quickness with which data is gathered and participants volunteer to be part of the study (Creswell, 2013). I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and I relied on my existing contacts and networks to recruit my participants.

To recruit participants I contacted teacher associations and/or school boards and/or principals and provided them with an overview of my research study. I provided the participant criteria and asked that these individuals or organizations
distributed my information to teachers that they believed might have fulfilled my criteria. I provided my information to principals and organizations. This helped ensure that teachers were volunteering rather than feeling pressured to participate. I also contacted teachers who have worked in behavioural support systems in the school board in order to gain insights about strategies that the board employs to mitigate labeling surrounding this issue.

3.3.3 Participants Bios

In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, I have assigned each participant a pseudonym. Similarly, I have also refrained from using names of schools, neighbourhoods, or institutions.

Lucy

At the time of the interview, Lucy was in the middle of her twentieth year working as a behavioural support worker. She had taught primary grades throughout her career and had gone from school to school to assist students whose behaviour had an impact on his/her learning and achievement. Lucy had taught Grades 1 through Grade 8 and also had experience teaching Physical Education and Health. Her aspirations of becoming a behavioural support worker derived from the fact that she was once a victim of stigmatization. She shared personal stories of how her behaviours as a child were seen as “bad” by most of her teachers. Not only was she perceived deviant but also as not bright. She expressed that she was stereotyped as a child as someone with a set of characteristics based on biased perceptions of parents, teachers and peers. Lucy’s personal and professional experiences rationalized the harm of
informally labeling children and the fact that it is a powerful sociological explanation for underachievement in education.

Amanda

At the time of the interview, Amanda had been teaching at the same school for 7 years. Although she was currently working in a Public High School in Toronto, she had 5 years of experience working in an elementary school with Grades 7 and 8. What led her to her interest in student behaviour was the fact that her own teachers’ expectations had an impact on her self-identity when she was a child. Amanda’s personal experiences had guided her own teaching as an educator.

3.4 Data Analysis

Currently, there is a plethora of research about strategies to accommodate students who illuminate deviant behaviours successfully in classrooms. Initially, I conducted a literature review and continued to analyze the research throughout this study by organizing the data into themes that were reoccurring and drawing similarities and differences. Following this, the primary means of data collection was accomplished by conducting two face-to-face interviews with teachers currently teaching students who express deviant behaviours. Each interview was comprised of forty-one semi-structured interview questions to draw upon the interviewees’ experiences of teaching students that elicit deviancy, their teacher education experience, collaboration, inclusion, and strategies they utilize within the classroom. Both participants were asked the same set of questions and interviews were conducted at a time and place suitable for both.

Each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes in length and audio recorded to facilitate transcription of the data. Analysis of the data was initiated when I read the
transcripts several times to establish themes and patterns. The main themes that emerged from the data address the knowledge of delinquency from educators’ perspectives, effective classroom strategies to ensure meaningful learning experiences, the importance of support programs in the system, and the challenges that arise when fostering inclusion for students who are informally labeled as deviant. I have coded my data in search for common themes and divergences in the data as relevant to the research questions. The data was analyzed by highlighting parts of the transcripts that pertained to the questions. This was accomplished by assigning each question its own colour and highlighting the data according to its colour. Following this, the data was analyzed to see if the colour codes were present in the other transcripts and looked over to ensure that the overall interview experience pertained to the research question. The data was then grouped and assigned theme names.

Through the process of coding and transcribing, I have made meaning and interpreted the data based on my research questions. Given my research questions, the themes that emerged addressed topics including: beliefs and values regarding participants pedagogy surrounding the issues of informally labeling children as delinquent; personal experiences that led them to have an interest in this area of research; discipline strategies they have integrated within their classrooms to minimize potential risks while supporting their developmental needs; practice teaching in behavioural support programs to mitigate the harm that students encounter when informally labeled as delinquent; and challenges when responding to the child’s needs and parental concerns. Themes were coded according to similar responses shared by both participants. Although participants were
asked the same set of questions, both of their responses varied depending on personal experiences and perspectives.

Null data was also investigated to bring awareness to some components of the interview that may not have been identified. This component of the research process is critical, as it assists in identifying the gaps in the research that may have been a crucial component to achieving a successful research outcome.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

As a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate, there are several significant aspects to consider when reviewing the ethical review procedures for the MTRP. My task was to obtain information while listening and encouraging all participants to speak about personal life experiences. This process requires the researcher to consider the implications that may arise prior, during, and after the interview, and take measures to reduce possible implications by applying ethical standards.

A Letter of Consent for Interviews (Appendix A) was distributed to all participants prior to the interview. This letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implication, and specifies expectations of participation. Participants have signed this document giving their consent to the interview as well as audio recording. The letter also includes an overview of the study, addresses ethical implication, and specifies expectations of participation. For example, in the letter there was a sentence that relates to what is expected in terms of one interview that will last up to 45-60 minutes. In order to ensure confidentiality and keep the anonymity of the participants, the use of pseudonyms were used for individuals and institutions. All data,
in other words the audio recordings, will be stored on my password protected computer, laptop, or phone and will be destroyed after 5 years. I will not use participants name or anything else that might identify them in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to this major assignment will be my course instructor.

Participants are free to change their mind at any time, and to withdraw even after they have consented to participate. Participants may also decline to answer any specific questions. For example, given the research topic its possible that a particular question may trigger an emotional response from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. To minimize this risk, I have given the participating teachers a chance to look over the questions before beginning the interview. There are no known risks or benefits for assisting in the project–Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before a conduct data analysis. In responding to the issues of validity, all participants have reviewed the transcripts and have validated their answers to be true. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) clarify, “Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not the given explanation fits a given description” (p. 216).

3.6 Methodological Limitations & Strengths

In this section, I will be addressing some of the key areas that both limit and strengthen the study design.

1. Limited Choice and Number of Participants.

Given the ethical parameters that we have approval for on behalf of the MTRP I can only interview teachers. So, consequently it is not possible to interview students, or
parents, or to conduct surveys or do classroom observations. Interviewing is an important means for data collection and although a limited sample of participants who follow a certain criteria are chosen, it is important not to generalize the experience of teachers more broadly speaking. In selecting two participants, the sample size was small due to other requirements of the program that needed to be fulfilled such as course work and field experience. On the other hand, the information provided by both participants was valuable to the existing literature, as it helped to solidify some of the results from other researchers in the field. Although there is a grand literature base on this topic, it will continue to be further investigated and the data will continue to evolve both theoretically and practically.

This study was only limited to a single data collection method, which was semi-structure interviews. There are other data collection methods that would have enriched my study. For instance, if I had the opportunity to observe, I would be able to see if what the participants say in the interview matches what they practice in their classroom. The goal of using observation to collect data is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. Observations can also increase the validity of my study, as it allows for richly detailed description of students and teachers behaviours, intentions, and situations in their natural environment.

2. **Strengths**

In terms of some of the strengths, I chose to speak to the significance of interviewing teachers. This method of collecting data allowed me to hear from them in more depth and in their own words and it also created space for teachers to speak to what matters most to them when it came to the topic at hand. This also validates teacher voice
and experiences and it allows an opportunity for the teachers to make meaning from their lived experiences and they also have the opportunity to reflect on their own practices and to articulate how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and in practice. By having teachers participate in interviews in this way, where asking them questions about their practise, is a great opportunity for them to think of the rational for some of the reasons why they do the things they do in terms of pedagogical decision making.

3.7 Conclusion

Chapter 3 provides key methodological decisions by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments before elaborating specifically on participants sampling and recruitment. This chapter explains how the data has been gathered and analyzed. I have described the qualitative tradition used and provided a rationale for using that tradition. The primary means of data collection was also discussed in this chapter as I felt that semi-structured interviews were the most effective way of gathering information about teachers’ practices and attitudes. I then identified a range of methodological limitations, but I also speak to the strength of the methodology. Next, in chapter 4, I report the research findings.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings from two interviews conducted with one Toronto high school teacher and one elementary school behaviourual support worker on their understanding of, and experiences with students who have been ascribed negative labels. While each of the professionals had prominently different understanding of, and experiences with informal labels, they both demonstrated a sincere commitment
to mitigating the effects of the label on students by working towards overcoming barriers. The experiences, opinions, and personal stories presented in these interviews are an essential component of this study as they provide valuable insight into the different ways that behavioural students are perceived and what different resources are available to minimize this stigma.

This study aimed to determine what the perspectives of educators on the effects of labeling students as behavioural are, and how they mitigate these effects while supporting these students. After analyzing my interview transcripts, I felt that the information was best organized into 5 key themes (and several sub-themes) that mirrors the subsidiary questions that guided my research and interview questions. Therefore, the themes that will guide this discussion are as follows; (1) Participants articulated that the term “behavioural” typically refers to students who do not follow the rules or students who are different in in the context of social or cultural norms, (2) Participants’ understanding of the effects of labeling was a direct result of their own experiences (3) Participants believed that it was a professional responsibility to minimize the stigma surrounding an informal label, and this belief was informed by their own experiences, and (4) Participants believed that teacher education programs can do more to prepare teachers to support students who have been labeled ‘behavioural’.

Results are presented in this section and the importance of the findings will be discussed extensively.

4.1 Participants articulated that the term “behavioural” typically refers to students who do not follow the rules or students who are different in the context of social and cultural norms.
In order to understand how the labels given to individuals may impact their lives, it is wise to understand first how the labels are created and reinforced within societies. When asked to describe what the word “behavioural” means to them and whom this label is typically ascribed to, both participants articulated their beliefs based on conventionalities. Although the term *behavioural* is found within the literature used in this study, participants found that the meaning of this term depended on social and cultural norms.

When asked to describe the meaning of “behavioural”, Amanda, for example, commented: “A student that doesn’t act how they’re supposed to be in the classroom in the terms of probably the education system.” Amanda suggested that the education system focuses on an establishment of classroom norms and expectations, which are the desired behaviours. Moreover, Amanda raised more indicators of what she believes behavioural looks like in a high school environment by stating, “students that can’t sit still. Students that skip class, doing things they shouldn’t be doing outside of class and then coming into class with these deviant behaviours but not following rules with their careless and disrespectful manners.” Defining the behavioural student was shared with the other participant as well.

Lucy, for example explained that in her experiences with the term behavioural typically refers to “kids that are different for whatever reason.” According to Lucy, a student labeled as deviant is a student that behaves in a way that is unacceptable and markedly different from the norm. Durkheim (1938) referred to deviance as any behaviour or action that affronts the collective conscience of individuals within a society, which as a consequence attracts punishment. She also stated that, “us Canadians are so
multicultural and our different perspectives clash and this equals labels.” Lucy spoke to
the idea that the ascription of being labeled as behavioural is given to a student when
he/she acts in a way that does not adhere societies norms. Amanda mentioned that she
understands the meaning of the term deviancy as a student that has ongoing patter of
“uncooperative, defiant, hostile and annoying behaviour towards people in authority”. To
Amanda, the meaning of the term appeared to be a child who behaviour disrupts normal
daily activities, both within family and school settings.

While both participants perceived the behavioural student as those who violate the
rules or on the basis of being different, Amanda specifically focused on what the norms
are in regards to the education system, and Lucy focused on how cultural norms create
unwanted and informal labels.

Given what I reported in the literature review, the participants’ voices are
significant to my research as it explains how what is deemed as behavioural is
determined by societal norms and expectations. Although there are some rules normally
adhered to by all members of a society, there are some rules constituted by specific
groups and organizations that vary from what is deemed desirable by all. For instance,
within a larger society, there are smaller societies, which include the family, different
cultures, religious bodies, law enforcement agencies and government who all have
differing values and beliefs. The labeling literature points to the idea that societies create
rules for behaviour; what is considered as deviant or conforming behaviour is culture-
specific (Schur, 1971). Amanda and Lucy both felt that societal and cultural norms are
what constitute the behavioural label.
4.2 Participants’ understanding of the effects of labeling was a direct result of their own experiences

Teacher participants recognized the presence of certain factors that contributed to students’ labeling experiences based on their personal experiences with informal labels as children. Attention has been devoted to informal labels that are applied by educational institutions, significant others, and parental figures as they can either increase future delinquency or motivate the individual to disable the label. Both interviewees have had the perceptions of others’ become internalized and obstruct part of their sense of self. With time, their image reflected in the mirror was displeasing which in turn motivated them to disable whatever label was imbedded on them.

As Amanda mentioned in her account, she experienced a lot of bullying when growing up and this affected her behaviour at home and at school, which resulted in her being labeled as “behavioural” by one of her junior teachers. She stated that both teacher and students perpetuated the bullying and it all began when her grade 2 teacher told her that she will, “never pass grade 8”. She further explained that:

… my negative behaviour continued for a while, but then I got to a point that eventually the things that people were saying to me actually made me stronger. I don’t know why but maybe it was because I wanted to prove everyone wrong.

In Amanda’s experience, labeling began in her early years and as she mentioned, the label had negative effects on her behaviour by progressively behaving in undesirable ways until the label motivated her to do the opposite. Her desire was to “…prove those people wrong…” by not only graduating grade 8 but also going on to university to become a teacher who she expressed, “…will one day be better then those who told me I wasn’t going to make it”.

Lucy expressed similar concerns as she remarks that, “Kids back then were so mean to me because I came from Italy and didn’t speak English. The kids treated me like an alien at times and to tell you the truth, I feel like the teachers were lost in the sense that they didn’t know what to do to integrate me”. She also proposed that for these reasons, in today’s curriculum, teacher knowledge and training in diversity and building inclusive environments is mandated into teacher expectancies. Lucy continued on by explaining that due to the students’ and teachers’ lack of knowledge, they began calling her “the immigrant”. Soon enough this label began frustrating her and she began expressing her anger through behavioural acts and the label then transformed into, “the girl with behavioural problems”.

Labeling is a phenomenon that is prevalent in society and people are labeled for various reasons. This can be a direct response to their behaviour while others may be due to certain stereotypes attached to them based on looks, race or illness and these names often have an impact on the labeled person, either positively or negatively. This often results in the stereotyping of such persons and has either negative consequences or can produce a positive response on their lives (Gates, 2010; Simmons, 1969). Another concept that is important to explore is the fact that not everyone who is labeled will continue on to greater deviance acts (Masten, 2001). The fact that they have overcome some challenges in life, which could have prevented “normal” development, both participants have overcome threats. This is called resiliency. This is significant to my findings because research has shown that the labels given to people become the primary means of identification of the person by others and its is not always the case that those being labeled as behavioural will continue to on to greater acts of delinquency.
4.3 Participants believed that it was a professional responsibility to minimize the stigma surrounding an informal label, and this belief was informed by their own experiences.

Both participants identified a range of strategies to mitigate the stigma surrounding the powerfully negative label. Minimizing the potential effects of labeling within the classroom environment was accomplished by fostering empowerment and setting high expectations so that all students are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of learning. I will begin by reporting their perspectives on this approach and why it matters.

4.3.1 As a way of mitigating the label, teachers recognized the importance of empowerment on the students’ sense of self and identity.

A common theme across the interviews was that the promotion of student empowerment was a necessary basis for, and benefit of, inclusive education. One the one hand, teachers described a desire to encourage student voice and on the other, they described seeing an increase in students’ social and emotional development.

With respect to empowering students, Lucy described different dimensions of empowerment. These dimension, according to her, increase students’ level of confidence and learning abilities. Lucy shared her perspective when she described what grounds her educational work towards mitigating the “deviant” label. As she put it:

It is important for me to empower students who have been labeled negatively. To me, empowerment means doing something to unstick the label. I’ve noticed that the more choice kids have, the more empowered they feel because they get to choose what learning activity they want to accomplish and obviously they know their capabilities of accomplishing whatever I assign them. So choice and empowerment go hand in hand. Ummm, also giving them something to do that they know that it will impact or make a difference in something. And going back to giving kids choice; I think that it gives them the feeling of competence. The fact that they feel that they can handle whatever work you assign will definitely empower them and give them a boost of confidence. Its not just about saying
things like, “Oh Johnny, you did such a wonderful job! Look class, look at what Johnny did! Let’s follow his example. You know … empowerment goes beyond this.

Similar to Lucy, Amanda talked about taking on the empowerment approach by allowing students to participate in developing the classroom rules or behavioural guidelines. She mentions, “Students need to have ownership of the classroom rules. I always tell my kids to make a list of rules and then I tell them to tell me what they look and sound like so they have a better idea”. She discussed that giving students a say in the classroom gives students the feeling of empowerment because they feel as if their decision are important and students work collaboratively in this decision making process. Amanda shares that students who are labeled as behavioural have a chance to “…be part of creating a shared vision of a quality classroom…” Amanda reinforces that students’ engagement and voice is beneficial for those ascribed a label as they given opportunities to identify themselves.

The ideas gathered from literature indicate that societies create rules for behaviour and those who violate the rules are labeled. The label becomes the main means of identification for the labeled person due to stigma associated with the label resulting in isolation/rejection from society, lowered expectations, self-blame/guilt and emotional distress. The labeled individual tends to take on the identity of the meaning attached to the label. An individual cannot think of him/herself without a thought to others; therefore whatever he/she would think of him/herself would be influenced by what others would say he/she is. Ross (1992) explains that self-concept can be defined as the notion one has about him/herself or how a person perceives him/herself. Through interactions or
experiences with the physical and social environment, individuals gain their sense of self and this gained self-concept impacts their behaviour (Ross, 1992).

4.3.2 Participants have also recognized the importance of setting high expectations for every student in order to mitigating the label.

Both participants have concluded that students in any environment generally rise to the expectations set for them. Amanda mentioned that some teachers are convinced that given the problems faced by students growing up in low-income communities, those students simply cannot be expected to meet the same behavioural guidelines as students growing up in high-income communities. Amanda stated that several of her previous colleagues have said things like, “look at what she sees just out her front door … of course she get into trouble all the time,” or “children from that neighbourhood have no respect for adults, never mind teachers – what makes you think they’ll listen to you?” Such generalization can severely limit a teacher’s expectations and highlight the importance of remembering that every child’s situation is unique. Amanda continues by saying, “the key to managing for me was to treat every child as if they were the most important person in the class. I give each student responsibilities and daily duties and they love it. I think I tend to give my kids who have been labeled the most responsibilities because they seem to love it and I think it makes them feel part of a community and the other kids see them as part of the classroom community too.”

Lucy also believed that in order to mitigate the label, teachers must hold high expectations for student behaviour regardless of misperceptions about the inevitability of deviant acts. She talks about how one of her students started the school year with exceptionally undesirable behaviour. She said, “I knew that this kid could behave if he
wanted to, so I had to make him want to behave. If he continued to misbehave throughout the whole school year, how do you think the other students would view him?” In order to fully integrate him into the classroom dynamics, Lucy gave this particular student daily responsibilities. For instance, every morning this student’s responsibility was to take attendance and bring it down to the office. Lucy’s intention was to not only keep this student busy, but to also give him a sense of identity within the classroom. Lucy has taken effective measures to lessen the child’s chances of being identified as different or deviant by others.

Labeling within educational settings if often associated with lower self-esteem, decreased academic motivation, increased problem behaviours, and greater levels of anger and depressive symptoms (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Teachers who engage in such classroom experiences must be given opportunities to practice theoretical concepts in order to increase their confidence for developing a curriculum that supports all learners. This finding is significant because educators need to understand the essence of their own perceptions, positive or negative, as their attitudes and actions influence children’s self-identity.

4.4 Participants believed that teacher education programs can do more to prepare teachers to support students who have been labeled ‘behavioural’.

The lack of knowledge and experience for teachers was a topic that both participants communicated immensely. This factor will continue to hinder their capabilities to have a greater and more positive influence on students’ learning. Effective teacher training programs can provide teachers with the greatest chance of success as
they are given the knowledge, experience, and guidance to support their students. Both participants have expressed the significance of teacher training as it helps prepare them for challenges and every day issues.

Lucy revealed personal experiences when she was a beginning teacher and how she believed to have minimal knowledge and experience working with students labeled as behavioural. She discussed how challenging one of her initial encounters with a student ascribed a behavioural label in grade 3 was and mentioned that she constantly asked herself, “Could this student’s behaviour be a result of inappropriate curriculum or teaching strategies?” Lucy believed that her teaching strategies might have been inappropriate because of her inability to meet the diverse needs of all students. Lucy felt that she “…wasn’t at a content skill level to address the needs of the whole class, especially the informally labeled ones…” She then expressed that with formally labeled students, other professionals give educators resources and guidance to attend to the diverse needs of all students. Contrary, with the informally labeled students, “…you don’t know what’s wrong and it’s hard to work and help misbehaving students! I was given zero support for that…”

Although the lack of teacher training when working with students with behavioural issues was a major commonality between the two teacher interviewees, Amanda took other factors into consideration. She suggested that a student’s behavioural issue might be from an underlying result of the student’s disability. Recognizing that teachers play a pivot role, it is important for teachers to feel confident in shaping the overall attitudes towards students’ differences in classrooms. She expressed that teacher education programs need to be accredited for teachers to gain employment. One strategy for
teachers to overcome the challenge of not being able to distinguish the difference between behavioural or a disability is for them to endorse the need for teacher-training curriculum to include at least one compulsory unit of work on special education. Amanda also stated that the school administrator’s often oversee the development of appropriate programs and tend to place an emphasise on other responsibilities.

As mentioned, “… maybe he hasn’t been diagnosed yet for having a disability, or maybe the kid was misdiagnosed. How am I supposed to teach a student that hasn’t been identified, but from my professional judgement, something is wrong. And then on top of everything because this student hasn’t been identified, he doesn’t have an EA or any other professionals to help him or me…” When dealing with incidents of student behaviours, Amanda’s seems to experience frustration because a student that she believed to have a disability did not get the special treatment he deserved and therefore resulted in the stigmatization of being “behavioural” by peers, teachers, staff, and even parents.

Implementing the educational model of inclusion for students with diverse learning needs into mainstream classrooms requires teamwork among parents, classroom teachers, special education teachers, and teacher assistants. Research states over and over again how fundamental collaboration is in order to prevail students’ labels.

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, the teacher participants believed that informal labels given to people become the primary means of identification of the person by others and it is not always the case that those being labeled as deviant will continue to engage in undesirable acts. Regardless of what one is encountering in life, resiliency plays a role in those whom overcome a stigma. Participants have understood the essence of their own perceptions as
their attitudes influence their students’ sense of self. Each participant also specified the need for support from parents and other professionals in order to attend to the diverse needs of all students. These findings make a contribution to existing literature as it has been emphasised that the perceptions of teachers’ may impact students’ own self-identity. This study has addressed the issues concerning the fact that when primary caregivers identify students as deviant, these students will most likely identify themselves the same way and therefore behave how others expect them too. Next, in chapter 5, I will speak to the significance of my findings as a beginning teacher, and for the educational research community more broadly. Given what I found, I will also identify areas for future research and make recommendations for the Ministry of Education and/or school boards, professional development, teacher education, Principals, teachers, support workers etc.

Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

My research was designed to learn from a sample of elementary school teachers how they mitigate the labeling of children and what behaviours they look for as indicators of delinquency. The findings from this study serve to reinforce the case being made by many other researchers that the consequences of informally labeling children are profound. Based on what I found, the consequences of an individual being labeled deviant may lead to a continuing pattern in deviant behaviour. Also, the individual who internalizes the label integrates the label as part of his/her identity. This self-degradation results in a negative impact on their self-perception or self-identity. Additionally, being judged from a significant other, the labeled person is in isolation/rejection from society, lowered expectations, self-blame/quit and emotional distress. Many erroneous
expectations of primary caregivers, such as teachers, may negatively affect the students’ academic performance/achievement.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings and their significance in the context of the literature I review in Chapter 2. In connecting these teachers’ insights with the body of existing literature, I am able to connect theory and practice to create a clearer image of what is happening, what needs to be happening, and how to move forward. I put my interview findings into conversation with the literature to draw out the trends and nuances regarding how teachers and researchers understand the connection between informal labeling and the effects of the stigma into the lives of children and how these understanding inform their practice and work. Next, I articulate implications of the research findings for the education community and also to the implications for me as a beginning teacher. Given what I found, I then identify a range of recommendations based on what I learned and identity areas of future study that I think are important areas requiring further attention. Finally, I conclude by emphasizing the significance of the research findings and for whom they matter the most in the short and long-term.

5.1 Discussion

A review of the literature and analysis of the data from my interviews reveal that teacher perceptions of students who display deviant behaviour affects how they perceive themselves and the world around them. In sum, the informal labeling assigned to the participants based on their deviant behavioural acts can have a negative impact on their own self-image. Ross (1992) indicated that when a label becomes the main means of identification, the labeled person experiences isolation/rejection from society, lowered expectations, self-blame/quit and emotional distress. The main themes that emerged from
the interviews address the knowledge of delinquency from educators’ perspectives, effective classroom strategies to ensure meaningful learning experiences, the importance of support programs in the system, and the challenges that arise when fostering inclusion for students who are informally labeled as deviant.

Both participants described their understanding of the word deviant to be a student that behaves in a way that is unacceptable and/or markedly different from the norm. Becker (1963) explained that labels are “created by society … social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders” (pg. 114). In order to challenge students’ labels, both participants expressed the need for further support from other professionals in order to enhance their capabilities to attend to the needs of those who have been informally labeled. For instance, Social Workers help each child make the most of their school experience by working closely with parents, children, teachers and other professionals. This is accomplished through a variety of means including counselling, linking families with community resources, and planning with school staff on how best to meet a child’s social/ emotional needs. The shared insights by both participants were valuable to my study, as both participants have incorporated proactive instructional approaches and strategies that aim to support students who exhibit delinquent behaviour and create positive classroom environments.

In order to mitigate the effects of labeling, one participant views empowerment as an important dimension to increase students’ level of self-confidence and the other participant reinforces student engagement as she sees student voice beneficial due to the opportunities for involvement and the creation of ones personal identity. Both
participants agreed that in order for students who are labeled bad or troublesome to be integrated into classroom learning experiences, teachers must find ways to overcome the perceptions of others and remove the label from their identity. Fostering empowerment and setting high expectations so that all students are supported to learn can achieve this. With this said, the lack of factors and resources that would support the capacity of both participants to help students who have been labeled have been discussed. One participant mentioned how she wished that she were more knowledgeable and experienced about students that have been informally labeled. The other participant took other factors that could be hindering her ability to mitigate the harmful effects of labeling. She suggested that a student’s behavioural issue might be the underlying result of a disability. These findings are important for my study as the participants perceptions, experiences, and challenges lead this study to further discussion about how teacher can become more educated about students who exhibit these kinds of behaviours and what actions they can take to diminish the effects.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this research study have inevitable inspired new questions that lead to further research. These research findings have been communicated in order to educate, raise awareness, and inspire action from the education system and a range of educational stakeholders. In this section I speak to the broader implications that affect schools and school boards as well as the specific implications for teachers, students and myself as a future teacher.

5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Research Community
To start, one implication of the findings is that informal labeling from teachers had initial negative consequences on the lives of the labeled, which appeared to be due to the influence they had in shaping the self-concept of the student labeled as deviant. More specifically, teachers have a pivotal role to play in socializing these students and therefore in determining their rules for behaviour. This suggests that the continuous labeling of children as “deviant” creates a negative self-image and must therefore be discouraged among parents and caregivers.

Children with behavioural issues have long challenged professionals in the field of education. As a result of ever escalating numbers of referrals, programming within school boards had risen substantially. For this reason, an implication for policy makers is ensuring that parents and teachers are educated in order that they are able to distinguish between a badly behaved child and a child who suffers from a mental health issue. This should enable them to seek assistance from the right source to aid with caring for that child and to provide the proper support they need rather than labeling them, since mental health was identified in this study as a contributing factor to increased negative behaviour or the initial labeled behaviour (Masten, 2001).

As an educational researcher, I hope that my research will find its way into school communities in a way that impacts daily practice. Those interested in knowledge and educational change recognize that research has the greatest impact when it is used in meaningful and authentic ways. A particular area of interest that has emerged for me as a result of this research is how to more effectively integrate pre-service teacher training programs about informal labels.
Also, parents need to be made aware of the power they have in influencing the sense of self of their children so they are more intentional about what they say or teach their children. Protective factors such as support from parents and other mentors or role models, participation in organized activities such as church and extracurricular activities should be encouraged in the lives of children struggling with labels.

5.2.2 Narrow: My Professional Identity and Practice

As I move forward in the world of education this process and content of this research study will stay with me in several ways. For one, the value of an active and ongoing relationship between research and my practice has been reinforced through this study. The field of education is rich with research and in order for me to apply practices into my classrooms; I must utilize the many research publications and studies available. An emerging area of interest which will be of particular relevance once I become a teacher is how classroom teachers effectively work to create shared staff philosophies and approaches that work to mitigate the stigma of students whose behaviour is seen as unusual in a negative way, socially maladjusted, psychologically impaired and so on. The terminology used seems to be a reflection of the confusion found within the field of education for this population of children. I have learned that “troubling” children have been labeled throughout the years as, among others: deviant, seriously emotionally disturbed.

As a result of what I have learned, in my role as a teacher I will work to identify the labeled child’s characteristics, understand the theoretical orientations, assessment techniques and adapt effective educational approaches. I have also learned that a child who has been ascribed a label may begin to take on and fulfill the role of a “deviancy” as
an act of rebellion against the society that has labeled that child as such. In order for me to mitigate the chances of a child embracing a deviant identity, I must enact effective strategies in the classroom. For instance, empowering students is a strategy that can help all students identify themselves within the classroom dynamics as one who positively contributes.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to change the landscape of education, changes will need to be made at the levels of teacher training, schools as institutions, and classroom teacher practices.

A recommendation for professionals working with children with challenging behaviour is taking preventative measures. For instance, spending more time promoting appropriate behaviour then responding to inappropriate behaviour is a strategy that can create opportunities for all children to succeed. Learning how to take preventative measures in order to avoid children from engaging in delinquent behaviours is the first step. At times, teachers may feel that they have inadequate skills in this regard. Therefore, it is important for administration to take these pro-active measures by training their staff in order to help them develop roles and procedures that will encourage appropriate behaviour and have the ability to build inclusive classroom environments. An example is offering teacher candidates with pre-services training programs aimed to heighten their competencies of responding to challenging behaviour. Important topics may include, understanding the behaviour, collaborating with professionals, mitigating the label, and ways to effectively respond to deviancy. An effective response to challenging behaviour is a process, not an event, which provides children with the opportunity to develop skills and attitudes they need to meet their needs appropriately.
INFORMALLY LABELING CHILDREN AS DELINQUENT

Teachers must interact with parents whose children have been ascribed a label in order to understand the diversity of each family system since both the familial and school environment influence and can benefit as well as harm a child’s development. Teachers must communicate with parents frequently, openly, honestly in a non-judgment manner. Parents can contribute greatly in finding the problem as well as a solution as they act as an emotional and information support for teachers. For instance, when looking for strengths, competencies, and resources, parents most likely have important information, such as a diagnosis. At times, teachers may be oblivious of the fact that a child may, for instance, have a more serious condition known as Oppositional Defiance Disorder. With such valuable information, teacher have a better understanding of the child and can then follow up with the students parents with strategies to work in partnership at home and school. Team building with the students’ family is crucial to understand what other factors can be affecting this child challenging behaviour and discussions about next steps should follow. Overall, teachers must collaborate with parents and be willing to find out the core issues to a child’s behaviour in order to mitigate the label and alleviate the chances for later social problems or school failure.

One particular recommendation for policy makers is ensuring that teachers have sufficient education and experience with students who have been informally labeled in order for them to be able to distinguish between a badly behaved child and a child who suffers from a mental health issue. This can be accomplished by integrating pre-service teacher training programs to support teachers and other professionals into seeking assistance from the right sources in order to provide the proper support students’ need rather than perceiving them. For example, if a student who have been informally labeled
and continues to act in ways that validates the label, teachers must have the resources and encouragement to seek assistance from school counsellors in order to help families and their children. One of the most popular delinquency-prevention programs is D.A.R.E. (2016), which is a program that provides children with an opportunity to learn and practice good decision-making skills to lead safe and healthy lives.

5.4 Areas for further research

Informally labeling students is an enduring and troubling phenomenon that requires more research. The results of the present study reiterate the need for additional research on the impact of informal labeling. More specifically, this research study did not speak about what students who are ascribed a label are at risk of if they continue to engage in delinquent behaviour into adulthood. Another concept that can be explored further is the fact that not everyone who is labeled will continue on to greater deviance acts. For the few that could not overcome their labels, further research should be undertaken in order to create appropriate preventive measures.

As the participants of this study have shown through personal experiences of being informally labeled as deviant, to be resilient one must overcome some challenges in life, past or present. Furthermore, this research is limited in regards to ways in which an informal label influences a students’ education and motivation to learn and prosper. This is an area of study that is vital in order minimize persistent deviant behaviour and to maximize these students’ potential.

Seeing how negative labeling increases the likelihood of further delinquent involvement, it would be interesting to research if positive labeling has similar effects on children sense of self and school performance. I believe greater attention to positive
labeling is necessary to achieving a more complete understanding of labeling and its consequences.

The final recommendation for further research is the examination of the distinction between different connotations of the term “behaviour”. A child’s delinquent behavioural outbreaks may be as a result of external influences, such as family factors, exposure to violence, cultural dissonance, etc., or are a result of underlying biological factors such as mental health, genetic traits, developmental delays, gender, temperament etc.

5.5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the application of the labeling perspective to one particular area, juvenile delinquency. In particular, this study looked at how informal labels that are applied to children by significant others, such as parents, peers, and teachers can have a stigmatizing effect that increases the likelihood of future deviancy. From the data gathered from the participants, it is clear that many of those who are ascribed an informal label have an increased chance of identifying themselves as other perceive them. The emphasis of this study was to get insight and learn from teachers how they perceive students with behaviour issues, and to learn what they do to mitigate the label in order to make their classroom environment a safe and nurturing place to learn for all. In the short term, the research findings are beneficial for educators and their students, as the importance of teacher training has been highlighted. Participants addressed the importance of professional development in the field of education and how developing the confidence to deliver effective learning strategies is critical in creating an environment where all children are empowered to learn and give equal opportunity. In the long term,
the findings of this study will matter most to policy makers because the concerns of having students who have been labeled as delinquent have been addressed. It is time to make a difference in the lives of students who have been ascribed a label solely based on their behaviours. There are reasons as to why these students behave the way they do and there are strategies that teachers can implement to mitigate how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves.

While there are many important conclusions of this study, I believe there are two key big ideas found in the literature that are supported by this research and deserve the final remarks. Fewer studies have examined the effects of informal labeling on delinquency. When informal labeling is the focus of research, much of the emphasis is placed on negative parental reaction. By a way of new knowledge, my research has contributed to existing literature by emphasizing the potentially important role of teachers in the labeling process, how they perceive delinquency and in what way do they work to mitigate the label. To begin, societal reactions of peers, family members, and educators’ do in fact play a role in defining the nature and extent of the delinquency associated with perceptions, identities, and actions that reinforce the delinquent label. Moreover, through this process I have concluded that teachers conceptualize delinquency as behaviour that is different from the norm, they recognize it as being something that requires additional attention, and respond to it with strategies to enhance ones’ sense of self with minimal recourses and support. This study will be useful to parents, teachers and other professionals working with children as it provided insight of what delinquency looks like, how children who have been ascribed a label look and act like, and different types of techniques and strategies can be used in the classroom to mitigate the label.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ____________________________

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Ilenia Italiano 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 your perspective on the effects of labeling students as “behavioural” and to hear from you how you work to mitigate these effects in your role as an educator. I am interested in interviewing teachers who (a) have had at least one role in a behavioural support program, (b) must have demonstrated leadership and/or expertise in the area of child development and behaviour, (c) must have a minimum of five years teaching experience, and (d) must be a secondary school teacher who is aware of and/or has experienced the possible effects of informally labeling children as “behavioural”. I 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 Dr. Angela McDonald. 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,

Ilenia Italiano
(647) 404-8797
ilenia_97@hotmail.com

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic, OCT/PhD
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

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 Ilenia Italiano 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 Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of this research study is to hear your perspective on the effects of labeling students as “deviant” and to hear from you how you work to mitigate these effects in your role as a behavioural support worker. The primary research question asks: *What are the perspectives of behavioural support workers on the effects of labeling, and how do they work to mitigate these effects while supporting these students?* This interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes and in it I will ask you a series of questions pertaining to your experience, perspectives, and practices on the topic of supporting students who have been labeled as “behavioural”. I want to remind you that you may choose to not answer any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any point. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Background**

- Can you please state for me your name and your current position in the education system?
- How many years have you been in this role?
- Do you fulfill any other roles in the education system? Have you in the past? (classroom teacher, coach, advisor, councillor etc.)
- What grades of students do you predominantly work with?
- Can you tell me more about the school you currently work in? (size, demographics, program priorities)
- As you know, I am interested in hearing your perspectives today on the topic of labeling and more specifically, the label of “deviancy” that is commonly ascribed to students in schools. Can we begin with you telling me a bit more about how you came to be in your current role?
  - How did you develop an interest in supporting students in this role?
  - What experiences have you had that contributed to developing your interest and your competence in this role? *listen first, and then probe re: personal, professional, educational experienced (e.g. own experience as child, B.Ed training or undergraduate degree, Masters degree in this area, PD in this area, Spec Ed AQ…*)
  - Can you tell me what formal educational training you have had that prepared you for this work?
Beliefs and Values

- What does the label “deviant student” mean to you?
  - What do you think about this label?
  - Who is this student, in your view?
  - In your experience, what are some of the needs these students have?

- What do you think about how schools meet these needs?

- In your experience, to whom does this term typically refer to in the education system?

- What behaviours specifically, tend to be ascribed to “deviant” students in schools?

- In your experience, what are some of the causes of these types of behaviour?

- What are some other labels that you hear associated with these students?

- In your experience, how do these labels impact students? What impacts have you observed from students?

- In your view, what is the purpose of your role as a behavioural support worker in schools?

Practices

- What are your goals when working with students who have been labeled “deviant”?

- What range of instructional approaches and strategies do you enact to meet these goals?

- Can you give me an example of a student that you have worked with, and tell me more about how you worked with them?
  - Who was this student? *tell me more about the referral, the behaviours, grade
  - How did this student initially respond to you?
  - How did you work to develop a rapport with this student?
  - What were your goals working with this student?
  - How did you instructionally respond to this student and why?
  - What opportunities for learning did you create and how?
  - How did this student respond to your approach? What outcomes did you observe, and over what period of time?
Earlier, you told me about some of the effects of this label you have observed for students. What, if anything, do you do to try to minimize the potential for these effects?

What other stakeholders do you work with in your role as a behavioural support worker? (e.g. classroom teachers, parents, administrators, school support teams, social workers, councillors, children’s aid society). Can you tell me more about how, if at all, you work collaboratively with these stakeholders to support students who have been labeled as a behavioural student?

How do parents typically respond when told that their children have behavioural problems? What is the nature of your work with parents?

Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

What range of factors and resources support you in your capacity to support students who have been labeled as “deviant students”?

What range of challenges and barriers do you confront in this work? How do you respond to these challenges? What would help you further in meeting these challenges? (probe re: resources, attitudes, collaboration, training)

What advice do you have for classroom teachers in terms of practices they can enact in response to behavioural issues that arise in their classrooms?

What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting students with behavioural issues, yet are weary of the label itself?

Is there anything else that you would like to offer that I did not specifically ask about?

Thank you for your time today. As I mentioned earlier, I have procedures in place to keep this information confidential and it only will be used for this research project. You will receive a copy of the written transcript from this interview for your review.