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# Guided by the Spirit: Understanding Student Behavior and Theological Philosophy Through the Lens of Secondary Catholic School Teachers

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Guided by the Spirit: Understanding Student Behavior and Theological Philosophy  
Through the Lens of Secondary Catholic School Teachers

by

Angela M. Mucci

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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College of Education  
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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to Our Lord. It has been through Him and with Him that any of this has been possible. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my parents, William and Debra Mucci, who have always believed in me and have supported me throughout my entire educational journey; my brother, Mario Mucci, who made me laugh and smile in times of frustration and difficulties while completing my graduate coursework; and other members of my family, especially my grandmother, Elaine Fuller, who have always been there to support and encourage me. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to two wonderful teachers, Mr. Charles Krzan, who when I was in fourth grade took me under his wing and said, “You can do this, Ang,” and Dr. MeShelda Jackson, who when I was in my undergraduate program also took me under her wing and mentored me. Without either of them, I don’t know if I would have been able to have accomplished what I have accomplished. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to all those who prayed for me and my intentions throughout this journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceived problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. Using the methods identified in grounded theory, seven secondary Catholic school teachers were interviewed to gain an understanding of the extent to which a theological philosophy was reflected in their perceptions, responses, and policies towards behavior challenges/problems. In order to conceptualize and contextualize the notion of a “theological philosophy,” this study utilized three tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (dignity of the human person, common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable) and the notion of hospitality to the stranger.

The majority of teachers perceived behaviors showing a lack of respect towards themselves or peers as what they considered to be a behavior problem with few teachers discussing incidences of behavior that were exhibited by students with disabilities. Many teachers responded to behavior verbally as well as believed they had a role in providing interventions or support for behavior problems, and while this was the case, not all teachers differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities. School policies were found to inform more how secondary Catholic school teachers responded to behavior challenges/problems with teachers citing factors that affected how they implemented the school policies. The notion of a theological philosophy was found to be reflected in these teachers’ perceptions and responses in relation to the dignity of the

human person and common good tenets of Catholic Social Teaching with teachers believing the notion of a theological philosophy was not reflected to a great extent within school policies.

Findings from this study point to the individuality of the teacher. While these seven teachers taught within the context of a secondary Catholic school, each brought to their practice their own beliefs, expectations, and faith. Consequently, this affected not only how they perceived and responded to behavior challenges/problems, but the extent to which a theological philosophy was reflected in their perceptions and responses towards behavior challenges/problems.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The purpose of this study is to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. As a prelude to discussing my study, I have written a section about myself. Here, I hope to give the reader an understanding of who I am, why I chose to do my dissertation on this topic, what I hoped to learn when I began this study, and what I learned as a result of this study.

Sitting down to write this section has been a journey in itself. I have learned much through this process and it has shaped me, not only as a researcher, but also as a person. I have spent many months thinking about what I am going to write in this section and what it will “look like” when it is finished.

### **Who Am I?**

My journey as an educator began when I was in fourth grade. It was from fourth grade until high school where I volunteered each summer at Easter Seals Disability Services. Through my work at Easter Seals, I had the opportunity to work with students who had speech impairments, physical disabilities as well as emotional and learning disabilities. My experiences at Easter Seals not only led me to a Bachelor of Arts degree in Special Education and a Master of Arts degree in Varying Exceptionalities, but continue to stay with me to this day because this is where I learned that teaching was my vocation. I knew this not just based on a feeling of being “called” to teach from when I

was young, but I also felt that because of my own experiences and difficulties in school I understood what it meant and felt like to struggle.

### **Why I Chose This Topic?**

Prior to entering the doctoral program, I was a special education teacher and taught second and third grade students who had emotional/behavioral disorders for two years in a self-contained setting. Through this experience, I became increasingly intrigued with this notion called “behavior.” I became interested not just in the behavior exhibited and why the student was exhibiting the behavior, but how others perceived and responded to the behavior. Thus, my interest in learning more about behavior and, in particular, learning more about how others perceive and respond to student behavior was one reason I selected this topic.

Another reason for engaging in research on this topic was to learn more about Catholic schools. I would consider myself a conservative Catholic and feel my faith informs not just my everyday life, but also my professional life. While I did not attend Catholic school as a child, I did attend a Catholic university for my Bachelor of Arts degree. Through this experience, I learned not only how the Catholic faith is integrated into one’s education, but the importance of a Catholic university reflecting and being faithful to the teachings of the Catholic faith. It was with my experience of attending a Catholic university and being Catholic that I embarked on this journey of learning more about Catholic schools through this dissertation research.

### **What I Hoped to Learn...**

As I began this study, I hoped to learn many things. One thing that I hoped to learn was if and how the Catholic faith guides secondary Catholic school teachers in their

practice with regards to behavior. In other words, are secondary Catholic school teachers *guided by the spirit* in how they perceive and respond to challenging behavior exhibited by students and if so, how does this occur?

I also hoped to learn more about myself as a researcher and as a person. It is interesting how after embarking on a major milestone in your life, you can be changed so that you do not see things the way you did prior to the milestone. As a result of going through my doctoral program, I believe it has changed not only how I view the teaching profession, but also my Catholic faith. Therefore, I hoped to also be *guided by the spirit* in being open to how this experience could transform my understandings about teaching and my Catholic faith.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state, “persons choose to do research because they have a dream that somehow they will make a difference in the world through the insights and understandings they arrive at. But it is not enough to dream. Dreams must be brought to fruition.” (p. 15). It has been my dream to be able to do my dissertation research on this topic. I was excited to be given this opportunity because I was able to not only learn more about how the Catholic faith is reflected in how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to challenging behavior, but also contribute to the understandings of practice in Catholic schools.

### **What I Learned...**

Engaging in research on this topic has really been a transformative experience for me. I guess I knew I would have insights because of the nature of research, but I never thought so many would emerge. As this study progressed, I found myself reflecting on my own practice as a teacher even though I did not teach in a Catholic school. As

participants kept mentioning they would not teach any differently in a public school, I thought about and questioned how my practice as a teacher would have been different if I taught in a Catholic school. As I thought about this, the conclusion I kept arriving at was that a teacher brings to the school who they are as a person. As I reflect on my years teaching at a public school, it was very hard to separate and remove that faith aspect from my practice, and while I could not pray out loud or with my students, my faith helped me get through the difficulties that would arise as well as affected how I perceived and responded to behavior exhibited by my students.

This research study has also helped me to grow in my faith. With each interview, I learned more about my Catholic faith and consequently, began to love my faith more as I witnessed the role of passion for one's faith in relation to teaching. I was able to see how "faith" and religious "beliefs" can be incorporated into something that can be called a "job," but yet make it such a passion for individuals that it becomes a vocation. As I interviewed these teachers, I was able to witness through their responses their faith in action, which also allowed me to see my faith in action as one who was conducting this study.

As a researcher, I have learned that research involves having patience with yourself and having faith in the journey that research can take you on. There were instances in the process of conducting this study and writing up this study that I wanted things to happen quicker than they were occurring in terms coming to an understanding of "what does this mean?" While this can be frustrating for any researcher, I learned that conducting research involves going on a journey where you come face to face with uncertainties and questions as the study progresses. However, I learned that when you



encounter these instances on your journey, time and reflection will help in revealing what it is you are searching for or wanting to discover.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Within the United States, Catholic schools are “among the oldest educational institutions” (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993, p. 15). Catholic schools provide students with the opportunity to grow in their faith as well as be provided with an education in the core academic subjects of reading, math, science, and social studies. It is essentially through Catholic education that Catholic culture “develops and transmits its vision of truth, morality, and the human condition” (Hancock, 2005, p. 35). It is through Catholic education that students learn “knowledge of what is real; elucidation of what makes us human; judgment about how we ought to live, individually and communally; and explanation of how we as human beings, through our choices and actions, cooperate with God’s intentions for history” (Hancock, 2005, p. 37).

### **Statement of the Problem**

After careful and comprehensive review of the literature, it became evident that limited research exists on Catholic secondary schools. The research that has been conducted on Catholic secondary schools focus on entities such as the effect of Catholic secondary school education on student achievement (e.g., Bempechat, Boulay, Piergross, & Wenk, 2007; Grogger & Neal, 2000; Kim & Placier, 2004) and the implementation of programs and inclusionary practices for students with disabilities (e.g., Bello, 2006; Laengle, Redder, Somers, & Sullivan, 2000; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1998; Powell, 2004).

However, research examining behavior challenges/problems that exist in Catholic secondary schools is lacking. This is especially the case when examining how teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems exhibited in Catholic secondary schools.

While studies have examined the implementation of programs and inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, more research is needed to better understand special education within the context of a Catholic school. In fact, Weaver and Landers (2004) found the research on the nature of special education within Catholic schools to be “woefully lacking” with few dissertations addressing special education within the context of Catholic schools (p. 117). The dissertations published on special education in Catholic schools focus on inclusion and inclusive practices (e.g., Bello, 2004; Burgoon, 1997; Gonwa, 1981; Meyer, 1998; Scanlan, 2007), law in Catholic schools (e.g., Depp-Blackett, 1997), and team problem solving approaches (e.g., Frey, 2000). Therefore, more research is needed on the nature of special education in Catholic schools, in general, and especially with regards to understanding behavior challenges/problems that exist in Catholic secondary schools among students with disabilities.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Flynn and Mok (2002) identified eight elements that are contained in a theory of Catholic education. The elements within this theory include: “the dimension of faith,” “Catholic schools as genuine educational institutions,” “the goals of Catholic schools,” “Catholic schools as Christian communities,” “the culture of Catholic schools,” “the ‘Catholic’ character of the schools,” “the education in faith or Catechesis,” and “the involvement of parents in the life of the schools” (p. 16). The first element of the theory,

“the dimension of faith,” involves integrating faith in the culture of the school and in a child’s education. The second element of the theory, “Catholic schools as genuine educational institutions,” focuses on how students develop through their education. The third element of the theory, “the goals of Catholic schools,” involves how Jesus Christ is reflected in the goals of the school. The fourth element of the theory, “Catholic schools as Christian communities,” involves how the school community incorporates the teachings of the Catholic Church through opportunities to pray and worship. The fifth element of the theory, “the culture of Catholic schools,” involves the cultural ways through which the school portrays the teachings of the Catholic faith. The sixth element of the theory, “the ‘Catholic’ character of the school,” involves the connection the school has with the Catholic Church and her teachings. The seventh element of the theory, “the education in faith or Catechesis,” involves teaching catechesis. The eighth element of the theory, “the involvement of parents in the life of the schools,” involves the school encouraging parental involvement (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 16).

Flynn and Mok (2002) provide an understanding of what elements are important within the culture of a Catholic school. However, the role each of these elements have in how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems among students with or without disabilities is unclear. It also remains unclear to what extent these elements are reflected in school policies regarding behavior that guide secondary Catholic school teachers in how they respond and possibly perceive behavior challenges/problems.

When reviewing the literature, research does exist which examine teacher perceptions of student behavior (e.g. Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Axup & Gersch, 2008;

Baker, 2005; Green, Shriberg, & Farber, 2008; Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; LeBlanc, Swisher, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007; Little, 2005; Malone, Bonitz, & Rickett, 1998; Ritter, 1989; Salkind et al., 2000; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010; Watt, 2003). However, research on teacher perceptions of behavior in the context of a Catholic secondary school is lacking. To date, one study was conducted that examined how behavior problems were perceived among teachers within a religious high school (e.g. Romi, 2004). Other studies such as Bryk et al., (1993) and *High School and Beyond* have examined behavior in Catholic secondary schools with the primary focus on the occurrence and types of behavior problems that occur.

Even though more research needs to be conducted regarding how behavior challenges/problems are perceived and addressed within Catholic secondary schools, it is also essential for research to be conducted to understand the theological orientation regarding behavior in school. To date, there has been no research conducted which examines the theological philosophy regarding behavior within Catholic schools. More research is needed to examine the theological philosophy behind not only how behavior problems are handled after incidences of behavior occur, but also how the theological philosophy guides the perceptions, as well as drives the policies and everyday management of behavior in classrooms and throughout the school.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. The research questions that guide this study include:

1. To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.1. How are students' behavior challenges/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?
  - 1.2. How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students' behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.3. How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?

### **Definition of Terms**

For purposes of this study, the terms behavior challenges/problems, Catholic school, Catholic secondary school, laity, religious or consecrated, students with disabilities, and theological philosophy of a Catholic school, are being defined so others are able to understand how the term is being used in the study. These terms are being defined as:

*Behavior challenges/problems*- does not necessarily refer to behaviors exhibited solely by an individual who is identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder, but refers to “any observable action” exhibited by an individual (Alberto & Troutman, 2006) that interferes or impedes with the academic learning of others (p. 12). The behavior challenge/problem can result “in self-injury or injury of others, causes damage to the physical environment, interferes with the acquisition of new skills, and/or socially isolates the learner” (Doss & Reichle, 1997, p. 215). Other examples of behavior

challenges/problems are provided in a study conducted by Romi (2004). In this study, teachers and students from secular and religious junior high schools rated the following behaviors based on severity: talking without permission, not completing homework, vandalizing school property, physical and verbal violence towards other students, swearing or cursing, breaking school rules and regulations, not paying attention in class, stealing, not following teacher directions, arguing with the teacher, being disruptive in class, and tardiness (Romi, 2004).

*Catholic school*- is an educational institution where “its aim, methods and characteristics are the same as those of every other school. On the other hand, it is a ‘Christian community’, whose educational goals are rooted in Christ and his Gospel” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, n. 67). Therefore, according to the Second Vatican Council, what is distinctive about a Catholic school is the religious dimension found in “the educational climate, the personal development of each student, the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, n. 1).

*Catholic secondary school*- is school that includes grades 9-12. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) stated that Catholic secondary schools “give special attention to the ‘challenges’ that human culture poses for faith. Students will be helped to attain that synthesis of faith and culture which is necessary for faith to be mature” (n. 52).

*Laitiy*- refers to “...all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry

out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world” (Paul VI, 1964, n. 31). Within a Catholic school, The Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) state, “the lay educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school...” (n. 24).

*Religious or consecrated-* is a “life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels...” (Canon Law Society of America, 1983, Can. 573-§1). According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (2002), a school, for those who are consecrated, “...is a place of mission, where the prophetic role conferred by baptism and lived according to the requirements of the radicalism typical of the evangelical counsels is fulfilled” (n. 17). Within a Catholic school, “...men and women religious educate, help young people to grasp their own identity and to reveal those authentic needs and desires that inhabit everyone’s heart, but which often remain unknown and underestimated...” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002, n. 18).

*Students with disabilities-* according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), students require special education or related services because of a hearing impairment, deafness, deaf-blindness, visual impairment (including blindness), orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, speech or language impairment, emotional disturbance, autism, or specific learning disability.

*Theological philosophy-* is based on the teachings and theological truths of the Roman Catholic Church and the Catholic faith. It may be evident in the school and classroom climate and culture, in the physical environment of the school and classroom, in the



instructional materials used, and within school documents (e.g., mission statements). Specifically, Scanlan (2009) states, “Catholic schools cannot claim to be truly Catholic if they do not diligently strive to adhere to the fundamental teachings of the Church...” (p. 7).

### **Educational Significance of the Study**

Limited research exists regarding the perceptions of behavior problems within Catholic secondary schools. This study not only contributes to the knowledge base and research on Catholic schools, but it examines the role a theological philosophy plays in not only the school policies regarding behavior, but also how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems. This study also informs teacher preparation programs preparing individuals to teach in Catholic schools by further demonstrating how the teachings of the Catholic Church (e.g., Catholic Social Teaching) are integrated into a Catholic educator’s practice.

Additional research is necessary because providing all students, especially those who display challenging behaviors, with a safe and positive learning environment assists in maintaining the vision and mission of Catholic education. In fact, Haney (2005) explained that to fulfill the mission of the Catholic school, it is important for Catholic school personnel to assess the learning environment in terms of its safety. Protecting the learning environment is important in Catholic schools, as it is in all schools, because students learn best in a safe learning environment (Haney, 2005). Part of creating a safe environment involves not only the implementation of school policies which assist in enforcing the culture of the school, but it also involves understanding students and their struggles and providing them with the necessary supports and interventions (Haney,

2005). Therefore, in order to better understand the learning environment within Catholic secondary schools, it is important to examine how teachers in Catholic secondary schools perceive and respond to student behavior challenges/problems.

It is also important to understand teacher perceptions and responses towards behavior challenges/problems in order to maintain student enrollment within Catholic secondary schools. When examining the enrollment history from 1920 to 2011 within Catholic secondary schools (see Table 1), one would notice how the numbers have fluctuated over the years with the highest enrollment of students in the 1970s (1,008,000) and the lowest enrollment of students in the 1920s (130,000) (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). While the fluctuation in the enrollment of students is important, it is also important to note the trend in the number of students enrolled in Catholic secondary schools from the 1970s to 2011. Unfortunately, the enrollment of students between these years dropped drastically from 1,008,000 in the 1970s to 598,178 in 2011 (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). Even from 2010 to 2011, the enrollment of students in Catholic secondary schools dropped from 611,723 in 2010 to 598,178 in 2011 (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). The drop in enrollment between the 1970s and 2011 may have also been a factor in the decline of the number of Catholic secondary schools from the 1970s to 2011 (McDonald & Schultz, 2011).

Table 1

*Schools and Enrollment History*

	Schools			Enrollment		
	Elementary	Secondary	Total	Elementary	Secondary	Total
1920	6,551	1,552	8,103	1,796,000	130,000	1,926,000
1930	7,923	2,123	10,046	2,223,000	242,000	2,465,000
1940	7,944	2,105	10,049	2,035,000	361,000	2,396,000
1950	8,589	2,189	10,778	2,561,000	506,000	3,067,000
1960	10,501	2,392	12,893	4,373,000	880,000	5,253,000
1970	9,366	1,986	11,352	3,359,000	1,008,000	4,367,000
1980	8,100	1,540	9,640	2,293,000	846,000	3,139,000
1990	7,395	1,324	8,719	1,983,000	606,000	2,589,000
2000	6,923	1,221	8,144	2,013,084	639,954	2,653,038
2010	5,889	1,205	7,094	1,507,618	611,723	2,119,341
2011	5,774	1,206	6,980	1,467,694	598,178	2,065,872

*Note.* From *United States Catholic elementary and secondary schools: The annual statistical report on schools, enrollment and staffing* (p. 2), by D. McDonald and M. M. Schultz, 2011, Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association. Copyright 2011 by the National Catholic Educational Association. Reprinted with permission.

While all the factors that contributed to the decline in enrollment and the number of schools from the 1970s to the present are unknown, it is important for Catholic schools during the present time to retain their students in order to maintain a healthy enrollment. Part of maintaining enrollment involves providing students who exhibit challenging behavior with supports and interventions to help them be successful rather than using other means of managing student behavior, such as expulsion. While Bryk et al (1993) explain this occurs very infrequently, the rate at which students are expelled from schools can contribute to the decline in the enrollment of students in Catholic secondary schools. Therefore, it is important to examine teacher perceptions of student behavior challenges/problems because these perceptions could affect how they respond to student behavior challenges/problems (Tillery et al., 2010) which can impact the retention of students in Catholic secondary schools.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. This section consists of a review of literature designed to provide an understanding about the nature of Catholic schools. Specifically, this literature review will include a discussion of the history of Catholic schools; church documents regarding Catholic education; Catholic schools and special education with a particular emphasis on special education services in Catholic schools; and Catholic schools and behavior with a particular emphasis on research studies regarding behavior, behavior management approaches used, and the culture of Catholic schools.

According to Canon 803 in the Code of Canon Law (1983):

- §1. That school is understood to be Catholic which ecclesiastical authority or a public ecclesiastical juridic person supervises or which ecclesiastical authority recognizes as such by means of a written document.
- §2. It is necessary that the formation and education given in a Catholic school be based upon the principles of Catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding for their correct doctrine and integrity of life.
- §3. Even if it really be Catholic, no school may bear the title *Catholic school* without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority (p. 301).

Catholic schools, by their very essence, have a role in the mission of the Church in proclaiming the gospel to all people, especially the young (Miller, 2006).

### **Historical Context**

The history of Catholic education began with individuals who had a vision of how the faith learned within the Catholic Church could be brought into education in the form of the Catholic school. Even with the first Catholic school established, the Catechetical School of Alexandria founded by St. Clement, a foundation was laid for Catholic education (Hancock, 2005). The motto of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was *Credo ut intelligam*, which translates as “I believe in order to understand” (Hancock, 2005, p. 46). From the beginnings of the Catechetical School of Alexandria to our present day, Catholic schools have provided an education to children so they will learn the subjects of math, reading, science, and history, but also grow in their Catholic faith.

The beginning effort of individuals to establish Catholic schools within the United States was not without struggles. The Catholic Church struggled because of laws against Catholics, which forced Catholic education to take place in the home (Hancock, 2005). It was not until 1791 when the First Amendment of the Constitution regarding religion was enacted that the Catholic Church could begin to evolve and grow (Buetow, 1970). However, despite the First Amendment and its benefits for the Catholic Church, the Catholic school struggled in its development because “colonial education had been a private matter and under the control of the churches, and the writers of the Constitution did not deem it necessary to make any mention of education” (Buetow, 1970, p. 46).

Beginning in 1791, Catholic education began with the establishment of Georgetown College, and later other Catholic colleges such as Saint Mary’s College and

Mount Saint Mary's College were established (Buetow, 1970). Shortly after the establishment of Georgetown College, religious orders of Sisters were being established to teach children who attended Catholic schools (Buetow, 1970). In particular, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, of Emmitsburg, Maryland, assisted in the effort of educating children within Catholic schools. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's religious order, the Sisters of Charity, provided a foundation for the success of Catholic schools within the United States (Hancock, 2005). Seton envisioned the Catholic school "as an effective way for the Church to serve the world" (Hancock, 2005, p. 60). Other religious orders such as the Sisters of St. Dominic and the Sisters of Loretto began developing schools. It was with these religious orders of Sisters that Catholic schools were able to establish and provide education to the youth (Bryk et al., 1993).

It was also during the establishment of these Catholic schools that the aims of Catholic education were established. According to Buetow (1970) the fundamental aims of Catholic education were:

To teach Catholic doctrine; to imbue Catholic youth with the spirit of Christ; and to instill the realization that man is God's—formed in God's image and to be fashioned to Godlikeness to become more worthy of God as his final goal. The schools did not forget that man must live in this world; they sought to equip students to take their place in society and to present the rudiments of a literary tradition (p. 105).

While Catholic schools continued to grow and evolve in the years to follow with religious sisters continuing in their effort to teach children who attended Catholic schools, public schools were also beginning to emerge along with laws that mandated

children to attend school (Buetow, 1970). However, difficulties emerged within the common schools, and in 1829 the first formal Catholic educational legislation was passed because “many Catholic children were still being exposed to the danger of losing their Faith in the common schools” (Buetow, 1970, p. 146). Within the common schools, Horace Mann proposed what was called a non-denominational approach. Even though Mann’s approach was non-denominational, the approach involved children engaging in activities such as reading the bible and singing hymns from the Protestant religion (Bryk et al., 1993). Later, other Provincial Council meetings occurred where efforts were made to ensure that children who were Catholic were receiving an appropriate education. Efforts involved the establishment of committees for the review of textbooks as well as searching for means to provide Catholic education to the many immigrants who were arriving in the United States (Buetow, 1970). The tension between the Catholic schools and public school system, which was ran by the Protestants, led to the creation of two different types of education (Bryk et al., 1993).

During the 1880s and into the 1950s, growth continued with Catholic education, particularly among elementary schools (Buetow, 1970). With the growth in Catholic education, there was found to be a need for an organization. Therefore, in 1904, the Catholic Educational Association was developed (Buetow, 1970). With the development of this organization, Catholic educators could come together to problem solve and share their experiences (Buetow, 1970). Later in the 1920s, the Catholic Educational Association was renamed to the National Catholic Educational Association and was responsible along with papal encyclicals on clarifying the aims of Catholic education (Buetow, 1970). It was also during this period that there was found to be an increase in

attention to meeting the needs of children with disabilities who attended Catholic schools. In particular, the results of a 1951 survey found that 15 Catholic schools served students who had intellectual impairments, 10 Catholic schools served students who were deaf, five Catholic school served students who had physical impairments, and four Catholic school served students who were blind (Buetow, 1970). Because of the presence of students with disabilities in Catholic schools, two events occurred. One event, held in June 1952, was a workshop titled, *Workshop on Special Education of the Exceptional Child*. The purpose of this workshop was to provide training to teachers in terms of methods and strategies and to discuss the need for Catholic schools to have classes for students with disabilities (Buetow, 1970). The second event occurred under the direction of Msgr. Elmer H. Behrmann when the Department of Special Education was established by the National Catholic Education Association in 1954 (Buetow, 1970).

During most of the 1950s, enrollment within Catholic schools was higher than within public schools. For example, from 1950 to 1960, Catholic school enrollment increased 171%; whereas, elementary public school growth was 142% (Buetow, 1970). At the secondary school level, Catholic school enrollment grew 174%; whereas, public school enrollment grew to 148% (Buetow, 1970). Despite the growth in Catholic schools, difficulties emerged that ranged from financial concerns, to a negative stereotype, to a decline in the number of religious personnel within Catholic schools (Buetow, 1970). The difficulties that Catholic schools faced led to increased discussion regarding Catholic schools, research studies conducted on Catholic schools, and attention from Bishops on the situation that Catholic schools were facing (Buetow, 1970). Another difficulty Catholic schools were facing was that the curriculum in Catholic schools was similar to



the curriculum used in public schools (e.g., sex education and textbooks) (Buetow, 1970). The only part of the curriculum that separated the two schools was how religion was taught (Buetow, 1970).

Within the present day, Catholic schools do have marked differences from their beginnings. A notable difference is the decrease in religious vocations which resulted in a decrease in the number of brothers and sisters as well as priests and deacons who are teachers and administrators within Catholic schools. Hancock (2005) stated “after Vatican Council II, many priests and nuns left the consecrated life” (p. 60). Consequently, the laity were given the responsibility to teach in Catholic schools (Hancock, 2005). With the decline in the number of religious (brothers, sisters, priests, and deacons) vocations, currently 96.3% of teachers within Catholic schools are laity and only 3.7% are religious (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). The decline in the number of brothers, sisters, priests, and deacons is seen as drastic when looking historically at how many brothers, sisters, priests, and deacons staffed Catholic schools.

As shown in Table 2, the number of religious who staffed Catholic schools in 1920 were 45,563 (92%) whereas only 3,942 (8%) of the staff were laity. Throughout the next 40 years, the trend of Catholic schools staffed by religious continued. In 1960 there were 112,029 (73.8%) religious who staffed Catholic schools and 39,873 (26.2%) laity who staffed Catholic schools. However, even though the number of religious who staffed Catholic schools continued to grow, the number of laity also grew. This led to the percentage of religious declining and the number of laity increasing. Hence, the trend of increasing laity who staffed Catholic schools continued and in 1970, the number of religious rapidly declined (80,615; 48.4%) and the number of laity rapidly increased

(85,873; 51.6%). Presently within Catholic schools, laity make up the majority of the staff within Catholic schools (145,905; 96.3%) whereas religious make up only a small percentage (5,568; 3.7%) (McDonald & Schultz, 2011).

Table 2

*School Staffing History*

Total Staff					
	Religious		Laity		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
1920	45,563	92.0%	3,942	8.0%	49,505
1930	65,601	90.4%	6,951	9.6%	72,552
1940	73,960	91.2%	7,097	8.8%	81,057
1950	84,925	90.1%	9,370	9.9%	94,295
1960	112,029	73.8%	39,873	26.2%	151,902
1970	80,615	48.4%	85,873	51.6%	166,488
1980	42,732	29.0%	104,562	71.0%	147,294
1990	20,020	14.6%	116,880	85.4%	136,900
2000	11,011	7.0%	146,123	93.0%	157,134
2010	5,749	3.7%	148,567	96.3%	154,316
2011	5,568	3.7%	145,905	96.3%	151,473
Total Staff Summary 2010-2011					
Staff	Elementary/Middle		Secondary		Total
Female Religious	2,678		1,052		3,730
Male Religious	119		633		752
Clergy (priest/deacon)	274		812		1,086
Female Lay	85,827		26,131		111,958
Male Lay	13,467		20,480		33,947
Total	102,365		49,108		151,473
Teaching Staff	Number		Percentage		
Lay	145,905		96.3%		
Religious/Clergy	5,568		3.7%		

*Note.* From *United States Catholic elementary and secondary schools: The annual statistical report on schools, enrollment and staffing* (p. 3), by D. McDonald and M. M. Schultz, 2011, Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association. Copyright 2010 by the National Catholic Educational Association. Reprinted with permission.

Even though it is clear that the number of laity is more compared to the number of religious within Catholic schools, a closer examination of the staff within Catholic schools reveals there are more female religious and laity compared to the number of male

religious, clergy, and laity (see Table 2). When examining the staff within Catholic secondary schools, the number of female religious consist of 1,052 whereas the number of female laity consist of 26,131. Among male religious, clergy, and laity within Catholic secondary schools, the number of male laity (20,480) is more compared to the number of male religious (633) and clergy (812) (McDonald & Schultz, 2011).

One thing that is interesting to note is the difference in staff between elementary/middle and secondary Catholic schools (see Table 2). Within elementary/middle schools, the number of female religious (2,678) and laity (85,827) are more compared to the number of female religious (1,052) and laity (26,131) in secondary schools. However, when looking at the number of male staff within Catholic secondary schools compared to the number of male staff in Catholic elementary/middle schools, the number of male laity (20,480) as well as religious (633) and clergy (812) are more in Catholic secondary schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2011).

The decline in the number of religious within Catholic schools is a notable difference and does bring about challenges in Catholic schools in maintaining their Catholic identity. Since Catholic schools are an extension of the Catholic Church, the identity of the Catholic school should be that of a Catholic identity reflecting Christ and the gospel (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988). Joseph (2004) stated that “what makes Catholic schools Catholic are the theological truths which govern and give guidance to both philosophy and to persons of Catholic faith” (p. 31). Miller (2006) explained that as the marks of the Catholic Church are that of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church” as proclaimed in the Creed, so the Holy See also identifies five essential marks or features that make a school Catholic (p. 17). The five essential marks

of a Catholic school include: (1) “inspired by a supernatural vision;” (2) “founded on Christian anthropology;” (3) “animated by communion and community;” (4) “imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum;” and (5) “sustained by gospel witnesses” (Miller, 2006, p. 17). In order for Catholic schools to maintain their Catholic identity, trust has been put in the laity in carrying out the mission and goals of Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982).

### **Church Documents regarding Catholic Education**

Catholic education has not only been addressed in professional literature, but also in church documents through Papal encyclicals and the Congregation for Catholic Education. These documents assist in guiding Catholic schools in their mission of educating children on the teachings of the church. It is within this section that some of the church documents that have guided the Catholic school in their mission are discussed.

#### **Vatican I**

During the years of 1869-1870, the first Vatican Council convened (Bryk et al., 1993). The purpose of Vatican I was to “have the Church act as a total institution for its members in order to insulate them from the threats of modern society” (Bryk et al., 1993, pp. 35-36). With regards to the Church’s position on education, the council expressed the importance of children who were Catholic going to Catholic schools (Bryk et al., 1993). Therefore, the documents written after the first Vatican Council reinforced the importance of Catholic schools for children.

In November 1885, Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical on Christian Education, *Spectata Fides*, declared that “the beginning and, as it were, the seed of that human perfection which Jesus Christ gave to mankind, are to be found in the Christian Education

of the young; for the future condition of the State depends upon the early training of its children” (n. 4). It is also within this encyclical that Pope Leo XIII explained the consequences of children not receiving a Christian education. Following Pope Leo XIII encyclical was a 1929 encyclical titled, *Divini Illius Magistri*, by Pope Pius XI on the Christian Education of Youth. It was in this encyclical that Pope Pius XI (1929) declared that “the work of Christian education becomes manifest and clear; for after all it aims at securing the Supreme Good, that is, God, for the souls of those who are being educated, and the maximum of well-being possible here below for human society” (n. 8). It is the duty of the church, Pope Pius XI (1929) explained, to oversee the education of her children through means of the Catholic school. Pope Pius XI (1929) declared the Catholic school was to be a place for Catholic students where it was necessary that “all the teaching and the whole organization of the school, and its teachers, syllabus and text-books in every branch, be regulated by the Christian spirit, under the direction and maternal supervision of the Church; so that Religion may be in very truth the foundation and crown of the youths’ entire training” (n. 80).

Progress towards understanding the purpose of Catholic education was prevalent after the first Vatican Council. It was through these papal encyclicals that Catholic education was shown to be important to the growth and development in faith for Catholic children. With the purposes and a foundation of Catholic education declared, Catholic education was prepared for the changes imposed on the Church by the second Vatican Council.

## Vatican II

The second Vatican Council convened during the years 1962-1965 (Bryk et al., 1993). It was during the second Vatican Council that a shift occurred within the church that affected the nature of Catholic schools. The task of the second Vatican Council was characterized by Pope John as “one of *aggiornamento*, an updating or reviving of the Church to heed the ‘signs of the times’ and at last to encounter the modern world” (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 46).

A result of the second Vatican Council was a Declaration on Christian Education (1965), *Gravissimum Educationis*. In this document, the second Vatican Council (1965) reinforced that it was the Church’s responsibility to provide an education to its children and that all Christians had a right to receive a Christian education. Christian education was believed to help the baptized “become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God” (Vatican Council II, 1965, n. 2). Teachers were also called to have preparation and be ready to adapt new ideas to assist the Catholic school in achieving its purpose (Vatican Council II, 1965).

Following *Gravissimum Educationis* was a document by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) titled *The Catholic School*. In this document, it was declared that the task of the Catholic school was a “synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 37). Despite the difficulties that Catholic schools were presented with, the Congregation urged Catholic schools to maintain its distinctive mission and

identity. Even in 1997, in the document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, the Congregation reminded those involved in Catholic education of the importance in maintaining the mission and identity of a Catholic school in the midst of the modern world.

The Congregation for Catholic Education in 1982 provided an understanding of the laity's role and contributions within Catholic schools in the document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*. The lay Catholic educator was described as a "person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, n. 24). The church and its mission for the Catholic school have put its trust in the laity to form children on the teachings of the Catholic Church (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982). More recently, The Congregation for Catholic Education in 2007 declared in its document, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, that even though a consecrated person is to "testify his or her specific vocation to a life of communion in love so as to be in the scholastic community a sign, a memorial and a prophecy of the values of the Gospel," a lay person in a Catholic school is to "exercise a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school" (n. 15). However, prior to the 2007 document, the Congregation for Catholic Education in 2002 reiterated the role of religious in Catholic schools as those individuals who are called to be a witness and create an environment reflecting the values and teachings of the Catholic faith. Specifically, religious "...carry out an ecclesial mission that is vitally important inasmuch as while they educate they are also evangelizing"

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002, n. 6). In essence, both religious and the laity are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ and to be witnesses of the Catholic faith.

The Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988 gave attention to the dimensions of the Catholic School in the document titled *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. In this document, it was declared that a student entering into a Catholic school should have “the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics....an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, n. 25). Specifically, the climate of the school, the physical environment, and the educational and ecclesial climate should be reflective of the spirit of the Gospel. Just as the environment and climate of the Catholic school is to be reflective of the spirit of the Gospel, so is the religious instruction that occurs within the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

### **Catholic Schools and Special Education**

As stated previously, during the years 1918-1957 there was an increase in attention to meeting the needs of children with disabilities who attended Catholic schools based on the results of a 1951 survey. This survey revealed that Catholic schools were serving more students with special needs (Buetow, 1970). A similar situation occurred in 2002 where a study conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) found that students with disabilities are being served within Catholic schools. Data from these studies reveal that students with special needs are present within Catholic schools. Therefore, research is needed to better understand students with



disabilities within the Catholic school setting since Catholic schools must seek to include students who have special needs (USCCB, 2005a).

When examining the results from the study conducted by the USCCB (2002), these data show the largest percent of children with disabilities in Catholic schools are children with learning disabilities (44.71%) followed by children with speech/language impairments (26.93%) and children with other health impairments (13.78%). Children in these three disability categories also represent the highest percentage of total enrollment in Catholic schools (learning disabilities, 3.05%; speech/language, 1.84%; other health impairments, 0.94%). These data also reveal that students who have autism (0.75%), are deaf and blind (0.67%), or have traumatic brain injury (0.40%) represent the smallest percent of children with disabilities in Catholic schools as well as represent the smallest percent of total enrollment in Catholic schools (autism, 0.05%; deaf and blind, 0.05%; traumatic brain injury, 0.03%) (USCCB, 2002).

### **Special Education Services in Catholic Schools**

Long and Schuttloffel (2006) state “individuals with special needs and their families seek full participation in Catholic educational institutions and programs” (p. 443). When students with special needs are included within Catholic schools, Behrmann (1971) suggested that Catholic special education programs should include the following objectives: (1) “spiritual and moral growth as the result of religious training;” (2) “maximum adequacy in the essential academic subjects;” (3) “development of social and personal skills to promote acceptable human relations;” (4) “a practical arts program including manual, vocational, and work experiences to develop maximum economic self-

sufficiency;” and (5) “training in civic responsibility” (p. 22). In this section, a review of the literature regarding Catholic schools and special education will be explored.

DeFiore (2006) stated that “Catholic schools are not legally required to accept students with disabilities but doing so is consistent with Church teaching” (p. 455). Even though accepting students with disabilities into Catholic schools is consistent with Church teaching, “no formalized system for students with special needs currently exists within Catholic schools” (Bello, 2006, p. 461) nor are Catholic schools “required to meet every need of every child” (Shaughnessy, 1998, p. 56). Therefore, the services provided to students with disabilities within Catholic schools are not guaranteed nor are the services required to be the same as those offered in the public schools (Osborne, Dimattia, & Russo, 1998; Russo, Massucci, & Osborne, 2000). The student who has special needs does, however, have rights and can receive services since they are protected under the same legislation as students in public school; namely Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Shaughnessy, 1998). For example, according to Shaughnessy (1998), a student who attends a private school has the right to an evaluation and an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). When this happens, Shaughnessy (1998) explained the public school “must make reasonable effort to provide the student with services needed even if the student remains in the private school” (p. 31). If the public school is unable to provide those services to the student, an IEP is created and the parent decides if their child should remain in the private school (Shaughnessy, 1998). If it is decided the child will remain in the private school, the public school “cannot be held responsible for the child’s progress” (Shaughnessy, 1998, p. 56).

Even with the passing and implementation of IDEA in 2004, children in private schools are not entitled to receive special education services (Weber, 2007). If the child does receive services under IDEA, it is not guaranteed that the child will receive those services by school personnel at the private school (Weber, 2007). However, IDEA does require school districts to have funds allocated for purposes of educating children with disabilities in private schools (Weber, 2007).

When programs for students with disabilities are implemented, Bello (2006) discovered some challenges occurred within Catholic secondary schools. Some of the challenges Bello (2006) discovered were related to professional and financial resources, knowledge and skills among faculty in meeting the needs of learners, and time. Despite the difficulties that need to be overcome to include students with disabilities within Catholic schools, information from the literature have documented the results of a few schools attempting to successfully integrate and include students with disabilities within Catholic secondary schools (Laengle, Redder, Somers, & Sullivan, 2000; Powell, 2004).

Laengle, Redder, Somers, and Sullivan (2000) implemented a program entitled *The Success Central program*. The program was designed and implemented within a Catholic secondary school by a Success Central teacher who had experience working with students who exhibit academic challenges. *The Success Central program* provided extra support for 15 freshman in an inclusive setting through a co-teach model for science, English, and math classes. In addition, the students also participated in reading and math enrichment over the summer. The students who participated in *The Success Central Program* were not necessarily identified with a disability, but did exhibit a lack of attention span, organizational skills, and had experienced little success in their

academics. As a result of the program, all of the students maintained a 2.12 GPA, passed the state proficiency assessments, and 13 students were accepted to postsecondary programs. Student, teachers, and administrators reported positive experiences. One of the positive experiences was reported by a student who had a learning disability. This student reported that they appreciated the teachers' understanding when they had difficulty with comprehension. The general education teachers expressed how positive the experience was in meeting the needs of the students in collaboration with the Success Central teacher. Lastly, administrators expressed how the program had teachers examine their own teaching methods in how they teach all students (Laengle, Redder, Somers, & Sullivan, 2000).

Similarly Powell (2004) found that they were able to include students with special needs even though the publicly-funded services provided were minimal. The Paul VI Catholic High School's efforts to include children who had academic challenges began in the early 1980s when the school opened. Since that time, different programs were developed to better include students who had academic challenges. Two of the programs that have been implemented at Paul VI Catholic High School were done in collaboration with other agencies and included a tutorial model through an Academic Support Program and an Options program that incorporated peer mentors. The Academic Support Program began with the school's collaboration with a center that provided tutoring to students with special needs. When the school adopted the program, they included students with or without disabilities. The Options program that incorporated peer mentors was the result of a parent's request when they wanted their child who had Down Syndrome to attend the school. The implementation of the Options program began through collaboration with

another Catholic secondary school that was implementing the program successfully. Both the Academic Support Program and the Options program required additional tuition to be paid for students to participate in the programs. Some of the elements that contributed to the success of Paul VI Catholic High School in being able to include students with academic challenges were: commitment, support among faculty and administration, listening to parents, and diocesan administrative support for the program. A great advantage of this program was that students at the Paul VI Catholic High School “had the opportunity to study and socialize with peers of widely varying academic abilities” (Powell, 2004, p. 104).

### **Catholic Schools and Behavior**

As with other schools, Catholic schools have a code of conduct that students are expected to follow (Bryk et al., 1993; Shaughnessy, 1998; Shaughnessy, 2007), which can include expectations for interacting with other students and teachers, dress, and behaviors that are prohibited on school grounds (Bryk et al., 1993). When this code of conduct is violated, the student may be suspended or expelled (Bryk et al., 1993). In fact, Bryk et al (1993) found that the seven Catholic secondary schools used in their study had procedures in place regarding which offenses led to a suspension or expulsion. Bryk et al (1993) found student conduct was maintained through the school community established. Therefore, within Catholic schools, it is important for teachers to provide the supports necessary within a positive classroom environment in order to promote appropriate behavior (Gould & Vaughn, 2000). Some recommendations Gould and Vaughn (2000) suggest for providing students with behavioral difficulties with a positive classroom

environment include: providing students with expectations, structure, and choices; opportunities to express feelings; and building relationships with students.

In this section, the literature regarding behavior will be discussed. This review of literature begins with a discussion on research studies that have been conducted which examine teacher perceptions of behavior, in general. In what follows is an examination of the literature pertaining to behavior in the context of a Catholic school. Lastly, this section concludes with a discussion on the culture of Catholic schools.

### **Research on Teacher Perceptions of Behavior in all Schools**

While they are few, research studies examining teacher perceptions of behavior have been conducted. These studies have been conducted in elementary (e.g., Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Baker, 2005; Tilley et al., 2010), middle (e.g., Axup & Gersch, 2008; Green et al., 2008), and secondary (e.g., Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; LeBlanc et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Ritter, 1989; Watt, 2003) schools with both general and special education teachers (e.g., Ritter, 1989). The results of these studies provide insight into not only how teachers perceive the behavior, but how they perceive their ability to manage or respond to the challenging behavior.

**Perceptions of behavior.** When reviewing the studies, it was clear that teachers viewed the male student as more problematic than the female student when it came to how challenging behavior was perceived (Little, 2005; Malone et al., 1998). This was even the case when examining perceptions between general and special educators, where general educators perceived the behavior exhibited by the male student as more problematic with special educators showing no difference in their ratings based on student gender (Ritter, 1989). In fact, Malone and colleagues (1998) found in their study

that when teachers were asked to identify the type of student who would exhibit challenging behaviors, 86% of the teachers identified it would be a male student, 76% of teachers identified the student would be a low achiever, 50% of teachers identified the student would have an average IQ, and 57% of teachers identified the student would come from a low socio-economic status background. In the same study, the researchers found that the two most frequently cited beliefs among teachers regarding the causes of disruptive behavior were due primarily to a student's lack of social skills and coming from a poor home life (Malone et al., 1998).

Another dimension regarding perceptions of behavior was which behaviors teachers perceived as troublesome and/or frequently occurring (Houghton et al., 1988; Little, 2005), disturbing (Johnson & Fullwood, 2006), or challenging (Axup & Gersch, 2008). Little (2005) found little to no difference between what was perceived to be a troublesome behavior and a frequently occurring behavior with talking out of turn, hindering others, and idleness as three behaviors teachers perceived as most troublesome and frequently occurring. The only two behaviors that were viewed as most troublesome rather than frequently occurring were disobedience and lack of punctuality (Little, 2005). Likewise, in the study conducted by Houghton and colleagues (1989), talking out of turn, hindering others, and idleness were listed among the behaviors that were viewed as most troublesome and the most frequently occurring. With regards to those behaviors teachers viewed as most disturbing, Johnson & Fullwood (2006) found that the behaviors on the *Disturbing Behavior Checklist I* teachers rated as most disturbing included: stealing, destructiveness of property, profanity, gang activity, difficulty in disciplinary control, fighting, and disobedience. Some of the behaviors the teachers rated as least disturbing

included: awkwardness, shyness, socially withdrawn, and always on the go (Johnson & Fullwood). Lastly, when an open-ended questionnaire was given to teachers, the teachers stated that the behaviors they had a difficult time coping with included: the student being out of their seat, avoiding work, and verbal (Axup & Gersch, 2008).

**Factors that affect teacher perceptions of behavior.** There are a variety of factors that contribute to how behavior is perceived by teachers. One of these factors includes teacher gender (Green et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Ritter, 1989). In the studies conducted by Green et al (2008) and Ritter (1989), it was found that when female and male teachers were asked to rate the same behaviors, females rated the behaviors as more severe or problematic than the male teachers. When examining specific behaviors of concern in terms of teacher gender, Houghton and colleagues (1988) found that when asked to select from a list of 10 behavior categories, female teachers selected talking out of turn and hindering other children as two categories that were most troublesome in general and among those students who display disruptive behavior as well as the most frequently occurring. In the same study, male teachers selected idleness/slowness as most troublesome in general and among those students who display disruptive behavior as well as frequently occurring (Houghton et al., 1988). While Green et al. (2008), Houghton et al. (1988), and Ritter (1989) all found differences in teacher perceptions of behavior based on teacher gender, Johnson and Fullwood (2006) found no difference between the ratings of male and female teachers when asked to complete the *Disturbing Behavior Checklist I*.

In addition to teacher gender, Ritter (1989) found there was a difference in perceptions of student behavior between general and special educators. When asked to



complete the Teacher's Report Form of the *Child Behavior Checklist*, general educators rated externalizing behaviors and overall problem behavior as more of a concern compared to special educators. However, when examining the ratings of teachers in the area of internalizing behaviors, there was found to be no difference between general and special educators (Ritter, 1989).

Other factors that can affect teacher perceptions of behavior are years of teaching experience, degrees earned, and subject area taught. In the studies conducted by Johnson and Fullwood (2006) and Ritter (1989), the researchers found no difference between teacher ratings of problem behaviors and their years of teaching experience. However, Johnson and Fullwood (2006) did find a difference in teacher ratings of problem behaviors and degrees earned in the area of social defiance where teachers with more education did not rate behaviors in this area as disturbing as teachers with less education. Johnson and Fullwood (2006) also found a difference in the perceptions of disturbing behavior among teachers based on the subject area taught. In particular, Johnson and Fullwood (2006) found that teachers who taught elective courses compared to teachers who taught required courses rated behaviors as more disturbing on the *Disturbing Behavior Checklist I*.

Lastly, teacher tolerance towards problem behavior can affect teacher perceptions of behavior. In the study conducted by Algorzzine and Curran (1979), teachers were asked to rate their perceptions of behavior using the *Disturbing Behavior Checklist I* and statements which reflected the needs and capabilities of a student as well as respond to psychological reports which contained behaviors found on the *Disturbing Behavior*

*Checklist I.* Results of the study showed that teacher tolerance can affect how they perceive behavior exhibited by students (Algorzzine & Curran, 1979).

**Perceptions on managing student behavior.** Along with perceptions of student behavior is the notion of how teachers perceive their ability to be able to manage student behavior. Little (2005) found teachers prefer to get advice from other teachers in order to help manage student behavior. In addition to getting advice from other teachers, the teachers also rated professional development opportunities, tip sheets, and working with a psychologist as acceptable means of assistance in helping them manage student behavior (Little, 2005). When Malone et al. (1998) asked teachers to rate which disciplinary methods they believed were more effective in managing student behavior, the majority of teachers rated parent conferences (76%) followed by withholding privileges (75%), office referrals (69%), suspension (67%), and detention (65%). Other disciplinary methods including expulsion, changing the student's seat, and conferencing with the student were viewed as more effective by 64% of teachers. Lastly, the teachers rated isolating the student (58%) and paddling (51%) as more effective means of managing student behavior (Malone et al., 1998). In another study, the researchers examined teachers' level of self-efficacy, ability, and willingness with regards to managing challenging behavior (Baker, 2005). In terms of self-efficacy, Baker (2005) found that teachers reported high self-efficacy in developing rules as well as asking for advice and assistance from others; high ability to be able to use strategies for managing student behavior that are nonaversive as well as using routines and rules; and high willingness to collaborate with colleagues as well as implement routines and rules. On the other hand, teachers reported low self-efficacy in being able to work with students who were difficult or defiant; low ability in

being able to individualize reinforcement and use different types of reinforcement schedules; and low willingness to implement individualized reinforcement, behavior intervention plans, and use different types of reinforcement schedules (Baker, 2005).

**Studies on secondary education teachers and perceptions of behavior.** When examining those studies conducted in secondary schools, some insight can be gained regarding secondary school teachers' perceptions of behavior. In these studies, it was found that teachers perceived the behaviors exhibited by males as more problematic (Little, 2005; Ritter, 1989). It was also found that in some cases teacher gender was not a factor in how teachers perceived the severity of behavior problems (Johnson & Fullwood, 2006) where in other cases female teachers perceived some behavior problems as more severe than male teachers (Houghton et al, 1988; Ritter, 1989). Another factor in perceived severity of behavior problems was also based on the subject area the teacher taught. In the study conducted by Johnson & Fullwood (2006), the researchers found that teachers who taught elective courses did not perceive behaviors as severe as teachers who taught required courses. Lastly, in two studies conducted in secondary schools, behaviors that were perceived by teachers as most troublesome and frequently occurring included talking out of turn, hindering others, and idleness (Houghton et al., 1988; Little, 2005).

### **Research on Behavior in Religious Affiliated Schools**

Romi (2004) conducted a study in Israel which examined the attitudes of both students and teachers from secular and religious junior high schools. Participants included 90 male students and 30 teachers (27 male and three female) in a religious school and 72 male students and 120 teachers (nine male and 111 female) in a secular school. In Israel, religious schools are for the most part not co-educational which led the

researcher to only include male students in the study. The students and teachers in both the religious and secular school were given a 38-item questionnaire where they rated behaviors on their perceived degree of severity using a five-point Likert scale (1- least severe to 5- most severe). The results of the study revealed that behavioral problems were perceived as more severe by participants in religious schools compared to those participants in the secular schools. When examining the perceptions of teachers in religious schools, they perceived behaviors in the following categories as more severe; severe offenses, light offenses, disrupting class, lateness and absences, and non-participation, whereas those teachers in secular schools only perceived behaviors in the category of eating/drinking in class as more severe (Romi, 2004).

Based on classroom observations in seven Catholic secondary schools, Bryk et al. (1993) found that incidences of disruptive behavior were not observed, which was supported by responses on a teacher questionnaire. The only behaviors that were reported by less than 5% of the teachers included: verbal or physical abuse of students, absences or tardiness, fights, use of drugs and alcohol, and teasing of other students (Bryk et al., 1993). Other behaviors that less than 15% of teachers reported included: students not doing their homework and other infractions that were considered to be minor in nature (Bryk et al., 1993).

Bryk et al. (1993) explained the findings from their study were consistent with the findings from a 1982 study, *High School and Beyond*. The study, *High School and Beyond*, reinforced how behavior problems were found to occur less often in Catholic high schools compared to public high schools (as cited in Bryk et al., 1993). Some of the behaviors reported to occur less often in Catholic high schools included: talking back to

and attacking teachers, not going to class, and not obeying instructions (as cited in Bryk et al., 1993).

### **Behavior Management Approaches used in Catholic Schools**

In addition to research studies, literature regarding behavior within Catholic schools also includes how behavior is managed in Catholic schools. This has been done primarily through descriptions of programs that are implemented within Catholic schools. However, one research study has been conducted for purposes of evaluating the implementation of a behavior management program.

In the book, *Programs that Educate* (2001), five programs implemented within Catholic elementary schools are described. The programs discussed emphasize the following behavior management techniques: assessing the learning environment; teaching new behaviors; implementing a preventative, school-wide discipline plan; incorporating positive reinforcement; developing problem statements and goals; and including the child's family. Even though these programs are implemented within Catholic elementary schools, they provide an understanding of what behavior management approaches are used in Catholic schools. In what follows is a brief description of the five programs described in the book.

The first program, *Second Step*, involved classroom instruction that incorporated teaching students the use of problem-solving strategies as well as instruction in order to increase social competence (Brand, 2001). The classroom teachers were required to create classroom management plans that were unique to their own classrooms. However, these classroom management plans should reflect the school's mission and philosophy of

discipline as well as show how instruction on preventative discipline is incorporated. These plans were sent home to parents (Brand, 2001).

The second program utilized Foster Cline and Jim Fay's *Discipline with Love and Logic* Program by using positive techniques in the classroom (Repichowski, 2001). Some of these techniques included: using positive verbal praise, teaching routines, creating a positive classroom environment, focusing on student strengths, teaching classroom rules, and providing the students with choices. The implementation of this program has increased the level of parental involvement at the school by offering classes to parents on the Love and Logic program that can be used by parents (Repichowski, 2001).

The implementation of the third program, *Respect and Responsibility* Program, began with creating a mission statement, long-term goals, development of a problem statement, and conducting a problem analysis done by a committee consisting of both parents and teachers (Joelle, 2001). This committee met on a regular basis. After the committee gathered the necessary information, programs were reviewed. After the programs were reviewed, the committee decided to implement the *Tough Kids Social Skills* and *Boy's Town Model* programs. These two programs were implemented by teachers within their classrooms. After the program was implemented, the committee evaluated the program and noticed improvement in student behavior (Joelle, 2001).

The fourth program involved addressing behaviors such as name calling, bullying, and other unacceptable behaviors (Clough, 2001). Implementation of the program began when school staff met and discussed what problem behavior was and what appropriate behavior was. After a list of appropriate behavior practices was generated, the school staff met to discuss the list and came to a consensus. Ultimately, the school was able to

develop a curriculum focusing on virtue and character and was implemented throughout the school (Clough, 2001).

The last program was preventative and proactive in nature with regards to addressing violence and promoting positive behavior (Kryger, 2001). This program involved teaching and posting rules throughout the school, establishing school wide consequences for bullying/violence, parental involvement, professional development for staff, creating a positive school climate, and reinforcing positive behavior. The students were taught different strategies through role playing and conflict resolution training (Kryger, 2001).

In addition to the five programs described, one other program; the *Boys Town Model*, is a behavior management approach used in Catholic schools. The *Boys Town Model* is a school-wide program based on applied behavior analysis, which teaches student appropriate behavior (Peter et al., 1998). This school-wide program teaches students appropriate behavior through teaching social skills, direct instruction and role playing, and reinforcement of appropriate behavior through the use of token economy systems as well as providing teachers and administrators with strategies to help students who display challenging behaviors (Peter et al., 1998).

In addition to the description of behavior management approaches used within Catholic schools, one research study has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of a partnership model between families and schools in Catholic elementary schools within a single diocese called *Family Builders* (Sar & Wulff, 2003). The *Family Builders* model helped to create partnerships and collaborative problem solving between families and school personnel in addressing not only behavior concerns, but also academic concerns.

The implementation of this model involved: identifying a student who was of concern, having a meeting with school personnel and the child's family, and implementing a plan developed in collaboration with the child's family. Evaluation of this model was done by giving 70 families of children who participated in the *Family Builders* intervention model a survey. Of the 70 families who received the survey, 50 families responded. The results of the survey indicated that families believed school personnel had more of an understanding of student needs, addressed behavior problems that could have otherwise been overlooked, provided a structured process for addressing student concerns, and were involved in addressing student concerns. In addition, results from the survey indicated that overall families were satisfied with the program, the program allowed the families to feel empowered, and that the *Family Builders* model was beneficial to their child (Sar & Wulff, 2003).

### **The Culture of Catholic Schools**

The culture of a Catholic school has been characterized and described as a type of community (Bryk et al., 1993; Buetow, 1988; Flynn & Mok, 2001; Peter et al., 1998). Specifically, Bryk et al. (1993) explained that the notion of a community is not simply about the "physical space" (p. 128). When a community is not established within a school, Buetow (1988) warned that "the school drifts aimlessly" (p. 225). It is the community created within the school that consequently shapes the identity as well as the atmosphere of the school. However, since the atmosphere created within a Catholic school is based on Christian values and beliefs, it is not always easy to define (Buetow, 1988).



The unique atmosphere created within Catholic schools is based on Christian beliefs and values, which is what makes Catholic schools distinctive (Taymans, 1999). In the document, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, the community within a Catholic school was described as a place where “teachers and pupils experience together what it means to live a life of prayer, personal responsibility and freedom reflective of Gospel values. Their fellowship helps them grow in their commitment to service of God, one another, the Church, and the general community” (USCCB, 1972, para.108). Many times, the community of a Catholic school is communicated through school documents such as mission statements, philosophy statements, school handbooks, codes of conduct, and other documents.

Bryk and colleagues (1993) discovered in their study that specific aspects contributed to the communal organization within Catholic secondary schools. These aspects include: defined boundaries, shared beliefs and activities, and organizational roles. Defined boundaries consisted of procedures regarding admission of students and selection of faculty as well as termination procedures for both students and faculty (Bryk et al., 1993). Shared beliefs and activities within the Catholic secondary schools also contributed to the communal organization of the schools. These included the curriculum, formation of students, school mission, and extracurricular and religious activities (Bryk et al., 1993). As far as with the organizational roles within the Catholic schools, this included the role of the principal, pastoral minister, and teacher (Bryk et al., 1993). Results of the Bryk et al (1993) study revealed the communal organization of Catholic secondary schools can influence things in Catholic schools such as the activities for

students, the collegial relationship among teachers, student engagement, and teacher commitment.

### **Summary**

A more comprehensive review of the literature is needed to understand the nature of Catholic schools. As one looks to the past in reviewing the historical overview and church documents regarding Catholic schools, an understanding can be gained as to how Catholic schools have evolved to the present day. One can also gain an understanding of the meaning behind a Catholic school and what purpose the Catholic school serves for students who attend a Catholic school. Now, in the present day, one can observe how Catholic schools have changed with regards to the teachers who now comprise the Catholic school classroom. The number of clergy as well as religious brothers and sisters have decreased and the number of laity have increased within Catholic schools. Even though Catholic schools have changed with regards to the faculty (laity as opposed to religious), efforts continue to maintain the identity, goals, and mission of Catholic schools.

Research studies have been conducted which examine teacher perceptions of behavior (e.g. Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Axup & Gersch, 2008; Baker, 2005; Green, Shriberg, & Farber, 2008; Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; LeBlanc, Swisher, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007; Little, 2005; Malone, Bonitz, & Rickett, 1998; Ritter, 1989; Salkind et al., 2000; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010; Watt, 2003). There remains, however, a gap in understanding how behavior problems exhibited by students with or without disabilities are perceived within Catholic schools. To date, one research study has been conducted in a religious high school (e.g.,

Romi, 2004) as well as others studies that have examined the behavior challenges that can occur in Catholic schools (e.g., Bryk et al., 1993). These research studies examine problem behaviors that occur in Catholic schools and how those problem behaviors are perceived. In addition to these research studies, literature also exists on how behavior problems are handled in Catholic schools. However, literature on how behavior problems are handled in Catholic schools is done mainly through a description of programs. Even though these research studies have been conducted to provide an understanding of how behavior challenges/problems are perceived within Catholic schools, more research is needed.

In addition to a lack of literature on the perceptions of behavior problems exhibited by students with or without disabilities in Catholic schools, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the extent to which a theological philosophy is reflected in the perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems in Catholic schools. In order to fill this gap in the literature, three tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) (dignity of the human person, common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable) and the notion of hospitality to the stranger will make up the conceptual framework for this study. Specifically, this conceptual framework will assist in conceptualizing and contextualizing the notion of a “theological philosophy” when examining the extent to which a theological philosophy is reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers’ perceptions, responses, and policies towards behavior challenges/problems. A discussion of the three tenets of CST and hospitality to the stranger are presented in Chapter Three as well as the methods that were used to address the research questions of this study.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. The research questions that guided this study include:

1. To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.1. How are students' behavior challenges/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?
  - 1.2. How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students' behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.3. How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?

This chapter describes the methods for addressing the research questions. Specifically, this chapter will include a brief discussion of the research design, conceptual framework, selection of participants as well as data collection and analysis procedures.

## **Research Design**

In order to answer the above research questions, a descriptive study was conducted using the methods identified in grounded theory. A qualitative research design was used because “qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). In other words, a qualitative research design, such as the methods identified in grounded theory, allowed for a more in-depth understanding of how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy.

When reviewing the literature, it was discovered that the majority of studies employed surveys, questionnaires, and rating scales to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions of behavior (e.g., Algozzine & Curran, 1979; Axup & Gersch, 2008; Baker, 2005; Green, Shriberg, & Farber, 2008; Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; LeBlanc, Swisher, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007; Little, 2005; Malone, Bonitz, & Rickett, 1998; Ritter, 1989; Salkind et al., 2000). While these methods of data collection can provide information about how teachers perceive challenging behavior, Tillery et al. (2010) explain that qualitative methods “minimize the researchers’ influence on teacher responses and produce data that reflect the teachers’ voice rather than that of the researchers” (p. 97). Therefore, in order to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions of behavior, this study utilized qualitative methods for data collection which include conducting interviews with secondary Catholic school teachers.

## Conceptual Framework

Leshem and Trafford (2007) state “the conceptual framework is a bridge between paradigms which explain the research issue and the practice of investigating that issue” (p. 99). For purposes of this study, the conceptual framework acted as a guide during the data collection and analysis process in order to conceptualize and contextualize the notion of a “theological philosophy” with regards to secondary Catholic school teachers’ perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems. The components of the conceptual framework for this study consisted of: (1) three Catholic Social Teaching (CST) tenets identified for this study (dignity of the human person, common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable) and (2) the notion of hospitality to the stranger. In what follows is a discussion of the components and how both components relate to one another.

DeBerri, Hug, Henriot, and Schultheis (2003) among others have referred to CST as “our best kept secret” (p. 3). While this may be the case since there is “no canonical or official list of the documents belonging to Catholic social teaching” (Aubert, 2003, p. 16), the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004) emphasize the importance of individuals following these teachings. A reason for their importance is they are grounded in scripture, papal encyclicals, and other church documents (Aubert, 2003; Curran, 2002; McKenna, 2002) which is part of “authentic Magisterium” and “has the same dignity and authority as her moral teaching” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §80). These teachings also provide “the foundation of the Church’s commitment to social justice and its teachings on the human person and the human community” which calls us to action (Storz & Nestor, 2007, p. 7).

Beginning with the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, these teachings continue to guide the Church in addressing and responding to issues that arise in our society (McKenna, 2002) as well as in our Catholic schools (Scanlan, 2009; Storz & Nestor, 2007). In fact, Scanlan (2009) asserts that CST should be applied to Catholic schools in an effort to provide an inclusive environment for all, but especially the marginalized. While there is a list of themes that are identified as part of CST, Scanlan (2009) states that “what drives the commitment to inclusivity in a Catholic approach to service delivery is an appreciation of the dignity of each individual person coupled with the commitment to the common good and a preferential option for those who tend to be marginalized” (p. 8). Storz and Nestor (2007) further explain that the three tenets of Catholic social teaching; dignity of the human person, common good (call to community), and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, can be seen as a framework with its application to Catholic education. In fact, when Storz and Nestor (2007) began speaking with students from Catholic schools, they found the students’ experiences in Catholic schools were grounded in justice and, in particular, how their dignity as humans was respected in a Catholic school environment. Therefore, these three tenets were seen as essential in the current study in examining how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy.

### **Dignity of the Human Person**

Scanlan (2009) explains the dignity of the human person is a foundational tenet of CST. The basis of this CST is that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, *Imago Dei*, where “the church sees in men and women, in every person, the living

image of God himself” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §105). Because each individual is made in the image and likeness of God, each individual is deserving of “equal dignity” no matter what qualities an individual may bring that could be different from others (Curran, 2002, p. 132).

When applied to education, Storz and Nestor (2007) state this theme is “at the very core of our vocation as Catholic educators” (p. 10). Storz and Nestor (2007) went on to explain that the environment in which children learn in as well as the interactions had within the learning environment can “respect or diminish students’ dignity” (p. 10). In particular, the students Storz and Nestor (2007) interviewed in their study emphasized the notion of care. Storz and Nestor (2007) stated the “students challenged us to see how a climate of caring is a fundamental requirement for Catholic schools committed to respecting the life and dignity of the human person” (p. 20). In fact, Storz and Nestor (2007) found through student interviews and classroom observations, behavior problems occurred more frequently when “students believed the teacher did not care for them” (p. 26). In addition to the notion of care, high expectations and effective teaching and learning were two other themes that emerged in relation to the dignity of the human person when interviewing the students (Storz & Nestor, 2007).

### **Common Good**

This tenet of CST is acknowledged within the theme, *Call to Family, Community, and Participation* (McKenna, 2002; USCCB 2005b). A reason for this is because this tenet insists that each individual, who is considered to be a social being, is deserving of participating and should seek the common good for all individuals in a community (USCCB, 2005b). Therefore, this tenet “stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all



people” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §164). Since this tenet focuses on promoting dignity, unity, and equality, DeBerri and colleagues (2003) warn this tenet is not achieved within a community that is utilitarian in nature. Rather, this tenet is achieved when the community is committed to helping each individual “achieve their authentic human development more fully” (DeBerri et al., 2003, p. 23).

Storz and Nestor (2007) explain the CST tenet, the common good, can be applied to the community aspect of Catholic schools when examining things such as the needs and contributions of students. Just as Storz and Nestor (2007) discussed caring as an element for respecting the dignity of the human person, caring was identified as important in the learning community. Also important in the community of the Catholic school was the notion of being one family and the importance of schools and teachers building relationships with families, colleagues, and students (Storz & Nestor, 2007). Therefore, essential to this element of CST, the common good, is the communal effort of both teachers and students in helping to build a community that values each individual (Storz & Nestor, 2007).

### **Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

This tenet of CST has to do with promoting social justice for those who are considered to be marginalized or vulnerable within our society and ensuring their needs are met (Storz & Nestor, 2007). In essence, this tenet challenges individuals to put themselves in the position of the poor and vulnerable when making decisions and ask “what effect will it have on poor people” (Curran, 2002, p. 188). Similarly, as Fasching and deChant (2001) explain, John Rawl’s theory of “the veil of ignorance” challenges individuals to do the same by forcing “one to identify, not with everyone equally, but

rather with the alien, the stranger, and the outcast—since you can never be sure that you will not be placed in their position” (p. 25). And while the term for this tenet is fairly new, with John Paul II first using this term in papal encyclicals, its roots are found in liberation theology as well as in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the church (Curran, 2002; Storz & Nestor, 2007).

This tenet of CST also reflects the notion of hospitality to the stranger (Fasching, 2000; Fasching & deChant, 2001) where teachings from the prophets and Jesus focus on how hospitality should be shown to the poor and vulnerable. For instance, in the Old Testament, it is stated in Exodus (23:9, New American Bible), “you shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt” as well as in Leviticus (19:34) it is stated, “you shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as you yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” These biblical passages reinforce how the Lord wanted the people in the land of Egypt to treat both native and stranger alike with equal dignity and love since they too were once strangers (Fasching, 2000). Similarly, the idea behind the Jubilee year discussed in Leviticus (25:10) was a time where “you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants.” This meant that people were set free, including slaves and all started new because during this time “every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to his own family estate” and “you shall not sow, nor shall you reap the aftergrowth or pick the grapes from the untrimmed vines” (Leviticus 25: 10-11). The year of Jubilee not only set people free and sold property because all had to return to their “own family

estate,” it also provided an opportunity for everyone to be equal (Leviticus 25:11), including those who were viewed as the poor and oppressed.

Likewise, instances in the New Testament focus on how hospitality to the stranger should be shown to the poor and vulnerable through the parables that Jesus told. In fact, McKenna (2002) states, “Catholic social teaching proclaims that an important dimension of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the respect, dignity, and assistance that are given to the poor and lowly within society, with whom Jesus Christ so intimately identified himself” (p. 57). For instance, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus explained how the sheep and goats will be separated from one another and to the ones on his left, the goats, he will say, ““Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). Similarly, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told the story of a man who fell victim to robbers and a Samaritan traveler was the only person who approached the man and helped him even though he did not know the man. These parables serve as examples of how Jesus wants us to respond to the needs of the poor and vulnerable and consequently, reinforce when one shows concern or hospitality to the poor and vulnerable, one is also showing compassion towards God (Fasching, 2000).

When contextualizing this tenet within schools, Storz and Nestor (2007) explain this tenet is carried out when teachers provide services to students with disabilities as well as work with families and students who encounter struggles. As Storz and Nestor (2007) interviewed the students, this tenet emerged when students discussed “how truly vulnerable they were in schools that were not meeting their basic educational needs” (p. 100). Some areas of their educational experience where the students explained inequities

pertained to curriculum; teacher characteristics, expectations, and assumptions; and available resources (Storz & Nestor, 2007). As with the dignity of the human person and common good, the notion of care also emerged in the students' responses around this tenet (Storz & Nestor, 2007).

This tenet can also be applied to schools when students who are from different cultural and religious backgrounds or even students who have disabilities are not welcomed into the culture of the school because of their religious beliefs or because of their disability, they experience being a stranger or vulnerable to the dominant group. For instance, within secondary settings, more students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001) rather than being placed in a self-contained classroom. Unfortunately, when students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms, general educators do not feel they have the knowledge or skills necessary to work with students who have disabilities in their classroom (e.g., Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003; Kavale & Forness; 2000; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006; Singh, 2002). This presents a challenge toward including students with disabilities in these classrooms because students in inclusive settings should feel like they belong (Dixon, 2005). Unfortunately, Dixon (2005) states, "as the history of integration demonstrates, special education joins the mainstream system and functions in accordance to the standards of the dominant system. The experience of someone joining a group and having to conform to the standards of that group is a very different experience from that of belonging to a group one is accepted as he or she is" (p. 35).

In essence, while the notion of hospitality to the stranger is innately reflected in the tenet, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, it is also reflected in the CST tenets, dignity of the human person and common good. With regards to the dignity of the human person, Fasching (2000) warns that viewing others as being created in the image and likeness of God could exclude individuals because since we cannot see God “we only come to grasp who God is through our encounter with other human beings, especially the stranger” (p. 53). Fasching (2000) further states that “if we encounter God only in those who are like ourselves, the danger is that we are only worshiping our own self-image” (p. 53). Rather, we must “reach beyond our own identity to grasp our common humanity shared with the stranger, our common dignity as creatures created in the image of a God without image” (Fasching, 2000, p. 53). This understanding regarding the dignity of the human person is illustrated when Fasching (2000) discusses the difference between a sacred and holy community which relates to the CST tenet, common good. In a sacred community, God is created in the individuals own image, which can lead to exclusion for those who are not like the majority and, consequently, strangers are not welcomed (Fasching, 2000). On the other hand, in a holy community, all individuals are included because the understanding of God is God is not created in the individuals own image, but in the image of God who does not have an image (Fasching, 2000). Therefore, while the two components of the conceptual framework are presented as separate entities in Figure 1, the figure also shows the relationship between them as the concepts underlining the tenets of CST and hospitality to the stranger reflect one another in that they both reinforce the importance of the dignity of the human person and how we should treat others.

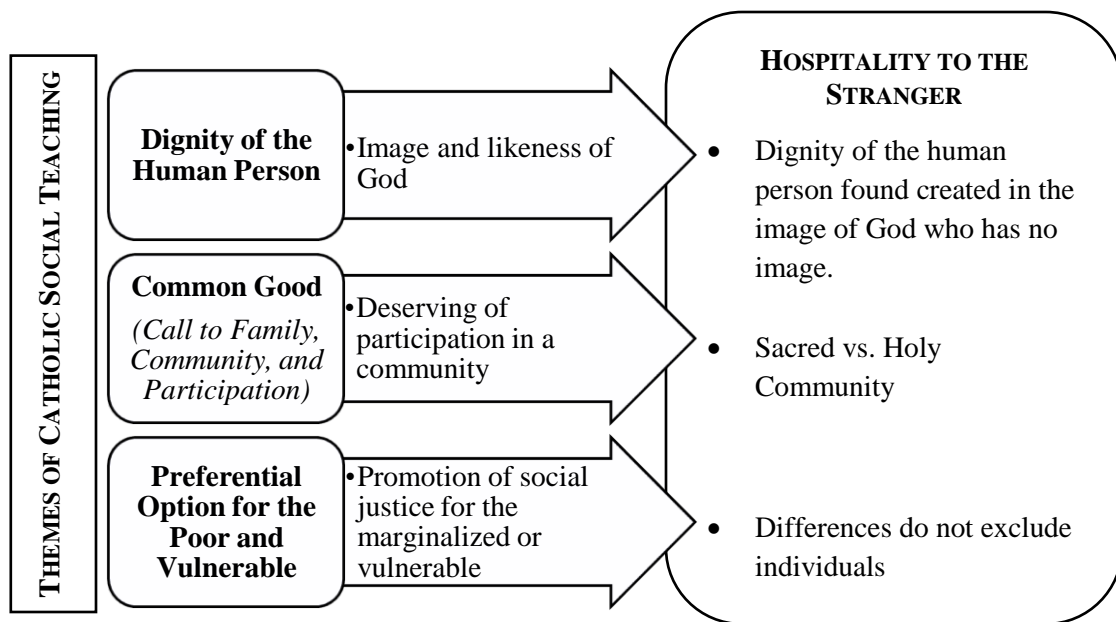


Figure 1. Relationship between Themes of Catholic Social Teaching and Hospitality to the Stranger

The three small boxes in the diagram contain the tenets of CST identified in the conceptual framework (dignity of the human person, common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable). Each box is attached to an arrow which contains a short descriptor of the CST. The larger box contains short descriptors relating to the notion of hospitality to the stranger. The relationship between CST and the notion of hospitality to the stranger is shown by the three arrows pointing to a descriptor relating to hospitality to the stranger. This relationship between the CST tenets and the notion of hospitality to the stranger shown in this diagram demonstrates how the teachings of the Catholic Church represented by the CST tenets are reflected in the notion of hospitality to the stranger. Therefore, the tenets of CST and the notion of hospitality to the stranger allowed for the identification of a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems.

## Participants

Seven participants (3 female, 4 male) participated. Participants for this study consisted of teachers who are currently teaching ( $n = 5$ ) or have taught in Catholic secondary schools ( $n = 2$ ). While the majority of participants were laity (not a deacon, brother, sister, priest;  $n = 5$ ), two were religious (deacon, brother, sister, priest). The teachers were selected to participate based upon a set criteria. A description of the sampling procedures, criteria for selection, and procedures for participant recruitment follows and a summary of participant demographic information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

### *Demographics of Participants*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Female	3	42.9
Male	4	57.1
Age		
21 and under	0	0.0
22 to 34	1	14.3
35 to 44	3	42.9
45 to 54	1	14.3
55 to 64	2	28.6
65 and over	0	0.0
Race		
Black	0	0.0
White	7	100.0
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	0	0.0
African American	0	0.0
Asian Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Multi-Racial	0	0.0
Native American	0	0.0
Religious or Laity		
Religious (deacon, brother, sister, priest)	2	28.6
Laity (not a deacon, brother, sister, priest)	5	71.4
Religious Affiliation		
American Baptist	1	14.3

Catholic	5	71.4
No affiliation	1	14.3

### **Sampling**

The intent was to include six to eight participants in this study. Therefore, initially six teachers were selected to participate. However, when comparing data across participants through the use of constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009), it was determined that one more participant was needed to ensure the point of saturation was reached (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000) as well as confirming and disconfirming cases were identified (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles & Haberman, 1994). Because the point of saturation was reached and confirming and disconfirming cases were identified after the seventh participant, the researcher determined additional participants were not needed.

These teachers were selected using two purposeful sampling methods (Patton, 2002): convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling involved selecting participants who were easy to obtain and available to the researcher (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Snowball sampling involved asking participants to recommend other individuals who could participate in the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). In the current study, the majority of participants were selected using a convenience sampling method (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004) with snowball sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Mertens & McLaughlin, 204) used on only one occasion to recruit participants. All teachers selected to participate were selected based on a set criteria developed by the researcher.



## **Criteria for Selection**

Participants in this study could be individuals in Catholic secondary schools who were either a deacon, brother, sister, or priest (religious) as well as those who were not a deacon, brother, sister, or priest (laity) since the teaching staff within Catholic secondary schools consist of both religious as well as laity (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). In addition, participants could be currently teaching or have taught in a Catholic secondary school. If a participant was not currently teaching in a Catholic secondary school, they were selected to participate if they have taught in a Catholic secondary school preferably within the last three years, but no more than five years. A reason for this is that the longer a teacher is out of the classroom the more difficult it is for the teacher to not only remember his/her experiences, but also the nature of the classroom experience as well as use the language to communicate and speak about his/her experiences. Lastly, a criterion for participation was not dependent on religious affiliation. While the majority of the teaching staff is Catholic within Catholic secondary schools, the teaching staff does consist of those who are not Catholic (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). However, just as lay Catholic educators are responsible for maintaining the Catholic identity of the school and carrying out the mission and goals of Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982), so is the responsibility of those educators within Catholic schools who are not Catholic.

Secondary education teachers were selected to participate in this study because “secondary teachers, in common with their primary colleagues, frequently cite inappropriate classroom behavior as one of their major problems” (Houghton et al., 1988, p. 297). However, when reviewing the literature on teacher perceptions of behavior in

secondary settings, there were other factors that affected how teachers within this setting perceived behavior beyond teacher gender, tolerance, and experience. One factor included differences in perceptions of problem behaviors between teachers who taught core and elective courses. In the study conducted by Johnson and Fullwood (2006), the researchers found that teachers who taught elective courses did not perceive behaviors as severe as teachers who taught required courses. Another factor pertained to a student's school history with regards to behavior. LeBlanc and colleagues (2007) found in their study that "teachers' reports of classroom behavior problems can be predicted from students' history of physical aggression during elementary school" (p. 437). In essence, when students who have a school history of exhibiting behavior problems are admitted to high school "high school teachers are more likely to report classroom behavior problems" (Johnson & Fullwood, 2006, p. 437).

### **Procedures for Participant Recruitment**

Individuals who met the criteria for selection in this study were recruited to participate. Recruitment of participants was done using personal contacts already established by the researchers as well as utilizing key informant(s), who are "knowledgeable insider[s]" (Weiss, 1994, p. 20). The purpose of key informant(s) in this study was to identify individuals who would be able to recommend individuals who met the inclusion criteria for participation in this study.

When individuals were recruited for this study, the researcher or key informant(s) contacted individuals using phone or email. In many cases, the key informant(s) contacted the individual initially. If the individual was interested in participating, the key informant(s) provided the individual with the researcher's contact information. In either

case, when contact was made, an explanation regarding the purpose of the study was provided and the individual was asked if he/she would be willing to participate in the study. If the individual was willing to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled a face-to-face meeting with the individual in order to obtain informed consent (see Appendix A). After the informed consent document was reviewed, the individual had the choice to think about whether or not they would like to participate. However, in each case, the participant decided to participate after the informed consent document was reviewed. If the individual was not able to meet in person to obtain informed consent due to the location of the individual, verbal consent was obtained using a verbal consent script. Verbal consent to participate in this study was documented by the researcher on the verbal script.

### **Pilot Study**

Prior to conducting this study, a pilot study was conducted. The purpose of this pilot study was to “field test” the two measures that would be used in this study, the teacher demographic questionnaire and the interview protocol, to ensure clarity of questions and to assess if the questions elicited responses that could provide an understanding of how teachers perceive and respond to problem behavior (Weiss, 1994, p. 48). The pilot study also served as a way for an individual who has had experience in Catholic schools to conduct an expert review of the teacher demographic questionnaire and questions on the interview protocol.

The expert reviewer for the instruments taught in a Catholic school for over 25 years. While she has not taught in a Catholic secondary school, she has teaching and administration experience in Catholic elementary schools. In addition to her experience in

Catholic schools, she is also part of a religious order of sisters whose primary focus is on teaching and education.

When the pilot study was conducted, the researcher began by explaining that the purpose of the pilot study was to complete the teacher demographic questionnaire and conduct an interview using the interview protocol as well as provide an opportunity for her to give feedback on the nature of the questions asked and if the questions would elicit the best responses from participants. After the purpose of the pilot study was explained, she completed the teacher demographic questionnaire and then was asked each question on the interview protocol. At the completion of the interview, she provided feedback on the questions asked on the teacher demographic questionnaire and on the interview protocol.

Based on the responses provided and feedback received during the pilot study, the teacher demographic questionnaire and questions on the interview protocol were revised. For the teacher demographic questionnaire, one revision was made to question 18. For this question, instead of asking the participant to list the type(s) of disabilities the students had, this question was revised to providing a list of disability categories under IDEA. For the interview protocol, the researcher moved question 5, which asked about the individual's role in providing interventions or support for behavior questions. This question was moved because during the pilot study, asking question 5 interrupted the flow of the interview and what was being discussed. Therefore, question 5 was asked after the question which asked for the participant to talk about a time when a severe behavior problem occurred in his/her classroom.

Besides revisions made to the instruments, other things were learned from this pilot study that had an effect on how the study would be conducted. One thing learned affected how the interviews were conducted. When question 5 was asked on the interview protocol, tell me about your classroom and what it looks like on a regular day, an elaborate response was provided by the expert reviewer. As the expert reviewer responded, I questioned whether I should stop her and ask a follow up question or let her continue responding. However, as I listened to her response after the interview was conducted, I found she provided insightful information that may not have been captured if I would have stopped her by asking a follow up question. From this experience, I learned the importance of letting the individual provide their response and then follow up with questions. The second thing learned affected the criteria for selecting participants. The expert reviewer has not taught in a Catholic school within the last five years. As she was responding to the interview questions, she had a difficult time recalling and describing experiences she had while teaching. This experience reaffirmed the importance of selecting participants who have not been out of teaching for a number of years. Therefore, based on this experience, if a participant was not currently teaching in a Catholic secondary school, they were selected to participate if they taught within the last three years, but no more than five years.

### **Data Collection**

In order to gain an understanding of how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy, data collected for this study were derived from multiple sources. Data were collected using a teacher demographic questionnaire and conducting

interviews with secondary Catholic school teachers. Prior to collecting any data for this study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought and approval was granted on November 30, 2010 (see Appendix B). In this section, a description of the measures used to collect data for this study will be explained as well as the procedures that were used to collect data.

### **Description of Measures**

**Teacher demographic questionnaire.** Teachers who participated in this study completed the teacher demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). This questionnaire consisted of 18 open and closed-ended questions. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information on the teachers' gender, age, race, ethnicity, if they were religious or laity, religious affiliation, teaching experience and certifications, teacher preparation experience, and experience working with students who have disabilities. The information provided on this questionnaire was used to provide additional information on the participants as well as was used during the interview in guiding the questions asked regarding their teaching experience and experience in working with students who have disabilities.

**Interview protocol.** In addition to completing the teacher demographic questionnaire, the participants were interviewed using questions developed by the researcher (see Appendix D). The 15 question interview protocol consisted of questions to learn more about the teachers' teaching experience, teacher preparation experience, perceptions of behavior problems, responses to behavior problems, experience working with students who have disabilities, the Catholic school environment and behavior, and school policies. The last set of questions pertained to the three tenets of Catholic Social

Teaching (dignity of the human person, common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable) with regards to what the tenets meant to them as a teacher, how the tenets affected how they perceive behavior problems, and the extent to which the teachers believed the tenets were reflected in school policies.

The interview questions developed for this study were based on the research questions. In Table 4, a representation of the relationship between the research questions and interview questions is presented by showing how the interview questions aligned with the research questions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Table 4

*Relationship between Research Questions and Questions in Interview Protocol*

	Research questions	Interview questions
1.	To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?	14a, 14a.i., 14b, 14b.i., 14c, 14c.i, 14d
1.1.	How are students' behavior challenge/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?	6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 11a, 12
1.2.	How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students' behavior challenges/problems?	7a, 8a, 9, 10a, 12
1.3.	How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?	13, 13a, 13b

In some cases, the interview questions did not directly align with the research questions.

A reason for this is because some of the questions on the interview protocol, particularly at the beginning, allowed for the researcher to gain some background information on the participant's teaching experience(s), why they decided to teach in a Catholic school, how they believed their teacher preparation program prepared them to teach in a Catholic school, and about their classroom and what it looked like on a regular day. Questions

such as these allowed for the researcher to not only contextualize responses to those questions which asked the participant to specifically talk about their perceptions and responses towards problem behavior, but helped the researcher build a rapport with the participants. In fact, Charmaz (2006) suggests beginning the interview with a “few broad, open-ended questions” and then having the interview questions become more focused on the topic of interest as the interview progresses (p. 26).

### **Procedures**

Data collected for this study consisted of the teacher demographic questionnaire and one open-ended, semistructured interview (Bernard, 2000, 2006) using an interview protocol developed by the researcher. These data were collected during face-to-face meetings (in person or via Skype) with each participant. On one occasion, the participant and the researcher were not able to meet in person due to the location of the participant. In this case, the researcher utilized online video conferencing via Skype.

**First meeting.** The researcher began the meeting with each participant by reviewing and obtaining informed consent. Once informed consent was obtained, the researcher provided the participant with the teacher demographic questionnaire. In many cases, the participants whom the researcher met in person with requested combining the first and second meetings because of time and availability on the part of the participants. In these cases, once the teacher demographic questionnaire was completed the second meeting began.

For the participant who participated in this study using online video conferencing via Skype, verbal consent was obtained and a second meeting was scheduled. Immediately following the first meeting, the teacher demographic questionnaire was



emailed to the participant. The participant was asked to email the completed questionnaire to the researcher prior to the second meeting. In this case, the second meeting occurred at a different scheduled time.

**Second meeting.** As mentioned previously, in many cases, this second meeting was combined with the first meeting. In these cases, the researcher began this meeting by reviewing the completed teacher demographic questionnaire and explaining the purpose of the interview. When explaining the purpose of the interview, the researcher also reminded the participant the interview would be audio taped for transcription and analysis purposes. After the purpose of the meeting was explained, the researcher asked the participant if they had any questions. If the participant did not have any questions, the researcher began the interview using the questions on the interview protocol.

As stated previously, the interview was an open-ended, semistructured interview (Bernard, 2000, 2006) that was audio taped with permission from the participant. A semistructured interview was chosen because it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of participant experiences and perceptions as well as allowed for the researcher to ask the participant to elaborate on their responses and ask further questions to gain clarification. The researcher did interject if additional clarification on the question being asked was needed or if additional probing was necessary to gain a better understanding of the participant's response.

In one instance, the participant and the researcher were not able to meet in person due to the location of the participant. In this case, the researcher utilized online video conferencing via Skype. The interview was recorded using PrettyMay, which is Skype software that records the audio from Skype video conferencing.

At the conclusion of this meeting, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and for talking about their experiences. Also, a third meeting was scheduled with the participant for purposes of doing a member check (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997) and to follow up on any thoughts the participant had following the interview. A member check was conducted following the second meeting with each participant because it provided the participant with a voice during the research process as well as allowed the researcher to know the transcript accurately represented the conversation had between the researcher and participant (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Manning, 1997).

**Third meeting.** The researcher began this meeting (lasting approximately 20 minutes) by explaining the purpose of the meeting and that it would be audio taped for transcription and analysis purposes. After the purpose of the meeting was explained, the researcher asked the participant if they had any questions. If the participant did not have any questions, the researcher gave the participant the transcript from the second meeting. In some cases, the transcript was emailed to the participant for them to review prior to the third meeting because of time constraints or convenience on the part of the participant. In either case, when the participant was given the transcript they were asked to review it for any misrepresentations or inaccuracies regarding what they stated (Brantlinger et al., 2005). If the participant felt the transcript accurately represented the conversation had at the second meeting, the researcher engaged in a discussion with the participant regarding any thoughts they had after the second meeting. Also during this time, the researcher asked for clarification on anything that was unclear from the second meeting.

In the one instance where Skype was used for the previous meetings, the transcript containing the conversation from the second meeting was emailed to the participant and they reviewed the transcript prior to the meeting. After the transcript was reviewed by the participant, the participant and the researcher engaged in a discussion using online video conferencing via Skype regarding if the transcript accurately represented the conversation had at the second meeting and if the participant had any thoughts after the second meeting. The researcher also asked for clarification on anything that was unclear from the second meeting. This discussion was audio recorded using PrettyMay, which is Skype software that records the audio from Skype video conferencing.

**After each meeting.** The researcher engaged in several activities following each meeting with each participant. One of the activities the researcher did was engage in a “self-reflective process” (Anderson, 1989, p. 254) called reflexivity (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Cutcliffe, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hall & Callery, 2001; & Lincoln, 2005) by maintaining a journal throughout the research process. The purpose of this journal was to reflect on thoughts and reactions to what was experienced during meetings with the participants. After each meeting with each participant, the researcher wrote in the journal. Journal entries included thoughts and reactions the researcher experienced as the interview was being conducted as well as thoughts and reactions the researcher experienced following the interview.

Reflexivity was used in this study because within qualitative research the researcher is considered to be “the instrument” (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 197). It also

provided the researcher with an opportunity to reflect and document changes in thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and biases as she progressed through the research process (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Cutcliffe, 2003). By doing this, the researcher was able to be transparent since the researcher was explicitly expressing her thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and biases as she progressed through the research process (Cutcliffe, 2003). Reflexivity was also used in this study because it added to the creditability of the study (Cutcliffe, 2003). Specifically, Hall and Callery (2001) state reflexivity within grounded theory has “the potential to increase the validity of the findings” (p. 258).

Based on recommendations within grounded theory, the researcher also engaged in transcribing the interviews and beginning the analysis process (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; McHatton, 2009). This is important in grounded theory because “being immersed in data analysis during data collection provides a sense of direction, promotes greater sensitivity to data, and enables the researcher to redirect and revise interview questions or observations as he or she proceeds” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 57). By engaging in the analysis process while collecting data also allowed the researcher to seek clarification or elaboration on emerging concepts when the researcher met with the participants during the third meeting.

### **Data Analysis**

As stated previously, data collected for this study were derived from multiple sources. These data included information from the teacher demographic questionnaire and information from the interviews conducted. Once data from each of these sources were collected, data were analyzed using the methods identified in grounded theory in order to gain an understanding of how secondary Catholic school teachers perceived

problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. Therefore, in this section, a description of procedures that were used to analyze the collected data from the teacher demographic questionnaire and interviews will be discussed.

## **Procedures**

**Teacher demographic questionnaire.** The information collected on this form was analyzed using descriptive statistics (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). For questions which asked the participant to select an answer from a list of preselected choices (questions 1-5, 7-8, 10-13, 15, 17, 18), the researcher obtained a total number and percentage for each question. For those questions that asked the participant to provide an answer (questions 6, 9, 14, 16), the researcher listed the answers given by the participants. Next to each answer listed, the researcher provided the total number and percentage for each response provided by the participants.

**Interviews.** Since this study utilized the methods identified in grounded theory, analyses of data collected from interviews with participants were done following each interview with each participant (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009). Creswell (1998) refers to the data collection and analysis process within grounded theory as a “ ‘zigzag’ process—out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, analyze the data, and so forth” (p. 57). Therefore, in the current study, the researcher did not interview the second participant without at least transcribing and analyzing data collected during the member check with the first participant. However, in one instance, the researcher moved on to another participant before completing the member check with a participant because of the

availability of the next participant. While this occurred, the researcher felt enough of an understanding of these data were gained from the interview during the second meeting that little follow up was needed during the member check. However, in no instance did the researcher move on to another participant without at least completing meetings one and two with a participant.

Analysis of data collected from the interviews began with transcribing the interview that was conducted. Since it was important for the researcher to begin immersing herself into the data early in the analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), transcription of the interviews were done by the researcher. Once the interview was transcribed, the researcher uploaded the transcript to ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) software that allowed the researcher to do text analyses on qualitative data (Saldana, 2009) to identify relevant themes/codes.

However, before the researcher coded the interview transcript, the researcher began by reading the transcript once through without making any marks (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; McHatton, 2009). The researcher conducted the first iteration in this way because as Corbin and Strauss (2008) state “the idea behind the first reading is to enter vicariously into the life of the participants, feel what they are experiencing and listen to what they are telling us” (p. 163). The researcher conducted additional readings of the transcript without making any marks if the researcher felt additional readings were necessary to gain a sense of “what the data are saying” (McHatton, 2009, p. 133). After the researcher felt she had a sense of what was expressed during the interview, the researcher did additional iterations. While doing these iterations, the researcher began coding these data and writing memos using ATLAS.ti (see Figure 2).

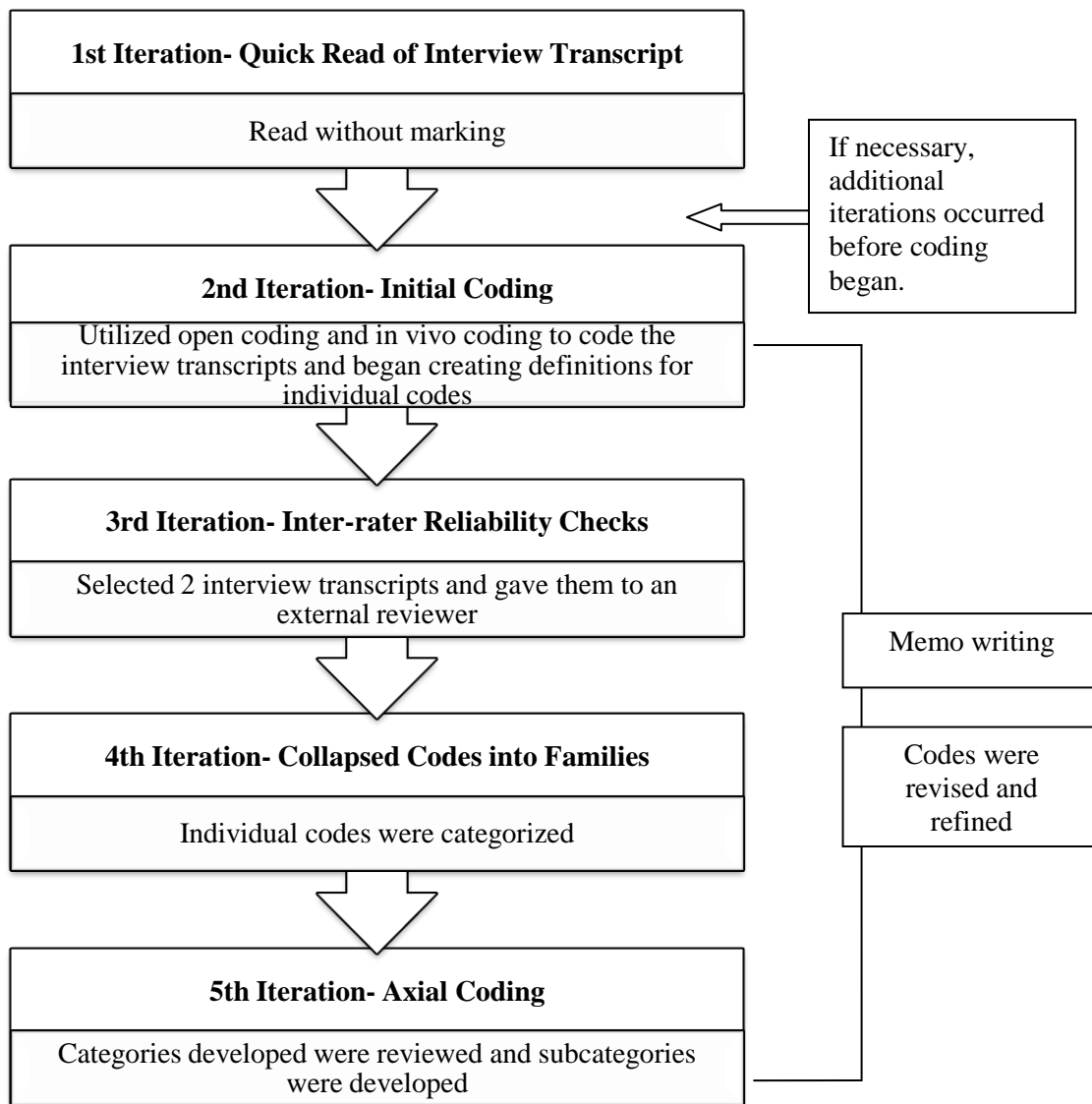


Figure 2. Process for Analyzing Interview Transcripts

Coding these data began with initial coding (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; McHatton, 2009) where the researcher read the transcript and began assigning codes to the data using open coding and in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; McHatton, 2009). As the data were being coded, the researcher used an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach. By using an inductive approach, the researcher could assign codes to data based on what emerged rather than using a list of pre-developed codes (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; McHatton, 2009).

When codes were assigned to these data, definitions were also developed. As the researcher engaged in additional iterations, the researcher revised and refined the codes as well as began collapsing codes into families. Once codes were collapsed into families, the researcher engaged in axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009) where the categories developed when codes were collapsed into families were reviewed and subcategories were developed in order to link and show connections between categories.

As the researcher coded each interview transcript, the researcher used constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) state constant comparison occurs when “each incident in the data is compared with other incidents for similarities and differences” (p. 73). In this study, this was done by comparing similarities and differences among data and codes. In addition to engaging in constant comparison analysis, the researcher also engaged in memo writing, which is another important part of the analysis process in grounded theory.

In grounded theory, memo writing provides space “to stop and analyze your ideas, pose questions, identify literature you may want to explore, make comparisons or connections, identify gaps in your analysis, and most important, simply to capture your thoughts” (McHatton, 2009, p. 136). In this study, the researcher utilized memo writing when each transcript was analyzed. The researcher began memo writing at the point in the analysis when coding began and continued for each iteration during data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).



It was found that through additional iterations as well as using constant comparison analysis and memo writing, the way in which the researcher conducted iterations of these data from the point of initial coding throughout data analysis changed. Initial coding of the transcripts began by reading the transcript and assigning codes based on what emerged through what the participant shared in response to questions on the interview protocol. However, throughout additional iterations of these data, the researcher began to look deeper at these data and ask, “What is really going on here?” This provided a deeper level of analysis where the researcher was able to examine the beliefs and actions of the participants and in some cases, identify the factors and variables that contributed to beliefs and actions of the participants.

**Inter-rater reliability checks.** Inter-rater reliability checks were conducted on the interview transcripts where the researcher selected two interview transcripts (3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> interview). Those transcripts selected were given to an external reviewer who was also a doctoral student working on her dissertation. The external reviewer chosen to conduct the inter-rater reliability checks not only had experience in analyzing qualitative data, but was also sensitive to the notion of a theological philosophy discussed in participant responses. While the individual selected had experience analyzing qualitative data, the researcher discussed in detail the coding process the researcher followed to ensure the individual was following the same protocol as the researcher was when data were analyzed. In addition to discussing the coding procedure, the researcher provided the individual with the codes and code definitions as well as the interview protocol used to conduct the interview.

Inter-rater reliability check was conducted first on transcript three where the external reviewer independently coded the transcript in the same manner as the researcher and used the codes and code definitions provided by the researcher. Once the external reviewer completed the coding of transcript three, it was sent to the researcher and the researcher did a one-to-one comparison to determine the percent of agreement between herself and the external reviewer, which was less than 80%. Because of the percent of agreement, the researcher and external reviewer engaged in a further discussion regarding the codes developed. It was determined that the codes “Catholic school environment,” “school policies regarding behavior,” “role in providing support for interventions,” and “including students with disabilities” were redundant to other codes and did not really capture what was being said in participant responses. Therefore, the quotations assigned to these four codes were reviewed by the researcher and external reviewer and new codes were assigned. After consensus was reached on transcript three, the researcher sent transcript six to the external reviewer and the external reviewer independently coded transcript six taking into consideration the discussion had regarding transcript three. After the researcher received transcript six, the researcher did a one-to-one comparison to determine the percent of agreement, which was above 80%. While the percent of agreement on transcript six was above 80%, the researcher and external reviewer still engaged in a discussion. After a discussion with the external reviewer, no further changes were determined to be needed to the codes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Brantlinger and colleagues (2005) state “...qualitative researchers also have the task of ensuring that their empirical qualitative studies (involving actual collection of data

in the field) are credible and trustworthy” (p. 200). In order to do this within qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed the following criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the current study, the researcher utilized multiple methods to establish trustworthiness. In Table 5, a summary of the methods that were used throughout this study to establish trustworthiness are presented (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Table 5

*Summary of Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness*

Indicators of Trustworthiness	Strategy Utilized
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member checking</li> </ul>
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thick description</li> </ul>
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer examination</li> </ul>
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexivity</li> <li>• Constant comparative analysis</li> </ul>

**Credibility.** The method utilized in this study to establish credibility involved the use of member checking (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking “is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). In this study, member checks were conducted during the third meeting with each participant throughout the study. During this third meeting, the researcher provided the participant with a copy of the interview transcript and asked them to review the transcript. The researcher established credibility in this study through the use of member checking because the researcher provided an opportunity for the participant to review the interview transcript for purposes of ensuring accuracy pertaining to what the researcher had transcribed based on the interview conducted during the first meeting.

**Transferability.** The method that was utilized to establish transferability in this study involved the use of a thick description (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Brantlinger and colleagues (2005) explain providing a thick description involves “reporting sufficient quotes and field note descriptions to provide evidence for researchers’ interpretations and conclusions” (p. 201). In this study, the researcher employed this strategy specifically when reporting the results of this study based on data collected and analyzed from the teacher demographic questionnaire and interviews. The teacher demographic questionnaire assisted the researcher in providing a thick description regarding the participants in this study since it provided information on the teachers’ gender, age, race, ethnicity, if they were religious or laity, religious affiliation, teaching experience and certifications, teacher preparation experience, and experience working with students who have disabilities. Likewise, transcripts containing interviews with each participant assisted the researcher in providing a thick description by incorporating detailed quotes from the participants when discussing secondary Catholic school teachers’ perceptions and responses towards problem behavior. Therefore, the researcher established transferability in this study through the use of thick description by providing “as much detail as possible” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129) when discussing the participants who participated in this study and by incorporating quotes provided by the participants when discussing the results of the study.

**Dependability.** The method utilized to establish dependability in this study involved the use of a peer examination (Brantlinger et al., 2005). In this study, peer examination was utilized when inter-reliability checks were conducted on the interview transcripts. When conducting inter-reliability checks, two interview transcripts (3<sup>rd</sup> and

6<sup>th</sup> interview) were selected by the researcher and were given to an external reviewer. When the external reviewer was given the transcripts, they independently coded the transcripts following the same protocol as the researcher when data were analyzed. Therefore, the researcher established dependability in this study through the use of peer examination when inter-reliability checks were conducted to ensure agreement in the codes/themes that emerged from these data.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability was established in this study through the use of reflexivity (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Cutcliffe, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hall & Callery, 2001; & Lincoln, 2005). Reflexivity was utilized in this study by the researcher maintaining a journal throughout the research process which documented thoughts and reactions to what was experienced during meetings with each participant. By engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process, confirmability was established because the researcher acknowledged their thoughts and reactions which assisted in providing insight into how the researcher was making meaning throughout the research process.

Another method utilized to establish confirmability in this study was constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009). In this study, the researcher utilized constant comparison analysis by comparing data collected across participants to identify where similarities and differences occurred. By utilizing constant comparative analysis, the researcher established confirmability in this study because data collected among participants were compared for instances of confirming and disconfirming cases.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceived problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. The research questions that guided this study include:

1. To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.1. How are students' behavior challenges/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?
  - 1.2. How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students' behavior challenges/problems?
  - 1.3. How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?

In this chapter, the results of the current study are presented. Specifically, the first section of this chapter contains a discussion regarding these teachers' teacher preparation experiences, teaching experiences, and their experiences working with students who have disabilities. While this information does not directly relate to the research questions of the current study, it does provide a context regarding these teachers' perceptions and

responses towards behavior problems. The second and third sections contain qualitative results from the interviews regarding the teachers' perceptions and responses towards behavior problems/challenges. In the fourth section, a discussion regarding how school policies informed these teachers' perceptions and responds toward behavior challenges/problems will be presented. Lastly, the fifth section contains a discussion pertaining to the extent to which a theological philosophy was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses towards behavior as well as in school policies.

### **Section One:**

#### **Background Information on the Teachers**

Findings from the teacher demographic questionnaire and teacher responses captured from the interviews provided background information on these teachers. In the current study, this information provided a context for the researcher when teachers discussed their perceptions and responses towards behavior. Therefore, in what follows is a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results pertaining to these teachers' teacher preparation experiences, teaching experiences, and their experiences in working with students who have disabilities.

#### **Teacher Preparation Experiences**

Findings from the teacher demographic questionnaire revealed six teachers in this study went through a teacher preparation program. Of those six participants, all went through a regular or traditional teacher preparation program with the majority having secondary education ( $n = 6$ ) and one also having elementary education as their area of teacher preparation and certification. Since one of the participants was a priest, he did not go through a formal teacher preparation program prior to teaching at a secondary

Catholic school. A summary of participant demographic information regarding teacher preparation experiences is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Teacher Preparation Experiences*

	<i>n</i>	%
Teacher preparation program		
Yes	6	85.7
No	1	14.3
Type of teacher preparation program		
Regular or Traditional	6	100.0
Alternative	0	0.0
Area of teacher preparation		
Elementary	1	14.3
Secondary	6	85.7
Highest degree earned		
Bachelors (B.A., B.S.)	2	28.6
Masters (M.A., M.Ed.)	4	57.1
Specialists (Ed.S.)	0	0.0
Doctorate (Ph.D.)	1	14.3
Teaching certifications		
Elementary	1	14.3
Secondary	6	85.7

**Teacher preparation- preparedness and experience.** Findings from the interviews with these teachers revealed that while most of the teachers went through a teacher preparation program and felt their teacher preparation programs prepared them to teach, only one teacher believed her teacher preparation program helped prepare her to teach in a Catholic school. Specifically, she shared, “they wanted you to accept the student as a whole person and not just their academic side.” Otherwise, many of the teachers remarked how their teacher preparation program did not specifically prepare them to teach in a Catholic school: “...it was a public program and had nothing to do with teaching in Catholic schools,” “...it was set for the general education... they had to



teach according to the state for the state schools,” or “I don’t think my teacher preparation program geared me up for Catholic school probably because most people don’t go to a Catholic school.” Since many of the teachers believed their teacher preparation program did not specifically prepare them to teach at a Catholic school, they believed it was their experience going to Catholic school as a child, exposure to Catholic education through other prior experiences, and actually being a teacher within a Catholic school that prepared them to teach in a Catholic school.

### Teaching Experiences

Results of the teacher demographic questionnaire revealed three of the teachers in this study have been teaching for 6-14 years with two having 25+ years of teaching experience. Similarly, three of the teachers in this study have been teaching at a Catholic school for 6-14 years ( $n = 3$ ) with few teaching at a Catholic school for 25+ years ( $n = 2$ ). While the majority of teachers have only taught in a Catholic school ( $n = 4$ ), three have had experience teaching in a school other than a Catholic school (public,  $n = 2$ ; post-secondary,  $n = 1$ ). A summary of participant demographic information regarding teaching experiences is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

#### *Teaching Experiences*

	<i>n</i>	%
Number of years as a teacher		
0-1 years	0	0.0
2-5 years	1	14.3
6-14 years	3	42.9
15-24 years	1	14.3
25+ years	2	28.6
Number of years teaching at a Catholic school		
0-1 years	0	0.0
2-5 years	1	14.3

6-14 years	3	42.9
15-24 years	1	14.3
25+ years	2	28.6
Taught in a school other than a Catholic school		
Yes	3	42.9
No	4	57.1
Type of school		
Public	2	28.6
Private (Non-Catholic)	0	0.0
Charter	0	0.0
Magnet	0	0.0
Other: Post-secondary	1	14.3

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**Decision to teach in a Catholic school.** Each of these teachers made the decision to teach in a Catholic school for various reasons. For five participants, going through Catholic school themselves at some point in their K-12 school experience influenced their decision to teach in a Catholic school. One of those participants stated her decision to teach in a Catholic school “was almost an automatic expectation” because she went through Catholic education as a child and it was her “vocation” and “that was where the Holy Spirit was sending [her].” Another participant shared one of the reasons why she decided to teach in a Catholic high school was because of her “good experience” going through Catholic school. Yet another participant explained that because of his experience in Catholic school, he left his teaching position at a public high school to teach in a Catholic high school:

I guess the reason why I left would have been because I wanted to have the spiritual component and that was probably the strangest part, going to Catholic school my whole life, without having that there was sort of different. ... But... yeah in the back of my mind, I knew that... more than anything I could offer a Catholic school, I knew that for me teaching in a Catholic setting would benefit me the most. And I think when you go to a Catholic school your whole life and you get that spiritual component of your education and then you're withdrawn from that, I think that you notice it may be at least subconsciously.

For two of the participants, their decision to teach in a Catholic school was part of their vocation as a priest and Brother. The participant who was a priest stated, “even though the Bishop appointed me, I didn’t fight it or anything at all.” On the other hand, the participant who was a Brother explained his experience going to a Catholic high school as a student and his call to religious life influenced his decision to teach in a Catholic school:

[While in high school] I got to know some of the monks and got interested in the life and... I was always interested in science so that was really my first love. So when Fr. XXXX [name of person], at the time was vocation director, said, ‘Well you know you can teach science here as a monk.’ I said, ‘Well I suppose I could.’

While for most of the above participants their decision to teach in a Catholic school was because of the experience they had going through Catholic school themselves, two participants attributed their decision to teach in a Catholic high school because of other factors. For instance, one participant shared:

To be honest, it was the only job in town. My first experience in a Catholic school was... it was... they were the first ones to call me and I applied to both... and XXXX [name of secondary Catholic school] were the first ones to call me.

Similarly, another participant shared because he was finishing up coursework for his advanced degree in secondary social studies that he “needed to have at least three years of teaching experience in secondary social studies, so [he] went and got a job at a high school.”

For one teacher, her decision to teach in a Catholic school meant returning to the Catholic Church: “I cannot in conscience take the job unless I go back to church.” A reason for this was because she did not want to be “a hypocrite and tell the kids they should be going to church if [she] wasn’t.”

**Public school experience.** For two participants, in particular, they taught in a public school setting prior to teaching in a secondary Catholic school. For one of these teachers, her experiences in the public schools were marked with numerous opportunities to work with students who had disabilities:

The first public school that I taught in was a school that had a specialized unit for all of the children in the area. It was a large, reasonably large city, but it also... the area covered a large sparsely populated area. And so all of the children who lived in the region who had any hearing disabilities came to our school. And we started some as young as 3. And we had disabilities that ranged from mild to severe... so kids who were considered totally deaf as well as kids who have just a mild hearing impairment... and those kids... the aim of the program was to integrate them into a regular classroom as much as possible.

... And I have had by this point a lot of experiences in this because the second public school I went... it was a junior high, I went to had a very active... again special education department and lots of... all the kids integrated. We were one of the first schools to have a boy who was legally blind and had cerebral palsy be totally integrated into the classroom.

Through her experiences in the public school, she also learned the importance of working together with other colleagues as well as the importance of strong leadership from administration. While she was in a public school, she mentioned a time during Lent when she used her faith as a way for her to begin responding in a more positive way to two students in her class who “were pains” by throwing a quarter into the rice bowl every time she responded incorrectly or was short with them. She shared,

I had to start in a very physical way to say, ‘Are you treating those boys the way you would treat Christ?’ And I got better by the time Lent was over. I learned to try to see the DXXX’s [name of students] with more patience.

For another teacher, he shared that his experience in a public school prior to coming to a Catholic school was positive:

My experience in a secondary public school actually was a really positive experience. I taught at XXXX [name of public high school] in the south suburbs and it was... it had basically all your demographics, but it was mostly middle class to upper class so there weren't a lot of problems that would be in inner city. But it was really good. I taught for two years there and really enjoyed my experience. [I] had a wide variety of students from really smart to classrooms that were mostly special education kids without a teacher's aide or anything like that.

He did feel that his experience teaching at a public school was both similar and different from teaching at a Catholic school. In terms of similarities he stated, "... my experiences are kids are kids. They are at the same points in their life. They're experiencing the same things for the most part." However, he felt differences in the atmosphere of the school which affected how he felt as a teacher:

In the public school it was all education, which was great. I felt much more like a professional teacher when I was in the public school. I wore my shirt and tie, kids were quiet in class... they were scared a little bit and I taught. ...When you go to the Catholic school, there's a level of more closeness. And so the atmosphere is a little more warm and family-like than just teacher and student because I think in the Catholic school you're working to build the whole person and not just the mind, which is good.

**Classes these teachers taught and their classrooms.** Interviews with these teachers provided more information on their teaching experience in a secondary Catholic high school as far as the classes these teachers taught and their classrooms. The teachers in this study taught either English ( $n = 2$ ), Math ( $n = 1$ ), Science ( $n = 1$ ), History ( $n = 2$ ), or Religion ( $n = 2$ ), where one teacher taught both History and Religion. The courses these teachers taught are considered required courses for students who attend secondary Catholic schools.

When discussing their classrooms, many teachers shared what the overall environment of the class was like and instructional methods used. As far as the overall environment of the class, the teachers described their classrooms as "controlled chaos,"

“disorganized,” “structured,” and “casual.” With the teachers who had a more “structured” classroom, they had seating charts for the students and enforced the rules consistently whereas those who described their classroom as more “casual” had rules and enforced them, but were a little more lenient when it came to students having to raise their hand to get a drink or answer a question as well as where students sat in the class. Even though the teachers managed their classrooms differently, there was definitely a sense that each teacher expected respect shown to them, as teachers, and to other students in the class:

There are simple standards and expectations and I expect them to come in and behave like human beings and treat people in a Christ-like manner and that includes not having the right to disrupt anyone else’s learning.

So that’s what the classroom...it would be respectful. I expected them to respect me. I expected them to respect each other. Did we have fun together? Absolutely. Did we tease each other? Absolutely. But there was no line crossing.

It’s not strict, casual. I think it’s open to conversation. I don’t think the kids feel like they need to be nervous or concerned if what they are going to say is wrong in my classroom. But I definitely feel like they don’t cross the line either; there’s a level of respect there.

As far as instructional methods were concerned, while some of the teachers shared that, at times, they used “teacher-directed” instruction, many of them mentioned they engaged the students in “hands-on activities,” “group work,” and “group discussion” in order to teach content. Some of the teachers mentioned they used technology (e.g., “laptop” and “SmartBoard”) or the “chalkboard,” while one teacher tried to “speak to the kids through beauty” using “music or the arts, cinema, videos.” One teacher while discussing her instructional methods mentioned how teachers need to be responsive to where the kids are:

I never use the same lesson plan... you are always tweaking depending on the kids you have in front of you. Even if you are doing three classes of the same thing, you don't do it the same way because you have a different group of kids in front of you. And that's when you have to recognize there are different people. And good teachers, I don't care what system you're in... a good teacher says, 'Yeah these are different kids we've got in front of us.'

While the content, learning environment, and instructional methods may be different, one thing that was common among all of these teachers was that each class began with prayer. For these teachers, prayer time consisted of Our Father, Hail Mary's while others "recite a prayer from the heart" or linked the prayer to the liturgical season (e.g., Lent, Advent). One teacher shared she linked the prayer to the "time period we were studying" in her British Literature course. For instance, while the students were doing Anglo-Saxon, they would recite "Caedmon's prayer" and "...when we moved into another era I had prayers that were written at that time by someone." For another teacher, he used the Prayer of St. Francis every morning, sang by Sarah McLachlan, during his prayer time. Yet another teacher explained that while they may say an Our Father during prayer time, she was also open to situations that may arise where "prayer requests are brought up." In some cases, these prayer requests consisted of "just an informal prayer praying specifically for the student or for the surgery or whatever."

**Teaching in a Catholic school.** Qualitative findings from the interviews revealed these teachers have not only experienced positive things while teaching at a Catholic school, but also some challenges. One positive aspect of teaching in a Catholic school that most of the teachers mentioned involved "sharing the faith" by being able to "pray with [the kids]" and helping "kids grow in their relationship with Christ and in their faith." And in that, many of the teachers remarked that they were able to grow in their faith as well. Specifically, two teachers shared:

Get the joy of knowing you are interacting with Christ. And that's the bottom line. If I can know that every interaction I have with every kid is an interaction with a manifestation of God that only that child has. Our God is so incredible and that every person is an image of that God and it takes every person that has ever been created to even begin to image that God. And the image that you are is an image that I find and will never find and has never been and will never be again.

I think just on a selfish individual basis for me I get to practice my faith where I work and I think there are so few people that can actually say that. Every class I start with prayer. I can talk about my faith freely in the classroom setting. Every Monday I take my religion classes to the chapel for 10-15 minutes and that's 10-15 minutes of prayer time that I would not have gotten otherwise. I get to pray the rosary at least once a week with the whole school. I get opportunities to go to mass all the time. I mean there are just so many individually positive things that you just wouldn't get anywhere else that have helped me grow a ton.

With two teachers mentioning that not only were they able to share their faith with the students, but they were able to discuss particular things related to the faith in classes that they would not otherwise be able to discuss because of the school itself or the students:

To affect the soul. Really, to give the truth and the freedom to teach the truth. Where else could I teach what I'm teaching on contraception and shacking up and how those are great evils and insidious habits you bring into marriage? Where else could I do it except a Catholic school? I'd be fired the next day.

I mean talking about just confession and examining your conscience and right and wrong, I think it's easier to have that conversation with a Catholic school kid because generally their consciences are pretty well formed that they can understand the difference between right and wrong. And if you ask them, 'Well, was that right or wrong?' They can say, 'It was wrong.' I mean they have an excuse for probably doing that, but at least they know the difference between right and wrong.

Other positives some of the teachers mentioned pertained to how the environment of the Catholic school was conducive to building relationships with parents and students with one teacher sharing, "I think it's more of a family-like community." One teacher in particular shared that the involvement his parents had in their child's education was a positive aspect to teaching in a Catholic school. Because of this, he was able to contact parents and send home homework assignments, notes, study guides, and upcoming tests.



With regards to building relationships with students, one teacher reflected on how his experience in a Catholic school helped to build a “special relationship” with his students because of the frequency of having students in his classes, which also made him “almost sort of feel like a sense of responsibility for their growth. And when you know they achieve things, I’m happy for them and when they fail, I feel bad for them too.” Also pertaining to the environment of the school, the same teacher mentioned that a positive was that “you get to be around people that want to be Catholic.” A last positive to teaching in a Catholic school one teacher mentioned was the freedom he experiences in being able to be who he is: “...it would be hard for me to teach in a public school especially after experiencing this freedom in the private school, Catholic school where I can be able to express who I am.”

With regards to challenges, one challenge many of these teachers mentioned stemmed from money and finances in not giving “special treatment to those with money, but to treat everyone equally” in that “... this person has donated money or we’re looking for a donation from this person, ...that person should not be disciplined the same way the child whose on scholarship should be disciplined.” In one instance, money donated by a family affected how a student was disciplined and “they took her side because they didn’t want her to leave... and she threatened to leave if she wasn’t made happy.” Yet another teacher mentioned that a lack of financial resources affected the technology provided in the classrooms and the classes they could teach. Another challenge some of the teachers mentioned involved teaching students who were “unchurched” and were sent to a Catholic school for various reasons:

They know they get a better academic education, there is no question they do. ...And so there are a lot of kids who are there for that reason and ...it is cache in the community, 'ohh my kid goes to...', and because it has always stayed in the family and Grandma is paying the tuition or whatever or you want to be.

Because some of the students who go to a Catholic school are "unchurched" one teacher mentioned the struggles they have in the classroom when trying to teach content in a Religion class:

... a lot of kids don't go to mass. Parents... they're my greatest help or my greatest hindrance. So if the parents aren't doing their job with the faith, then the child... and he comes here and says, 'Why do I have to? Why this faith stuff? Because we don't do anything on Sunday, we don't pray at home.' Faith is something that's just an extra. In fact, one said yesterday, 'I'm not going to have this in college; I'm not going to be a Sister...'

A last challenge some of the teachers mentioned involved the administration at the school. For instance, one teacher shared that because of "weak leadership" she was fired, but then re-hired because of complaints from parents. This same teacher shared, "...it's leadership that can give a school all of its character and where it's going and can make a Catholic school really a Catholic school."

### **Experiences Working with Students with Disabilities**

Results revealed all of the participants in this study have had students with disabilities in their classrooms. Most of the teachers ( $n = 6$ ) have had students with Autism as well as those who have a Specific Learning Disability whereas few reported ( $n = 1$ ) having students who have an Emotional Disturbance, Mental Retardation, a Speech or Language Impairment, or Traumatic Brain Injury in their classrooms. A summary of participant demographic information regarding their experiences working with students who have disabilities in their classroom is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Experiences Working with Students with Disabilities*

	<i>n</i>	%
Students with disabilities in classrooms		
Yes	7	100.0
No	0	0.0
Types of disabilities		
Autism	6	42.9
Deaf-Blindness	0	0.0
Deafness	0	0.0
Emotional Disturbance	1	14.3
Hearing Impairment	2	28.6
Mental Retardation	1	14.3
Multiple Disabilities	0	0.0
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0.0
Other Health Impairment	2	28.6
Specific Learning Disability	6	42.9
Speech or Language Impairment	1	14.3
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	14.3
Visual Impairment (including blindness)	0	0.0

**Working with students who have disabilities.** Results of this study revealed that while the teachers in this study all have had students with disabilities in their secondary Catholic school classrooms, each has had different experiences. Many of the teachers discussed their personal experiences with including students who have disabilities in their classrooms. For instance, one teacher discussed a time when she had a student in her English class and was frustrated that he had not been provided with the skills to be successful in her class:

I have a youngster right now who can't read; very good verbal skills, very good thinking skills... decent, does absolutely nothing in my class. I have said to the XXXX [name of agency], 'If you're telling me he can't read, why is he in a literature course? This child can't read. That's out of the realm of my ability to deal with him. I have 110 students a day, I can't teach the reading, that's not part of my curriculum.' I think that's a serious injustice because if he couldn't read at the first half of first grade, then there should have been some serious intervention.

Yet another shared her story of trying to provide services to students with disabilities prior to beginning level “C” courses for students who were struggling. She said to her administrator,

‘If you believe this is important, if you believe XXXX [name of school] should be trying to program for kids... it’s not enough too simply put them... dump them all together at Level 3 or whatever you want to call it and then teach them the same stuff, but slower. That’s not called programming for kids who have learning disabilities. That’s not acceptable. Either don’t take them and send them to public schools where they can program for them because they have to or take them and program for them. I said, ‘This is not working, this is not teaching these kids. This is simply managing to push them through.’

Another area that was discussed by one teacher in this study was the role of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in private schools. For this teacher, based on her experiences with students coming into Catholic schools with IEPs, was developing a “bias or negative approach” because many of them didn’t have the skills and used the IEP as a “free pass to do what they want.” Therefore, she tells her students: “I respect [you] enough and I am not going to treat [you] as though [you] can’t do anything.” She further shared that within Catholic education, accommodations have been made without IEPs since “we have always had students who needed accommodations... because Catholic schools are not set up for [IEPs]” because “we don’t have the resources.” For her personally, she explained that

I don’t need an ISP or IEP to understand if the student is struggling. All I have to do is read that child’s sentence or ask the child a question. The students in my class know full well that I’ll ask a question and if the answer is way off, I will find a way of reinforcing them that’s where they are.

However, for another teacher, he found students, particularly those with learning disabilities, who had IEPs to be “really hard working.”

While including students with disabilities can be a challenge for teachers in Catholic schools in making sure, academically, they are receiving the services they need, it can be a challenge to ensure that other students in the classroom are also understanding of these students and their needs. While this is the hope, one teacher in this study shared that group work can be a challenge with a child in his science class who has Aspergers because “he’s got a lisp and they like to make fun of him.” Another aspect of this is the reaction of students in the class when a student with a disability exhibits behavioral difficulties. One teacher shared:

And the other kids don’t... it’s hard for them to develop an empathy because they’re not allowed to behave like that. Yeah he has consequences, but how come he’s back in the classroom? Why do we have to put up with this disruption all the time?

## **Section Two:**

### **Teacher Perceptions towards Behavior Challenges/Problems**

**Research Question 1.1:** How are students’ behavior challenges/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?

Teachers in this study discussed their perceptions towards behavior challenges/problems. In discussing their perceptions, many discussed not only what they considered to be a behavior problem and behavior problems exhibited by students with disabilities, but factors they believed affected the occurrence of student behavior. Therefore, in this section a discussion regarding teacher perceptions towards behavior challenges/problems will be discussed.

#### **Identified as a Behavior Problem**

Many of the teachers in this study cited behaviors that relate to showing a lack of respect towards the teacher or their peers as what they considered to be behavior

problems. These behaviors included: talking while others are talking, talking out of turn, dominating the conversation, or consistently talking too much; rudeness; cutting anyone down; clowning around, pushing, and shoving; controlling other students; not paying attention or engaging; sleeping; sophomoric (overconfident and argumentative); doing other work in class; using cell phones and texting; immodest dress; and having poor attitudes (not trying, attitudes in class, dropping classes). Consequently, many of these teachers cited the above behaviors as occurring frequently within their classrooms. In particular, the teachers mentioned disrupting, blurting out answers, dominating the conversation, talking at will or out of turn, and consistently talking too much; peers being disrespectful to one another during group work and activities; cell phones; chewing gum; cheating; doing other work; and sleeping. While the teachers were able to identify behaviors they considered to be a behavior problem and those that happened frequently, many of them explained the behaviors they identified were not extreme.

### **Identified as a Severe Behavior Problem**

When asked about a time a severe behavior problem occurred in their classroom, many of the teachers had a difficult time identifying incidences where some said, “Well I don’t know if I have had severe,” “... in the classroom for severe... I haven’t really had one that I would characterize... where I had to call on outside help for... had to use physical restraints or anything... nothing like that. Verbal abuse to one another... no,” “I can’t say I’ve had a severe behavior problem while I’ve been in the Catholic school,” or “I haven’t had severe behavior problems so I can’t think of really any examples.” While few teachers could not identify any incidences of severe behavior problems, others could identify instances either after some time of thinking about it or fairly quickly. It seemed

like those instances that teachers could identify quickly had such an immense impact on them. In what follows are three separate incidences of severe behavior three teachers could identify fairly quickly because of the impact it had on them:

I didn't know the dynamics that were going on within and between this boy and this girl. You know they were seated and XXXX [name of student] and she were whispering back and forth... and XXXX [name of student] did not have his work done and had no intention of doing the work. He was in one of those places where I am going to do everything so I can get attention or whatever. And I guess I said, 'One last time' or something and XXXX [name of student] said, 'You don't know what the fxxx you're talking about.' I said, 'That kind of language is not acceptable.' And he got up and left the room.

I had caught her like six times with gum and I'm like 'Do you have gum?' And she looked at me and said, 'a-hole;' mouthed it. I said, 'You can't do that.' She said, 'I can mouth whatever word I want.' And I said, 'Okay, you know what fine, just sit there.' So the next day, ... she comes to class and she had this smug look on her face because she knew... she got away with it right so I said, 'You're really happy with yourself aren't you?' And she said, 'Uhhaaa you can't do anything about it.'

During the class, someone had taken a cigarette lighter and melted a girl's cheerleading jacket. So I didn't respond and I'm thinking I would smell the butane... bloodhound as my husband says. And so I'm teaching and they didn't say anything to me, but the girl went and told her cheerleading coach after the class. And so I got called down to the office and I'm like, 'I didn't know that happened.' You know when you're writing something on the board and when there's a full class and I'm only 5 feet tall, so you're not seeing all the intricacies behind somebody's back and they're trying to hide it anyways. And I said, 'Hmm interesting.'

### **Not Considered a Behavior Problem**

There were two instances where teachers mentioned behaviors that they considered not to be behavior problems. In these cases, the behaviors were mentioned when they were discussing what they considered to be a behavior problem or when recalling incidences of severe behavior. For one participant, she did not see "failure to do school work as a behavior problem", but rather as a "motivational problem" or "as a personal lack of interest in the class" because "there are students who just don't like

English and there are some that just don't like you." With regards to the other participant, he discussed a situation where a student continued to disrupt the class by talking.

However, he stated, "I guess for me, I don't consider that severe because I would much rather have him be on a talkative level than on the quiet level."

### **Behavior Exhibited by Students with Disabilities**

For the most part, these teachers shared that the students with disabilities in their classes did not exhibit problem behavior: "they're very well behaved," "with learning disability kids, not so much," or "I know he's listed there as ADHD, but I don't have any behavior problems with him." However, in other cases, teachers shared incidences of behavior that did occur with students who have disabilities in their class. For instance, one teacher who had a child with Aspergers shared when the child got in a confrontation with other students "he'll fight back, he'll fight back and call them names... but it can escalate because it just goes back and forth. No, but he's got the verbal and the 'f' word does fly." In yet another instance, a teacher shared that one of the struggles she had with a student in her class was that he refused to take notes.

The teachers in this study attributed the occurrence or lack of problem behavior exhibited by students with disabilities to different factors. One teacher shared the student who would act out or disrupt others while they were trying to work was a student who was struggling, but "the student with the [Individual Service Plan] ISP or IEP has learned to rely on every accommodation and who has been passed along isn't frustrated. That youngster has learned to use the system." In another instance, a teacher explained that the students with disabilities in their class did not cause any behavior problems because "they're not quite up to par with the rest of the students so they're going to cover



themselves.” In yet other instances, the teachers mentioned a lack of medication as the reason a student with a disability would act out more in their class with one teacher stating, “When you are talking about choices, I think the biggest one was students who were medicated who didn’t take their medication regularly... on days when they didn’t take medication, especially ADHD... horrible horrible difference.” However, in one case, a teacher mentioned that in terms of their “general behavior, no, I refuse to say it’s connected to their disability” rather she believed:

It is connected to how well everyone involved in their life has made them... helped them to develop. If we go back to faith base, to help them to develop that they are an image of God with special gifts of one sort or another. You know we are all special... you’ve got... again it’s too easy to let that role of because of the gifts... we have both gifts and limitations that God has chosen.

### **Factors Affecting the Occurrence of Student Behavior**

**The Catholic school.** As the teachers discussed the behavior problems/challenges that have occurred in their classrooms, many of them attributed the occurrence of behavior to different factors. However, mixed perceptions were obtained from the teachers regarding the role a Catholic school played in the occurrence of behavior with few teachers attributing the occurrence of behavior to the child simply going to a Catholic school. In fact, one teacher shared, “I don’t think [the Catholic school] affects [behavior] the way you might think it should.” She further explained that a Catholic school itself may not be able to be the only influence on behavior because “when you came to the school you already had those Catholic principles or you didn’t, so the school isn’t going to give that to you. I can teach religion, I can model values, but I can’t make you incorporate those.” Therefore, many of the teachers believed “... it depends on the Catholic school itself,” as one participant put it, that had an effect on the occurrence of

student behavior where being at a Catholic school one participant felt, "... it's not that they behave better, but they have the chance to behave better..." another teacher believing that "grace is working there" and with that he believed this led students to feel like they were "cared for" and "loved," and one more participant stating that "we give kids a lot more chances."

**Dress code.** One of these factors within a Catholic school the teachers mentioned was related to having a required uniform and a dress code. Two teachers felt strongly that required uniforms and a dress code made a difference with one teacher sharing, "You dress like a gentleman; you'll behave like a gentleman. You dress like a lady, the same result. So, dress up a little bit. It usually helps." Yet another teacher explained if you are out of dress code, there are consequences: "you can get a Dean's detention for not tucking your shirt in." However, one teacher shared that within her school, the dress code was "getting more and more lax" where the students "...don't have to tuck in their shirts anymore, they don't have to wear belts." As she reflected on another school's dress code, she stated, "I still think some of that brings some discipline."

**Exposure to faith.** Another factor the teachers discussed was the constant exposure to the faith students got within a Catholic school, particularly through Mass and prayer services as well as required coursework. One teacher in particular shared how they felt Mass and prayer services could affect student behavior within a Catholic school:

...they're exposed especially now during Lent, weekly, but outside of Lent, monthly, we're always in church as either a mass or a prayer service. So right there, they're getting the idea of the respect of being silent as a group during worship times... This is solemn; this is what we're about here at a Catholic institution. So that's instilled in them and I think that draws their behavior much better for respect and knowing that it's really Jesus leading the way.

Similarly, one teacher mentioned how required coursework in Catholic schools could affect student behavior: “I think kids are constantly being talked to about behavior in religion classes; morality. I mean talking about just confession and examining your conscience and right and wrong....”

**Monetary investment.** Teachers believed that the monetary investment had in their education when attending a Catholic school could affect student behavior. One teacher believed the monetary investment made a difference in behavior because “...halfway through the school year, if you get kicked out, you don’t get that money refunded and you’ve lost the money.” Because of this, he stated, “I think discipline was a little bit easier” and “...students were better behaved because they knew that their parents had a significant monetary investment.” While positive results can emerge from knowing a monetary investment was made, teachers shared that the monetary investment parents had in their child’s education at a Catholic school could affect student behavior in a negative way where as one teacher stated, “... sometimes the expectation that we’re paying tuition and we have this right...” This was shown in a situation a teacher shared about how the parents of one of his students were large donors to the school and because of this, when an incident occurred between him and the student, “they took her side because they didn’t want her to leave... and she threatened to leave if she wasn’t made happy,” which left the student’s behavior not addressed in the way the teacher felt it should have been.

**The classroom teacher.** Another factor that was brought up by one of the teachers, specifically, was that “even though we are a Catholic school and we have our rules, we are not all at the same degree of discipline for our students” where the students

“know what teachers they can get away with murder with.” Therefore, teachers were found to play a role and have an effect on student behavior. As one teacher shared regarding the occurrence of behavior problems in her classroom, “they’re rare in my classroom just by the virtue of the fact that students know what the expectations are.” She further stated, “In the classroom my approach has always been to conduct the class in such a way that you don’t have the problems occur.” Yet, another teacher explained just in the way he delivered instruction in his classroom, few behavior problems occurred: “But you know, I really never had a lot of problems with discipline. I’m really... I was energetic and I was engaging...” He further shared:

And to be honest, cause of the charismatic authority I had, students wanted to please me and they knew that I cared about them, they knew that I was fair, and they knew that I was going to make it interactive and relevant.

**Other factors.** Besides the previously mentioned factors which directly pertain to what occurs in a Catholic school, the teachers in this study felt that other factors such as the parents and “what they’ve learned at home” as well as our society, which occur outside the Catholic school, had an effect on student behavior in the Catholic school. Many of the teachers in this study reflected on the role of the parents when their child attends a Catholic school. As one teacher stated, “I would say a vast majority of the parents themselves went to Catholic school, and you know probably maybe in the 60s or 70s when nuns would rule with an iron fist... the parents would transmit those values like- when you’re in school...” However, another teacher stated, “For some, I think parents have high expectations and the students meet those. Yet for others, the parents have no different expectations...” For instance, one teacher shared a situation that occurred in his classroom where the student, as he called it “defied authority,” and he felt

that it was a parental thing in that “your parents put you in your place, they love you and respect you and they do you a favor by letting you know that you’re not the center of the world.” In another instance, a teacher shared about the struggles of getting students to complete the required number of service hours. She believed that the “whole culture within the family” played a role in the students meeting those hours because “... the one’s that haven’t met them, probably it’s not in the culture of the families.”

Lastly, a teacher discussed the influence of original sin on behavior. Specifically, he shared:

And you know because we believe in original sin, that explains a whole lot as to why you need discipline. Kids aren’t naturally good.. They are... I mean in other words, it takes effort to be good, and grace and free will. And so of our nature with original sin- baptism takes away guilt, but it doesn’t take away the tendency towards sin. So that means you’re responsible, too. You have a free will, you have intelligence, so you’re expected to use it.

### **Section Three:**

#### **Teacher Responses towards Behavior Challenges/Problems**

**Research Question 1.2:** How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students’ behavior challenges/problems?

In addition to discussing what they perceived to be a behavior problem, teachers also discussed their responses towards behavior challenges/problems. Responses to behavior were captured when teachers shared how they responded when incidences of behavior occurred. In response to behavior, teachers also discussed what they believed their role was and how they provided interventions and support as well as differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities. In their discussion of how they responded to incidences of behavior, school policies were found to have an effect on how behavior problems were handled by teachers, which will be discussed in section four of

this chapter. Therefore, in this section, a discussion regarding teacher responses towards behavior challenges/problems will be discussed as well as factors affecting teacher responses to student behavior.

### **Responses to Incidences of Behavior**

**Verbal.** Most of the teachers in this study responded to incidences of behavior verbally in some way. For some, it was as simple as saying, “Knock it off,” “this has gone far enough...,” or “telling them to cease.” In other cases, the teachers responded to behavior by verbally reprimanding an individual student in front of the entire class and sort of “putting them on the spot”:

‘Listen everyone. XXXX [name of student] is doing this because he wants attention. Every time he tells a joke you laugh and it distracts me and it stops us from learning. Here’s the thing, please when XXXX [name of student] does that, stop laughing at him and he’ll stop doing it.’ Now I’m saying this right in front of XXXX [name of student] and his face was getting red. I said, ‘XXXX [name of student] you know that I like you, but this has got to stop because you’re keeping me from teaching.’

I come up to the desk, I walk there because I suspect. There are usually tell-tale signs... there’s a pile of books in front of them and they’re writing a lot. And I say I know they’re not taking all those notes cause that’s too many. So I’ll come up, ‘XXXX [name of student] what’s that?’ ‘No.’ ‘But I got a test.’ ‘No. Put it away. This class we study. I’ll give you time at the end. I never use the full period so you wait till then. It’s your responsibility to have that done beforehand. Don’t use my class to do your work. We do Religion here.’

If there is a kid who’s constantly being disruptive, it has brought out the worst in me. I have yelled at them or said things I shouldn’t have. I think I told one kid that he ruins everything one time...

However, in one instance, a teacher shared how she acknowledged an individual student in front of the class for doing something positive by helping another person:

...as soon as he walked in my classroom I said, 'Mr. So-and-so I got to tell you something.' He goes, 'Ohh know, what what what. Am in trouble?' 'Absolutely not. You and I have had our differences; we've been at each other because of your behavior. However, I saw you do this and you need to be told a good job. Just not me, but I said I need to tell you in front of the entire class.'

She further explained that these were "teaching moments" which,

...sometimes help them with the behavior later. So when you get them for interrupting class for the third time and go tell them to sit down in the hall or tell them to move to the other desk, hopefully they remember in the back of their head, but she'll tell me when I do a good job too.

Not only did teachers respond to behavior by verbally reprimanding individual students in the class, but they would reprimand the entire class for an incident which occurred that involved either a few students or a group of students:

'No tell me exactly what you meant because I understand what you're saying to be a sexual orientation that is completely unnecessary. And if that's what you mean, do you realize what you're saying?' 'Ohh, that's not what we meant.'  
'What did you mean? Just disrespect.'

'Sometimes I'll just do it right there in front of the class and say, 'Really, really now. Are you trying to be funny or are you guys just being stupid to this kid?'  
'And you, why do you retaliate? You know you're bringing it on... you know it.'

So the next day in the classroom I said, 'Number one, the buck stops here. I'm in charge. If anything happens, I'm responsible. If the young lady would have gotten hurt, I'm responsible. However, every last one of you that saw it and you didn't bring it to my attention or didn't mention something to me afterwards or do something... if you didn't want to do anything... even cough to distract me or raise your hand and say, 'Can I go to the bathroom' for the safety of your own classmates, to bring to my attention. Shame on you.'

And in some cases, the teachers not only addressed the behavior by verbally reprimanding the entire class, but delivered consequences for their actions. For instance, one teacher shared that at times, when she steps out in the hall to speak with a colleague, the class would begin talking. When she comes back in the room she would just "...look

at them and glare at them and say, ‘Really... that’s too bad. In this amount of time, I was going to do 10 problems that you’ll have to do for homework tonight.’”

In other instances, the teachers mentioned that when incidences of behavior occurred, they would “talk to them individually” after class, “take those kids involved off to the side later and talk to them about it” with one teacher stating that when a child was being disruptive in his class he would “just call him out in the hallway and say, ‘Listen, you need to relax.’ And usually talking to him out in the hallway, for me, has been very effective in stopping stuff like that.” In these instances where the teachers would talk with the students on an individual basis, the teachers shared they asked, “How can I help you” or they would provide them with choices “to give students the opportunity to make good decisions for themselves” before other steps were taken. One teacher mentioned how he compared his one-on-one discussions with students in addressing behavior problems similar to “a priest in the confessional or someone with spiritual direction” because the “discipline problem” could be pointed out and assistance could be offered, but “... I can’t make the decision for you to get out. You’re going to have to do this.”

Similarly, the teachers responded by contacting the child’s parents to make them aware of the situation that was going on with their child. In one instance, a teacher shared when he made a positive phone call home to the parents:

But I call his mom like ‘Hey Mrs. XXXX [name of student’s mom] this is XXXX [name of teacher].’ She goes, ‘Ahhh, what did he do this time?’ And I said, ‘No no no, I just want to tell you he’s a great kid to have in class and today he did... he answered this... it was a really hard question.’ And she started crying and she said, ‘No one’s ever... this is the first time a teacher’s ever taken time to call.’

**Non-verbal.** Non-verbal responses were also used by the teachers as a way to respond to incidences of behavior. For many of these teachers, non-verbal responses



meant just to “stop and look at them” with one teacher stating, “I apparently have a look that could kill, so I make people quite uncomfortable;” “use proximity; you walk over by them;” if the student has something they are not supposed to have “I’ll take it away;” or simply “not calling on them” if they continued to dominate the class discussion. In one case, a teacher mentioned how he used to just tap on the desk as a signal for a boy to stop making inappropriate comments and two taps if the boy was close to leaving the room and “no one else knew what it meant.” Another way one teacher used non-verbal responses was to put a “little note at the top of the weekly quiz” for a young boy that would not take notes. Some of the notes she used to leave on the boy’s quizzes read: “you took notes this week and look at your quiz grade; it’s very good” or “good notes this week, good quiz score.” Yet, in another instance, the teacher wrote a letter discussing the difficulties he was having with a student stating, “I’ve never had more trouble and more problems. I never had a more defiant kid.”

**Physical.** For some teachers, an incident escalated to the point that physical contact was made with a student or objects within the classroom. One teacher in particular reflected on an incident where he mentioned “my reactions were probably the severe” where in response to a student getting “lippy” the teacher chased a boy “across the room...going through desks and what not...” and also “grabbed the girl by the neck.” After he shared this incident he stated:

... I don’t know what prompted me to do that. I think when I started out I had the higher expectations and any little out of line characteristic from students you just... would just upset me right away. So I think my temper has cooled down over the years... I’ve tempered it off a little better and so now I’m a little bit more easy going...

In another instance, the incident escalated where a teacher threw a student's "book bag down the hall":

XXXX [name of student] one time would just not stop with the smart mouth and I said, 'Get out of my classroom.' And he walked out and he left his book bag and I grabbed his book bag and I opened the door and I threw his book bag down the hall to him. It opened up and papers went everywhere and I said, 'Clean that up.' And I slammed the door.

Lastly, one teacher in this study discussed that she had to rearrange students in the class because of the behavior:

I did have one class one year that they had three separate seating charts; that was a very tough class and I had to discipline them often. And so I usually, I don't have a seating chart, but I will move students if required.

**Removal.** For some of the teachers, they simply needed to remove the student from the classroom because as one teacher stated it gets "so disruptive you just have to get them out of there" because "it's destructive to the whole class and you only need one and then you get one, two, or three that they feed on one another." Another teacher shared:

I will, with some kids being too chatty or disrupting class, I put them out in the hall so that they can... I say, 'You know you're paying good money for this, so you sit right there and watch it and you don't say anything to anybody.'

The same teacher shared an incident that occurred with a student who was caught cheating by "supplying the answers to someone":

I told this individual, I said, 'Go to the pew.' Now the pew is a place outside the Dean's office, so everybody knew the pew meant you were being sent to the Dean's office. He liked to talk back and said, 'Why me...?' I said a little bit louder the second time, I said, 'Go to the pew.' By the third or fourth time I'm sure the entire school heard me.... finally the student left after the third or fourth [time] at the very loud decibel.

Similarly, another teacher shared that he “just kicked him out” and “sent him down to the office.” He further shared that “for the next two, three days, I just put him in the room next to me by himself. He was like isolated; solitary confinement.”

**Doing nothing.** Lastly, some of the teachers in this study responded to student behavior by doing nothing where one teacher shared, “sometimes I’ll just let it go. I’ll take it in and listen and see where it’s developing and how serious it’s going.” Similarly, one teacher struggled with getting a student to take notes in class. She said that on some days, “...I just let him go without taking notes. I know he knows that I know that he can take them. If he wants to be stubborn, which is word I use with them often, then he can be stubborn.” Yet another teacher shared that he has learned, as a teacher, “to be more relaxed and not to bring down the hammer at the first offense.”

**Severe behavior.** Teacher responses to incidences of student behavior were also captured when some of the teachers discussed how they looked back on themselves and what they could have done when incidences of severe behavior occurred in their classrooms. For instance, one teacher shared that after the incident occurred she said to herself, “You blew it. You could have acted differently in that situation. What would be a better way to have dealt with this?” Similarly, another teacher stated, “...what I realize was she was just like me, she was very hard headed and very smart, and she pushed my buttons and instead of behaving more appropriately, I sunk to her level and got written up for it.” Lastly, another teacher simply said, “I felt so guilty about it and I apologized to him later on” and then went on to say later in the interview “honestly, I felt bad because when I... I did yell at him and it’s probably harsh if you have a teacher tell you that you

ruin everything.” And because of the teacher’s response to the behavior, the student “wouldn’t look [him] in the eye probably for a few days after that.”

### **Interventions, Support, and Differentiating**

Findings also revealed that in response to student behavior teachers had different beliefs regarding their role in providing interventions or support for behavioral difficulties as well as differentiating behavior consequences for students with disabilities. One teacher believed her role was “to discipline the action, never the child as such” by “making it quite clear that disruptive behavior is not acceptable.” The way this teacher did this was taking “the student aside in an appropriate time in the absence of others and discuss that behavior and set down here what I can tolerate and what cannot be tolerated.” Similarly, two other teachers believed their role was to first “talk with the kid. I try to work it out with him.” He further shared that he told the student, “You’re old, you’re responsible.” While another teacher shared: “As the class is leaving, I’ll say, ‘Hey John or Sally, hang on a second. What’s going on? Either your grades are poor, what happened on that test? What’s going on that we have to disrupt all the time?’” She further explained that if she did not have the opportunity to speak to the student in private, then she would stand outside her class at the end of the day and ask the student to step in her class for a second. Also, during her prep period, she stated, “I’ll see where they are at, if they’re in study hall I’ll go get them and talk to them.” Lastly, she would seek out other colleagues to find out what is going on with a student:

I do like to talk to other teachers, not to break any confidence or anything, but to say, ‘Hey, what’s so-and-so like in your class? Just one-on-one, not with a whole group necessarily.’ Just to see if it’s a problem... some students have had a fear of math or whatever and maybe just act up in that class. Maybe somebody has an insight to something or somebody starts acting strange or starts acting up... you know, ‘Hey is so-and-so acting up in your class? Has anything changed?’

For two teachers, they believed their role was to be proactive by knowing “what potential might be there” and to “stop [behavior problems] before they happen.” And to do that, both believed it began with how a teacher delivered content. For instance, one teacher did this by asking herself: “Am I well prepared to teach these kids and is what I’m teaching them something that I know they need whether they do or not?” She also shared that in order to teach the material to different learners “you have to have lots of tricks in your box” and “be familiar with the strategies that have been identified” for a child who has an IEP to address behavior problems. With these things in place, she stated “you’ve begun by giving a student who has behavior problems an atmosphere in which he or she can succeed.” For the other teacher, he was proactive by stopping behavior before it occurred by having “a classroom that is engaging.” He further stated, “If you have engaging, relevant, fun instruction, I think 90% of the problems go away.” In the case of this teacher, he shared how he tried a specific strategy with a student in his class that was fidgety, so he “would give him a squishy ball and he would use the squishy ball under his desk and he could play with that and he stopped.”

Yet another teacher believed his role was “to have them see themselves how bad their behavior is” in order for them to see “they need to be a little more serious student and not always playful in their disposition.” He shared that he did this by turning attention to it or putting “the guilt on them” by stating, “Really, your parents are paying how much money and they expect this of you? They expect more from you, I think.” He would also say to them, “I gave up my life, a family, and kids to do this... what am I doing here?”

For another teacher, he believed his role was to be an “advocate first of all.” He also shared that he wanted his students “to feel like [they] can communicate with me if [they’re] having problems.” A reason for this was because “we have so few students who have documentation of disabilities or actual IEPs.”

When it came to how these teachers differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities, results of this study revealed many of the teachers did this by differentiating behavior consequences for every student, not just for students with disabilities or they tried to “treat them all the same.” One teacher did this by following the “spirit of the law” rather than the “letter of the law” while another teacher shared he knows the students on an individual basis that he tried to “discipline them in a way that will fit best with their personality.” Another way teachers mention they differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities was by not addressing the problem right away. For one teacher, that meant “differentiating the recognition of the problem.” In doing this, the teacher mentioned “if the student is quite capable and is disruptive, I am going to come down on the child right now.” However, for a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), she would “cut the slack” and not address it right away, but would if it continued after multiple times. Similarly, another teacher also said that for his students who did not take their medication, he would “give them a lot more slack.” He did this because “sometimes you could almost look at them and see when you react to a bad choice that they were almost like damn I didn’t mean to ... you could almost see that they were frustrated that they were doing it.” In the case of another teacher, he knew one of his students with Aspergers would “throw the ‘f’ word around or something like that.” When this occurred, this teacher did not give him a detention or ask

them to leave the room. However, like he said, it was difficult because he questioned if the way he responded to this student's behavior was giving "the impression to the other students that I can get away with this?"

While most of the teachers mentioned they differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities in some way or another, there were instances teachers mentioned where they would not differentiate. In one case, a teacher felt that because he "wasn't given any special notice for the class... it's not official" that he did not differentiate for the child who he believed had Attention Deficit Disorder and was fidgety in class. Similarly, another teacher stated that she would not differentiate behavior consequences for students with disabilities if the behavior exhibited was "disrupting the class and things like that because then they are really stealing from the others and from myself as well." However, if the student "tries to work through that disability" she would provide additional assistance.

### **Factors Affecting Teacher Responses to Student Behavior**

**The Catholic school.** Many teachers in this study believed that simply being in a Catholic school impacted their responses towards behavior problems. For one teacher, he believed it had an effect because he came from a public school and having the "right or wrong conversation" with students was easier in a Catholic school because there was a "starting point to talk to them about the consequences of their actions and the implications of their actions whereas in the public school, you have so many different backgrounds that you might not have an even starting point." He also believed that being in a Catholic school also "keeps [him] in check a little bit too." When reflecting on a behavior incident where he told one of his students that "he ruined everything," he shared

he would not have felt as “remorseful in a public school.” He attributed this to teaching Religion in a Catholic school and discussing the difference between right and wrong and because of his, he shared:

I have to hold myself accountable too, which isn't always easy but I think it... it keeps me humble, in my place where I think as an adult it gets so easy to not want to apologize to people because you don't want to lower yourself below them. So I think it can be humbling and I think it's good.

Lastly, he shared that “because you know you are part of being in a Catholic school and being a Catholic school teacher, you want to help those who can't necessarily help themselves. So it makes you more compelled to reach out to them.” In a similar way, three other teachers believed that simply being in a Catholic school impacted their responses towards behavior problems. For one teacher, he shared he could be “very forthright and say, ‘you are being a jerk’ and ‘get out of here.’ I don't have to put up with that. So there's a freedom in discipline in that we don't have to keep you.” Similarly, another teacher stated, “I think the students for the most part... I know... I can tell them to behave or get out; and I have told them to get out and I have been supported by administration.” Yet another teacher believed that with regards to discipline and responding to behavior that “you can do a lot more things in a Catholic school that I probably would have been kicked out of the public school.” In another case, a teacher shared that they were able to “challenge a girl to give up sex for Lent,” which he believed he could not do in a public school.

**Faith.** Many teachers discussed the role of their faith in how it affects how they respond to student behavior. For instance, one teacher shared the role of Mass and the Eucharist:



I guess if I didn't have mass in the morning and have the Lord fill me up, then I just... you would soon lose faith, hope, charity, you would lose your strength, you would lose that agape, and you would just sit back and say, 'Ohh well, I get my money... brats stay away from me.' So this way, when you're continually replenished by the Eucharist, you can bring that charity to play in your classroom.

This same teacher also shared how he incorporated "mercy and justice" into his dealings with students with "mercy saying, 'I'll give you a second chance and a third; you can be better.' And then justice, 'but you must cooperate... you have a free will; like, let's meet in the middle here.'" Yet another teacher incorporated her faith when she knew a particular student was going to be coming into her next class: "I have to remember they're a child of God, then I can teach the class." Similarly, she also shared,

The kid that acts out the most, for some reason, needs to know more that he is a child of God because they're the kid that I'm on the most probably, they're the kid that the other teachers are on the most, or the kid's in the detention hall...that's not being an effective way of discipline, so maybe they need to know more. And I don't think I come out and say, 'You're a child of God' to them. But somehow, I let them know that you're important enough that I care about you...

In another case, a teacher mentioned she would respond a little more harshly towards students who were being disrespectful towards the faith. For instance, the teacher shared how as she was walking through the cafeteria, the students were tossing some things. She stated,

'You say a prayer right now to thank God that you did not throw that bible.' 'Oh Mrs. XXXX [name of teacher] I was just.' I said, 'No you were not. You were going to throw that and trust me.'

Lastly, a teacher brought in his faith when he responded to behavior problems by saying,

'You're sure this is really what you want to do? Do you realize that at the end of your life, you're going to have to call upon or answer or you know? If there is a God, do you think he is going to approve of this?'

**Previous experiences in Catholic school as a child.** Another factor that affected some of the teachers' responses towards behavior problems was their own experience in

Catholic school. For one teacher, in particular, her experience in Catholic school affected how she perceived and responded to behavior problems. She explained that in the school she went to as a child, respect was expected to be shown and “you don’t waste time and you work to your potential. And there are no rulers, but they ran tight ship, but they also ran a very loving ship.” She further stated that “the nuns told you, ‘When we go, you’re going to sit. You’re not going to say anything.’” Because of this experience, she perceived student behavior differently than others in that she does not always believe that behavior “is where it needs to be.”

**Making them aware.** Lastly, two teachers mentioned that their reasons for responding to behavior in a certain way were to make the students aware of their behavior. For one of the teachers, she referred to this as a teaching moment where she stated, “...it’s a problem that means I have to sit and teach, make them aware of what they’re doing. Otherwise, they don’t comprehend.” For the other teacher, she stated that she liked “to bring it to their attention that it was disrespectful or that I don’t think it’s an accepted norm, at least not here and it shouldn’t be.... I don’t think it should be anywhere.”

#### **Section Four:**

#### **School Policies**

**Research Question 1.3:** How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?

Each teacher interviewed discussed the school policies at their school. While some discussed them in more length or emphasized particular things about them, one

common thing among all the teachers in this study was that each school had a set of policies the teachers were asked to follow when incidences of behavior occurred. However, in some cases, teachers implemented policies with fidelity and in other cases, the teachers did not. Therefore, in this section, a discussion regarding the school policies and implementation of these policies by teachers at their school will be discussed. Also included in this section will be a discussion regarding the factors that affect the implementation of school policies by these teachers.

### **Overview of School Policies**

**Teacher's role.** When some of the teachers discussed their school policies, they explained that they play a role in the implementation not just in issuing a detention, but what happens before that detention is given. In many cases, the teachers shared they were supposed to handle the issue first. One way some of the teachers mentioned they handle the issue if it escalated was to discuss it with the student or contact the parents. In some cases, teachers shared that the parents were to be contacted first prior to the child being sent to the principal's office. One teacher explained that she would contact parents "either through telephone, email, or whatever." In either case, as one teacher stated, the parents had to be "aware there's a problem and what you have tried to do with the problem."

**Detentions, dismissals, suspensions, expulsions.** After the teacher addressed the incident to the best of their ability and the behavior continued, it may result in the student receiving a detention or being dismissed from the class or even suspended or expelled. With regards to detentions, many of the teachers said that teachers could issue detentions and an accumulation of detentions could result in after school detentions or Saturday detentions. Yet in other cases, a teacher shared that "it's up to the Dean of Students to

determine the severity of consequences.” In particular, two teachers explained that this was the case at their school where they now have “pink slips for detentions.” On the pink slip, they “write the incident down and they give it to the Dean.” After the Dean gets it, “the Dean discusses it with the student and/or parents.” When he does this, he completes a checklist that includes what actions he took in addressing the behavior.

In cases where a student was issued a detention, sometimes it was just simply sitting in a room for a specific amount of time whereas in other cases the students had to do something, such as pick up trash. In one case, the teacher explained that their school’s policy allowed for students to be able to “pay a dollar” to get out of getting an offense. However, there was a limit of how many times you could “pay” to get out of an offense in one semester before they became detentions.

With regards to dismissing a child from class, one teacher shared that if you asked a child to leave the class, “you’ve dismissed them from class and there’s a disciplinary process.” This disciplinary process included having to “write up what happened” and include “under what conditions is he welcomed back in the classroom.” The child then took that home and the parents had to “agree to it and it gets signed off” and the child had to “write up their side, in a sense, of the story.” After you “accepted him back in the classroom, then you can’t rehash [the situation].” However, if the child was dismissed again, they were “out totally.”

In few cases, the teachers discussed suspensions or expulsions. However, one teacher did mention if a child got suspended in his school, they got “F’s” on “anything that was due and you can’t make it up.” With regards to what constituted an expulsion, one teacher shared that “it depends on the nature” of the behavior. For instance, he stated,

“if there is something where a kid was caught threatening somebody else with violence or something like that they may be suspended a few days right on the spot without going through the protocol of building up detentions.”

**Dress code.** Many of the teachers mentioned that as part of their school policy, the students either have to adhere to a dress code or wear assigned uniforms. In many of the schools, the teachers explained that when assigned uniforms were required, the students had to wear khaki pants and a shirt that had the school name on it. While this was the requirement across most of the schools, teachers did share differences in the strictness of this policy when implemented. In the case of one school, the teacher shared that the students were required to wear the right shade of khaki and if you had the wrong shade of khaki on, “you’d have to change.” Similarly, this teacher shared that if a student had “just a green shirt on that wasn’t the XXXX [name of school] shirt, you would get in trouble for that.” However, in other cases, the dress code was not as strict, or as a participant put it, “more lax.” For instance, one teacher stated, “our kids don’t have to tuck in shirts... they don’t have to wear belts... they don’t have to wear socks... you’re allowed to wear hoodies.” In her case, the students were supposed to wear polos with the school shield on them or that had the school name on it somehow, but students would wear hoodies and said, “we got them sort of at an event that the high school was at.” As far as pants were concerned, this teacher shared that the students had a choice in where they could purchase the khakis as well as the color of khakis they wanted to wear.

In one instance, a teacher mentioned their school had a Mass dress code when students attended Mass. The teacher shared that this Mass dress code consisted of boys wearing shirts and ties and girls wearing no sleeveless shirts and wearing skirts that were

“supposed to be two inches above the knee.” However, she explained that in some cases, girls would wear skirts that were shorter than the required length.

**Drug testing.** Another policy that was commonly discussed among the teachers was their drug testing policy. While each teacher mentioned the students who were going to be tested were randomly picked during the year, the way in which this was done differed. In one case, the teacher shared it was done by homeroom where he stated they say, “This Tuesday Mr. XXXX [name of teacher] you’re going to send your whole homeroom down.” At that time, he explained they would do 20 kids and then “maybe in a few weeks they’ll do maybe a random other homeroom.” In yet another instance, the teacher shared that a list of random numbers was generated by the principal and the principal picked who was going to be tested. He did share that “her goal was to test 10% of the population every year.” Lastly, one of the teachers shared at his school, it was done throughout the year and it was not announced, so “you never know when you’re going to be drawn.” He shared that the “principal calls you in or the Dean does it and they snip some hair and it’s sent down.” In some instances, he mentioned that you could get drawn again, but he stated that “they only do a certain percentage of follow-up.”

In addition to describing how drug testing was done in their schools, some of the teachers discussed what happened if “there is stuff found in the test.” One teacher stated, “they won’t be penalized by the law, but they will be enrolled in a program... they’ll have to seek counseling.” Yet, another teacher shared that if the first test came up positive:

...the student would be sent to another place to do a hair test to confirm it. If it was positive, then the student had to do mandatory drug counseling. If they said, no, then they were kicked out of school. After that mandatory drug counseling and...while they were going through drug counseling they had to be tested...they had to do a pee test weekly. And the second time you were tested positive for anything, you were expelled.

This teacher even shared an instance where school personnel found out that a student might have had drugs in their possession and they “made her open her car, open her center console.” This teacher mentioned that this was something private schools could do because “they have different laws” and “they can search vehicles.” One teacher said at the end of discussing his school’s drug testing policy, “so we’re here trying to support the student, trying to help them change for the better.”

### **Implementation of School Policies**

Some teachers mentioned that the school’s policies pertaining to behavior did have an effect on how they handled behavior problems when they occurred whereas others mentioned that the policies did not have an effect on how they handled behavior problems. One teacher in particular shared she does follow them because “whether I agree or disagree with the school rule, it is the rule and I am not going to challenge it in front of the kids.” She did share that the school policies do have an effect on how she handled behavior problems because in the past, she could ask a student to step outside until the end of class, but now, “if you put a kid out of the class, then you officially put them out of the classroom...and you better have documentation...you better be able to point out what you had tried to do... why the behavior escalated to that point.” In other instances, teachers shared that they followed the school policies by writing detentions or referrals. For one teacher, he shared that if the students did not heed his warning, he would report it. Similarly, another teacher shared, “I’ll use the referral system for

continuous outbreaks or if I think a situation should be documented.” However, in the case of another teacher, he would somewhat threaten students with detentions or referrals by saying to the student, “‘Alright, you’re getting a detention for that,’ and then it just stops that one.”

However, results also revealed that the implementation of these policies could also cause a student to get a reputation. In particular, one teacher shared an instance where a student “got in trouble one too many times and they just asked him to leave.” Before being dismissed, the teacher shared “he had been written up 10 or 12 times... you know for minor things,” which caused the student to get a reputation. Therefore, the teacher said, “once you get a reputation, teachers are looking for stuff.”

The teachers who really did not indicate that the policies had an effect on how they handled behavior problems, for the most part preferred to handle their own behavior problems. In one teacher’s case, she shared that for some of the behaviors that were punishable according to the handbook, she would not necessarily address because “you can’t be nit picking all those little things all day.” For another teacher, he preferred to “correct the student there and if it continues then take some homework points away or something like that.”

### **Factors Affecting the Implementation of School Policies**

**Beliefs.** For many teachers, they decided not to implement school policies consistently because of their own beliefs in how behavior should be handled. For one teacher, the incidences of behavior that warranted a detention according to the school policy, she felt did not because she believed “some things are very important and others are not” and that “a lot of the codes in the handbook are not behavior problems.” While in



other cases, the teacher felt it was important to follow the school policy even if they did not agree with it in order to not “challenge it in front of the kids.” In another instance, a teacher shared they handled their own behavior problems because “I was one of these teachers that I never sent kids down unless it was serious...I didn’t want to annoy the Dean with trivial stuff.” He believed that if you did not bother the Dean with “trivial stuff” then “when you do send somebody down, they know it’s serious and they react appropriately.”

**Security.** One teacher mentioned that teachers tend to follow school policies because it was “their security.” Therefore, “if it’s not in the rulebook they won’t deal with it.” A reason for this she believed was if a parent came in to discuss the consequence given to their child, the rulebook was “their security.” Similarly, another teacher mentioned how teachers did not know how to handle their own behavior problems and for those teachers, they could use the referrals.

**Changes in policies.** Another factor one teacher mentioned that affects the implementation of policies in her class is changes in policy. She shared that if she would have continued one way of handling behavior that would have led to other problems because the policy changed. However, in other cases, incidences of behavior occurred and there was no policy to address the incident. One teacher in particular shared that their school has “come across situations where [they] don’t have a policy.” She explained that there is a need to review existing policies as well as add new policies in order to be responsive to what is occurring in the school “and to continue to grow.” While this is necessary, she stated that it can be a challenge because “How do you start from scratch? How do you know to put everything in it?”

**Ease of implementation.** Most of the teachers attributed the ease of what would occur after an incident was written up to the role of administration personnel in dealing with incidences of behavior. For many teachers, they felt good knowing “a Dean was going to back you up” because as one teacher shared, “I was fearful that I wouldn’t be backed up.” In fact, one teacher shared that the Dean of Students in his school was “universally reviled by the students because he was seen as being very harsh, and that was his game face. He was the nicest guy in the world, but when he walked out of his office he put the scowl on.” Other teachers would discuss the seamlessness of what would occur after a referral was written because of the administration. For instance, one teacher shared,

I would write a referral and I would tell the student, ‘You’re getting a referral because of your behavior.’ If the student was really disruptive, I would send them to the office and I’d give the referral to the Dean. Within the day, the Dean would have assigned a certain number of detentions or suspensions for the student. The student’s parents are notified immediately and that’s that.

Yet another teacher shared that when they have to write a student a referral, because of the system they have in place at the school, “I can put it on a little sheet of paper and give it to the hall runner or I take it down to the office and then it’s enforced.”

Other teachers mentioned how the flexibility of policies affected the ease of implementation where one teacher believed the policies provided him “with flexibility to handle behavior problems.” For this teacher, he stated he “never feels like if a kid does something in [his] classroom, unless it’s really bad, that I have to go through the system. I feel like I can work with that student.” However, in another instance, a teacher mentioned the inconvenience of being able to readily access the student handbook because it was “just online instead of in the students’ planners.” Because of this, she

could not say, “Get it out and look at page 7” or “Get your planners out and see what it says about this.”

## **Section Five:**

### **Theological Philosophy**

**Research Question 1:** To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers’ perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?

For purposes of this study, the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and the notion of hospitality to the stranger allowed for the identification of a theological philosophy reflected in these secondary Catholic school teachers’ perceptions and responses towards behavior challenges/problems as well as in school policies. This theological philosophy was most transparent when teachers discussed the tenets of CST. When it came to hospitality to the stranger, while not specifically mentioned, it was reflected when teachers discussed their perceptions and responses to behavior problems as well as in school policies. Therefore, in this section a discussion regarding the extent to which CST and hospitality to the stranger was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses to behavior as well as in school policies will be presented.

#### **CST Reflected in Teacher Perceptions and Responses**

**Dignity of the human person.** For most teachers, the dignity of the human person meant treating each student “equally” or “they’re made in the image of God.” In one instance, a teacher stated the dignity of the human person meant that “every student is important and that every student has an equal dignity. Bottom line, money doesn’t talk in my classroom. I don’t care who you are. I don’t care who your parents are.” On the

other hand, a teacher shared because he saw his students made in the image of God that “you have a soul; that means you have intelligence and free will, so I’ll respect that fact in you.”

This understanding regarding the dignity of the human person affected how these teachers perceived and responded to student behavior. For instance, one teacher shared, “if I see them all as having equal dignity, then... respecting their dignity has nothing to do with the discipline problem.” Therefore, she believed that the actions were separate from the student and had nothing to do with how she saw them as a person. She further stated that the only time that discipline had anything to do with their dignity was if “I’m humiliating them in terms of the discipline.” For another teacher, he stated that because he acknowledged his students as having a “free will and intelligence” that he “holds them more responsible.” Specifically, he stated this meant he was “not going to treat you like a slave or a thing or a little kid. If you have a free will and intelligence, I expect you to use it.” Therefore, “I’m not going to do everything for you and put it all in your lap” because he believed they were able to make their own decisions as well as handle the consequences. Lastly, another teacher shared that because of the way she saw the students based on the notion of the dignity of the human person that everyone deserved a new chance to start again. Specifically she stated, “If you messed up the day before or all three weeks, I have to get over it.”

When it came to problems in Catholic schools with things such as bullying, one teacher believed this stemmed from the dignity of the human person in that bullying “should never have existed in Catholic schools, but do. But they shouldn’t have if we are really saying every one of these people is my brother or sister, every one of these people

is the same image and likeness of God as I am.” The same teacher also discussed her beliefs in responding to a child with a disability who was engaging in behavior problems which also reflected the dignity of the human person: “I wouldn’t let XXXX [name of student] who was the autistic kid misbehave, not that he did very much, more than I would let somebody else simply because he is autistic. No... that’s not respecting him. It’s not respecting him as a human person.”

On the other hand teachers believed that the dignity of the human person did not necessarily mean treating each student “equally.” For instance, one teacher stated the dignity of the human person to him meant “treating people as individuals and recognizing that fair is not always equal.” In yet another case, a teacher shared that the dignity of the human person meant that “everybody is their own unique person with their own gifts and their weaknesses.” For yet another teacher, he did not necessarily say students did not need to be treated equally, but “that every person needs to be treated fairly and with respect.”

Because of their understanding of the dignity of the human person, one teacher shared, “behavioral problems stems off from the fact that you’re, in a sense, you’re being controlled by your own weaknesses and your own addictions for this or that.” Therefore, he tried to help students work through their weaknesses. For instance, he challenged a student to give up sex for Lent because the dignity of the human person does not just involve respecting one another, but it also includes respecting yourself. Yet another teacher shared that “you have to consider every single case.” In order to do this, he explained that he separates the “behavior from the student.” This meant that as a teacher, you have to “find out what’s causing the misbehavior and then you have to address it at

the individual level. There's not a one size fits all solution for anything like that.”

Similarly, one of the teachers said that he preferred to “work with them more as an individual than to allow the institution to handle the problem.”

**Common good.** Most of the teachers in this study discussed the tenet, seeking the common good for all individuals, in terms of the type of climate they needed to create in their classroom. For one teacher, that meant creating an environment in the classroom that was “conducive to bring every child’s potential to fruition.” Similarly, other teachers believed it was important to create a learning environment in the classroom in which “everyone can learn.” On the other hand, one teacher felt that because he was a social studies teacher that seeking the common good meant “helping my students feel like they’re part of a community.” In the case of another teacher, he felt that seeking the common good was closely tied to the dignity of the human person in that he believed in building a learning community that was conducive to learning where the teacher and the students know each other and the students feel cared for and dignified.

While most teachers agreed that seeking the common good meant creating an environment in their classroom that was conducive to learning, some felt that this meant they had to be responsive in terms of instructional methods and building relationships with students in order to maintain the classroom environment. For these teachers, this meant “modifying lessons for kids who have disabilities” or “re-teaching in different ways” and “having the sense that everybody is different in a sense with their different skills to learn and their different intelligences and learning styles.” Specifically, one of these teachers believed if she met the needs of students who were struggling, in a way, that she was preventing behavior problems from occurring because she believed when a

student misbehaves “he or she is not learning.” Similarly, another teacher believed that seeking the common good meant “catering to each kid individually and trying to help each kid become the best person and student they can be.” Yet another teacher believed that it was important to get to know the students on an individual basis and to allow them to feel welcomed.

On the other hand, others believed that students needed to be removed as a way to maintain the classroom environment. For instance, one teacher shared that while she wanted to respect the student’s inability to function appropriately, if “it impacts the others then it can’t be tolerated.” In the case of another teacher, because she felt that everyone had a right to learn, she felt that “misbehavior should not take away from it, which means if you disrupt the class and you’ve done this, I’m going to point out you just wasted 30 minutes of time. It’s just not your minute and not just my minute, but everybody’s in the classroom.”

**Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.** When teachers discussed the tenet, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, many associated this with helping those who were poor in one way or another; academically (skills) or in their family-life (fatherless, divorced parents). For most of these teachers, it meant responding to their behavior problems, in some ways, differently. Yet for others, it did not affect how they perceived or responded to behavior problems because as one teacher mentioned, she would do it for anyone and another teacher stating, “the poor do not have a lack in behavior problems.”

Teachers shared they felt the need to advocate for these students’ needs and provide them with additional assistance. For instance, one teacher stated, “I go out of my

way to stand up for or try to help the youngster that doesn't have someone fighting for him or her. If there's someone not fighting for you, I'm not going to let someone else take advantage of you" as a way to offer support. Another teacher felt it was her responsibility to treat them equally, but to also know that they may need more than others. Yet for another teacher, he believed that it was important to "find out what the problem is." For instance, this teacher shared, "if I find out that a student has a horrible home life or has problems in their home life that definitely affects the way I perceive them, the way I handle them" and in some cases, he gave them "more slack." Similarly, another teacher shared that they were "gentler" with the student, but at the same time, not "enable" them. He shared that he wanted to see that they were trying their best and using their talents. In the same way, another teacher said it was important for them to "overcome" their difficulties. In the case of another teacher, he explained that at times, they can be quiet or withdrawn, so it was important to "draw those students out of themselves."

### **Hospitality to the Stranger Reflected in Teacher Perceptions and Responses**

The notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when teachers discussed their perceptions and responses towards behavior problems in relation to the tenets of CST. With regards to the dignity of the human person, the notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when teachers shared this tenet meant treating each student "equally" or that each student "has an equal dignity." Likewise, hospitality to the stranger was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses to behavior when some of the teachers mentioned they saw the behavior exhibited and the student as two separate entities where one teacher shared, "I make a clear distinction between the behavior and the person." In



yet another instance a teacher shared, “Bottom line, money doesn’t talk in my classroom. I don’t care who you are. I don’t care who your parents are.” In terms of seeking the common good for all individuals, the notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when teachers discussed their learning environment as being a place where “everyone can learn” and where students felt cared for and dignified. Hospitality to the stranger was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses when teachers shared the importance of “modifying lessons for kids who have disabilities” or “re-teaching in different ways” and “having the sense that everyone is different in a sense with their different skills to learn and their different intelligences and learning styles.” Lastly, the notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when discussing that preferential option for the poor and vulnerable was associated with helping those who were poor either academically or in their family-life. Consequently, hospitality to the stranger was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses where one teacher shared, “I go out of my way to stand up for or try to help the youngster that doesn’t have someone fighting for him or her. If there’s someone not fighting for you, I’m not going to let someone else take advantage of you.”

### **CST Reflected in School Policies**

The teachers in this study had mixed perceptions regarding how they felt the tenets of CST were reflected in their own school’s policies. For one teacher, there was a sense that she felt that the policies did not reflect “justice” or caused other problems to occur that jeopardized the three tenets of CST in one way or another. Specifically, she believed that the policies in her school were for “the benefit of the school day and an appropriate environment” and that the policies “have been written to impress the public and the community and they’re often implemented without giving thought. The people

who often implement are administrators and boards don't really have much experience with the reality of students to begin with." Similarly, another teacher felt that the tenets were not reflected in school policies because "not a lot of thought at the administrative level was given to home situations and stuff like that. I think it was very...for this act equals this punishment." In yet another case, a teacher mentioned that he questioned if the "actual policy was set up to meet those." However, he mentioned that those who enforce the policies were in a position to possibly implement the policies in dealing with behavior:

I think that at XXXX [name of Catholic high school] anyway, generally we have good people in positions to enforce the policies. And whether they know it or not, I think when they enforce the policies they have those things in the back of their mind because they do have a high regard for the human person."

In instances where teachers believed that the three tenets of CST were reflected in school policies, they mostly referred to the notion of the dignity of the human person, where one teacher stated specifically that the "policies are for all" and that "we treat you all equally because there is a policy." For another teacher, he shared that the idea of "being dignified as a human person is very much our value...in the forefront I should say." He further explained the mission statement as well as the values of the school reflected the dignity of the human person in that he shared the mission statement read, "as a Catholic institution we're here to uphold the human person, to develop the human person in the image of Christ in a Catholic setting," and likewise, the school's values included things such as, "being polite to one another, seeing the person as good... as a person rather than as an object of either someone or something to take advantage of or make abuse of." In yet another instance, a teacher discussed that the differentiation in offenses allowed the dignity of the human person to be reflected because he stated, "you

with your free will, have been somehow or less very irresponsible or malicious. We're taking into account your free will there."

As far as the other tenets, seeking the common good for all individuals and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, they were discussed among the teachers with regards to the school environment and providing assistance to others. Specifically, one of the teachers believed the tenet, seeking the common good, was reflected because the policies were "all aimed at maintaining a healthy learning environment." In another instance, one of the teachers believed that the tenets of CST were reflected in the school policies because the policies were for "the benefit of the school day and an appropriate environment." With regards to preferential option to the poor and vulnerable, one teacher explained that the policies at her school required students who were getting "D's" or "F's" to go to a place in the school to get some additional assistance. She explained that this place was not a special education room, but was a place where these students would go to receive additional assistance. Yet in another instance, the teacher believed that with her school's new referral system it provided more equality in dealing with behaviors because the Dean dealt with the behaviors rather than individual teachers handling behavior situations in different ways. She explained because of this new referral system, it could give consideration to "some special cases" because "you have to meet with the Dean" where there is "some extra coaching or maybe a relationship building there."

### **Hospitality to the Stranger Reflected in School Policies**

The notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when teachers discussed their schools' policies in relation to the tenets of CST especially when discussing the tenet, dignity of the human person. Specifically, one teacher shared that "the policies are

for all” and that “we treat you all equally because there is a policy.” With regards to seeking the common good and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the notion of hospitality to the stranger was reflected when teachers discussed the school environment and how assistance was provided to students. For instance, one teacher mentioned that at her school students who were getting “D’s” or “F’s” could go to a place within the school to receive extra assistance. While this place in the school was for those who were getting certain grades, she shared that any student was able to go and get additional assistance with their work or just to talk with someone about a problem which she believed reflected the notion that “everybody is treated equally...it doesn’t matter in that respect.”

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **DISCUSSION**

The current study examined how seven secondary Catholic school teachers perceived problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. Background information on these teachers revealed that while the majority went through a teacher preparation program, all but one teacher believed their teacher preparation program did not specifically prepare them to teach in a Catholic school. Rather, it was their experience going to Catholic school as a child, exposure to Catholic education through other prior experiences, and being a teacher within a Catholic school that prepared them. For some, their experience going to Catholic school as a child also influenced their decision to teach in a Catholic school.

Many of the teachers in this study believed that their overall experience teaching in a Catholic school has been positive, while some also mentioned challenges. One positive aspect of teaching in a Catholic school most of the teachers discussed involved their ability to be able to share the faith with their students. This was done mostly through prayer time or through class discussions and lessons. One teacher in particular even mentioned how being able to share the faith with his students has allowed him to also grow in his faith. On the other hand, two of the biggest challenges most of the teachers shared stemmed from money and finances and teaching students who are “unchurched.”

Another common experience many of these teachers have had while teaching in a Catholic school is that each of them have had students with disabilities in their classroom. While most of the teachers reported having students with Autism or a Specific Learning Disability in their classroom few reported having students with an Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, Other Health Impairment, Speech or Language Impairment, or Traumatic Brain Injury in their classroom. While these findings confirm the presence of students with disabilities in these selected secondary Catholic schools, findings differ from the study conducted by the USCCB (2002). Most of the teachers in the current study reported having students with Autism with few reporting they having had students with a Speech or Language Impairment. Results from the USCCB (2002) study revealed that children with Speech and Language Impairments were one of the largest percent of children with disabilities and children with Autism were one of the smallest percent of children with disabilities in Catholic schools. Findings from the current study could indicate that with an increase in awareness regarding Autism during the present time as well as more mild cases of Autism being identified (e.g., Aspergers), more of these students are being identified and attending Catholic schools.

When including students with disabilities in their classrooms, the challenges most discussed amongst the teachers was meeting the academic needs of these students with as well as ensuring others in the class understood their needs. Findings from previous studies have indicated that when students with disabilities were included in the general education classroom, general educators did not feel they had the knowledge or skills necessary to work with these students in their classrooms (e.g., Buell, Hallam, Gamel-

McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003; Kavale & Forness; 2000; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006; Singh, 2002) and specifically regarding Catholic secondary schools, Bello (2006) found that some of the challenges that occurred when including students with disabilities were related to professional and financial resources, knowledge and skills among faculty in meeting the needs of learners, and time. While none of the teachers in this study directly stated they did not have the knowledge or skills necessary to work with these students in their classrooms, one teacher did mention in her response regarding the role of IEPs in Catholic schools that they don't have the resources.

### **Perceptions**

**Research Question 1.1:** How are students' behavior challenges/problems perceived by secondary Catholic school teachers?

Findings from the current study revealed that teachers perceive behaviors related to showing a lack of respect towards the teacher or peers as what they considered to be a behavior problem. While teachers mentioned that behaviors related to showing a lack of respect occurred frequently in their classroom, many shared that the behaviors they identified were not extreme. Similarly, while some teachers could quickly identify incidences of severe behavior, many had a difficult time. Lastly, a surprising finding occurred when two teachers discussed what they considered not to be a behavior problem with failure to do schoolwork as well as disrupting the class as the incidences identified by the two teachers. When looking at incidences of problem behavior exhibited by students with disabilities, results revealed that in many cases, students with disabilities

did not exhibit problem behavior with only some teachers discussing particular incidences of behavior that occurred with these students. In discussing behavior exhibited by students with disabilities, many attributed the occurrence or lack of behavior exhibited to particular factors, with one teacher believing that the student's behavior was not connected to their disability.

These findings relate to the results of previous studies. For instance, in the studies conducted by Houghton and colleagues (1989) as well as Little (2005), there was found to be little to no difference between what was perceived as a troublesome behavior and a frequently occurring behavior. Likewise in the current study, the behaviors teachers considered to be problematic were also those, in many cases, that were identified as frequently occurring. In the same way, results from the study conducted by Bryk et al. (1993) and the 1982 study, *High School and Beyond* (as cited in Bryk et al., 1993) documented the infrequency of behaviors exhibited by students in secondary Catholic schools. In particular, researchers in the Bryk et al. (1993) study found that incidences of disruptive behavior were not observed during classroom observations as well as in teacher responses on a questionnaire. Findings from previous studies also suggest that in some cases factors such as teacher gender (Green et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Ritter, 1989) as well as years of teaching experience, degrees earned, and subject area taught (Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Ritter, 1989) could have an effect, particularly on how teachers perceive behavior problems. However, in this study, overall findings reveal that these factors did not affect how teachers perceived behavior problems. In many cases, both males and females in this study referred to the same behaviors as what they considered to be problematic and those behaviors that occurred



frequently. This was also the case when examining these teachers' years of experience, degrees earned, and subject area taught.

Findings from this study not only revealed what these teachers perceived as being a behavior problem, but also what factors they believed affected the occurrence of student behavior. While few teachers believed that behavior was affected by the child simply attending a Catholic school, most believed that it was what happened within the Catholic school that had an effect on student behavior. Some of the factors mentioned that occur as part of attending a Catholic school these teachers believed had an effect on student behavior was required uniforms and dress codes, exposure to the faith, parents having a monetary investment in their child's education, and teacher expectations. In addition to the factors identified as part of attending a Catholic school, others mentioned factors such as the child's parents, society, and original sin that were believed to have an effect on student behavior.

### **Responses**

**Research Question 1.2:** How do secondary Catholic school teachers respond to students' behavior challenges/problems?

Results from the current study revealed that when incidences of behavior occurred, most teachers in this study responded verbally (saying something to the student or group of students) whereas others responded either non-verbally (using a signal or prompt), physically (contact was either made between the teacher and student, objects were thrown, or the teacher had to rearrange students in the class), by removing the student (the student was asked to leave the classroom or was relocated to another area), or doing nothing (the teacher did not respond at all to the behavior exhibited). When

teachers responded to behavior, most of the time this was done by reprimanding one student in front of a group of students. However, in some cases, the teacher would talk to the student on an individual basis or contact the parents. While in most cases, teachers responded to student behavior because of something the student did wrong, there were instances where the teachers in this study acknowledged a student because of something positive they did.

Two interesting findings pertaining to teacher responses to incidences of behavior emerged. One of these findings was that little to no discussion occurred among participants if detentions were given or if students were suspended as a result of their behavior. The only indication that teachers mentioned regarding the use of an outside source to assist them with discipline came in the few instances when teachers sent the students down to the office. Secondly, in instances where severe behavior occurred, some of the teachers also responded to the incident by reflecting back on their actions and questioning what they could have done in the situation.

Findings from this study reveal a difference in teacher responses to students when they discussed their role in providing interventions and support as each teacher felt they had a role in providing interventions or support. For many of these teachers, this meant talking with the student on an individual basis and engaging in a dialogue. Yet for other teachers, they did this by seeking out other colleagues, being proactive through their delivery of content and material, and making the students feel guilty. However, while the teachers in this study felt they had a role and shared ways they provided interventions and support for behavior problems, findings from this study revealed that not all the teachers differentiated behavior consequences for student with disabilities.

These findings regarding teacher responses to student behavior relate to the results from a study conducted by Malone (1998) where teachers rated disciplinary methods they believed were most effective in managing student behavior. Teachers in the Malone (1998) study identified methods such as parent conferences, withholding privileges, office referrals, suspension, detentions, expulsion, changing the student's seat, conferencing with the student, isolating the student, and paddling. Likewise, in the current study, teachers responded to student behavior by rearranging students in the class, talking with the student on an individual basis, and removing students from the class. While the teachers in this study did not indicate if they believed the ways in which they responded to behavior was the most effective way of managing student behavior, the Malone (1998) study showed similarities in how behavior is managed.

Results of this study revealed not only factors that affected the occurrence of student behavior, but factors were also identified that affected how teachers responded to student behavior. Unlike the effect of a Catholic school on the occurrence of student behavior, teachers attributed their responses towards behavior problems to being in a Catholic school itself. In addition to the Catholic school, the teachers identified the role of their faith, their own experiences in Catholic school as a child, and simply making the student aware of their behavior as factors that affected how teachers responded to student behavior.

### **School Policies**

**Research Question 1.3:** How do school policies (regarding behavior) inform how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive and respond to behavior challenges/problems?

Findings from this study indicated school policies informed more how secondary Catholic school teachers responded to behavior challenges/problems with no indication that the policies informed how they perceived behavior challenges/problems. School policies were found to inform how the teachers in this study handled behavior problems because the policies provided guidelines and options for responding to student behavior. In some cases, the policies did inform how some teachers handled behavior because teachers shared they did not want to challenge the policy in front of the student, there were changes in policies which caused teachers to reconsider how they responded, provided teachers with ways to address behavior if it continued to escalate after a teacher provided warnings, ease of implementation, and, in some cases, teachers shared it provided other teachers with a sense of security. However, there were also indications that school policies did not inform how teachers handled behavior problems as some teachers had different beliefs in handling behavior or what they perceived to be a behavior problem. Therefore, while findings indicated that school policies were found to inform how teachers handled behavior problems, in most cases, factors such as the one's mentioned above affected the implementation of school policies by these teachers.

Another finding pertaining to school policies that was found to be relevant when policies were examined across schools was the similarities and differences among the policies themselves and how they were implemented. When teachers discussed their school's policies, many shared they had a role in handling the behavior before detentions were issued by speaking with the student or the parents. In instances where detentions were given in response to student behavior, in many cases, the teacher or administrator was responsible for issuing detentions. Differences among policies were found when

teachers discussed how detentions were served by the students where in some cases the student sat in a room quiet for a certain amount of time or they were asked to complete a task during their designated time. When incidences of behavior warranted dismissing a student from the classroom, one teacher shared they could not simply ask a child to leave the class because of the policy in place at the school whereas other teachers could simply dismiss a child from class. Interestingly, only a few teachers discussed what occurred when students were suspended or expelled. In the few cases where this was mentioned, teachers briefly discussed how they were supposed to proceed and what behaviors may have caused a student to get suspended or expelled. Lastly, two policies that were for the most part similar among schools were the required dress code and drug testing. Differences occurred pertaining to these two policies with regards to the implementation and strictness of the policy when implemented.

Consequently, the policies discussed among the teachers were similar to those mentioned in the literature. Similarities were found in terms of schools having a code of conduct (Bryk et al., 1993; Shaughnessy, 1998; Shaughnessy, 2007). This code of conduct, which was reflected in the policies discussed by the teachers in this study, provide students with expectations for interacting with other students and teachers, dress, and behaviors that are prohibited on school grounds (Bryk et al., 1993).

### **Theological Philosophy**

**Research Question 1:** To what extent is a theological philosophy reflected in secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions, responses, and policies toward behavior challenges/problems?

## **Theological Philosophy Reflected in Teacher Perceptions and Responses**

The teachers in this study had a clear understanding of what the dignity of the human person meant to them as a teacher. Many of the teachers believed this tenet involved treating students with equal dignity and seeing the students as made in the image of God whereas others believed that the dignity of the human person meant treating each student as an individual and treating them fairly, rather than equally. Consequently, the teachers believed that respecting their students' dignity meant separating their behavior from who they were as a person, holding them more responsible for their actions because of their free will and intelligence, helping them work through their weaknesses, and addressing the behavior on an individual basis. With regards to students with disabilities, one teacher shared that she did not let one of her students with Autism act out any more than the other students because she believed letting him act out was not respecting that student as a human person.

Similarly, others have discussed the dignity of the human person in terms of being made in the image and likeness of God (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004) and deserving of equal dignity (Curran, 2002). In fact, Storz and Nestor (2007) share that the environment in which children learn in as well as the interactions had within the learning environment can “respect or diminish students' dignity” (p. 10). Findings from this study revealed that there were instances where teachers did take into consideration the students' dignity when responding to behavior. In these cases, the teachers acknowledged their students for doing something positive or talked with the student about their behavior on an individual basis.

With regards to seeking the common good for all individuals, this tenet is reflected in a community where individuals help one another (DeBerri et al., 2003) and “stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §164). Specifically, Storz and Nestor (2007) share this tenet is reflected in the communal effort of both teachers and students in helping to build a community which values each individual. Likewise, the teachers in the current study discussed this tenet in terms of the learning environment they tried to create in their classroom. Teachers shared they did this by being responsive to student needs, helping students to feel like they were part of a community, and creating a learning environment where the students felt cared for and dignified. Findings from this study revealed that in terms of behavior, the teachers believed this tenet was reflected in their classroom by being responsive in terms of their instructional approaches to ensure the students were learning in order to prevent behavior problems whereas others shared they believe in removing students from the classroom in order to protect the learning environment and to prevent the behavior from disrupting others.

As with the dignity of the human person, results from this study reveal that in most cases, this tenet was evident in the teachers’ practice. Those instances where this was most evident was when the teachers tried to be responsive and meet student needs by modifying their instructional approaches and building relationships with their students. With regards to behavior, this tenet was reflected in teacher responses to student behavior when teachers provided additional support for students who were having difficulties with their behavior and in instances where teachers differentiated behavior consequences not only for students with disabilities, but in some cases, for all students.

Lastly, unlike the dignity of the human person and seeking the common good for all individuals, teachers in this study had a difficult time discussing the tenet, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, in relation to their teaching. Many of the teachers shared this tenet meant helping students who were poor either academically or in their family-life. Similarly, Storz and Nestor (2007) explain this tenet is carried out when teachers provide services to students with disabilities as well as work with families and students who encounter struggles. However, when discussing this tenet, in only a few instances did teachers specifically mention something regarding students with disabilities.

Findings from this study revealed mixed perceptions and responses with regards to the extent to which this tenet is carried out in their practice in terms of responding to behavior. In one instance, a teacher was clear about the fact that knowing about the home life of their student did affect the way they perceived and handled them. Instances where teachers believed that based on their students' situation they handled these students differently by providing additional assistance, advocating for their needs, taking the time to find out what the problem was, or providing them with more slack. However, in other instances, teachers shared they did not necessarily believe they treated these students differently with one teacher sharing that she would do the same for other students. Likewise, another teacher shared that she felt it was important to treat them equally, but know that they may have other needs. In terms of responding to behavior, this tenet was reflected when few teachers pointed out the importance of finding out why a student exhibited a certain behavior and handling each situation on a case by case basis.

While not specifically mentioned, hospitality to the stranger was reflected to a certain extent when teachers discussed their perceptions and responses to behavior in



relation to the tenets of CST where what continuously emerged was that differences do not exclude individuals (Fasching, 2000). When hospitality to the stranger was reflected in the tenets of CST, the idea of treating students equal was reflected in each of the tenets. An instance where this was reflected in terms of perceptions and responses towards behavior was when teachers mentioned they separated the behavior from the student. By separating the behavior from the student, the behavior exhibited by the student is not jeopardizing the dignity of that student because it is the behavior that is being viewed as not acceptable rather than the student themselves. When behavior is viewed in this way, the behavior is not used as a means to allow the student to feel like they are the ones who are not acceptable, but that they are valued and accepted just like the other students in the class. Similarly, teachers shared the importance of modifying their lessons and teaching methods to ensure that all students were able to learn, which consequently can help in preventing problem behavior from occurring. In essence, this reflected the notion of a holy community which Fasching (2000) shares occurs when all individuals are able to be included and individuals are not excluded based on differences.

### **Theological Philosophy Reflected in School Policies**

Findings from this study revealed that unlike teacher perceptions and responses to behavior problems, the tenets of CST were not reflected to a great extent within school policies. When teachers believed the policies reflected the tenets of CST, dignity of the human person was most represented. The teachers believed this tenet was not only reflected in actual school policies, but also in the mission statements and values at selected schools. With regards to the tenets, seeking the common good and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, they were reflected in school policies pertaining to

maintaining the school environment and in helping those in the school community who may have needed additional assistance.

As in the case with teacher perceptions and responses to behavior problems, hospitality to the stranger was not specifically mentioned when teachers discussed their school's policies. However, what was shared does lend itself to being reflected within school policies to a certain extent because what emerged was that differences do not exclude individuals (Fasching, 2000) since teachers shared the policies were for all and allowed for the school to treat students equally. This was most reflected in two instances where teachers discussed the policies at their schools. In the first instance, a teacher shared that the policies at her school allowed for equality in dealing with behavior since the Dean handled the behaviors. Even though this could lend itself to the Dean favoring one student or situation over another because the teacher said that the system could give consideration to "some special cases," it does provide a way for situations be handled in such a manner that each student is given equal opportunity. In the same light, because the teacher believed the new system allowed for consideration to be given to "some special cases" it allowed the Dean to assess the student's situation and go from there. In the second instance, a teacher shared a policy pertaining to students who were earning below average grades receiving extra assistance. However, any student who was having difficulties could come for assistance. In this case, hospitality to the stranger was being shown to those who were not necessarily included in the policy because they were not getting "D's" or "F's". Therefore, in this case, while these students were not considered to be "vulnerable" in the sense that they were really struggling academically, this place was open to them to receive extra assistance if they felt they needed it.

The title of this dissertation, *Guided by the Spirit*, depicted both my journey through this study as well as what was expected to emerge from participant responses. As each interview was conducted, the researcher was inspired to reflect on how what was shared connected to the spirit of the teachers and practice as teachers within secondary Catholic schools. As the teachers in this study discussed their practice, there was a sense that each teacher was *guided by the spirit*, particularly in how they perceived and responded to problem behavior. In most cases, this was evident in their discussion of how the tenets of CST were reflected in their perceptions towards behavior problems. Yet in other instances, it was reflected in discussions pertaining to the students in their classroom and what they did to meet their students' needs in terms of providing interventions or support as well as differentiating behavior consequences.

### **Limitations**

Even though the current study contributes to the knowledge base and research on Catholic schools, this study does have some identified limitations. One limitation pertains to the sample of participants. In this study, only seven teachers participated. Among the seven participants, most were selected from Catholic high schools within the same diocese and state, and in some cases, in close proximity to one another. This limitation lends itself to question the diversity of information gained and the representativeness of perceptions and responses pertaining to behavior among secondary Catholic school teachers as well as the policies discussed.

Similarly, the teachers selected to participate in this study were those teachers who have taught or are teaching in Catholic secondary schools. Therefore, the perceptions and responses these secondary education teachers discussed may not

represent the perceptions and responses of elementary Catholic school teachers or of all secondary Catholic school teachers. Furthermore, since this study was conducted with secondary Catholic school teachers, the results of this study may not represent the perceptions of teachers of other faith-based educational institutions, other private educational institutions, and even to public educational institutions.

A final limitation of this study was the interview protocol used did not contain a question pertaining to hospitality to the stranger. Analyses of data allowed for the researcher to identify instances where hospitality to the stranger was mentioned by participants. However, a question which directly asked the teachers to share what hospitality to the stranger meant to them and how this affected their perceptions of behavior would have allowed for the researcher to have a better understanding of what this meant to them and how it was applied in their practice.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should obtain a larger and more representative sample of teachers who teach in secondary Catholic schools to assess differences in perceptions, responses, and policies in different dioceses. Because the current study focused on teacher perceptions and responses toward problem behavior, the perspectives of other school faculty and staff that directly deal with and handle behavior within secondary Catholic schools such as administrators and the Dean of Discipline should be obtained. This may provide a different perspective on how behavior is perceived and handled within secondary Catholic schools. Lastly, the current study used a qualitative research design in order to obtain teacher perceptions and responses. In addition to qualitative methods, future research should also employ quantitative methods where perceptions and responses

are obtained through surveys and rating scales. By obtaining information using a mixed methods approach, findings can be compared where similarities and differences can be noted as well as a more in-depth examination of secondary Catholic school teachers' perceptions and responses towards behavior can be gained.

Future research should also examine the impact of spirituality on the cultivation of character and virtue pertaining to teachers in secondary Catholic schools. In the current study, the notion of a theological philosophy was obtained by asking each participant what the dignity of the human person, seeking the common good for all individuals, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable meant to them as teachers and how each of these tenets of CST affected how they perceived behavior problems. In an attempt to understand the role of spirituality in a teacher's practice, future research should obtain this information through open-ended questions which do not necessarily ask the teacher to align his/her responses to a particular aspect of religious beliefs or teachings. By obtaining information in this manner, findings can allow a researcher to understand the extent to which each individual teacher's spirituality informs his/her own actions with regard to managing behavior.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study provided an understanding of how teachers in secondary Catholic schools perceive and respond to behavior as well as the policies within these schools. In addition, this study also provided an understanding of the extent to which a theological philosophy was reflected in teacher perceptions and responses as well as in school policies. Consequently, findings from this study can inform practice in both teacher

education programs and within Catholic schools as well as professional development within Catholic schools.

Teacher education programs can use the information in this study to help prepare teachers to teach not only in public schools, but also in Catholic schools. In either case, it is important for teacher educators to provide opportunities within coursework and field experiences where preservice teachers are able to discuss their perceptions and responses towards behavior problems. Opportunities such as these can allow preservice teachers to possibly see how their perceptions influence their responses to problem behavior. This may in some cases allow preservice teachers to reflect further on this and help them better understand their own philosophy behind behavior management.

In addition, coursework provided to preservice teachers in teacher education programs regarding classroom and behavior management should discuss a diverse range of methods and strategies as well as allow the preservice teachers to understand the possible implications when implementing a particular method or strategy in the classroom. Likewise, field experiences should be provided. During these field experiences, preservice teachers should be given the opportunity to not only implement the methods and strategies learned in their teacher education programs, but to also be given the opportunity to reflect and discuss what happened as a result of implementing a particular method or strategy.

Lastly, for teacher educators within institutions of Catholic higher education it is important to provide opportunities for discussion in teacher education coursework regarding the role of theology in a teacher's practice. Findings from this study revealed that at times, teachers had a difficult time expressing how the tenets of CST were

reflected in their practice. Therefore, opportunities to discuss the role of theology and even how the tenets of CST can be implemented into their practice allow preservice teachers to understand another dimension of their practice where their own “theological philosophy” pertaining to teaching may be revealed, which not only helps them to grow in their faith, but it informs their practice.

The findings from this study can also inform practice within Catholic schools for those in administrative positions and classroom teachers. Qualitative findings from this study revealed that just because school policies are in place, teachers do not necessarily always follow them or implement them when incidences of behavior occur. Therefore, it is important for those in administrative positions to engage in continuous dialogue with teachers regarding the schools’ policies in terms of the usefulness and ease of implementation when the policy is used to address incidences of behavior. It is also important for those in administrative positions to frequently review their school’s policies and assess if new policies need to be written or existing policies need to be revised to address new issues that arise within the school since one teacher shared that a situation arose and the school did not have a policy to address it.

With regards to classroom teachers in Catholic schools, one finding from this study revealed that teachers have a role in the occurrence of behavior where one teacher stated, “even though we are a Catholic school and we have our rules, we are not all at the same degree of discipline for our students” where the students “know what teachers they can get away with murder with.” Therefore, it is important for teachers to state and reinforce their expectations for student behavior. This allows the students to know what is going to occur as a result of a behavior. In addition to making expectations for student

behavior known, it is also important for teachers to consider ways in which they can adapt instruction as well as implement methods and strategies that will ensure that all students are learning and engaged. When this is done, teachers from this study shared it decreases the occurrences of problem behavior in the classroom.

For both administrators and classroom teachers in Catholic schools, it is important to engage in a dialogue and reflect on the role a theological philosophy, specifically CST, plays in their practice. Those in administrative positions should review school policies to assess the extent to which CST is reflected. Likewise, teachers should also reflect on their practice in terms of their perceptions and responses towards behavior problems and assess the extent to which CST is reflected. By those within Catholic schools assessing the extent to which the tenets of CST are reflected can allow for practice and policies to be aligned with Church teaching.

Lastly, findings from this study can inform what professional development opportunities could be provided within Catholic schools. Professional development within Catholic schools should focus on providing teachers with different approaches and strategies in order to prevent behavior from occurring and how to best address incidences of behavior after they occur. In particular, teachers should be shown how these behavior management approaches can be used to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as for those who are exhibiting behavioral difficulties. In addition, results from the current study showed that while many teachers mentioned they differentiated behavior consequences for students with disabilities, some shared they did not. Therefore, professional development can provide teachers with ways in which they can differentiate behavior consequences based on their students' needs. Lastly, the teachers in this study



had a difficult time expressing how the tenets of CST were reflected in their practice in terms of their perceptions and responses towards behavior problems. Therefore, professional development within Catholic schools should help teachers to understand how their own faith or spirituality informs their practice when teaching in a Catholic school.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A:

### Informed Consent

Study ID: Pro00000415 Date Approved: 11/30/2010 Expiration Date: 11/30/2011



#### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

##### Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # Pro00000415

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Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:

*Guided by the Spirit: Understanding Student Behavior and Theological Philosophy through the Lens of Secondary Catholic School Teachers*

The person who is in charge of this research study is *Angela Mucci*, Principal Investigator.

---

#### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

Examine how secondary Catholic school teachers perceive problem behavior exhibited by students with or without disabilities based on their theological philosophy. This research study is being conducted for purposes of a dissertation.

#### Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in three meetings (in person or via Skype):

- During the first meeting (lasting approximately 15 minutes), the *informed consent* document will be reviewed. If you decide to participate in the study, I will provide you with the *teacher demographic questionnaire*. The teacher demographic questionnaire will ask you to provide responses to questions pertaining to your gender, age, race, ethnicity, if you are religious or laity, religious affiliation, teaching experience and certifications, teacher preparation experience, and experience working with students who have disabilities. You will be asked to bring the completed questionnaire to the second meeting. If the first meeting is not done with you in person, but rather using video conferencing (Skype), the teacher demographic questionnaire will be emailed to you and you will be asked to email the completed teacher demographic questionnaire to me prior to the second meeting.
- During the second meeting (lasting 60-75 minutes), the completed teacher demographic questionnaire will be collected and you will be asked to participate in an *interview* that will be audiotaped with permission from you. The purpose of the interview is to learn more about your teaching experience and teacher preparation experience, perceptions of behavior problems, responses to behavior problems, experience working with students who have disabilities, the Catholic school environment and behavior, school policies as well as what three tenants of Catholic Social Teaching mean to you as a teacher, how these tenants affect how you perceive behavior problems, and how these tenants are reflected in school policies. If you agree to allow the interview to be audiotaped, the Principal Investigator will be the only person who has access to this taped interview. When the interview is transcribed, no identifying information will be included on the transcript. Data collected during the second meeting will be maintained for a minimum of five years and be shredded at the conclusion of the study. If the second meeting is not done with you in person, but rather using video conferencing (Skype), the interview will be conducted using video conferencing and audiotaped using Skype software (PrettyMay). The conversation will be transcribed for analysis purposes.

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IRB Number: Pro00000415

IC Adult Minimal Risk Template – SocBeh Rev: 2008-10-14



IRB Consent Rev. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3

- During the third meeting (lasting approximately 20 minutes), you will be asked to *review the transcript* from the second meeting. If you feel the transcript accurately represents the conversation we had at the second meeting, we will engage in a discussion regarding any thoughts you had following the second meeting and I may ask for clarification on anything that was unclear from the second meeting. The conversation that occurs during the third meeting will be audiotaped with permission from you. If you agree to allow the conversation to be audiotaped, the Principal Investigator will be the only person who has access to this taped conversation. When this conversation is transcribed, no identifying information will be included on the transcript. Data collected during the third meeting will be maintained for a minimum of five years and be shredded at the conclusion of the study. If the third meeting is not done with you in person, but rather using video conferencing (Skype), the transcript will be emailed to you and our conversation regarding the transcript, thoughts had after the second meeting, and clarification on anything that was unclear from the second meeting will be conducted using video conferencing and audiotaped using Skype software (PrettyMay). The conversation will be transcribed for analysis purposes.

### **Alternatives**

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study. You may choose to withdraw at anytime during the course of the study.

### **Benefits**

We don't know if you will get any benefits by taking part in this study.

### **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

### **Compensation**

We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. The teacher demographic questionnaire as well as the taped interview and discussion will contain no personally identifying information. All data collected and analyzed for this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Department of Special Education or on a password protected computer for a minimum of five years.

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.) These include:
  - The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
  - The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

### Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status.

### Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call *Angela Mucci* at 815-228-2649 or you can email me at [amucci@usf.edu](mailto:amucci@usf.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If you experience an unanticipated problem related to the research call *Angela Mucci* at 815-228-2649 or you can email me at [amucci@usf.edu](mailto:amucci@usf.edu).

### Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

## Appendix B:

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

November 30, 2010

Angela Mucci  
Special Education  
EDU 105

RE: **Expedited Approval** for initial Review

IRB#: Pro00000415

Title: Guided by the Spirit: Understanding Student Behavior and Theological Philosophy through the Lens of Secondary Catholic School Teachers

Dear Ms. Mucci,

On 11/30/2010 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 11/30/2011.

Approved Items:  
Protocol Document(s):

[Dissertation proposal- revised](#)      11/24/2010 7:06 AM      0.01

#### Consent/Assent Documents:

Name	Modified	Version
<a href="#">Informed Consent- revised.pdf</a>	11/30/2010 1:27 PM	0.01

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

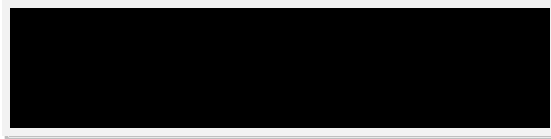
Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.116 (d) which states that an IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent, or waive the requirements to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects; (2) the waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (3) the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and (4) whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation. Specifically, the waiver of documentation of informed consent is for the interviews conducted via Skype.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,



John Schinka, PhD, Vice-Chair  
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Anna Davis, USF IRB Professional Staff

## Appendix C:

### Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions.

<b>1. Gender:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	<b>2. Age:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 and under <input type="checkbox"/> 22 to 34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35 to 44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45 to 54 <input type="checkbox"/> 55 to 64 <input type="checkbox"/> 65 and over	<b>3. Race:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> White	<b>4. Ethnicity:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> African American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Racial <input type="checkbox"/> Native American <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<b>5. Religious or Laity:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Religious (deacon, brother, sister, priest) <input type="checkbox"/> Laity (not a deacon, brother, sister, priest)	<b>6. Religious affiliation, if any:</b> _____ _____
<b>7. Number of years as a teacher:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 0-1 years <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 6-14 years <input type="checkbox"/> 15-24 years <input type="checkbox"/> 25 + years	<b>8. Number of years teaching at a Catholic school:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 0-1 years <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 6-14 years <input type="checkbox"/> 15-24 years <input type="checkbox"/> 25 + years	<b>9. If you are not currently teaching in a Catholic school, what is your current occupation?</b> _____ _____ _____ _____			
<b>10. Have you taught in a school other than a Catholic school:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>11. If so, what type of school:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private (non-Catholic) <input type="checkbox"/> Charter <input type="checkbox"/> Magnet <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				

<p><b>12. Did you go through a teacher preparation program:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p><b>13. If yes, what type of teacher preparation program:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Regular or Traditional</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Alternative</p>	<p><b>14. What was your area of teacher preparation (e.g., elementary education, secondary education, special education):</b></p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>15. Highest degree earned:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors (B.A., B.S.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Masters (M.A., M. Ed)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Specialists (Ed.S)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D)</p>
<p><b>16. Please list all teaching certifications you currently hold:</b></p> <hr/> <hr/>			

<p><b>17. Have you ever had students with disabilities in your classroom:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p><b>18. If so, what type(s) of disabilities did the students have:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Autism</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Deaf-Blindness</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Deafness</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Disturbance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impairment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mental Retardation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Disabilities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Orthopedic Impairment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other Health Impairment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Specific Learning Disability</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speech or Language Impairment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic Brain Injury</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Visual Impairment (including Blindness)</p>
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## Appendix D:

### Interview Protocol

1. *[Based on demographic information if they taught in a school other than a Catholic school]* Tell me about your experience when you taught in a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What made you decide to teach in a Catholic school?
3. Tell me about your experience teaching at a Catholic school and *[if they taught in a school other than a Catholic school]* how it is different from a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. How did your teacher preparation program help prepare you to teach in a Catholic school?
5. Tell me about your classroom and what it looks like on a regular day.
6. In your classroom, tell me what you consider to be a behavior problem.
7. What are the most frequent behavior problems that occur in your classroom?
  - a. How do you respond to those behaviors?
8. Tell me about a time when a severe behavior problem occurred in your classroom.
  - a. How did you respond?
9. What do you believe is your role in providing interventions or support for behavior problems?
10. *[Based on demographic information if they have had students with disabilities in their classroom]* You have had students with or without disabilities in your classroom, are there any differences in their behaviors?
  - a. Do you differentiate behavior consequences for students with disabilities? If so, how?
11. How do you believe that being in a Catholic school affects student behavior?
  - a. How do you think this might differ or be similar to other private or public school experiences?
12. How do you think being in a Catholic school impacts your perceptions and responses towards behavior problems?
13. Tell me about your school's policies in addressing behavior problems.
  - a. How do those policies affect how you handle behavior problems in your classroom?
  - b. How are those policies implemented when a behavior problem occurs with a student?

14. The Catholic Church has three tenets which are part of Catholic Social Teaching- dignity of the human person, seeking the common good for all individuals, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.
- a. What does the dignity of the human person mean to you as a teacher?
    - i. How does this affect how you perceive behavior problems?
  - b. What does seeking the common good for all individuals mean to you as a teacher?
    - i. How does this affect how you perceive behavior problems?
  - c. What does preferential option for the poor and vulnerable mean to you as a teacher?
    - i. How does this affect how you perceive behavior problems?
  - d. How are these three tenets of Catholic Social Teaching reflected in the school's policies pertaining to behavior?
15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding behavior or your preparation?

Thank you for your time and for talking with me about your experiences.

I am going to transcribe our conversation and would like to meet with you one more time for about 20 minutes. During that time, I would like for you to review the transcript to ensure that I have captured our conversation accurately as well as follow up with you on any thoughts you had following our last conversation.

If between now and the time we meet again you have any thoughts that you would like to share with me regarding our conversation, please feel free to contact me by phone (815-228-2649) or by email ([amucci@usf.edu](mailto:amucci@usf.edu)).

## Appendix E:

### Permission Letter from National Catholic Educational Association

RE: Permission

Page 1 of 1

#### RE: Permission

Dale McDonald [McDonald@ncea.org]

**Sent:** Thursday, September 08, 2011 10:55 AM

**To:** Mucci, Angela

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NCEA grants permission to Angela M. Mucci to use Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2 from the publication referenced below. Please use this attribution:

McDonald, D. & Schultz, M. (2011). *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing*. Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association.

Sister Dale McDonald, PBVM, PhD

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**From:** Mucci, Angela [mailto:amucci@usf.edu]

**Sent:** Thursday, September 08, 2011 7:38 AM

**To:** Dale McDonald

**Subject:** Permission

Hello Sr. McDonald,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am working on my dissertation titled, Guided by the Spirit: Understanding Student Behavior and Theological Philosophy Through the Lens of Secondary Catholic School Teachers.

I am writing to ask your permission to use two exhibits from your publication, *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary schools 2010-2011: The annual statistical report on schools, enrollment, and staffing*, for purposes of my dissertation. The first exhibit is Exhibit 1: Schools and Enrollment History (p. 2) and the second exhibit is Exhibit 2: School Staffing History (p. 3) which includes both the Total Staff and Total Staff Summary 2010-2011 data. May I have your permission to use these two exhibits in my dissertation?

Thank you for your consideration.  
Angela Mucci

Angela M. Mucci, M.A.  
Department of Special Education  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of South Florida  
4202 E. Fowler Avenue, Stop EDU 105  
Tampa, FL 33620  
E-mail: [amucci@usf.edu](mailto:amucci@usf.edu)

<https://email.usf.edu/owa/?ae=Item&t=IPM.Note&id=RgAAAACiczFifI1QR...> 9/8/2011

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Angela M. Mucci received her Associate in Arts degree from Illinois Valley Community College in 2001, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Special Education from the University of St. Francis in 2003, and a Masters of Arts degree in Varying Exceptionalities from the University of South Florida in 2006. While completing her Masters of Arts degree she was a special education teacher who taught second and third grade students who had emotional/behavioral disorders in a self-contained setting. Ms. Mucci began her Ph.D. program at the University of South Florida in 2006.

While completing her doctorate, Ms. Mucci was active in teaching, scholarship, and service activities. Ms. Mucci taught and mentored both undergraduate and graduate students through coursework and field experiences. She also participated in collaborative research with other doctoral students and faculty members that have resulted in a publication and presentations at both state and national conferences.