

Running head: QUALITATIVE STUDY OF URBAN ECT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF URBAN EARLY CAREER TEACHERS' ATTRIBUTIONS  
FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

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# QUALITATIVE STUDY OF URBAN ECT

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## Abstract

Early career teachers (ECTs) in urban schools face distinct challenges including a high prevalence of disruptive student behavior. Understanding teacher attributions for disruptive behavior, which shape teacher behavior, affect, and expectancy toward students, may allow school psychologists to act as more effective consultants to build teacher skills and increase teacher effectiveness. The purpose of the current study was to explore in depth ECTs' ( $N = 15$ ) causal attributions for disruptive behavior using extant data from a grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences. The most commonly described attribution categories for disruptive behavior in the previous literature are student, self, family, and school-related. The current study sought to understand how the four attribution categories were conceptualized, and the prevalence of each across the sample of ECTs. Qualitative analyses suggest that the attribution categories were defined as follows: (1) Student-related: Interpersonal and self-regulatory skills at different developmental stages, and student apathy; (2) Self-related: Preparedness and ability to engage students, and classroom rules and routines; (3) Family-related: Limited involvement and behavioral support; and (4) School-related: Inconsistent development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences, behavior of school staff, school conditions, and teacher authority. All of the four attribution categories were identified as *typical* within the current sample, which meant that each was endorsed by 8 – 14 ECTs ( $N = 15$ ). The discussion considers the concordance of the current study with previous literature, future research directions, and implications for the practice of school psychology.

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## A Qualitative Study of Urban Early Career Teachers' Attributions for Disruptive Behavior

### **Introduction**

School conditions such as overcrowding, limited resources, and deteriorating facilities in urban, high-poverty communities pose distinct challenges for teachers. These factors have been linked to high rates of teacher turnover (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2009). Given that attrition rates are particularly high among early career teachers (ECTs), or those who have been teaching for five or fewer years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), and contextual factors such as teaching resources and interpersonal support available have been found to be highly influential on ECT self-efficacy beliefs, understanding more about the experiences of ECTs in urban schools is an important area of inquiry.

Aside from the importance of resources and interpersonal supports, ECTs identify a lack of preparation in managing disruptive behavior as a major concern (Britt, 1997; Meister & Melnick, 2003). ECTs have noted that their pre-service training needs to include more courses in classroom management and discipline to meet the vast behavioral demands of students (Britt, 1997). Previous research has compared the self-efficacy beliefs of ECTs to experienced teachers, highlighting that ECTs have lower self-efficacy beliefs with regard to classroom management and controlling and managing disruptive behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) found that over time, however, teachers experience improvements in perceived ability to manage and prevent disruptive behaviors, suggesting that on-the-job experience may enhance teachers' feelings of effectiveness if teachers choose not to leave the role. In urban schools, however, teachers are at particular risk for struggling in classroom management given the high prevalence of student behavioral problems (Hertzog, 2002; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006). Disruptive behavior and a lack of training in behavior management may



be connected to teaching difficulties for ECTs in general, and of particular concern for teachers within urban schools. However, there is more to learn about ECTs' experience of the challenging student behaviors in urban schools. This includes understanding the attributions made regarding disruptive behavior, given that attributions can have an effect on an individual's behavioral and emotional responses to the behavior of others (Weiner, 1972).

Teachers identify student behavior as an issue and school-based behavioral consultation between school psychologists and teachers has been implicated as an effective method to increase teacher classroom management capabilities (Carter & Van Norman, 2010; MacLeod, Jones, Somers, & Havey, 2001; Wilkinson, 2003). However, school psychologists have been shown to devote most of their energy during the school day to special education initial evaluations and reevaluations (47% of total work time), which was followed distantly by consultation for student externalizing problems (10% of total work time) (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2010). Teachers have expressed significant concern that their limited knowledge, skills, and lack of pre-service training in regard to disruptive behavior has caused them to feel powerless (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011). Teachers in urban schools have also reported lack of information and training in managing disruptive behavior, along with inadequate time for consultation with mental health professionals, as barriers to preventing and managing behavior problems (Walter et al. 2006).

Noting that school psychologists have historically devoted limited time to behavioral consultation with teachers, several studies have sought to explore whether teacher perceptions of the consultation process are relevant to improved consultation effectiveness (Erchul, Raven, & Whichard, 2001; Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin, & Shwery, 2004; Perez-Gonzalez, Garcia-Ros, &

Gomez-Artiga, 2004). These studies have focused on the influence of teacher perceptions of themselves, the school psychologist, the organization, and the consultation sessions. Teacher perceptions of students and challenging classroom behaviors, including attributions for these behaviors, have not been considered in relation to behavioral consultation outcomes, but there is research to suggest that teacher attributions for behavior are important.

Understanding ECTs' feelings about behavior management and classroom misbehavior can enhance school psychologists' ability to be effective consultants. If teachers are experiencing overwhelmingly challenging behaviors, school psychologists may be able to act in a supportive role, help change maladaptive thoughts and feelings (e.g., attributions held by teachers about student behaviors), build teacher skills, and increase teacher effectiveness. Increasing teachers' ability to control and manage disruptive behaviors might also lead to fewer referrals to school psychologists of students with behavioral problems that impact academic performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **Disruptive Behavior**

Disruptive behavior is defined as (1) noncompliance (i.e., talking without permission, interrupting the teacher, speaking loudly to other children, talking back to the teacher, disobeying or ignoring class rules), (2) playing the clown (i.e., playing tricks, telling jokes, drawing attention upon oneself, provoking laughter within other children), (3) disturbing others (i.e., moving around, hitting others, taking things from others, verbally or behaviorally interfering in the work of others), and (4) off-task behavior (i.e., daydreaming, asking permission to go to the restroom, looking out of the window) (Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, & Stogiannidou, 2000). The presence of these behaviors has been shown to impede both the ability of the teacher to teach effectively and student learning (Jones, Charlton & Wilkin, 1995). Nonetheless, teachers who attain an

appreciation and understanding of the multiple factors that are involved in interactions between teachers and students develop more realistic expectations of personal efficacy and avoid self-blame for challenges including disruptive behavior (Shernoff, et al., 2016).

### **Attribution Dimensions**

Attributions are causal explanations for an event or behavior (Harvey & Martinko, 2010). Individuals make attributions about their own behavior or outcomes, and about the behavior or outcomes of others. Kelley (1967) posited that individuals develop attributions for events and behaviors in order to effectively manage the self and the environment. For example, determining the source of positive events or behaviors allows individuals to seek to experience these sources and their outcomes again. Conversely, determining the sources of negative events and behaviors could allow individuals to avoid certain perceived sources.

In social psychology, the study of attributions and attribution theory grew out of a focus on the functional significance of cognitive processes and phenomenal experiences (Weiner, 1972). Attribution theory focuses on an individual's perception of causality, or the judgments made as to why a particular incident or behavior has occurred. A separate but connected theory known as attributional theory focuses on what occurs after an individual makes attributions; that is, the subsequent behaviors and emotions that occur based on assigned responsibility for events and perceptions of behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1972). Research on attributions and attribution theory has shown that attributions are shaped by experience and work to create self-perceptions, perceptions of others, and responses to situations (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Overall, antecedents, such as available information, beliefs, and motivation, lead to the development of attributions about the behavior or performance of the self and others. The attributions adopted by an individual serve to shape consequences such as that individual's

behavior, affect, and expectancy towards the self and others (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Attribution theory defines attributions along three dimensions (Harvey & Martinko, 2010; Weiner, 1985). These are *locus of causality*, *stability*, and *controllability*. *Locus of causality* refers to whether an attribution is internal or external to the individual exhibiting the behavior. If a teacher attributes a student's misbehavior to that student's personality, the teacher is making an internal attribution. If the same misbehavior is attributed to a sudden death in the student's family, the teacher is making an external attribution. The next attribution dimension is *stability*. Attributions that are stable are those that are consistent over time and across situations. The third dimension is *controllability*, which refers to the degree to which the individual engaged in the behavior is perceived to have control over beginning or ending the behavior.

Weiner's (1985) theory launched a series of inquiries into the outcomes of attributions for student achievement made by teachers (e.g., Clark & Artiles, 2000; Graham, 1991). Thereafter, numerous researchers, as discussed in the next section, began to consider teachers' attributions for student misbehavior. Rather than classifying attributions based on Weiner's (1985) three dimensions of causality, studies defined attributions in terms of the person or system that was causing the behavior to occur, which can be likened to Weiner's *locus of causality* (i.e., internal versus external). The attribution categories most often studied within teachers in relation to students have been student, self, school, and family-related. Stability and controllability are less clearly explored in the extant literature on disruptive behavior attributions.

**Student-related attributions.** Student-related attributions are made when causality is viewed as residing within the student. The study of teacher's attributions for academic achievement illustrates the idea that the term "student-related" can have several meanings, those of which lead to different responses by teachers to students. A study of effort and ability found

that teachers who attribute low student achievement to low ability show more pity towards the student, whereas teachers who attribute low student achievement to low effort express more anger (Georgiou, Christou, Stavrinides, & Panaoura, 2002). The same study found that anger was also associated with teachers losing motivation to help the perceived low-effort student improve, and feeling less responsibility for student failure. The contrast of outcomes for the effort versus ability attribution, which are both categorized as student-related attributions, highlights the importance of fleshing out the particularities of any given attribution category rather than utilizing predetermined response choices. The nature of qualitative methods is such that study participants' own words often inform the development of attributional categories, and may be better suited to this task.

Student-related attributions in the literature on attributions for disruptive behavior have been categorized as follows: student personality, ability, motivation, effort, social skills, or physical skills (e.g., Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Ding, Li, Li, Kulm, 2010; Kulinna, 2007). Teachers across various international studies have expressed student-related attributions for disruptive behavior (Ding et al., 2010; Gibbs & Gardiner, 2008; Ho, 2004; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). Most of the above studies whose findings support teachers' use of student-related attributions use fictional depictions of students and lists of possible attributions from which teachers choose. These methods do not access the personal experience of teachers with their own students, and disregard teacher's own words in favor of predetermined response choices.

Other studies have used alternative methods to explicate teacher experiences more accurately. In a study of 55 teachers in the southwest United States, teachers were given vignettes of disruptive students, but subsequent procedures and methods included an interview after which responses were coded using thematic analysis (Hughes, Barker, Kemenoff, & Hart,

1993). It was determined that student problems were attributed mostly to pupil personality factors. A separate study used semi-structured interviews through which 12 teachers from a middle school in Hong Kong described student misbehavior and its causes (Sun, 2014). Qualitative analyses revealed the majority of teacher responses were student-related (e.g., effort, ability, motivation, and personality of students). A similar study design used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to understand the conceptualization of disruptive behavior among 22 elementary school teachers in Bangladesh (Malak, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2014). Teachers in this sample conceptualized the cause of inappropriate behavior as within students. That is, disruptive behavior was defined as intentional, deviant, and not likely to change. The above studies utilized methods that allowed teachers to describe attributions in their own words, and several studies utilized teacher's descriptions of actual students.

Research on student-related attributions held by subgroups within the US, specifically ECTs and teachers in urban schools, is underdeveloped. In a survey of 199 Physical Education teachers from grades K-12 in various types of schools, teachers assigned severity level (i.e., mild, moderate, severe) to behaviors depicted in vignettes, and then selected an attribution for the behavior (Kulinna, 2007). Student-related attributions were among the top two attributions selected for all three severity levels. The same study also determined that teaching experience was not related to the chosen attribution. A separate study with a sample of 61.8% ECTs used a questionnaire with eight predefined causal statements for behavior problems (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000). The most frequently chosen explanation for misbehavior was internal pupil-related, defined as character of the child and family influence. Family influence here was understood as a student-related attribution, whereas in other studies on attributions for disruptive behavior, family-related has been considered independently.

Although teachers in previous research consistently identified student-related attributions when interpreting disruptive behavior, it is evident that definitions for student-related attributions vary across studies. Therefore, an effort to understand each teacher's conceptualization, or definition, of the attributions is important in attributional studies moving forward.

**Self-related attributions.** Self-related attributions are made when teachers accept responsibility for student behavior. A review of the literature suggests that self-related attributions for disruptive behavior have been defined as teaching methods and style, classroom management strategies (e.g., system of rewards and punishment, encouragement), and teacher personality (e.g., caring, harshness, or leniency) (e.g., Hughes et al., 1993; Kulinna, 2007; & Sun, 2014).

Very few studies have found that teachers use self-related attributions to describe disruptive behavior. One example is a study that used vignettes and subsequent interviews to consider attributions made by 55 elementary classroom teachers in a small city school district in the Southwest United States (Hughes et al., 1993). Teachers attributed disruptive behavior equally across the following factors: teaching style, student motivation, and home factors. Self-related attributions such as teaching style or disciplinary methods were also connected to a teacher's decision to seek consultation on behavior management, as opposed to referring students out (Hughes et al., 1993). This finding implies that teachers who adopted self-related attributions for student misbehavior also thought there was room for improvement in their behavior management capacities, and may have felt able remediate behavior difficulties with assistance. Self-related attributions might therefore encourage teachers to seek consultation with school psychologists.

Other cross-cultural studies emphasized that teachers were not likely to experience self-related attributions for disruptive behavior. It should be noted, however, that these cross-cultural studies are very different from the current American learning context. Ho (2004) found that both Chinese and Australian teachers identified teacher attributions least often across six problem behaviors. Similarly, another study looked at Russian teachers' perceptions of internalizing and externalizing behaviors of fictitious students described in vignettes and found that teachers tended to downplay their own role in student behaviors (Savina, Moskovtseva, Naumenko, & Zilberberg, 2014). In a sample of mostly ECTs in Greece, self-related attributions, such as teaching experience, interest in students, and teacher character, were least endorsed.

The findings on self-related attributions suggest that there may be proactive behavioral responses made by teachers who identify self-related attributions for disruptive student behavior, although these attributions are least often cited. There may be inconsistent interpretations of self-related attributions across studies, such as teacher inability versus skills to be developed. The above literature suggests practical implications related to effective support for teachers. Consultation services that are accessible to teachers, paired with self-related attributions such as teaching style and discipline strategies, both of which can be improved, seem to encourage teachers to seek support managing disruptive behavior.

**Family-related attributions.** Family-related attributions are made when teachers attribute disruptive behavior to factors such as the student's home situation, parent-child attachment, parental discipline or support, family background, or parental involvement in school (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Kulinna, 2007; & Sun, 2014).

Studies have sought to determine whether teachers implicate family attributions for disruptive behaviors. A study of the differential attributions made by Chinese and Australian



teachers found that family-related attributions were made more often by Chinese teachers, which was interpreted as due to an emphasis on collective responsibility within Asian culture (Ho, 2004). Studies from Bangladesh (Malak et al., 2014) and China (Sun, 2014) found that teachers discussed poor parenting, parent-child attachment, parental discipline and support, and family background as influencing disruptive behavior among students. A separate study interviewed 23 physical education teachers in a variety of school districts across the US (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009) and used analytic induction methods to identify common themes related to attributions for disruptive behavior. Teachers identified home factors as the most common attribution for misbehavior. The same study may have benefitted from considering attributions in urban schools or among ECTs differentially.

Several studies examining family-related attributions have examined the findings by teacher years of experience. For example, one study surveyed the attributions made by special education teachers in Turkey, and found that although poor parenting skills were identified by some teachers as influencing problem behaviors in students (Erbas, Turan, Aslan, & Dunlap, 2010), there were no distinct findings among groups of teachers of different teaching experience. Another study presented a vignette describing a student's problem behavior to 249 elementary school teachers in Greece, and found that teachers with the least and most teaching experience agreed more than teachers with 10-15 years of experience that family factors might cause behavior problems (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Andreou & Rapti (2010) also considered whether years of experience was related to behavior management strategies, and found that ECTs were more likely to seek student confidence and trust, whereas experienced teachers used rewards and positive incentives. Given that ECTs therein thought family had a strong influence on misbehavior, gaining students' confidence and trust was discussed by the authors as a way to

enact a familial bond with students, and motivate behavioral change. Similarly, a separate study of mostly ECTs in Greece found that family influence, defined as “internal pupil-related attributions,” were most supported among teachers (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000). As mentioned earlier, the phrase ‘internal pupil-related attributions’ to signify a family-related attribution is inconsistent with previous literature, most of which identifies family as external to the student. Again, this highlights the variety of definitions for attributions, and possibility for misinterpretation of attribution phrases, throughout the literature.

The above literature suggests that family-related attributions for disruptive behavior are often held by teachers. Among ECTs, this attribution may be connected to attempts to engage in family-like bonds with students. However, the research in this area needs more development.

**School-related attributions.** School-related attributions are made when teachers attribute disruptive behavior to the school as an organization. These issues include class size, services for students, overall school management, curriculum demands, or the attitudes (e.g., too lenient) and/or practices (e.g., lack of classroom rules) of other teachers (Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Kulinna, 2007; Sun, 2014). It has been shown that teachers perceive the environment as more influential on disruptive behavior than genetics (Walker & Plomin, 2005). Further, some teachers perceive a punitive school climate as fostering fear and resentment which can cause student misbehavior (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). As discussed earlier, challenging conditions in urban schools including large class sizes, deteriorating facilities, multi-track schools, and lack of textbooks has been predictive of high rates of teacher turnover (Loeb et al., 2009), which suggests that school-related attributions may be particularly interesting to examine among teachers in urban schools.

School-related attributions have been held by teachers across various cultures. One study found that middle school teachers from Ireland were more likely than middle school teachers from England to attribute curriculum demands (e.g., too much homework and classwork) to student misbehavior (Gibbs & Gardiner, 2008). Sun (2014) and Malak et al. (2014) also found that in qualitative studies of China and Bangladesh, teachers identified school-related attributions for inappropriate behavior. Interestingly, for teachers in Bangladesh, this meant the absence of corporal punishment in school. This perspective illustrates that school-factors may be identified as influential cross-culturally, but the definition of school factors may vary.

A survey of 199 physical education teachers from varying school types in the US found that misbehavior was attributed to home or student factors, not school factors (Kulinna, 2007). School factors were defined as class size, services for students, and overall school management. However, given that challenging school conditions are more prevalent in urban schools (Loeb et al., 2009), this study may have benefitted from looking at attributions made in urban, suburban, and rural schools differentially.

Some inquiry has been made into whether school-related attributions were held by ECTs. ECTs from Greece used school-related attributions more often than teachers with 10-15 years of experience when considering a vignette of a student with disruptive behavior (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Within this sample, teachers with a higher perceived efficacy for classroom management were more likely to implicate school-related factors as causing behavior problems among students. This suggests that teachers who feel in control of their classrooms are less likely to accept responsibility for disruptive behavior, and more likely to attribute behavior difficulties to the system at large. Further development into the school-related attributions made by ECTs for disruptive behavior is needed.

### **The Current Study**

Previous studies of teacher perceptions of disruptive behavior often use pre-defined classifications of attributions and fictional depictions of students. The more meaningful and interpretable findings have been those that allow teachers to define attributions in their own words, and utilize actual students in their descriptions. The purpose of the current study was to explore in depth ECTs' attributions for disruptive behavior using extant data from a grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences. The goals of the larger study from which the data were collected included examining the feasibility and promise of a professional development model designed to enhance ECT effectiveness in classroom management and engaging learners, and to foster connections among colleagues. The service model included bimonthly group seminars for ECTs, regular classroom-based coaching for ECTs and monthly Professional Learning Community meetings for all faculty to enhance ECT effectiveness and connectedness. Semi-structured interviews facilitated exploration of ECTs' attributions for disruptive behavior and considered the voices of an understudied group of new teachers working in highly distressed urban schools. The current study utilized qualitative methods to examine attributions for student misbehavior at baseline, prior to the onset of the above intervention, in an effort to capture the pre-existing perceptions of students among ECTs in urban schools.

The use of qualitative methods in the current study allowed for the exploration of attributions from the perspective of ECTs through verbal depictions of students and disruptive behaviors that ECTs have experienced in their classrooms. Qualitative analyses are best suited for exploratory analyses and understudied populations due to the depth of the analyses towards the goal of understanding and assessing a newly researched phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). With these issues in mind, the current study examined the following research questions:

1. How did this sample of ECTs conceptualize student, self, family, and school-related attributions for disruptive behavior?
2. What percentage of ECTs within this sample discussed student, self, family, and school-related attributions for disruptive behavior?

## **Method**

### **Setting and Sample**

The present study uses extant data from a federally-funded grant from the Institute of Education Sciences. The overarching goal of the grant was to strengthen ECTs effectiveness around classroom management and to enhance social relationships among teachers to engender longer-term commitment to teaching. Three K-8<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools located in a large Midwestern city participated. Criteria for selection of schools was based on 85% or greater low income, average reading scores on statewide tests below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile (mean = 28, standard deviation = 3.8), and school population within one standard deviation of the district mean (mean = 702, standard deviation = 306) (Shernoff et al., 2016). Students were 94% African-American, 97% free and reduced price lunch, and teacher mobility rates were at 25% during the time of recruitment. The district statistics for these variables were 47% African-American, 87% free and reduced price lunch, and 19% teacher mobility. Teacher mobility refers to teachers leaving a school to obtain a teaching job elsewhere. National statistics on early career teacher mobility rates from 2011-2012 suggest that among public school teachers with 1-3 years of experience, 80% did not change schools, 13% moved to another school, and 17% left teaching altogether (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

**Early career teachers.** Early career teachers ( $N = 15$ ) with five or fewer years of teaching experience (mean = 2.28; standard deviation = 1.78; range = 0–5) were recruited from

three urban schools in the Midwest (see Appendix A). Recruitment methods included presenting information, answering questions, and inviting discussion among ECTs during informal meetings at schools, after which formal consent was obtained individually to reduce discomfort if ECTs chose to decline. Eighty-eight percent of eligible ECTs consented to participate. The reasons for declined participation among two ECTs were time commitment concerns and an impending medical leave.

The mean age of ECTs from the current study was 29.13 (standard deviation = 5.63; range = 22–41). National studies of early career teachers highlight that approximately 40% of teachers under 30 years of age have less than three years of teaching experience (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), which suggests that the current study sample contained ECTs older in age than the national average. The ECT sample also consisted of thirteen female teachers, which is consistent with national data that suggest females form greater proportions of new teachers than males (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). In the current study sample, 47% of ECTs were African-American, 47% were European American, and 6% self-identified as Asian American. National statistics on urban schools suggest that 29% of teachers were ethnic minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998), which suggests that the current sample contained greater proportions of minority teachers than average.

ECTs in the current study sample taught younger grades (pre-k - 3<sup>rd</sup>:  $n = 5$ ), older grades (4<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>:  $n = 4$ ), special education ( $n = 2$ ), and special area subjects such as art and physical education ( $n = 4$ ). ECT education included seven Master's Degrees through alternative certification programs and eight traditional pre-service training programs.

## Measures

**Semi-structured interviews with ECTs.** Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) were administered at 3 time points across the study with time one (baseline) data analyzed in the current study, prior to teacher participation in the two year intervention. Semi-structured interviews include conversations with a set of predetermined questions and a general idea of the desired information to obtain (Fylan, 2005). The order of questions and conversations during semi-structured interviews are free to vary substantially between participants. Mean interview length was 59.71 minutes (standard deviation = 11.8). Interviews were conducted in the school building before or after school by the lead researcher.

Interviews began with a brief orientation to the purpose of the interview, which was to improve the support of teachers in urban schools through understanding more about their experiences. Interviewees were made aware of confidentiality procedures, and assured that identifying information would be removed upon transcription of recorded interviews. The literature on professional development for ECTs informed the development of the interviews (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Interview protocols included five broad questions which focused on topics including expectations toward teaching versus reality, preparation to teach in an urban setting, experiences managing behavior and engaging learners, control of classroom, and norms and expectations for teaching and managing disruptive behavior school-wide. Open ended questions such as “*How much control do you feel you have in your classroom?*” were designed to gather general information and spark conversation, after which probes, such as “*How much do you believe that you can control students’ disruptive behavior?*” were used to gather more direct information regarding the topic of interest. Although the interviews were not designed to gather

teacher attributions for disruptive behavior, the above sample questions and others encouraged ECTs' spontaneous discussions related to the topic.

**Demographic survey.** At baseline, ECTs completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) in which they indicated gender, age, and ethnicity. Teachers also recorded the grade level taught for the current and previous years and the anticipated grade level for the following year. The totals for number of years teaching in general, at the current school, and at the current grade level were recorded. Teachers responded to whether they underwent a traditional teacher preparation program or an alternative certification. Teaching credentials and highest degree attained were also queried.

## **Procedures**

ECT interviews were digitally recorded, professionally transcribed verbatim, and compared to audio recordings for accuracy. The interviews were analyzed using QSR NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. The coding team was comprised of one female doctoral student, one female school psychology faculty, and one male undergraduate psychology and public policy student.

Before conducting thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006), four decisions were made. First, we determined what counted as a theme, or how prevalent an idea must be to count as a theme. Whether a theme was important did not depend on how often it is displayed, but rather on whether it captured something important in relation to the research questions. Subthemes were informed through grouping common excerpts together, and using common words within the excerpts to name the subtheme.

Second, a decision was made as to whether the author aimed to provide a rich thematic description of the entire data set, or a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme



or a group of themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latter was decided upon for the current study, in that the themes selected aim to provide a detailed account of attributions made for disruptive behavior, rather than to describe the dataset at large. The themes of student-related, self-related, family-related, and teacher-related were chosen based upon the themes most often identified within previous literature on attributions for disruptive behavior.

Third, decisions were made regarding the approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The current study used a theoretical approach, through which the analysis was driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area and provided a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. Interviews were coded based on the current study research questions. There were questions within the semi-structured interview that probed for a response related to attributions for student behavior, including, "*How much control do you feel you have in your classroom?*" and "*How much do you believe you can control students' disruptive behavior?*"

The last decision point was made around the level at which themes were to be identified. A semantic approach identifies themes within the explicit or surface content of the data, or what the participant has said. A latent approach searches for underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations that shape or inform the semantic content of the data. Given that the current study was exploratory and the attributions for disruptive behavior made by ECTs are not thoroughly understood in the literature, a semantic approach was used to organize excerpts and show patterns, and summarize content, rather than make interpretations.

Validity in qualitative research is defined as how accurately the account represents participant's realities of social phenomena and is credible to them (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The current study used the research lens of the researcher's own views, and individuals external to the project. The dissertation author did not participate in data collection, but used her own

research interests to analyze the data as the first coder. The principal investigator on the larger research study was the dissertation author's faculty advisor. Her views guided the data collection process, and she has also had an integral role in reviewing and advising the current study. The second coder was an undergraduate student who analyzed the data through guidance from the first author, and was mostly external to the development of initial codes, but took part in revising and refining codes. Lastly the second reviewer is external to the study, in that he did not take part in the collection nor the analysis of data.

The current study also relied on a postpositivist approach, which assumes that research consists of rigorous methods and systematic forms of inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) described above and below were also utilized.

### **Analyses**

Thematic analysis was used in the current study following procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include systematic steps for executing thematic analysis. Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) also delineate procedures for transforming the qualitative data into a quantitative display of the representativeness of each theme to the current sample.

**Become familiar with the data.** The first step included becoming familiar with the data through multiple readings of the interviews and taking note of initial ideas. The first coder read through each of the 15 baseline teacher interviews and pulled excerpts that discussed student behavior. Each interview was determined to have enough discussion of student behavior to justify the analysis of teacher attributions for disruptive behavior.

**Generating initial codes.** The second step included the first coder and faculty advisor generating initial broad themes based on the operational definitions within the literature on

attributions for disruptive behavior, which were then organized into a codebook (see Appendix D). The broad themes were student, self, school, and family-related. The second coder was then trained on the coding process using the codebook. The training process included a meeting during which the first author and second coder discussed each theme. The second coder raised questions about themes and was asked to explain each theme in his own words. An example excerpt was paired with each theme to actualize theme definitions. Then, the first and second coders completed a practice coding exercise, during which each individual coded sample excerpts from the interview transcripts. Both coders reviewed one another's codes, and some clarification of codes and wording changes were made to facilitate the coding process. Following the practice exercise, it was determined that both coders could begin coding interviews.

**Searching for themes.** Next, after the coder was trained to criterion, both coders independently reviewed baseline interview transcripts and assigned codes to segments of text within NVivo. At this stage, broad codes included Student-Related, Self-Related, Family-Related, and School-Related. After each team member independently coded weekly, the two projects were merged in NVivo and percent agreement was computed. Any codes that fell below 80% agreement were reviewed by the coding team and consensually revised if needed. Results from NVivo suggest that interrater reliability between coders was high (average percent agreement = 97.64, range = 89.2 – 100). The revision process included both coders meeting to discuss each coded excerpt and ensure that there was agreement. A 'master' file was created to include the ultimately agreed upon excerpts within codes. This process continued until each of the 15 interview transcripts were coded.

**Reviewing themes.** Files were created in NVivo for each excerpt or direct quote that was coded. Each week, coders were assigned the same 'theme file' to begin creating subthemes.

Coders were tasked with reading each excerpt within a theme and describing it using the speaker's own words, and in the fewest number of words. Coders were also asked to flag any excerpts that did not appear to fit the overall theme, in an effort to reach coherence within themes using the constant comparative approach (Boeije, 2002). This refinement ensured that excerpts accurately captured the defined theme. Coders met weekly to discuss descriptions of excerpts within the assigned theme file. The descriptions of excerpts were finalized through discussion and agreement. Then, excerpts which seemed to describe a similar construct were grouped together to create a subtheme.

The coders went through and re-read excerpts within each group to create coherence within subthemes (Boeije, 2002). Braun and Clarke (2006) outline several possible outcomes from this stage of refinement, some of which occurred. Subthemes were noted to collapse into one another, while others were broken apart to create new subthemes. When subthemes appeared not to cohere, a decision was made as to whether the subtheme itself was problematic, or whether quotes needed to be reassigned to other groups of codes or discarded. The purpose of this stage was to ensure that subthemes cohered together meaningfully, and that there were clear and identifiable distinctions between subthemes. The outcome of this process was a thematic map, which displayed the larger themes, and their associated subthemes.

**Defining and naming themes.** Coders met to discuss excerpts within each group, and assign a subtheme name and definition. The subtheme names and definitions were created by identifying the essence of each group of excerpts and the story that each subtheme told about the broader research questions. For the current study, it was important that the name and definition of each subtheme, or what cohered groups of quotes together, captured what each group of

quotes pointed to as the attribution for disruptive behavior in students. This process was repeated for subthemes within all of the four broad themes.

**Representativeness to the sample.** Consensual Qualitative Research Methods (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) informed our determination of the representativeness of each theme to the current sample, i.e., the percentage of ECTs for whom each theme applied. ECTs who discussed a theme once or more were counted as endorsing that theme. A theme that applied to all of the ECTs was considered to be *general*; if a theme applied to one half or more of the ECTs, but not all, it was considered *typical*; and if a theme applied to either three to just less than half of the ECTs it was considered *variant*. This approach was also applied to each subtheme to ensure that the subtheme applied to enough ECTs to be representative of the current sample. If a subtheme was discussed by one or two ECTs, other subthemes were broadened to include the excerpt.

**Audit of the cross analysis.** The credibility of the study was then established through auditing by the dissertation committee chair. The goals of the audit were to examine the process and product of the inquiry, and determine the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The auditor reviewed each theme and subtheme carefully to: (1) ensure that each excerpt fit under the specified subtheme, (2) confirm that the subtheme labels were adequate to capture the essence of the listed excerpts, and (3) determine whether subthemes should be further subdivided or collapsed (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). The process was iterative until both the coding team and the dissertation committee chair were comfortable that the data had been understood adequately.

## Results

Thematic analyses of semi-structured interviews provided insight into ECTs' attributions for disruptive behavior in students. As previous literature suggested, ECTs discussed students, themselves, student families, and school as attributions for disruptive behavior. Each ECT's attribution style has been represented, along with the frequency and percentage of mentioned theme and subtheme across teachers (see Appendix E). In addition, compelling quotes which elegantly and succinctly captured the features of each subtheme were selected and described below.

### Student-Related Attributions

*Student-Related Attributions* were operationalized as statements regarding factors internal to the student as the cause of disruptive behavior, which included interpersonal and self-regulatory skills that were evident at different developmental stages, and student apathy toward rewards and consequences. A total of 11 teachers (73%) identified student-related factors, within which two subthemes were evident, described below with exemplars included.

**Interpersonal and self-regulatory skills at different developmental stages.** A total of nine teachers (60%) pointed to student-related attributions for disruptive behavior that, when viewed more critically, emanated from interpersonal (e.g., asking for help, teamwork, communication, and/or active listening) and/or self-regulatory (e.g., distractibility, silence in groups, hyperactivity, and/or keeping hands to self) difficulties. Self-regulatory difficulties were understood by ECTs as appropriate age and grade level behaviors. One early career teacher, for example, shared that students in the lower grades were unaware that it was appropriate to remain silent in certain settings: *"It is most challenging getting control of the little kids. The upper kids understand not to talk. The little kids just don't have that sense yet."* Another teacher explained

that students were distractible, for instance, *“These type of kids have to be doing something every minute or else you’ll get behavioral problems, they’re easily distracted.”* Similarly, a different teacher stated, *“The students are still first graders so their attention span is not that of a fifth grader.”* The statements above implied that there were inherent qualities or characteristics within particular grade levels or ages that contributed to disruptive behavior, i.e., distractibility and talkativeness, and suggested that it was the teacher’s role to gain mastery over student behaviors, through behavioral control or engagement in activities, rather than teaching students the appropriate self-regulatory skills (i.e. self-awareness and self-management).

ECTs in the current sample also described student behavioral difficulties as the result of interpersonal skill difficulties. One teacher explained that disruptive classroom behavior may have been the result of limited interpersonal skills that make effective learners (e.g., asking for help): *“When I look at that little boy, that was me. I was afraid to ask questions. I used to talk during class because I didn’t know or I didn’t understand.”* Another teacher discussed that some students lacked situational experience to learn effective interpersonal skills, and thus displayed disruptive behavior, for example,

*I coach flag football, and I realized how awful of teammates they are. They’ve never been on a team. They’ve never had that much practice. They lack the interpersonal stuff, just communicating between two people. They’re screaming and yelling at each other.*

The two examples suggest that behaviors were understood as interpersonal skills difficulties, and in the latter quote, the teacher suggested that interpersonal skills could be learned through experience and practice.

Although most teachers ( $n = 9$ ) agreed that behavior difficulties were the result of self-regulatory and interpersonal skills difficulties, teachers differed on whether these behaviors were

expected within students and therefore required adult control, or rather that students could learn skills to alleviate behaviors through exposure to situations, such as sports involvement.

**Student apathy.** Four teachers (26%) discussed that some students were apathetic toward consequences, rewards, and/or incentives to reduce disruptive behavior. Therefore efforts to engage students or encourage positive behavior were unsuccessful, and disruptive behavior persisted. One teacher stated, “*Some kids just didn’t care, weren’t going to do any school work, were just gonna flunk and be jerks.*” Another teacher discussed, “*It’s really hard to follow a discipline plan with kids that day after day continue to do the same thing and there seems to be no way to reach them at all.*” Some students were described as impossible to reach and disruptive behavior and disinterest in school was expected of them, which suggests that teachers likely felt helpless to manage students of this nature.

### **Self-Related Attributions**

*Self-Related Attributions* were operationalized as disruptive student behaviors that were the result of either the teachers’ own preparedness/ability to engage students or classroom rules and routines (e.g., behavior management). A total of 9 teachers (60%) endorsed self-related causes for disruptive behavior, which were reflected in the two subthemes described below. *Self-Related Attributions* were encouraging in that this perspective suggested actionable steps for teachers to improve classroom behavior.

**Preparedness and ability to engage students.** Three teachers (20%) discussed that disruptive behavior occurred when they did not adequately prepare for class, or lacked an ability to engage students in the material. Teachers described student engagement as preceding behavioral control, with one teacher sharing: “*If she is not challenged, then that’s when the behavior problem comes into play,*” and “*The target areas are behavior management and*



*motivating and engaging learners. They go hand in hand, because if they're not motivated, then you're going to get the behavior problems.*" These quotes suggest that disruptive behavior was the result of disinterest in learning, and that the teacher's role was to incite engagement within students through preparation of interesting and challenging instruction.

**Classroom rules and routines.** Seven teachers (46%) expressed that teachers had a responsibility to organize and structure the classroom towards the prevention and management of disruptive behavior. Teachers discussed inciting respect within students and developing clear and consistent rules and routines. One teacher stated,

*It's not controlling your class – if the kids are not doing what they need to be doing, there's a reason. Either they don't know what they're supposed to be doing, or they aren't aware of the rules and routines. And that's the thing, I didn't really have rules and routines.*

This teacher's reflection suggests that students did not automatically engage in disruptive behavior, but rather that their behavior was a reflection of whether teachers explain procedures, rewards, and consequences to students. Another teacher discussed a similar point,

*It's understanding what I need to do better and being aware of how what I do affects my kids... I need to teach them that this is the routine. My classroom should run as though I'm there even when I'm not.*

The implication here was that students look to teachers for behavioral guidance, and appropriate classroom behavior was not automatically understood by students, but should have been taught and learned.

### **Family-Related Attributions**

*Family-Related Attributions* were operationalized as family or home factors that impact disruptive behavior in students, including limited or inadequate familial involvement and behavioral support. Teachers expressed that students generalized behavior norms at home into the school setting (e.g., rules, consequences, routines, behavior modeling, and behavioral expression), which promoted behavior difficulties. Further, teachers discussed that the communication between home and school impacted the persistence of disruptive student behavior. Eight teachers (53%) discussed family-related attributions within their interviews.

**Limited involvement and behavioral support.** Eight teachers (53%) discussed the impact of familial involvement and behavioral support on the development of student behavior difficulties in school. Teachers expressed that students learned appropriate behaviors through the expectations and structure of rules, routines, and norms in the home, and generalized behaviors at home into the school setting. For example, one teacher stated “*Sometimes their behavior or how they act is because they act that way at home, or mistreat things, it’s their norm, and it’s kind of hard to break from the norm.*” Similarly, another teacher discussed, “*A handful of kids in my class just do what they want, and I don’t know what they do at home. Maybe that’s what they do at home, and that’s why they do it here.*” These teachers speculate that for some students, there was a lack of structure in the home setting which encouraged learned disruptive behavior that was then displayed in school.

Another teacher discussed the impact of adult family member’s behavioral modeling and expression on student perceptions of appropriate responses to situations:

*A lot of my students don’t know how to express themselves well, or haven’t been given a good model to express themselves, so a lot of times they respond by hitting someone else*

*or swearing. It's really frustrating when you see where the behavior comes from when parents show up and swear at their kid outside the door.*

The above example suggests that some teachers thought students learned inappropriate behaviors from observing the behaviors of their parents.

Other teachers discussed that communication between home and school was challenging. For example, teachers discussed that coordinated consequences between home and school was lacking:

*When you give a consequence for a behavior, the student comes back the next day saying 'Nothing happens to me.' And that may be because you cannot get in touch with the parent or whatever else, but there's just not a lot of backup on consequences sometimes, which leads behaviors to be repeated.*

Another related piece was the idea that caregivers were not consistently available within the home, which caused students to be “*used to people walking out of their lives on a regular basis,*” and therefore lack respect for adults within the school setting, but also to take on greater responsibility in the home. One teacher discussed the latter by stating, “*It's very stressful for some of these kids, at an early age, being a young man in the fifth grade, being the man of the house, washing clothes and doing things for four, five other siblings.*” Teachers appeared frustrated at caregivers, yet empathetic toward students on this issue.

The above examples suggest that teachers perceived caregivers as highly impactful on student behavior, and that disruptive behavior was thought to emanate from the home setting.

### **School-Related Attributions**

*School-Related Attributions* were defined as factors present for the school at large that resulted in disruptive student behavior. Included were inconsistent development, implementation,

and support of school-wide rules and consequences, behavior of school staff (e.g., modeling conflict resolution, treatment of students, and sincerity), school conditions (e.g., material items, time, and services for students), and inconsistent teacher authority (e.g., late hires, special area teachers, and/or substitutes). A total of 12 teachers (80%) discussed school-related factors as influential on disruptive student behavior. Four subthemes emerged from the analysis of school-related factors, which reflects the complexity and extensiveness of this theme.

**Inconsistent development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences.** Ten teachers (67%) expressed that flaws in school-wide discipline policies impacted student misbehavior, such as inconsistent or ineffective development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules, consequences, and procedures regarding student behavior across situations and students. Teachers discussed that although there were often attempts to improve school rules and consequences, the execution of procedures and follow through on policy was inconsistent. Teachers shared, for example, the following quotes: *“It’s really challenging that the system itself has a lot of good ideas but they’re not implemented correctly and it seems like there is not a lot of consistency,” “We got together at the beginning of the year to come up with school-wide rules, but I don’t know if they’ve really happened. I think that it’s attempted, but I don’t think it really goes through completely,”* and *“School-wide rules are in place, they’re just not translating to the actual classroom.”*

Teachers also expressed frustration regarding lack of perceived support and actualization of consequences, and how this seemed to encourage disruptive behavior in students. One teacher cited an example: *“I wrote a student up for throwing chairs, he didn’t get suspended for that, and I was disappointed because it’s not sending a message.”* Another teacher explained further,

*There’s a seventh grader who just wanders the halls. It’s never enforced, they’re not*

*suspended for it, nothing happens to them. I don't know if it's the fact that they want to keep suspensions down or they just don't know how to deal with it, but there are no consequences for these students on a school-wide level, so the behaviors are repeated, repeated, repeated, and repeated.*

Despite their individual efforts to uphold consistency, the lack of school-wide support seemed to contribute to some teachers' experience of hopelessness and lack of efficacy, for example:

*I don't feel like there are true, real, set-in stone consequences so if a certain behavior happens, there's only a certain amount that I can do... I really can't do anything else and I have to still invite this child back into my class and attempt to reduce the behavior in the same way. So that's very frustrating.*

This in turn, left teachers feeling isolated in the face of frequent and recurrent disruptive behavior, for example,

*We got an email saying 'teachers, if your class is being loud and disruptive, please don't walk them past the office, we don't want to see that,' which meant 'teachers, manage your own classrooms.' So basically the feeling here is you're on your own.*

**Behavior of school staff.** Four teachers (27%) expressed that students behaved in a way that mimicked or responded to the behavior of the adults in the school setting (e.g., conflict resolution, treatment of students, and sincerity).

Arguments amongst teachers, cursing, and/or disrespect toward students was thought to impact student understanding of appropriate behavioral expression. One teacher shared, for example,

*Two teachers were literally in the hallway arguing with each other in front of the kids. The kids see that and feed off of it. If they see that back and forth between teachers, then*

*they feel that is what they're supposed to do.*

Teachers who had worked hard to instill certain behavioral skills in students expressed frustration at other teachers who undid their efforts through mistreatment of students. One teacher specified, *"It's really hard when you're trying to build respect with kids such that you treat someone with respect, they will treat you with respect, and back and forth, and another teacher goes ahead and disrespects your student."*

Another teacher explained that disruptive behavior was the result of teachers not being sincere with students, for instance, *"I find that when teachers are not themselves they have major classroom management issues because the students don't know them. How can you relate to somebody you don't know?"*

These exemplars illustrate that some ECTs in this sample were discouraged by the effects of teacher behavior on student behavior. However, the above examples suggest that teachers believed sincerity and appropriate behavioral modeling and expression by teachers might encourage positive behavior in students.

**School conditions.** Six teachers (40%) discussed school conditions as a cause of disruptive behavior in students. School conditions included material items (e.g., toiletries and school supplies), time (e.g., common planning time, school day hours, and class period time), and services for students to meet the varying needs of a large and diverse student body (e.g., students who were retained, students with higher behavioral needs, and/or large class sizes). School conditions were conceptualized as limited or inadequate in the context of urban, high poverty schools and thus student behavioral difficulties were more predominant and challenging for teachers to manage.

One teacher discussed a lack of material resources as a direct cause of interpersonal disruption between students, for example, *“It took me a while to figure out that the kids were fighting over pencils and books because they were not used to having them, so their survival instinct kicked in.”* This teacher’s response was to consistently provide supplies for students and gradually instill in them a sense of safety and stability.

Time was touched upon by other teachers, for example, one teacher discussed the impact of a six hour school day on student behavior: *“It’s more disruptive because we have a shorter time with the students. You always feel like you have so much you need to do and always feel like you’re trying to play catchup.”* Disruptive behavior within students was perceived as more challenging given that there was less time to address issues and calm students. A gym teacher shared that the limited time per week that students were in gym class impacted the teacher’s ability to instill appropriate behavioral norms in students, for example, *“Their classroom teacher has them for seven hours a day, they’re with me for two hours a week. They know her and her procedures and rules, but I have less time to get kids clear on mine.”*

The impact of inadequate services for students on disruptive behavior was discussed related to meeting the varying needs of a large and diverse student population. Retention of students who fail, as opposed to the provision of direct intervention for the student’s specific needs, led, in one teacher’s description, to disruptive behavior:

*I have these kids who are retained and are not getting special intervention. My biggest behavior problem is someone who was retained – he doesn’t want to be here, he shouldn’t be here, he’s with younger kids so it’s embarrassing and frustrating for him because he’s still not the smartest kid, but he’s the most violent and defiant. And there’s no intervention for these kids who are retained, which is a disservice to them.*

Other teachers discussed how large class sizes and inadequate support for unique student needs caused greater behavioral difficulties, for example,

*The huge groups are so enormous that you can't reach out to every kid and talk to them individually. When you have thirty kids in your class and there's all different levels of students, a lot of whom should be brought into the system in terms of special needs and are acting out like crazy, it's really hard to get control.*

Further, large class sizes were also thought to exacerbate behavioral difficulties within students. For example, *"The students were in a classroom with forty-three kids and even though they had great teachers at the time, they got away with more stuff because of the large class size"* and *"When students are in a large group, they're going to talk."*

According to ECTs in this sample, the systemic limitations and large and diverse needs described above increased the prevalence and impact of disruptive behavior in the classroom, and provided teachers with limited ability to intervene.

**Inconsistent teacher authority.** Eight teachers (53%) expressed that school-wide disorganization led to a lack of consistent teacher authority within classrooms which impacted student respect of teachers, and thus exacerbated student disruptive behavior (e.g., late hires, special area teachers, and/or substitutes).

Several teachers directly discussed their status as a late-hire, and the effect it had on their experience of disruptive behavior, for example, *"As a new teacher who came into a new school in the middle of the school year, it was very difficult to get the respect of students and have them see me as an equal teacher."* Another teacher shared, *"I started late over there so by the time I got the students they were already too far gone to learn the rules and all that."* Teachers in these



two examples expressed that disruptive behavior was often the result of not beginning the school year with the students.

The following two teachers took this idea a step further and explained how disruptive behavior was the result of an inconsistent classroom teacher for the full year (i.e., multiple substitute teachers), caused by disorganization at the school level:

Teacher A: *I started in the beginning of November and it was very challenging. The kids had gone through six substitutes, and were very rowdy. They hadn't had any kind of consistency or structure so there was a lot of confusion and chaos.*

And:

Teacher B: *The third graders were in one giant classroom with about 35 kids. They had a different sub every single day and the kids' behavior was out of control, throwing chairs, kids talking back to teachers. And it wasn't the kids who were the most frustrating to me – I couldn't believe that a school system would allow a classroom to go without a teacher for a month and a half before they actually found a consistent replacement for that teacher.*

Some special area teachers felt their role was not clearly defined and therefore not respected by students or teachers, for example,

*It's harder for the students to get seated and calm and ready when they enter the art classroom. Because I'm a prep, they assume that when they come in, it's free time. They're away from their classrooms and this is a different setting.*

Another teacher explained further,

*As a push-in teacher, I don't think that when I first entered the school that it was made very clear what my role would be, to me or to any of the other teachers, so it was much more difficult for me to feel effective managing disruptive behaviors in classrooms that*

*weren't my own.*

These examples further illustrate the complications related to student behavior with scarce resources and teachers not teaching in their own classrooms, or feeling unsupported and disconnected from other teachers or administration.

The above statements spoke to the complexity of issues that impacted disruptive behavior in students at the administrative level, specifically in an urban environment with limited resources and support.

### **Discussion**

The current study sought to explore in depth the attributions for disruptive student behavior made by fifteen early career teachers (ECTs) in urban Midwest public schools through qualitative methods and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative methods are effective within exploratory analyses and understudied populations due to the depth of analysis toward the goal of understanding and assessing a newly researched phenomenon or sample (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further, previous literature on causal attributions used restrictive methods such as predefined definitions for attributions and fictional student depictions, causing divergent and incongruent findings. Qualitative methods were considered well suited to more accurately capture the research questions.

#### **How Did ECTs Define Student-Related Attributions?**

Findings from the current study suggest that ECTs described student-related attributions for disruptive behavior as interpersonal and self-regulatory skill difficulties that were present at different developmental stages, and student apathy toward rewards and consequences.

Most ECTs in the current study ( $n = 9$ ) expressed that disruptive behavior was influenced by interpersonal and self-regulatory difficulties within students, which converges with previous

findings wherein teachers explained disruptive behavior as due to deficits in social and physical skills (Kulinna, 2007), self-discipline (Mavropoulou & Padelidu, 2002), self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and special needs (Sun, 2014). The current findings suggest that teachers may have viewed self-regulatory difficulties as fixed within grade levels, but that for some teachers, interpersonal skills were thought of as teachable through exposure to opportunities for practicing appropriate social behavior.

It is commonplace for students with disabilities and behavioral or psychological diagnoses to receive instruction in interpersonal and self-regulatory skills. For example, social skills are explicitly taught to children on the autism spectrum (Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Locke, & Gulsrud, 2011), and self-awareness and interpersonal skills are integrated into curricula for students in residential facilities for emotional disorders (D'Andrea, Bergholz, Fortunato, & Spinazzola, 2013). However, it is speculated that, in the absence of a disability or diagnosis, teachers may assume that self-regulatory and interpersonal difficulties are fixed features of a student's personality (Chang & Sue, 2003; Hughes, et al., 1993) or, in the current sample, fixed within certain ages and grades. Fixed attributions have been connected to a teacher's unwillingness to intervene (Weiner, 1985), which was displayed in the current study through teacher avoidance of teaching certain grade levels where specific self-regulatory and interpersonal difficulties were present and expected. This idea is related to Carol Dweck's (2008) work on *fixed* and *growth* mindsets. The *growth* mindset causes individuals to continue to seek opportunities to improve, whereas the *fixed* mindset inhibits risk taking. Thus, the *fixed* mindset, when used to qualify disruptive behavior, may limit teachers' creative behavior management strategies.

There are benefits to teachers understanding that interpersonal and self-regulatory skills can be improved and developed within all students, specifically through teacher instruction (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Harihan, 2013). For example, social and emotional learning for kindergarten through eighth grade students has been shown to improve student social-emotional skills, attitudes about the self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance, while reducing conduct problems and emotional distress (Payton, et al., 2008). Social and emotional learning includes skills instruction in self-awareness and self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Teachers across various school types and education levels have reported that social and emotional skills are teachable and that students from diverse backgrounds can benefit from instruction in these critical domains (Bridgeland, et al., 2013). The same study also found that teachers experience professional development for SEL as lacking in most schools.

Fewer ECTs in the current sample highlighted student apathy as influential on disruptive behavior ( $n = 4$ ). ECTs expressed that some students were not encouraged by behavioral rewards and incentives, and seemed impenetrable to intervention. This finding echoes some previous discussions on the impact of a lack of motivation or interest in learning on the prevalence of disruptive behavior within students (Hughes, et al., 1993; Kulinna, 2007; Sun, 2014). It has also been shown that perceived lack of effort within students causes teachers to experience anger toward students which may result in reprimand, condemnation, neglect, and retaliation (Weiner, 2005).

### **How Did ECTs Define Self-Related Attributions?**

Self-related attributions were conceptualized by ECTs in this study as preparedness and ability to engage students and implementation of consistent rules and routines. Previous literature points to the potential benefits for teachers who adopt self-related attributions.

The current sample's conceptualization of self-related attributions was concurrent with a previous study that found that self-related attributions were defined as teaching style and disciplinary methods (Hughes, et al., 1993). The same study found that teachers who discuss self-related attributions for disruptive behavior tend to select consultation as an intervention. Further, more experienced teachers with positive efficacy have been shown to prefer class activities, such as rewards and positive incentives to increase class concentration, interest, learning, and appropriate behavior (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). These studies suggest implications for the role of school psychologists, such that encouraging ECTs to consider the influence of their teaching style and behavior management early in their careers might increase ECT self-efficacy and use of behavioral strategies and consultation with school psychologists for disruptive behavior.

Urban teachers have traditionally been exposed to more challenging school conditions, such as limited teaching resources and sources of support (Loeb, et al., 2009), which are more salient for ECTs in the development of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). This suggests that the self-efficacy of teachers in the current study sample (i.e., ECTs in urban schools), may uniquely benefit from the connectedness and support of school psychologists. These findings highlight the importance of school psychologists as consultants to improve urban ECT self-reflection, self-efficacy, and classroom management strategies.

Classroom climate and emotional support from teachers have also been shown to minimize the risk for conflictual teacher-student relationships and internalizing/externalizing student behavior (Buyse, et al., 2007). Given that ECTs select interventions that involve gaining student confidence and trust to reduce problem behavior (Andreou & Rapti, 2010), ECTs may be best positioned to adopt positive classroom climate initiatives involving emotional support of students. ECTs preexisting supportive and nurturing attitude and climate building, coupled with consultation from school psychologists on how to create clear rules and expectations for students, may allow for optimal positive behavioral outcomes for students.

### **How Did ECTs Define Family-Related Attributions?**

ECTs in the current study defined family-related attributions as factors present in the family and/or home that may contribute to challenging behaviors in students. Family-related attributions were defined by teachers as limited school involvement and inconsistent behavioral support at home (e.g., inconsistent rules or consequences, limited routines, modeling of challenging behaviors). Teachers identified some students as applying behavior norms from the home into the school setting. Specifically, teachers shared that those families who struggled to stay involved in their child's schooling or who sometimes modeled anger or frustration to resolve conflict could explain disruptive behaviors observed at school. Partnerships between school and home were also described as weak and that communication between home and school was limited which may also contribute to challenging behaviors at school.

Historically, partnerships between school and home within urban, high poverty communities have been discussed as challenging, yet influential on improved student behavioral difficulties (e.g., Jeynes, 2007; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Previous literature and the current study have been interested in teacher

perceptions of disruptive behavior. However, the issue of family involvement and behavioral support is often bidirectional between school and home (Lawson, 2003), and will benefit from efforts to include teacher and caregiver voices equally. Lawson's (2003) study examined parent *and* teacher perceptions of barriers to parental involvement and behavioral support within a low-income, culturally diverse, urban community, which has allowed for a richer understanding of this complex issue.

The perspectives of urban teachers in Lawson's (2003) study matched the discussions of urban ECTs in the current study.. Lawson's (2003) teacher participants expressed that parent involvement included home-based reinforcement of the school's mission, positive parental social modeling, and parent valuation of education. Teachers expressed that many parents struggled in these areas. Also discussed were that student needs were not met in the home, and therefore students were ill-prepared for school, and required additional attention which they sought through engagement in disruptive behavior.

Lawson's (2003) parent sample perceived familial barriers to school involvement differently. Regarding the latter, in the Lawson sample, parents expressed that their role was to ensure child safety in the community and to meet financial needs so that children could continue to attend school. It was therefore a relief to some parents that children were safe within school, who therefore remained less involved in school due to other equally important responsibilities related to their child's wellbeing (Lawson, 2003). Further, when teachers placed the responsibility and blame on parents for being uninvolved, it was thought to contribute to conflictual relationships between parents and teachers and disrupted true partnerships from developing (Lawson, 2003).

Lawson's (2003) parent sample also made attributions for disruptive behavior. Parents agreed with teachers that some students of families with working parents and limited availability may have required additional attention in school. However, parents uniquely perceived that some teachers lacked warmth toward students, which may have caused students to misbehave to obtain attention (Lawson, 2003).

The issues described above point to the challenges of establishing strong partnerships between school and home in urban communities, which seems to lead both sides to blame the other for student misbehavior (Lawson, 2003). However, teachers and parents also discussed potential benefits to open communication and collaboration across school and home (Lawson, 2003). Means to enhance the partnership between schools and caregivers are discussed later (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007).

Family-related attributions have also been discussed as more prevalent within collectivist cultures (Erbas et al., 2010; Ho, 2004; Sun, 2014), as a result of a higher emphasis on familial responsibility for individuals. Further, teachers in areas of low socio-economic status have expressed that poverty lead to less time supervising children and teaching life skills, parent values, and appropriate behavior (Sun, 2014). Western ideals which regard family as responsible for social skills and values were evident within a study from Australia where social skills difficulties, such as bullying, disrespect toward teachers, and attitudes toward homework, were related to family upbringing (Ho, 2004). The current study findings relate to the impact of urban, high poverty communities and Western ideals on whether teachers express family-related attributions.



**How Did ECTs Define School-Related Attributions?**

School-related attributions in the current study were complex and varied. ECTs discussed the following school-related attributions: 1) inconsistent development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences, 2) behavior of school staff (e.g., modeling inappropriate conflict resolution, treatment of students, and sincerity, 3) school conditions (e.g., material items, time, and services for students) and 4) inconsistent teacher authority (e.g., late hires, special area teachers, and substitutes).

The successful development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences in urban schools rests upon adequate support from school principals and a high degree of classroom implementation by teachers (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003). These two factors were discussed within the current study as related to the frustration ECTs experienced regarding attempts to uphold consistent rules and consequences for students, but not being supported by administration or other school personnel.

School staff modeling inappropriate behavioral expression, and lack of sincerity, were thought to motivate disruptive behavior within students. This idea parallels discussions within family-related attributions of limited familial involvement and inappropriate expression of behavior by caregivers as influential on disruptive student behavior. Teachers in this sample seemed highly in support of the idea that the child's behavior was a result of social interaction (Gibbs & Gardiner, 2008), but expressed that the inappropriate behavior of others, rather than their own behavior, modeled inappropriate behavior for students. This may be due to ECTs' attempts to remediate behaviors through student confidence and trust (Andreou & Rapti, 2010), which causes them to connect to and empathize with students. ECTs in this sample may be best positioned to connect with children on an emotional and sensory level prior to a cognitive level,

which is especially important for working with children who have experienced neglect, rejection, and/or verbal and physical harm from caregivers or other adults (Walkley & Cox, 2013), such as was suggested in the family-related attributions theme. Further, ECTs also seem to have strategies and ideas regarding how teachers can encourage positive behavior in students (e.g., modeling appropriate behavior through interactions with adults and respect for students). This finding suggests the possible benefit of idea sharing and support amongst teachers (Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf & Spencer, 2011).

ECTs in the current study experienced difficult school conditions such as limited time, large class sizes, insufficient material resources, and inadequate services for students as related to disruptive behavior. Further, the school-related issues of late hires, unequal authority across teachers, and multiple and inconsistent substitute teachers impacted both teacher perceptions of whether students perceive them as having authority, and teacher perceptions of efficacy and control in the classroom, which were related to attributions for disruptive behavior. It has been shown that school conditions such as availability of material resources, overcrowding, condensed teaching schedules, and difficulty filling teacher vacancies within schools add substantial predictive power to turnover rates among ECTs (Loeb, et al., 2009). Further, a lack of collective efficacy in schools has been shown to impact teacher ratings of self-efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

There is evidence within the current study and the above literature that a lack of coherence across school personnel regarding student and teacher behavior norms and teacher experiences of self-efficacy, in addition to inadequate school conditions, impact beliefs about disruptive behavior within students.

### **What Percentage of ECTs Endorsed Student, Self, Family, and School-Related Attributions for Disruptive Behavior?**

From most to least endorsed, the themes were as follows: School-related ( $n = 12$ ), student-related ( $n = 11$ ), self-related ( $n = 9$ ), and family-related ( $n = 8$ ).

**School-related.** The high prevalence of school-related attributions for disruptive behavior ( $n = 12$ ; *Typical*) within the current sample may have been related to the urban, high poverty school setting and the specific systemic challenges therein. In contrast to the current study, it has been shown that teachers with greater experience and self-efficacy for managing disruptive behaviors attribute behavior problems to school-related factors (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). This was speculated to be the result of teachers feeling detached from behavior problems and constrained by the educational system over time, thus perceiving their role as curriculum goal enforcers rather than whole-child educators in their later careers (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). It has been shown, however, that ECTs quit jobs in schools that include both challenging school conditions specific to urban schools and challenging students, rather than jobs with challenging students alone (Loeb et al., 2009). This suggests that in schools where school conditions needs are met, students are perceived as less challenging. It may be the case that within the current study, school conditions were inadequate, and thus ECTs were more likely to identify school-related attributions for disruptive behavior.

An example of how context can lead to different interpretations of student behavior includes a discussion of grade-level retention. In the current study, the impact of retention on disruptive behavior was considered a school-related issue, given that there were not adequate resources to meet the needs of students who struggle academically, and thus students were retained and presented with behavior difficulties. In a previous study, retention was discussed as

a student-related attribution for disruptive behavior, in that retention led to a loss of interest in and motivation for learning and feelings of inferiority within students, thus causing behavioral and emotional difficulties (Atici & Merry, 2002). This example illustrates the idea that although the attribution content may be similar, the school context may impact the way the behavior is interpreted, such that schools with greater systemic needs attribute behavior to systemic issues. This again highlights the importance of methods in attribution research on disruptive behavior that allow for teacher elaboration on the attribution, such as qualitative methods.

**Student-related.** Student-related attributions were held among most ECTs in this sample ( $n = 11$ ; *Typical*), which mirrors the existing findings in the literature wherein student-related attributions received the highest endorsement by teachers (e.g., Kulinna, 2007; Ding, et al., 2009; Gibbs & Gardiner, 2008; Ho, 2004; Sun, 2014). ECTs described self-regulatory and interpersonal difficulties within certain grade levels. Behavioral expectations for students vary across school settings and cultures, and have implications for educators' sense of responsibility for student behavior. For example, a study from China demonstrated that teachers used student ability attributions for disruptive behavior least frequently, which was hypothesized as due to collectivist beliefs and high behavioral standards for students, including strict behavioral and impulse control from young ages (Ho, 2004). Conversely, within urban, high-poverty schools in the United States, teachers have been shown to hold more deficit-oriented beliefs about students, and express that low motivation and limited skills among students undermine teacher ability to engage learners (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). The results of the current study related to low interpersonal and self-regulatory skills within students, and student apathy, may be reflective of low behavioral expectations for students school-wide.

**Self-related.** Self-related attributions for disruptive behavior have been inconsistently endorsed in the literature (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000; Kulinna, 2007; Savina, et al., 2014). Teachers with more experience, for example, have viewed the causes of student misbehavior as student-related rather than self-related (Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002). Other studies have also found that more experienced teachers feel more competent and certain that their skills are “as good as possible” (page 61) (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Thus, teachers may turn to external factors to explain the persistence of student behavior problems, which may serve to protect teachers’ beliefs in their ability to create effective learning environments after several years of teaching. The higher prevalence of self-related attributions in the current study ( $n = 9$ ; *Typical*) may reflect the experience of novice teachers, some of whom have not developed strong beliefs regarding their teaching skills. Thus, when searching for the cause of disruptive behavior, novices may consider how their classroom management and teaching skills can improve.

**Family-related.** Family-related attributions were the least prevalent across ECTs ( $n = 8$ ; *Typical*), which may be the result of ECTs engaging in other forms of attributions, such as self-related, more appropriate to their status as novice teachers. Although family-related attributions for disruptive behavior have been noted in urban, high poverty samples (Lawson, 2003), the current study was limited in that the interview questions did not probe for discussions of the impact of student family on disruptive behavior. This may have curbed spontaneous discussion of this attribution, and thus led to a less detailed and nuanced account of family-related causes for disruptive behavior within this sample.

Family-related attributions have been most often discussed in cultures where the emphasis is on collective responsibility (Bibou-Nakou, et al. 2000; Andreou & Rapti, 2010; Ho, 2004; Erbas, et al., 2010). The current study relates most closely to studies on the impact of

urban, high poverty settings on family-attributions among teachers (Hughes, et al., 1993; Sun, 2014; Lawson, 2003). The previous literature shows that families in urban communities face economic stress and neighborhood difficulties that have been related to limited parental involvement in student schooling (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Further, urban schools have been discussed by parents as dismissive of parent input, which discourages parent involvement (Lawson, 2003). Based on these specific challenges to collaborative communication that are faced by teachers and parents in urban communities, teachers may be more likely to perceive disruptive behavior as due to low parental involvement and support.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Several strengths and limitations are important to acknowledge. The current study utilized rigorous qualitative methods, such as strong interrater reliability for the descriptive master codes, a systematic process for identifying thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and use of the constant comparative approach to create themes and subthemes (Boeije, 2002). The generalizability of findings from the current study may be limited due to the restricted sample size of fifteen ECTs in three urban schools. However, the goal of this study was to explore, in depth, an inconsistently studied phenomena of attributions for disruptive behavior within an understudied subgroup for which qualitative analyses are best suited (Creswell, 2012). Despite the strength in the aforementioned analyses and research methods which attempted to address researcher bias via consensus coding strategies, there is the possibility that the findings may reflect the coding team's unique interpretations of these data.

In addition, the original semi-structured interviews did not probe specifically for attributions for disruptive behavior, but rather the analysis of the interviews was focused on identifying attributions based on previous literature on the topic. Future studies should continue

to utilize qualitative methods to understand the attributions for disruptive behavior within teachers, but should also target questions toward the topic more specifically. To enhance the external validity of the study, replication and extension of the current study within other research teams and samples of urban ECTs is recommended. It might also be worth considering the changes in teacher attributions for disruptive behavior across time and following interventions.

### **Implications for School Psychology Practice and Research**

School psychologists play a key role in conducting psychological and academic assessments and individualized instruction and interventions (NASP, 2014). School psychologists are also charged with additional important roles such as consultation, supporting teacher skills development, promoting positive behavior and mental health of students, and strengthening family-school partnerships (NASP, 2014). Findings from the current study have four implications for the practice of school psychology.

First, findings regarding student-related attributions suggest that teachers in the current study understood disruptive behavior as typical within certain grades or ages. This finding suggests a unique opportunity for school psychologists to deliver psychoeducation for early career educators, specifically in disadvantaged school districts with high levels of behavioral difficulties within students. Teachers may benefit from school psychologists' assistance in identifying the appropriate self-regulatory or interpersonal skill to alleviate the display of disruptive behavior, and providing teachers with strategies to increase prosocial and adaptive skills. School psychologists could also offer psychoeducation on the link between social and emotional learning, classroom interventions, and behavioral and academic outcomes for students. It has been shown that teachers with the least experience are more likely to prefer interventions related to the social or emotional well-being of students, rather than curricular or environmental

adaptations (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). This suggests that ECTs may be willing and able to implement the interventions described above.

Second, findings regarding self-related attributions suggest that ECTs self-reflected on the impact of their own classroom management and teaching strategies on disruptive behavior. Training on behavior strategies and techniques, which can be held on a school-wide level by school psychologists, may enhance teachers' ability to think critically about the impact of their own behaviors in the classroom on students, and engage in classroom interventions to modify behavior. School psychologists can provide ECTs with actionable steps to improve classroom management. It has been shown that teachers with special education credentials and university courses in functional assessment and behavioral interventions reflected more often on the connection between their own behavior and the behavior of students (Erbas, et al., 2010). School psychologists can strengthen behavioral strategies and approaches within general education teachers who may not have received training in behavior management strategies.

Third, findings suggest that the relationship between teachers and families may be strained within urban, high poverty schools. School psychologists have unique training to work with families and teachers and can play a role in improving the partnership between home and school and fostering stronger relationships therein (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). Teachers who perceive the causes of disruptive behavior as family problems, parental attitude, and lack of parental interest have been shown to respond punitively or neutrally to students, and display low self-efficacy for managing disruptive behavior (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Further, teachers who identify family-related attributions in addition to high disagreement with student and school factors, and experience high self-efficacy in class management, tend to refer students to counseling (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). In essence, family-related attributions may cause teachers



to experience themselves as ineffective in managing specific disruptive behaviors, and therefore call upon other professionals to fix students.

Research suggests that educators should be aware of and concerned about family influence on disruptive behavior in students, without blaming parents (Kauffman, 1989). This points to the importance of a partnership between teachers and families toward an understanding of how home and school intersect, and how to improve behavioral outcomes for students in both settings. Partnerships can be enhanced through conjoint behavioral consultation, which includes teachers and families toward the goals of creating meaningful roles for family members to support child learning, promoting continuity across school and home, and enhancing the competencies of adult participants (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). School psychologists and other key support personnel can help support teachers to use best practices in home-school collaboration (e.g., welcome letters, good news notes, and family surveys (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007)) and help train teachers on productive use of parent teacher conferences. School psychologists might improve relationships between teachers and families, focus teacher attentions on school-related attributions, and thus promote the use of eco-systemic interventions for individual behavior difficulties (Andreou & Rapti, 2010).

Related to the above, the fourth finding on school-related attributions suggest that ECTs experienced frustration at maladaptive interactions among colleagues, and a lack of collaboration and support within the school setting, which were thought to impact the prevalence of disruptive behavior among students. School psychologists can help improve relationships and consistency of behavior standards among teachers through linking ECTs with more experienced teachers (Shernoff et al. 2011), assessing school climate and improving school culture, and implementing school-wide positive behavioral supports (NASP, 2014). School psychologists might also assist

in empowering teacher voice in systemic interventions through coordination of professional learning communities which allow teachers to collaborate on behavior management techniques and learn from one another (Shernoff et al., 2011). It is worth noting that although school psychologists are uniquely qualified to enhance their role across these four implications, preparing teachers to manage disruptive behavior effectively should also be the responsibility of teachers, administrators, and coaches.

There are gaps in the existing literature related to attributions for student disruptive behavior that warrant future attention and research. Although most studies related to causal attributions for student behavior have determined that teachers most frequently focus on student-related attributions, few studies have examined this from the perspective of students. One study highlighted that teachers most often attributed disruptive behavior to student-related issues, whereas students identified a lack of challenging learning content and the need for diversified teaching methods (Sun, 2014). This discrepancy illustrates the importance of student voice, and encouraging conversation between students and teachers on the causes of disruptive behavior, and ways to motivate positive behavior in the classroom (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). These conversations might also motivate teachers to self-reflect and adapt teaching methods and classroom management techniques, which as discussed earlier, has been demonstrated as influential on managing disruptive behavior.

Future studies should utilize qualitative research methods and thematic analysis to continue to explore the attributions for disruptive behavior held within ECTs, specifically within urban schools. Semi-structured interviews should include queries that specifically target student, self, family and school-related attributions for disruptive behavior, and allow teachers to define these in their own words. Studies might also consider the relationship between attributions and

demographic characteristics of teachers, such as training and exposure to behavioral strategies and consultation. Further, it might also be useful to determine the outcome of attributions through conversations regarding ways in which teachers manage disruptive behavior, whether that is to seek outside support, implement classroom behavior systems, refer students to counseling, connect with students, or other ideas that educators might spontaneously discuss. Future studies might also consider attribution profiles, such that teachers are understood according to all of the attribution themes that are endorsed (see Appendix F for the attribution profile table from the current study).

### **Conclusion**

The current study explored, in depth, ECTs' attributions for disruptive behavior in urban, high poverty schools. Students in urban schools are at an increased risk for a variety of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Hertzog, 2002; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006). Disruptive behavior in urban settings has been evidenced as the leading cause of turnover among ECTs (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Understanding teacher attributions for disruptive behavior, which shape teacher behavior, affect, and expectancy toward students (Weiner, 1985), may allow school psychologists to act as more effective consultants to build teacher skills and increase teacher effectiveness, and thus improve educational, social, and emotional outcomes for students. This study provides important insights into how ECTs in highly stressful work contexts experience disruptive behaviors. The findings hope to advance our understanding of attributions for disruptive behavior in urban, high poverty schools and among ECTs, thus enhancing the role of school psychologists as effective behavioral consultants and positive change agents in schools.

## Appendix A

Demographics Table**Table 1***Early career teacher demographic characteristics (N = 15)*

Measure	<i>M (SD, range)</i>
Age	29.13 (5.63, 22-41)
Years Teaching	2.28 (1.78, 0-5)
Measure	<i>n</i>
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American	7
European-American	7
Asian-American	1
Gender	
Female	13
Male	2
Grade/Role	
Pre-K – 3 <sup>rd</sup>	5
4 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup>	4
Special Education	2
Art and P.E.	4
Highest Degree	
Master's Degree through Alt. Cert.	7
Traditional Pre-Service Training	8

## Appendix B

Interview Protocol**TEACHERS SUPPORTING TEACHERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS  
TIME 1 EARLY CAREER TEACHER INTERVIEW INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT**

1. What were your expectations of being a teacher prior to becoming one?

Probes:

- a. Did your expectations match your reality? Why? Why not?
- b. What parts of teaching have been most rewarding?
- c. What parts of teaching have been most challenging?

2. How prepared do you feel to teach in an urban setting?

Probes:

- a. What parts of teaching in an urban school do you feel you were better prepared for?
- b. What parts of teaching in an urban school have you felt less prepared for?

3. What have your experiences been like running your classroom so far?

Probes:

- a. As a new teacher, what parts of running your classroom have come easily to you? Why do you think that is?
- b. What kinds of skills do you think you brought with you that made running your classroom go well?
- c. What parts of running your classroom have been more challenging? Why do you think that is?

4. How much control do you feel you have in your classroom?

Probes:

- a. How much do you believe you can control students' disruptive behavior? How much do you believe that you can get students to follow the rules of your classroom?
- b. How much do you believe that you can get students engaged in learning?
- c. How are you feeling about your ability to manage future challenges that come up in your classroom?

5. Are there specific norms and expectations at [Name of School] for teaching?

Probes:

- a. What types of norms and values exist regarding strategies for managing disruptive behaviors? Can you describe those norms/values?

Appendix C  
Demographics Questionnaire

<p><b>1. Teacher Name:</b> _____  <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; width: 100%;"> <span>(Last Name)</span> <span>(First Name)</span> </div> </p> <p><b>2. Gender:</b>    <input type="checkbox"/> Female                      <input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><b>3. Age (in years):</b> _____</p> <p><b>4. Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply):</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native    <input type="checkbox"/> Asian  <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American                      <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino/a                      <input type="checkbox"/> White  <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p> <p><b>5. Grade Level (2009-10):</b> _____  <input type="checkbox"/> General Education    <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education    <input type="checkbox"/> General &amp; Special Education (Previous year)</p> <p><b>6. Grade Level (2010-11):</b> _____  <input type="checkbox"/> General Education    <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education    <input type="checkbox"/> General &amp; Special Education (Current)</p> <p><b>7. Grade Level (2011-12):</b> _____  <input type="checkbox"/> General Education    <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education    <input type="checkbox"/> General &amp; Special Education    <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown (Next year)</p>
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<p><b>8a. Teachers (if not a teacher, please skip to 8b):</b></p> <p>Total Number of Years Teaching:          _____</p> <p>In CPS: _____</p> <p>At Current School: _____</p> <p>At Current Grade Level:          _____</p>	<p><b>8b. Other School Staff:</b></p> <p>Current Job Title:          _____</p> <p>Total Number of Years in Current Role:          _____</p> <p>Total Number of Years at Current School: _____</p> <p>School: _____</p> <p>Total Number of Years in CPS:          _____</p>
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	If Taught Previously, Total Number of Years: _____
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<b>9. Teacher Preparation Program</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Teacher Preparation Program Program (ex: Chicago (4 year bachelor's, 2 year master's) Teaching Fellows, Teach for America, Academy for Urban School Leadership, UNITE, etc.)		<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Certification
<b>10. Teaching Credentials: (check all that apply)</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Type 75/Administration <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary Certificate <input type="checkbox"/> Type 9/Secondary Ed	<input type="checkbox"/> Type 4/Early Childhood <input type="checkbox"/> Type 10/LBS1/Special Ed	<input type="checkbox"/> Type 3/Elementary Ed <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<b>11. Highest Degree:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma or GED	<input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS <input type="checkbox"/> MA/MS <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D./Ed.D. <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> J.D. <input type="checkbox"/> Master's in Progress

**THANK YOU!😊**

## Appendix D

Codebook: Teacher Attributions for Disruptive Behavior

<b>Node (Themes)</b>	<b>Description</b>
Student-Related Attributions	<p>Students are the cause of their own disruptive behavior.</p> <p>Student personality: hyperactive temperament, lack of respect for authority and teachers            Developmental ability or disability: grade level, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, self-regulatory ability, “Emotional Disturbance,” “ADHD,” or other classification            Student motivation: lack of interest and engagement in school, low effort            Student skills: lack of social/interpersonal skills, academic skills, self-regulatory skills, lack of understanding of appropriate school behavior            Negative influence: Students influence one another into engaging in disruptive behavior</p>
Self-Related attributions	<p>Individual teachers describe the cause of disruptive student behavior as due to the teacher’s own qualities, strategies, and/or practices.</p> <p>Qualities: personality traits, amount of care for students, harshness, leniency, confidence, subject taught            Strategies: lack of strategies to prevent or manage disruptive behavior, inconsistent discipline procedures, ability to incite interest in material            Practices: lack of or inconsistent routines, teaching methods and style, classroom procedures, system of rewards and punishment</p>
Family-Related Attributions	<p>Family or home factors are the cause of disruptive student behavior.</p> <p>Home environment: rules, norms, values, discipline procedures, stress and responsibility in the home            Parental support: lack of involvement in student’s education and behavior            Family background: inappropriate modeling of behavior, cultural factors that inform acceptable behavior, poverty, neighborhood influences</p>



School-Related Attributions	<p>Factors that are present for the school at large are the cause of disruptive student behavior.</p> <p>School environment: overcrowding, class sizes, hallway traffic, scheduling (amount of time spent with kids)</p> <p>School culture: increased amount of disruptive behavior school-wide promotes prevalence disruptive behavior</p> <p>Services for students: lack of mental health and behavioral programs, preventive programs, access to school counselors and psychologists</p> <p>Overall school management: lack of administrator involvement and care, inconsistent/missing school discipline procedures and consequences, security personnel, treatment towards students</p> <p>Curriculum demands: content of material, workload.</p> <p>Attitudes and practices of other teachers: lack of rules and procedures from other teachers, treatment towards students, modeling of disruptive or disrespectful behavior by teachers towards students or other teachers</p>
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## Appendix E

Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Frequencies**Table 2***Summary of themes, subthemes, and frequencies*

Theme/subtheme	ECTs
Student-related	11
Interpersonal and self-regulatory skills at different developmental stages	9
Student apathy	4
Self-related	9
Preparedness and ability to engage students	3
Classroom rules and routines	7
Family-related	8
Limited involvement and behavioral support	8
School-related	12
Inconsistent development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences	10
Behavior of school staff	4
School conditions	6
Teacher authority	8
General = 15 ECTs; Typical = 8 to 14 ECTs; Variant = 3 to 7 cases	

## Appendix F

Attribution Profiles

Theme	Subtheme	ECT														
		1003	1011	1014	1021	1025	2012	2050	2054	3004	3015	3027	3031	3039	3061	3062
Student-Related (n=11, 73%) typical	Interpersonal and self-regulatory skills at different developmental stages (n=9, 60%) typical			X	X	X			X	X	X		X		X	X
	Student apathy toward rewards and consequences (n=4, 26%) variant				X	X	X							X		
Self-Related (n=9, 60%) typical	Preparedness and ability to engage students (n=3, 20%) variant			X									X		X	
	Consistent classroom rules and routines (e.g., behavior management) (n=7, 46%) variant		X	X			X				X	X		X		X

Theme	Subtheme	ECT														
		1003	1011	1014	1021	1025	2012	2050	2054	3004	3015	3027	3031	3039	3061	3062
Family-Related (n=8, 53%) <b>typical</b>	Limited involvement and behavioral support (n=8, 53%) <b>typical</b>		X		X			X	X			X	X	X		X
School-Related (n=12, 80%) <b>typical</b>	Inconsistent development, implementation, and support of school-wide rules and consequences (n=10, 67%) <b>typical</b>	X		X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		
	Behavior of school staff (e.g., modeling inappropriate conflict resolution, dependability, sincerity) (n=4, 27%) <b>variant</b>							X			X	X	X			
	School conditions (e.g., time, supplies, class size, services for students) (n=6, 40%) <b>variant</b>				X	X	X	X	X		X					
	Inconsistent teacher authority related to school disorganization (n=8, 53%) <b>typical</b>				X	X	X		X		X	X		X		X

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