

PUBLIC ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH EXPLOSIVE STUDENT  
OUTBURSTS: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Two research questions guided this study: How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school? How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts? The theoretical framework was based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping. Literature review themes included explosive outburst characteristics and terminology, behavior intervention strategies, adverse effects on teachers, teacher coping strategies, and teacher resilience. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews of eight participants who self-identified as being general elementary teachers from the site district and had experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Following the coding and analysis of the data, several themes were revealed, including primary appraisal of well-being, lived experiences, coping strategies, and outcomes. The findings that focused on the participants' lived experiences included threat appraisal, explosive behavior characteristics, and coping strategies. Adverse effects, the need for more student services, and teachers experiencing self-blame were findings associated with the outcomes of experiencing students' explosive outbursts. The study results contribute to the limited research on elementary teachers' experiences with

students' explosive outbursts, and stakeholders can use the results to create support systems for teachers.

***Keywords:*** adverse effects, coping strategies, explosive behaviors, explosive student outbursts, elementary teachers.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my fellow educators who give so much to their students, community, and profession.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teachers who experience students' explosive outbursts can have numerous adverse effects such as physical and emotional distress (Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Physical adverse effects can include increased headaches, exhaustion, physical illness, and injuries such as bruising (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Emotional distress can include elevated guilt, sadness or depression, and increased anger and self-blame (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019). Teachers cite students' behavior problems in school as a primary stressor at work (Reinke et al., 2018).

Research on subjects such as disruptive student behaviors, teacher resilience, and students' explosive behaviors described adverse effects on teachers due to student behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2019). Negative effects on instructors, such as emotional exhaustion, were discovered by Caldarella et al. (2020) in a study on pupils' disruptive behavior. In studies on teacher resilience, the adverse effects on teachers were explored. Several of these studies found that students' behaviors increased teachers' stress levels, impaired work performance, and had physical and emotional effects on teachers (Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2019).

Students demonstrating explosive outbursts such as screaming, throwing objects, destroying property or physically assaulting others at school are common occurrences, use significant school resources to handle the events, and often cause property damage or physical harm (Bostic et al., 2021; Musu et al., 2019). General emotional dysregulation which includes explosive outbursts and impaired emotional outbursts is frequent in children (Carlson et al., 2022). Emotional dysregulation is characterized by excessive emotion that is exhibited too

frequently, too rapidly, and for too long in relation to the antecedent triggering event and is frequently related to anger dysregulation (Carlson et al., 2022). According to estimates extrapolated from current studies by Carlson et al., (2022), impaired emotional outbursts occur in 4%-10% of children from preschool through adolescents.

While reflecting on classroom management, teachers reported feeling unprepared to adequately handle students' behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2020; Carroll et al., 2021; Chuang et al., 2020; Niwayama et al., 2020). Teachers participating in research studies cited that inadequate pre-service classroom management training and poor school climate negatively impacted their classrooms and professional satisfaction (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020). Teachers felt unprepared to meet the demands of managing increasingly explosive pupil behaviors (Chuang et al., 2020).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Adverse effects.** Adverse effects will generally be defined as conditions causing detrimental impacts to the person (Zhao, 2017). Adverse effects can negatively impact physical, physiological, and emotional health (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017).

**Behavior interventions.** Behavior interventions will generally be defined as management strategies used to target skill deficits and guide children to become proficient with the skill (Reynolds et al., 2020).

**Coping.** Coping will generally be defined as processes and strategies used to “mitigate the harmful effects of stress” (Folkman, 2011, p. 4).

**Explosive outbursts.** Explosive outbursts will generally be defined as spontaneous impulsive reactions (Scott et al., 2020) such as screaming, throwing objects, abusing others verbally,

physically assaulting teachers and students, or damaging property (Bostic et al., 2021) that is out of proportion with the situation or provocation (Carlson et al., 2022).

**Impairing Emotional Outbursts.** Impairing Emotional Outbursts (IEO) are defined as developmentally inappropriate exhibitions of verbal or physical anger towards others, self, or property that are substantial, last longer and are more intense than the precipitating provocation, and lead to significant functional impairment (Carlson et al., 2023).

**Resilience.** Resilience is the ability to adapt that has been taught or developed, using techniques to overcome challenges and accomplish positive results despite significant threats to adaptation or development (Mullen et al., 2021). Resilient educators cope with challenging or stressful situations by drawing on their own resources and/or environmental resources (Arnup & Bowles, 2016).

**Stress.** Stress is an interaction between a person and their environment that the individual perceives as exhausting or exceeding his or her resources and jeopardizing their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). Working conditions which include the safety of the workplace, disruptive students, and classroom management are among the most challenging factors affecting teacher resiliency and attrition rates (Curran et al., 2019). However, the "topic of teacher safety has received little attention by policymakers and researchers" (Curran et al., 2019, p. 21).

After experiencing students' explosive outbursts, teachers can suffer adverse effects with detrimental impacts that negatively impact their physical, physiological, and emotional health



(Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017). According to a study by McMahon et al. (2019), teachers reported feeling frustrated, unsafe, and dissatisfied with their profession and developed professional disengagement due to students' explosive actions. After handling students' violent, aggressive, or explosive outbursts, some teachers reported feeling physically ill (Anderman et al., 2018), experiencing increased headaches (Curran et al., 2019) and fatigue (Carroll et al., 2021).

Student outbursts can include externalizing behaviors such as screaming, swearing, kicking, punching, foot stomping, spitting, biting, or head banging (Spring & Carlson, 2021). Children that exhibit explosive anger outbursts put themselves, others, and the environment at risk (Spring & Carlson, 2021). Students demonstrating explosive outbursts pose safety risks and their behavior hinders their academic, social, and emotional growth (Vaudreuil et al., 2021). Student aggression, violence, and explosive outbursts are common and represent a threat to student and staff safety (Bostic et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2019).

Nearly one-fifth of 3,403 kindergarten through 12th grade teachers participating in a recent national survey did not report violent school incidents against them (Anderman et al., 2018). The authors hypothesized teachers did not report incidents because they perceived a lack of administrative support with addressing students' behaviors. Anderman et al. (2018) concluded that given the underreporting rate, the prevalence of unsafe school incidents is likely larger than current data suggest.

The most recent Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2021 (Irwin et al., 2022), examined numerous measures of United States public school crime and safety. Most of the data centered around the experiences of students aged 12-18, yet the authors also acknowledged the importance of including safety issues from teachers' perspectives (Irwin et al.,

2022). According to the national data collected, elementary school teachers reported higher rates of being threatened or being physically attacked than middle- or high-school educators (Irwin et al., 2022).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. In this study, explosive outbursts will generally be defined as spontaneous impulsive reactions (Scott et al., 2020) such as screaming, throwing objects, abusing others verbally, physically assaulting teachers and students, or damaging property (Bostic et al., 2021) that is out of proportion with the situation or provocation (Carlson et al., 2022). According to Bohnenkamp et al. (2021), existing studies tended to focus on whole school effects and not individual experiences. Furthermore, few studies have explored how students' explosive episodes affect teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). The results of this study's individual interviews will add to the current research on the effects of explosive student behaviors on teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). Improved working conditions regarding such behaviors could positively influence teacher retention rates and students' academic progress (Curran et al., 2019). The information could help administrators and policymakers create support systems that increase teacher resiliency, attract highly qualified candidates, and improve employee retention and longevity.

### **Research Questions and Design**

In this study, two research questions guided the exploration of public general education elementary teachers' lived experiences with explosive student episodes.

**Research Question 1:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school?

**Research Question 2:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts?

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I interviewed eight public general education elementary kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Participants were recruited from one central Maine school district. The recruiting process included descriptions of the study, estimated length of interview, and the definition of explosive student outbursts to ensure participants have experienced explosive student outbursts. Virtual semi-structured interviews were audio recorded using Zoom video communications (2023). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using Zoom audio transcription (Zoom video communications, 2023). Participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcript and offer revision suggestions. Following member verification, the transcripts were in vivo coded to review the interview responses for themes and insights.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

A conceptual framework is created by bringing together several related concepts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or a research topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). A study's conceptual framework justifies the significance and applicability of a study and demonstrates how the design of the study rigorously and appropriately addresses the research objectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Theoretical framework refers to the theory that researchers choose to guide their study to comprehend a phenomenon (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). A theoretical framework is the application of a theory to provide a justification for an occurrence,

cast light on a specific phenomenon, or address a specific research issue (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

According to Weaver-Hightower (2014) personal interest, relevant research, and a theoretical framework are the components that make up a conceptual framework. My personal interest in this topic was ignited by my work as a public elementary school teacher in central Maine with pupils who displayed explosive outbursts from pre-kindergarten through Grade 5. While working in several public elementary schools in Maine, I noticed staff members struggling with the difficulties of student explosive outbursts in public general education classrooms. My observations sparked a continued interest in teachers' experiences with students' explosive behaviors.

This qualitative phenomenological dissertation research was supported by gaps in the current relevant research. Curran et al. (2019) stressed the need for qualitative research focusing on teachers' experiences following the completion of a quantitative national study on the effects of violence on teachers. A call for more research was made by Wink et al. (2021) to explore teachers dealing with emotional and behavioral problems in the classroom. According to Anderman et al. (2018), teacher safety is a crucial issue. Yet teacher safety and experiences have received little attention from researchers or policymakers (Curran et al., 2019).

The theoretical framework was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC). According to the TTSC, people constantly evaluate or appraise the stimuli in their surroundings (Cooper & Quick, 2017). A person's ability to cope with challenges and problems is a consequence of transactions or interactions that occur between a person and their environment (Romas & Sharma, 2022).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described two primary forms of appraisal: *primary appraisal* and *secondary appraisal*. In primary appraisal, a person assigns meaning to an individual or environmental interaction, and its importance to a person's wellbeing is assessed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). During secondary appraisal, an individual identifies what can be done to control the stressor and the resulting distress (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Coping strategies are used when a scenario is judged to be stressful during the primary appraisal and necessitates efforts to manage or resolve the events during the secondary appraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) aligned with this study because teachers collected information and appraised risks when they experienced students' explosive outbursts. Teachers assessed if the situation was endangering themselves or others (McMahon et al., 2019) during the primary appraisal stage (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Herman et al. (2018), coping strategies are a person's responses to handle a stressful event. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) explained that coping includes cognitive processes and problem-solving strategies used to manage distressing emotional states. In the second stage of TTSC appraisal, teachers employ coping strategies to manage explosive student outbursts (Anderman et al., 2018). This study explored the connection between the TTSC and teachers' lived experiences of the central phenomenon.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**

Assumptions are what researchers take for granted in relation to their study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). An assumption of this study was that the teachers volunteering for the study would be comfortable sharing their experiences regarding explosive student outbursts and would answer the interview questions openly and honestly. An initial assumption was that most, if not

all, public elementary school teachers working in high-poverty areas in rural and semi-rural Maine schools have encountered explosive student outbursts. This was an unsubstantiated premise and participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to ensure they experienced explosive student outbursts. In the analysis of the data, I revisited these initial assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Limitations, or possible weaknesses of the study, could be used to inform decisions for future studies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The scope and length of the study were limited. The number of teachers interviewed were limited to eight due to time constraints of the dissertation program and the phenomenological qualitative design. Unlike quantitative surveys, which can collect data from any number of people, phenomenological interview research designs typically have a small number of participants to collect in depth data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Teachers volunteering for the study were geographically limited to one school district. The study was based only on the experiences of elementary kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers. Another limitation was that the teachers interviewed were currently employed in the district because I sought to uncover experiences of teachers currently working at the site. Results may be skewed, because information gleaned from staff who have left the district, profession, or retired may have different experiences than staff members who are currently employed. The constraints of the research design and scope limit the transferability of the study's results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

An additional consideration beyond the study's methodological limitations and scope that must be accounted for was bias. Researcher bias, assumptions, experiences, and perceptions can influence decisions about research design and data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that both the qualitative interviewer and participants bring

biases, dispositions, and attitudes to the study which may affect the data. To account for my bias toward participant responses that aligned with or were divergent from my own beliefs, I remained non-judgmental and respectful during participant interviews regardless of my beliefs and participant responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I remained non-judgmental and respectful by listening carefully, not offering advice, refraining from making comments on participant responses, and abstaining from asking leading questions. My potential knowledge of participants, the site they work at, and the students being described, was another area of bias. Audio recording the interview, focusing on listening carefully, and asking non-judgmental questions helped me mediate the effects of this bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Analyzing my study for language biases as outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) was an important preparation component to be sensitive and respectful to individuals and cultural groups. For example, I used the term participants instead of impersonal terms such as subjects or informants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Another potential influencing factor was if the participants had prior experience(s) with me. Their prior experience(s) might have influenced their comfort level and trust during the interview process. Before participant interviews, my research met the University of New England's (2023) Institutional Review Board requirements which certified that my study adequately protected the rights and welfare of my participants (see Appendix A). Every effort was made to create a comfortable interview environment to encourage open dialogue (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). During the interview, my prejudices, assumptions, and understandings were "bracketed or temporarily set aside" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). Bracketing allows researchers to suspend their beliefs, experiences, and presuppositions which allows them to be more receptive to the participant's descriptions of their experiences and allow

researchers to view the phenomenon from a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After participant interviews were completed, participant names were removed from transcripts and documents to reduce potential bias during data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

### **Rationale and Significance**

Large-scale survey studies on school safety and discipline (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021) and teacher victimization and resilience (Curran et al., 2019) emphasized the need for smaller, individualized qualitative studies which focus on individual experiences instead of large-scale quantitative indicators. Additional teacher resilience studies are needed across cultural and social contexts (Ghandour et al., 2019; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). According to Hirsch et al. (2022) further research on temper outbursts in school-aged children is required. Finally, study results need to inform policymakers or researchers because little attention has been paid thus far to teacher safety (Curran et al., 2019).

Data from a nationwide Schools and Staffing Survey of 104,840 educators (Curran et al., 2019), found that American teachers suffer physical and emotional effects and impaired work performance resulting from students' behaviors that can lead to attrition. As a result of managing student behavior, teachers reported feeling ill, experiencing increased headaches and fatigue, as well as bodily harm such as bruising (Anderman et al., 2018; Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Explosive outbursts at school are common and drain school resources including instruction time and staff involvement in order to respond to incidents (Bostic et al., 2021). Classroom management and student behaviors were reported by teachers as some of the top challenges in their profession (Curran et al., 2019). There are not enough qualified applicants to replace the numerous teachers who are leaving their schools and the



profession (Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021). Lower student achievement and unstable schools are caused by high teacher turnover rates. (Curran et al., 2019).

This study will add to the limited research on the effects on elementary teachers experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019). Results can be used by district leaders to inform policy decisions to improve school safety (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Administrators who seek to improve school climates may benefit from understanding this phenomenon from teachers' lived experiences (Curran et al., 2019). Teachers struggling to effectively address students' explosive outbursts could benefit from learning about successful strategies used by study participants. Reflecting on shared experiences with a challenging situation can offer hope to study participants and other educators that there are strategies and support systems to increase their resilience and help them improve students' and their own outcomes.

### **Summary**

Since students exhibiting uncontrolled outbursts are common in public schools, the problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). Prior research has shown that teachers experience physical and emotional adverse effects from experiencing student explosive outbursts (McMahon et al., 2019). Many teachers have concerns for their safety and feel dissatisfied with their jobs due to students' physical aggression (McMahon et al., 2019), and student behaviors can negatively impact teachers' resilience (Curran et al., 2019). Students who threaten to injure teachers or physically attack them broadly impact entire school systems, including lowered teacher resilience, increased job

dissatisfaction, threats to the stability of schools, increased staff turnover, and decreased school achievement (Curran et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of eight central Maine public teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. A qualitative phenomenological design using semi-structured interviews was conducted. The study assumptions, limitations, and scope included having eight participants from one Maine school district, researcher bias, and the study was constrained to the University of New England's dissertation deadline requirements.

The theoretical framework for this study was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping. Existing research supported this phenomenological qualitative study because large scale quantitative studies emphasized the need for smaller qualitative studies to explore teachers' experiences in depth (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019). While teacher safety has been identified as a critical issue (Anderman et al., 2018), teacher safety and experiences have received little attention from researchers or policymakers (Curran et al., 2019).

The rationale for this study stemmed from my desire to uncover the experiences and coping strategies of elementary classroom teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts. The study results could impact district practices, as results of this study will be shared with district staff, administration, and the school board to potentially inform policy decisions and professional development planning. Describing the commonalities and divergent experiences of participants will add to the limited research on teachers' experiencing explosive student outbursts.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature addresses the adverse effects, both physical and emotional, that teachers sustain due to experiencing student explosive outbursts. Screaming, throwing objects, damaging property, or physically assaulting others are common explosive classroom behaviors that elementary school teachers encounter (Bostic et al., 2021; Musu et al., 2019). These explosive student behaviors occur frequently, use substantial school resources to handle, and frequently result in physical injury or property damage (Bostic et al., 2021; Musu et al., 2019). Explosive behaviors in children hinder their intellectual, social, and emotional growth (Vaudreuil et al., 2021) and negatively affect teachers (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019).

In addition to physical and emotional adverse effects, teacher resiliency was also noted to suffer adverse effects from student behaviors (Curran et al., 2019). Resilience is the capacity to adjust, employ strategies, and use resources to overcome difficulties or stressful circumstances and produce desirable outcomes despite considerable dangers to adaptation or development (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Mullen et al., 2021). Factors that strain or hinder resilience and protective strategies and factors that increase resilience were examined in the literature review.

A variety of terminology and definitions to describe explosive behaviors were uncovered during the literature review. Inconsistent terminology and definitions lead to challenges in studying the phenomenon (Carlson et al., 2022; Connor & Doerfler, 2021). Explosive outbursts, temper outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021), emotional and behavioral health crisis (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021), impaired emotional outbursts, and emotional dysregulation (Carlson et al., 2022) were some of the terms used to label the phenomenon. While the terms vary, there were commonalities among the definitions including that the behaviors were sudden, unplanned, out

of proportion with the precipitating event, and longer lasting and more intense than the context warranted (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022).

Ross W. Greene (2014), a prominent clinical child psychologist, has studied childhood explosive behaviors for decades. Greene's (2021a, 2021b) longitudinal work informed his numerous books in which he called for a paradigm shift in educators' and parents' thinking about student behaviors. He posits that students' inflexibility, explosive behaviors, and low frustration tolerance stem from skill deficits such as poor problem-solving skills and not from willful disobedience (Greene, 1998, 2014, 2021a, 2021b). For these reasons people need to shift their mindset toward struggling students (Greene, 2021b). Greene (2021b) implored parents and educators to move away from reacting to a child's behavior and working towards analyzing and solving the problem that caused the behavior.

The main themes uncovered in the literature review included explosive outburst characteristics and terminology (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022; Connor & Doerfler, 2021), behavior intervention strategies (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Greene, 2021b; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; LaBrot et al., 2020), adverse effects on teachers (Anderman et al., 2018; Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017), teacher coping strategies (Anderman et al., 2018; Go et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2018), and protective (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020) and straining factors (Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021) on teacher resilience. Behavior intervention strategies were organized into the subcategories of punitive and positive practices (Greene, 2021b; Jean-Pierre & Parris, 2019; LaBrot et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2022). Keywords include adverse effects (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017), behavior interventions (Reynolds et al., 2020), explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al.,

2022; Scott et al., 2020), coping responses (Anderman et al., 2018), and resilience (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Mullen et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted using EBSCO, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Keywords used were explosive outbursts, temper outbursts, elementary classroom management, student behavior effects on teachers, coping skills, adverse effects on teachers, and teacher resilience/resiliency. Additional articles were found by exploring references cited in studies that correlated strongly with this research. Finally, several books by experts in the field were utilized, including *The Explosive Child* (Greene, 2021a), *Lost at School* (Greene, 2014), *Lost & Found* (Greene, 2021b), and *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support* (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Books by Folkman (2011), Lazarus (1966), and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) informed the study's theoretical framework.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

A conceptual framework explains why a study is important and relevant and how the study's design accurately and thoroughly responds to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The elements that make up a conceptual framework, according to Weaver-Hightower (2014), include personal interest, relevant research, and a theoretical framework. A theoretical framework is applying a theory to explain an event or shed some light on a specific phenomenon or research problem (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Concepts are interrelated ideas, and a conceptual framework allows researchers to apply the concepts to make meaning of the world and experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), the conceptual framework is the superstructure for the research, outlining its value and the best way to go about completing it.

## **Personal Interest**

Personal interest in this topic initially stemmed from my experiences teaching in pre-kindergarten through Grade 5 elementary classrooms in central Maine with students demonstrating explosive behaviors. *The Explosive Child* (Greene, 1998, 2021a) was a key piece of literature in my journey of exploring how to best meet the needs of at-risk youth. School staff at a central Maine public elementary school participated in a required book study of Greene's (1998) *The Explosive Child* to find strategies to address frequent and increasingly volatile student outbursts. Shortly after the book study, the school was put on a state-initiated intensive support plan due to low student achievement. Part of the action plan devised to improve academics included addressing student behaviors and teacher responses. Teachers and staff received training in positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and began implementing PBIS strategies and devising a multi-tiered support system for academic and behavioral needs. Over the next 10 years, school staff gradually improved their practices, and student academic and behavior outcomes showed a general trend of improvement.

My interest in students' explosive behaviors and teachers' intervention practices has persisted. While working in several other Maine public elementary schools, I noted staff struggling with challenges of explosive student behaviors in general education classrooms. The students demonstrating explosive behaviors often did not have a diagnosis that would allow them to receive additional support, so their behaviors were left for the classroom teachers to manage. Various factors contribute to my continued interest in this topic, such as, what factors allow some colleagues to persist through highly challenging situations while others leave the profession after only a year or two because of struggles with classroom management? In a time of widespread teacher shortages (Yarrell, 2022), are there educational practices, coping

mechanisms, and behavioral intervention strategies that can be replicated to support teachers in managing students' unexpected behaviors?

### **Topical Research**

Topical or relevant research supported this qualitative phenomenological dissertation. A large study of school-level implementation practices titled *Impact of a School-Based, Multi-Tiered Emotional and Behavioral Health Crisis Intervention on School Safety and Discipline* (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021) called for additional research to explore individual experiences and effects of school-wide interventions. A quantitative study utilizing nationally representative data from the Schools and Staffing Survey given in 1999-2000, 2003-2004, and 2007-2008 explored the general indicators of 104,840 United States teacher experiences of violence and the effects of those experiences on leaving the profession (Curran et al., 2019). Curran et al. (2019) emphasized the need for additional qualitative research focusing on specific teacher experiences. Likewise, Ghandour et al. (2019) acknowledged the limited information about the "mental health conditions in very young children" (p. 257), which supports the need for research of elementary-aged students and staff.

Teacher safety is a critical topic that has received little attention from policymakers or researchers (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019). Like Greene's (2021b) description of students' skill deficits, Wink et al. (2021) advocated for additional research to explore the lack of support or training for teachers in managing emotional and behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy's (2020) study on teacher resilience explained that further research on teacher resilience across additional cultural and social contexts was warranted.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC). There is a long history of the idea that a person's perception of an event shapes their emotional and behavioral response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). With the release of Richard Lazarus' (1966) groundbreaking book *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*, the topic of stress' damaging effects on mental and physical health became a major topic in psychology and research studies (Folkman, 2011). Subsequently, the transactional theory of stress and coping was created (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and it has played a crucial role in influencing stress and coping research over the past 50 years (Cooper & Quick, 2017).

According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC), people constantly evaluate or appraise the stimuli in their surroundings (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described two forms of appraisal: *primary appraisal* and *secondary appraisal*. In primary appraisal, a person assigns meaning to an individual or environmental interaction, and its importance to a person's well-being is assessed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The primary appraisal stage involves determining the level of stress based on prior experiences, self-awareness, and knowledge of the event (Romas & Sharma, 2022). If a primary appraisal is considered stressful, a secondary appraisal identifies what can be done to control the stressor and the resulting distress (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Coping strategies are used when a scenario is judged to be stressful during the primary appraisal and necessitates efforts to manage or resolve the events during the secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Romas & Sharma, 2022).

According to TTSC, there are three kinds of primary appraisal: irrelevant, benign-positive, and stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Van Der Want et al., 2015). Irrelevant



appraisal is when a person's interaction with the environment has no bearing on their wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When the result of an interaction is interpreted positively, or at least as having the potential to be positive, it is said to have a benign-positive appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Van Der Want et al. (2015) a benign-positive appraisal can be found in classroom circumstances that teachers perceive as protecting or boosting their well-being. An encounter is appraised as stressful when a person's well-being is at risk for harm or damage and they experience negative emotions (Cooper & Quick, 2017; Van Der Want et al., 2015).

Stressful appraisals are classified into three categories: harm/loss, threat, and challenge. When a situation is considered to fall within the harm/loss category, damage to the person has already taken place (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Threat appraisals are harms or losses that are anticipated but have not occurred yet. The third kind of stress appraisal is challenge. There are similarities between threat and challenge stress appraisals such as they both require the use of coping efforts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The central difference between threat and challenge appraisals is that challenge appraisals focus on the potential for gain or growth whereas threat appraisals focus centers on the potential for harm (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). People who regard situations as a challenge rather than a threat are more likely to have greater health and higher quality functioning than those who are quickly alarmed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The transactional approach is characterized by the interplay between a person and their environment (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Stress is not produced by a person or the environment alone but rather by a complex interaction between the environment and an individual (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Individual factors also influence a person's perceptions of events. Variability between people's experiences and beliefs can influence their interpretations of encounters

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Even under comparable conditions, there are individual and group differences in the reactions due to their differing prior experiences and beliefs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, people and groups vary in their sensitivity and vulnerability to particular events, and how they interpret and respond to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Viewed through the TTSC lens, this study seeks to explore the “human variation under comparable external conditions” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 23). The human variation in this study is the public general elementary teachers’ experiences, and the comparable external condition is the phenomenon of experiencing explosive student outbursts.

The Lazarus and Folkman (1984) TTSC model has shown to be a valuable framework for nearly four decades, but it is not without limitations (Folkman, 2011). The main kinds of stress assessment in the TTSC were geared to the past, present, and future (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), yet Folkman (2011) asserted that most measures of coping strategies tend to be past- or present-directed and neglect future-directed coping strategies. Another weakness of the TTSC was the limited mention of religious and spiritual beliefs as a coping mechanism (Folkman, 2011). A common criticism of TTSC, according to Cooper and Quick (2017), is that it merely offers a cursory explanation of coping and fails to fully distinguish between the conceptual intricacies of coping responses.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. The qualitative semi-structured interviews addressed teachers' experiences with explosive student outbursts including adverse effects, coping mechanisms, intervention strategies, and training. The findings exposed teachers' experiences which could influence

educational intervention practices and efforts to support teachers. Educators, administrators, and the school board could use the study's findings to reflect on and improve school safety practices.

### **Historical Perspective**

Teachers' experiences were not directly explored in earlier studies of student's explosive behaviors (Ashburner et al., 2010; Budman et al., 2000; Sandler, 2001). A study conducted by Ashburner et al. (2010) described explosive student behaviors in relation to children's autism spectrum disorder diagnosis. Similarly, Budman et al. (2000) and Sandler (2001) described explosive outbursts in children diagnosed with Tourette's disorder. The authors (Ashburner et al., 2010; Budman et al., 2000; Sandler, 2001) described explosive behaviors that included physical and verbal outbursts with sudden onset and were drastically out of proportion to the precipitating stimuli. However, effects on teachers were not specifically explored.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023) contains current and historical data about American education, students, staff, and school facilities. As the primary statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Education, the NCES is congressionally mandated to gather, examine, and report data on the condition of American education (NCES, 2023). In a NCES study, Bailey et al. (2020) reported that teacher turnover adversely affects student achievement. However, student behavior effecting turnover rates was not discussed.

Annual reports on Indicators of School Crime and Safety (ISCS) (Irwin et al., 2022; Kaufman et al., 1998; Musu et al., 2019) have been published by NCES since 1998 with the goal of delivering timely and accurate data to policymakers so they can make progress toward providing safe learning environments. The first report cited that "without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach, and students cannot learn" (Kaufman et al., 1998, p. 5). Teacher Victimization at School--Teacher Reports (Kaufman et al., 1998) and Teacher Reports

of Victimization and School Order (Irwin et al., 2022) are the sections of the Indicators of School Crime and Safety report that is most closely linked to this study. In the 1993-94 school year, 4% of all elementary and secondary school teachers were attacked by a student (Kaufman et al., 1998). In the 2015-16 school year, 9% of public elementary school teachers reported being physically attacked by students (Irwin et al., 2022). These ISCS reports do not specifically differentiate effects on teachers resulting from explosive student behaviors, but the national statistics give a general sense of the prevalence of physical harm, threats to teachers, and change over time (Irwin et al., 2022; Kaufman et al., 1998; Musu et al., 2019).

### **Explosive Behavior Characteristics and Terminology**

Researchers, clinicians, and educators use various terms to refer to explosive behaviors. The definitions vary yet the characteristics have commonalities, including sudden onset and prolonged reactions or behavioral responses beyond the degree to which the precipitating event would typically warrant (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022). There is a discrepancy about whether aggression is part of explosive outbursts or another diagnostic category such as emotional impulsivity, disruptive behavior disorders or attention deficit disorder (Connor & Doerfler, 2021; McMahon et al., 2019). Differing terminology and definitions lead to challenges in consistently identifying and studying the phenomenon and difficulty matching appropriate treatments or intervention strategies (Carlson et al., 2022; Connor & Doerfler, 2021).

A variety of terminology and definitions are used to describe the same general phenomenon of explosive behaviors. The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) included diagnostic criteria for *intermittent explosive disorder* which is associated with impulsive anger outbursts or aggression that are out of proportion with the triggering incident.

*Explosive Outbursts* (EO) often result from student frustration or distress, and students "escalate to screaming, throwing furniture, verbally assailing others, and even physically assaulting staff and students or destroying property" (Bostic et al., 2021, p. 492). *Temper Outbursts* (TO) involve experiences of sudden surges of negative emotions, such as anger, that lead to aggressive behaviors (Bostic et al., 2021). An *emotional and behavioral health (EBH) crisis* is characterized by a show of intense emotion and behaviors that cannot be quickly subdued, changed, or resolved, as well as the presence of behaviors that are unsettling and potentially harmful (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). *Emotional dysregulation* is characterized by frequent heightened emotions that last far longer relative to the antecedent causation event (Carlson et al., 2022). Other terms to describe explosive outbursts include but are not limited to rage attacks, impulsive aggression, severe anger attacks, temper tantrums, emotional impulsivity, and highly irritable (Connor & Doerfler, 2021).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has evolved through numerous revisions. The American Psychiatric Association's DSM provides definitions and classifications of mental disorders for physicians, counselors, researchers, and legal experts (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Like prior editions, the recently published *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision* (DSM-5-TR) is an updated comprehensive volume intended to improve diagnoses, treatment, and research (American Psychiatric Association, 2023).

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) 2019-2020 presidential task force was established to address childhood and adolescent emotional dysregulation which included explosive behaviors (Carlson et al., 2022). The AACAP team was tasked with providing clinical identification practices, characteristics, and treatment options for

people with “impairing emotional outbursts” (Carlson et al., 2022, p. 2). *Impairing emotional outbursts* (IEO) were defined by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) as "developmentally inappropriate displays of anger or distress manifested verbally and/or behaviorally with physical aggression toward people, property, or self that are grossly out of proportion in frequency, intensity, and/or duration to the situation or provocation and lead to significant functional impairment" (Carlson et al., 2022, p. 2). Use of the term *impairing emotional outbursts*, and its definition developed by the AACAP team, was approved by the American Psychiatric Association DSM-5 task force as a new diagnostic code (Carlson et al., 2023).

Whether aggression and its varying sub-types are used in definitions as part of explosive outbursts has been debated in the literature. According to Chuang et al. (2020), *instrumental aggression* is used to communicate feelings or thoughts. Alternately, *maladaptive aggression* is defined as "impulsive, intense, explosive, sudden, and disproportionate to the environmental context (and) may be prolonged and not terminate in a reasonable time frame" (Connor & Doerfler, 2021, p. 302). An angry, violent, or defensive reaction to environmental cues that cause annoyance, provocation, and/or a sense of threat is known as *reactive aggression* (RA) (Connor & Doerfler, 2021). Connor and Doerfler (2021) explained that children's explosive outbursts typically include overt aggressive behaviors and have similar characteristics to RA. However, in McMahon et al.'s (2019) study about violence against teachers, physical aggression was used as a stand-alone characteristic instead of criteria or a subset of another phenomenon like oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, or intermittent explosive disorder as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2013).

According to Connor and Doerfler (2021) and Bostic et al. (2021), children demonstrating explosive outbursts show aggressive characteristics. Connor and Doerfler (2021) explained that the type of aggression shown during EOs was reactive, which follows the premise of other studies that EOs are not premeditated (Bostic et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2020). It is difficult to determine the frequency of explosive behaviors without a consensus on what comprises them (Spring & Carlson, 2021). Furthermore, explosive behaviors need to be consistently defined to create reliable, measurable, and validated methods of intervention (Carlson et al., 2022).

### **Adverse Effects on Teachers**

Teachers can suffer adverse effects from experiencing explosive student outbursts. Adverse effects are conditions causing detrimental impacts to the person that can negatively impact physical, physiological, and emotional health (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017). Educators may experience stress and physiological and psychological adverse effects (Anderman et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). After experiencing job-related violence, teachers reported physical and emotional effects (McMahon et al., 2019). They can feel frustrated, unsafe, dissatisfied with their profession, and develop professional disengagement (McMahon et al., 2019). Furthermore, elementary school teachers cited a lack of time to manage the heavy burden of students' behaviors which in turn impaired their relationships with students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Wink et al., 2021). According to data from the nationwide Schools and Staffing Survey, which included 104,840 American educators, teachers suffer physical and emotional effects and impaired work performance that can lead to attrition (Curran et al., 2019).

In a study of 3,403 kindergarten through 12th grade teachers, conducted by Anderman et al., (2018), teachers reported several physiological or physical effects after handling students'

violent, aggressive, or explosive outbursts. Some teachers felt physically ill (Anderman et al., 2018), had problems sleeping, and experienced neck and back pain (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Chronic stress at work caused teachers to develop unstable blood pressure, high cholesterol, and muscle tension (Kebbi, 2018). Curran et al., (2019) found that educators experienced increased physical issues such as headaches; in addition, educators reported physical injuries like bruising (Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Fatigue and lack of energy were reported as effects of managing student behavior (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019). Physical and emotional exhaustion negatively impacted teachers' personal and social lives because they sacrificed time with family and friends to rest and recover from stress, student misbehavior, and discipline problems (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Educators reported a range of psychological or emotional effects resulting from managing student behaviors. After experiencing workplace violence, teachers reported negative emotional responses such as anger, crying, feeling upset or scared, and depression (Anderman et al., 2018). Teachers also described job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and stress (Carroll et al., 2021) in relation to managing students' behaviors. Managing student behavior is a complex issue and the cumulative effect of managing problematic student behavior can decrease a teacher's sense of efficacy (Carroll et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015) and lead to increased worrying, overthinking, unhelpful thought patterns, and creating unrealistic expectations for themselves (Carroll et al., 2021). Teachers reported experiencing extreme physical and mental exhaustion that required them to take a sick leave to recover (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Self-blame was commonly reported from teachers who experienced workplace violence (Anderman et al., 2018). In connection with self-blame, if educators felt somehow responsible



for the violence, they reported feelings of embarrassment, frustration, and loss of self-esteem (Anderman et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Emotional issues such as increased guilt and sadness were effects of experiencing job-related victimization (Curran et al., 2019).

Contextual factors such as a perceived lack of administrator support or understaffing to manage students' behavioral episodes contributed to educators' emotional responses. Teachers who perceived a lack of administrator support following a violent incident felt blamed, powerless, or unsafe (McMahon et al., 2019). Those who experienced physical aggression at work reported feeling unsafe, frustrated, unsupported, and dissatisfied with their profession (McMahon et al., 2019). Understaffing to handle high-needs student behaviors can negatively impact the classroom and teachers, as inadequate staffing reportedly left teachers feeling frustrated and ill-equipped to handle student needs, leading to poor morale (Carroll et al., 2021).

The adverse effects on teachers from managing challenging student behaviors can profoundly affect the profession, with many teachers leaving their schools and the profession (Curran et al., 2019; Yarrell, 2022), and there are not enough candidates to replace them (Mullen et al., 2021). Educators who experience workplace violence may also experience impact on their classroom efficacy, personal well-being (Anderman et al., 2018), and professional engagement (McMahon et al., 2019). Workplace violence can significantly affect educators' "attitudes towards their jobs, feelings of safety, and intentions to remain in the profession" (Anderman et al., 2018, p. 643). Curran et al. (2019) reported that teacher victimization was linked to an increased likelihood of leaving the profession. Similar to workplace violence findings, teacher victimization was linked to "impaired work performance," such as lower morale and job satisfaction (Curran et al., 2019, p. 21). High teacher turnover rates contribute to lower student achievement and decreased school stability (Curran et al., 2019).

### Teacher Coping Strategies

Educators utilize coping strategies to handle the effects of managing challenging student behaviors. *Coping strategies* are a person's efforts to lessen, manage, master, or tolerate stressful situations (Herman et al., 2018). A study by Anderman et al. (2018) explained that, following a violent or explosive student episode, educators utilized two main types of behavioral responses: communicating with others or using direct interventions with the perpetrator. Teachers reported utilizing communication coping strategies that included discussing the incident with administration, colleagues, school psychologists, social workers, union representatives, family, or spouses (Anderman et al., 2018). Many teachers (80.9%) reported speaking to an administrator about the incident (Anderman et al., 2018). If teachers had a high level of self-blame, they were less likely to communicate with others about the incident. Nearly one fifth of participants did not report the incident at all (Anderman et al., 2018). Experiencing physiological responses and anger were positively correlated with teachers communicating with a colleague about the incident (Anderman et al., 2018). Nearly 90% of teachers reported speaking to a colleague after the incident, and 76.1% reported talking to a family member (Anderman et al., 2018).

Intervention strategies included speaking directly with the perpetrator or contacting the student's parents. According to Anderman et al. (2018), in a sample of 3,404 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers surveyed, 38.9% reported providing feedback to the perpetrator and 42.2% of teachers reprimanded the perpetrator. Participants spoke to a student's parent approximately 60% of the time (Anderman et al., 2018). Some "emotion-laden responses" were reported, such as "calling in sick, pressing charges, or crying" (Anderman et al., 2018, p. 632).

Elementary school teachers reported more than 10% higher physical abuse or assault levels than middle and high school teachers (Anderman et al., 2018; Irwin et al., 2022).

A study of Finnish primary school grade one through six teachers examined educators' emotional coping strategies used after student-related stressful incidents (Go et al., 2021). Results indicated teachers used social support more than any other emotional coping strategy (Go et al., 2021 p. 100). Similar to Anderman et al.'s (2018) results, the participants in Go et al.'s (2021) study, reported high levels of self-blame. Finnish teachers used religion and mindfulness coping strategies when their students made them angry (Go et al., 2021). The authors of the study emphasized the importance of teachers using coping skills to manage workplace stress, and schools creating a supportive atmosphere to reduce the necessary reliance of employees on their families to manage school-related stress (Go et al., 2021). In a survey of 100 general education and 39 special education teachers teaching Grades 1 to Grade 6 in Beirut, teachers reported several effective stress coping strategies including doing relaxing activities, taking a day off, organizing time and setting priorities, and exercising (Kebbi, 2018).

A study of 121 teachers and 1,817 students in kindergarten to fourth grade in an urban midwestern school district in the United States investigated the relationship between teacher stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and coping on student outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). Results showed teachers who reported high stress levels and low coping skills were associated with the lowest student achievement (Herman et al., 2018). However, teachers who reported high stress, high coping skill levels, and high self-efficacy experienced low levels of burnout and students did not experience negative effects in their classes (Herman et al., 2018). Teaching is a high-stress profession, and educators need skills to cope with the intense job demands in order to

maintain their well-being and continue effectively in the profession (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018; Kebbi, 2018).

### **Teacher Resilience**

Teacher resilience has been linked to decreased burnout and an increased likelihood of staying in the profession (Curran et al., 2019). Increased resilience helps teachers cope with workplace challenges (Fernandes et al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, resilience factors directly related to the school and school system such as professional support systems (Carroll et al., 2021) and adequate training (Mullen et al., 2021) were focused on during the literature review. Studies found that personal characteristics and circumstances had less influence on teacher resilience than contextual factors (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Researchers have uncovered factors that strain or hinder teacher resilience (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021) and factors that protect or support teacher resilience (Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020).

#### **Factors that Strain Teacher Resilience**

Teacher resilience can be strained by numerous factors. Contextual factors, such as disruptive students, meeting the needs of disadvantaged students, unsupportive or disorganized administration, challenging relationships with parents, poor financial compensation, and working in a difficult class or school, can negatively impact teacher resilience (Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021). Additional workplace factors that can decrease teacher resilience include workload, stress, and insufficient or ineffective training for classroom management (Carroll et al., 2021; Mullen et al., 2021). Teachers may be aware of protective factors like exercising and fostering supportive relationships, but they may not know how to put those improvements into practice (Carroll et al., 2021). In addition to negatively affecting resilience, the abovementioned

factors have been shown to lead to greater teacher dissatisfaction with their profession and negatively influencing their decision to remain in a position or the profession (Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021).

Teacher's preservice experiences also affect resilience. During student teacher field placements, supervisor observations, behavior management, workload, and lack of support caused stress for practicum students (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Teacher education programs typically focus on academics and neglect instruction on social-emotional skills and coping strategies (Mansfield et al., 2020). According to Niwayama et al. (2020) lack of preservice educator training on handling challenging student behaviors is linked to teacher stress. Teacher education student stress is linked to psychological distress, detrimental effects on academic performance, adoption of unhealthy lifestyles, and attrition (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019).

### **Protective Factors that Increase Resilience**

Various types of support that improved teacher resilience were reported across the literature. Numerous studies indicated that strong professional support systems increased teacher resilience (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020). School administrative and leadership support was one of the most influential factors affecting teacher resilience (Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021). Teachers who had a mentor or the support of a colleague, or access to a professional support network reported increased resiliency (Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; Mullen et al., 2021).

Before teachers were employed full-time, preservice programs were crucial in preparing them with skills for problem-solving and managing stress (Fernandes et al., 2019). A recent

study showed improved confidence and increased resilience in preservice teachers who completed resilience training before their final professional experience (Mansfield et al., 2020). Preservice training programs can also impact teachers' efficacy in classroom management and thus improve resiliency (Curran et al., 2019). Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020) emphasized the need for less experienced or new teachers to have a strong support network and mentorship. Support from a mentor can boost student-teachers' resilience (Naidoo & Wagner, 2020) and self-confidence (Izadinia, 2015; Uleanya, 2021). Preservice teachers benefitted from mentors who modeled exemplary teaching, gave constructive feedback and advice, and developed a supportive learning environment in which the preservice teachers felt comfortable taking risks and learning from their mistakes (Izadinia, 2015; Naidoo & Wagner, 2020).

Adequate training and ongoing professional development to increase teachers' skills in handling challenging situations was linked to increased resiliency (Mullen et al., 2021). Experienced teachers can improve colleagues' resilience by modeling and training them to implement effective classroom management techniques (Fernandes et al., 2019). System-wide training or workshops for resilience, mindfulness, or social-emotional curriculums can help teachers learn critical skills and improve their resiliency (Fernandes et al., 2019; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Providing teachers with positive behavioral strategies, adequate resources, and ongoing professional development will help improve their classroom management skills, student experience, and teacher job satisfaction (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; Mansfield et al., 2020).

School structure and environment can also support improved teacher resilience. Several studies cited that schools that facilitate collaborative environments increase teacher resiliency (Curran et al., 2019; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; Mullen et al., 2021). Staff resilience

can benefit from positive school climate (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; Mullen et al., 2021) and culture (Mullen et al., 2021). Schools that provided social and behavioral support (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020) have greater teacher job satisfaction. Small class sizes (Mullen et al., 2021), supportive structures, and adequate resources (Curran et al., 2019) reportedly improved teacher resiliency. School environments that provided safety and structure (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020) supported teachers' and students' well-being.

School policies can be a protective factor for staff. Features that protect resiliency included clearly defined and consistently enforced school rules (Curran et al., 2019), high expectations and clear goals (Mullen et al., 2021), and schools that promoted shared problem-solving and reflection (Fernandes et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021). School boards that emphasized safety and support staff and students consistently can be protective factors for staff (Fernandes et al., 2019).

### **Behavior Intervention Strategies**

Substantial evidence shows the ineffectiveness and detrimental effects of punitive disciplinary practices (Greene, 2021b; Jean-Pierre & Parris, 2019; Phillips et al., 2022). However, punitive behavior management strategies are still widely used in United States schools (Greene, 2021b). Loss of recess, detention, suspension, and expulsion are examples of punitive disciplinary practices, in contrast to proactive strategies like skill development, behavior-specific praise, relationship improvement, and cooperative problem-solving (Greene, 2021b; LaBrot et al., 2020). Additionally, exclusionary practices (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Bostic et al., 2021) including expulsion, detentions, suspension, time-outs, seclusions, and being sent to the office are still widely used in American public schools (Greene, 2021b). These practices are overemphasized when handling children exhibiting challenging behaviors (Bohnenkamp et al.,

2021; Phillips et al., 2022), as opposed to utilizing more effective strategies like identifying precipitating events, addressing students' skill deficits, and working on proactive problem-solving (Carlson et al., 2022; Greene, 2021b). In the United States, nearly 40% of states still allow corporal punishment such as paddling (Greene, 2021b). Punitive disciplinary practices typically have the opposite effect from the desired result and rarely extinguish or diminish unwanted behaviors (Greene, 2021b).

Numerous sources highlighted the effectiveness of implementing positive school-wide or universal structures to address student behavioral expectations (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Hyson et al., 2020; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Simonsen & Myers, 2015). One study explored the effectiveness of Emotional and Behavioral Health Crisis Response and Prevention (EBH-CRP) intervention which included a universal component (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Some effective universal applications included mindfulness training, school-wide social-emotional learning curriculum, and structured environments (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020).

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) has a broad research base demonstrating its effectiveness with improving students' academic and behavioral abilities (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Consisting of three tiers of evaluations and interventions that are increasingly intensive at each level, MTSS is designed to assist school personnel in meeting the academic and behavioral-emotional needs of all students (Hyson et al., 2020). In every school setting, all children receive tier 1 or universal supports (Simonsen & Myers, 2015). At tier 2, at-risk students receive increased support in specialized groups, and students who demonstrate chronic or high-risk behaviors receive tier 3 intensive individual supports (Simonsen & Myers, 2015). The core principles of MTSS center on providing high-quality



instruction and interventions that are tailored to each student's needs and staff routinely monitor progress to make instructional decisions or change goals (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Behavior-specific praise (BSP) was found to positively affect student behavior (Niwayama et al., 2020). The term "BSP" refers to a positive verbal statement that is dependent upon a desired behavior and identifies that desired conduct, e.g. thank-you for using voice level zero in the hall (Niwayama et al., 2020). Shown to be more effective than general praise, BSP allows students to understand the specific actions they are being praised for (LaBrot et al., 2020). When used with adequate frequency, BSP promotes increasing the desired skills and increases students' awareness of behavior expectations in the school environment (Niwayama et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2020). In a study on specific praise statements, Reynolds et al. (2020) concluded that high praise rates for particular student behaviors can improve the classroom climate, help teachers better manage their classes, and positively affect students' conduct.

Another individual intervention was conducting a functional behavior analysis (FBA) (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020; McMahon et al., 2019). Also known as the antecedent-behavior-consequence (A-B-C) model, an FBA is a tool administered by trained individuals which helps analyze behaviors, triggers, and the context of the behavioral response (McMahon et al., 2019). Steps in an FBA include identifying the target behavior to change, collecting data to identify potential triggers, identifying the function of the behavior or what the student is attempting to attain or avoid, assessing the frequency of the behavior, and brainstorming a hypothesis about what will make the behavior more or less likely to occur (Bostic et al., 2021). The information gathered and analyzed in the FBA is used to match relevant interventions to a student's specific needs (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Based on precise information provided by a FBA, school staff can teach students cognitive behavioral strategies, problem-

solving, and conflict-resolution skills which can improve students' abilities to handle triggering situations effectively (Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022).

Other positive intervention strategies focused on improving staff classroom management skills. Several studies called for improving teacher skills through professional development (PD) (Carroll et al., 2021; Chuang et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2020; Niwayama et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2022). Improving teachers' classroom management skills increased job satisfaction and classroom climate (Chuang et al., 2020). Classroom climate was improved through setting and upholding clear expectations and fostering high rates of positive interactions, which minimized off-task and disruptive behaviors (Chuang et al., 2020). Another study emphasized the need to increase teacher preparedness through training such as life space crisis intervention and nonviolent crisis intervention training which are comprehensive trainings that aim to improve staff proficiency in preventing unsafe or unacceptable behaviors and handling students who exhibit them (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Indicating its positive impact on the issue, many studies addressed the importance of teaching staff to respond to escalating behaviors effectively (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Carroll et al., 2021; Chuang et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2020; Niwayama et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2022).

Greene (2021b) called for school personnel to focus on solving problems that are causing explosive student behaviors. Challenging student episodes can be predicted when student's skills such as difficulty with transitions or struggles with entering large groups are identified as lagging (Greene & Haynes, 2021). When students' explosive behaviors are viewed through the lagging skills lens, the challenging behaviors are regarded as a way for students to communicate they are having difficulty meeting certain expectations (Greene & Haynes, 2021). Greene (2021b) outlined three collaborative problem-solving steps for teachers and parents to use with the goal

of reducing the frequency, intensity, and duration of explosive episodes (Greene & Haynes, 2021). First, adults must demonstrate empathy towards the student and gather information about what is making it hard for them to meet an expectation (Greene, 2021b). Next, the adult shares his or her concern about the unsolved problem (Greene, 2021b). Lastly, in the invitation step, the student and adult brainstorm realistic and mutually satisfactory solutions together (Greene, 2021b). A final goal of the intervention is to teach students the skills that are lagging (Greene & Haynes, 2021).

### **Summary**

This literature review began with exploring the numerous terms researchers, physicians, and teachers used to refer to the phenomenon of explosive outbursts. Regardless of the term used, the definitions had similar characteristics, including that the behaviors were abrupt verbal or physical anger outbursts dramatically out of proportion to the precipitating factors (Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2020; Spring & Carlson, 2021). Inconsistent terminology makes studying the phenomenon and identifying appropriate intervention strategies difficult (Spring & Carlson, 2021).

The review then explored the physical and emotional adverse effects teachers experience due to explosive student outbursts. Most studies focused on middle- and high-school-aged students and teachers, and the literature lacked an exploration of elementary teachers' experiences. Adverse effects such as physical injuries, exhaustion, and depression negatively impact the educational profession because many teachers are leaving their schools and the profession (Curran et al., 2019), and there are not enough candidates to replace them (Mullen et al., 2021).

The literature review also highlighted teachers coping strategies, resilience straining and protective factors, and behavior intervention strategies. Based on this review, three main factors improve resilience: having a solid support system, working in a district that provides adequate and ongoing professional development, and being in a school that has a positive, collaborative environment. Despite substantial research regarding effective behavior intervention strategies, teachers often lack effective classroom management training (Carroll et al., 2021; Niwayama et al., 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. The study results can shed light on teachers' experiences with current students and district practices. The findings add to the literature addressing educational intervention practices and efforts to support teachers.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. The following research questions were used to explore public elementary teachers' experiences with explosive student behaviors:

**Research Question 1:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school?

**Research Question 2:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts?

Qualitative inquiry focuses on exploring and understanding a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers seek to understand how others interpret their experiences in the world and the meaning they have constructed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A primary characteristic of qualitative research is examining an issue and gaining a thorough knowledge of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Methodologically, qualitative research allows for flexibility and building upon knowledge as the study progresses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative studies typically focus on small sample sizes with the researcher as the primary data collection instrument, and interviews utilized for data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The number of participants for qualitative studies depend on the design being used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological studies typically involve 10 or fewer participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Phenomenology is a type of qualitative study that focuses on people's lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In phenomenological studies, interviews are one of the primary methods of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The analytical focus of phenomenological research is examining participants' shared experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that phenomenological research is useful in studying human experiences that are sensitive, emotional, and frequently intense. Qualitative phenomenologists collect data from participants who have experienced a central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After data collection, the researcher analyzes participants' responses and develops an essence or common meaning from their experiences of the shared phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Weaver-Hightower (2014), three components comprise a conceptual framework: personal interest, topical research, and a theoretical framework. My initial interest in the phenomenon of students' explosive behaviors affecting teachers stemmed from my experiences with students demonstrating explosive behaviors in public general education elementary classrooms and schools. I noted staff struggling with the challenges of students' explosive behaviors in general education classrooms. The students demonstrating explosive outbursts often did not have a diagnosis that would allow them to receive additional support, so their behaviors were left for the classroom teachers to manage.

Topical research on subjects such as disruptive student behaviors, teacher resilience, and students' explosive outbursts described adverse effects on teachers due to student behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2019). A study on students' disruptive behavior uncovered adverse impacts on teachers, such as emotional exhaustion (Caldarella et al., 2020). Studies on teacher resilience

examined the adverse effects on teachers, and several noted students' behaviors caused increases in stress, decreased work performance, and physical and emotional effects (Curran et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2019).

The theoretical framework was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping. According to the transactional theory of stress and coping, people constantly evaluate or appraise the stimuli in their surroundings (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described two primary forms of appraisal: *primary appraisal* and *secondary appraisal*. In primary appraisal, a person assigns meaning to an individual or environmental interaction, and its importance to a person's wellbeing is assessed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Secondary appraisal identifies what can be done to control the stressor and the resulting distress (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Coping strategies are used when a scenario is judged to be stressful during the primary appraisal and necessitates efforts to manage or resolve the events during the secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Romas & Sharma, 2022).

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of public general education elementary kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers who encountered students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Using a phenomenological approach allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews to examine the essence of the shared experiences of elementary teachers. During the semi-structured interviews, selected participants were asked a core set of questions, yet the order and sub-questions could be customized during the interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

### **Site Information and Demographics**

The study was conducted in a public school district in central Maine. The site has three preschools and five elementary schools, which include pre-kindergartens, one middle school, and

one high school. Of the 60 kindergarten through Grade 5 elementary classroom teachers, 97% are female. All classroom teachers are licensed employees, and 16% are in their first or second year of teaching.

Approximately three-quarters of the district's more than 2,000 students qualify for free and reduced lunch (Maine Department of Education, 2022). According to the 2022-2023 USDA Food and Nutrition Service (2022) child nutrition guidelines, if a student's household income is less than 130% (free) or 185% (reduced) of the federal poverty level, they are eligible for free or reduced lunches. There are approximately 1,000 kindergarten through fifth-grade students in this district. According to the United States Census Bureau, 96% of the population of the largest town in the district is White, 92% graduated from high school, and 24% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The high school has an 82% graduation rate. Minority enrollment in the district is 7%, which is lower than the 12% average for the state. Elementary students' standardized test scores in mathematics and reading are below state averages. The median household income is \$48,000, below the national average of \$69,000.

The district increased specialized services such as adding a behavior support learning teacher and educational technicians for students experiencing dysregulation. However, the expanded services have been unable to keep pace with the increasing need for student support. Students who do not qualify for specialized services typically spend most of their school day with general education classroom teachers. I selected this site because I noted that the phenomenon of general education teachers experiencing students' explosive outbursts is prevalent in schools I have worked in with similar demographics of population size and free and reduced lunch rates which indicate community poverty levels.



The site's superintendent approved this study to be conducted at the proposed elementary schools. All district kindergarten through Grade 5 elementary classroom teachers were invited to participate in the study via their publicly available district email addresses which are published on the district website. Demographic information about the site was gathered from public documents.

### **Participants and Sampling Method**

Qualitative purposeful sampling means researchers determine essential selection criteria for choosing participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling is also called criterion-based selection and involves deciding which attributes are essential to studies and finding sites and participants that match the criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rich, detailed accounts of particular sites or populations can be gathered using a purposeful sampling method (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described that researchers using purposeful sampling deliberately choose individuals and sites to explore a central phenomenon.

I used purposeful sampling in this study and potential participants self-identified as meeting the following criteria:

1. Full-time, employed public school teacher in the site district age 18 years or older.
2. Teaching in general education elementary grade is defined as kindergarten through Grade 5.
3. Have experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

All district elementary teachers, kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers, were invited to participate. Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended limiting phenomenological interviews to less than 10 participants. Additionally, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018) phenomenological studies typically involve a range of 3 to 10 participants. Based on these

parameters, I limited the sample size of my study to eight participants in order to collect extensive details about the participants. Every effort was made to recruit participants representing the study population (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). To achieve this, I emailed invitations to all district kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers. People who self-identified as meeting the qualifications criteria were accepted into the study in the order the individuals responded. Online interviews were scheduled at a mutually convenient time. Recruitment remained open for 6 weeks. Additional recruitment emails were sent every 2 weeks until the sample size was obtained.

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), qualitative data collection has five non-linear steps, these are: a) identifying participants and sites, b) getting permission to access the participants and sites, c) determining what types of information will best answer the research questions, d) designing procedures for gathering and recording data, and e) collecting the data for the study. After receiving the University of New England Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix A) and site approval, I invited all site kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers to participate through their publicly available district email addresses using my password protected UNE email address. The invitation email included a recruitment poster (see Appendix B), recruitment email (see Appendix C) and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D) which outlined the study's purpose, selection criteria, what was involved in the project, and confidentiality information. After self-identifying they met the selection criteria, interested participants contacted me via my UNE email to express interest in volunteering for my study. In response, within 24 hours I sent them a list of potential interview times. An interview time was then scheduled within two weeks from the day they expressed interest. If interested teachers had any questions, they contacted me via my UNE email address. Recruitment remained open for 6

weeks and the sample size of eight participants had been interviewed by the end of the sixth week.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Participants took part in an approximately 45–60 minute semi-structured online individual interview via Zoom. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix E) with semi-structured interview questions to guide the interviews. The research questions, as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study, were used to design the interview questions. At the beginning of the interview, I reviewed IRB guidelines including the participant information sheet and obtained each participant's verbal consent. Participants were asked a core set of questions, yet the order and sub-questions were customized during the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I took handwritten notes during the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded using Zoom video communications (2023). If participants choose to skip or not answer a question, I skipped that question and asked the next one.

Verbatim transcripts allow researchers to conduct accurate and thorough data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Furthermore, verbatim transcripts maintain the integrity of participants' responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, the interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using Zoom audio transcription (Zoom video communications, 2023) and my handwritten interview notes. All names or other identifying factors in the transcripts were de-identified. Transcripts were reviewed and cross-checked against my interview notes to improve reliability and accuracy.

A paper master list of participant names, email addresses, and assigned pseudonyms was used. The master list was stored in a locked fire safe in my personal home office accessible only by me. After all interview transcripts were verified for accuracy the master list was destroyed.

Based on Bloomberg and Volpe's (2019) recommendation of promptly transcribing interviews, I completed the initial transcriptions within a week of the interview. Participants were given an opportunity to verify the interview transcription for accuracy. Using participant member checks, which comprises sending the transcribed interviews to participants for review, ensured that my biases did not affect how participants' perspectives were depicted and to determine the accuracy of the transcription (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Transcriptions were emailed to participants, and they were given 5 calendar days to review the document and make recommendations for revision. If I did not hear from participants within 5 calendar days, the transcript was accepted as accurate.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of phenomenological research data operates from the central premise that the participants share elements of experience with others who encountered the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Phenomenologists examine data, develop themes, and create an analytical description of the phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) outlined six steps in the qualitative data analysis process.

1. Preparing and organizing data for analysis
2. Initial reading through the data and data coding
3. Using codes to develop a general picture descriptions and themes
4. Representing the findings
5. Interpreting the meaning of the results
6. Validating the accuracy of the findings

After completing the verification of the transcription for accuracy, I began the data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) extol the benefits of completing data analysis throughout

the data collection process instead of waiting until all data have been collected to begin analysis. This method allowed me to use initial interviews to inform subsequent interviews.

During initial data analysis, in-vivo or verbatim coding was used to analyze the raw data and identify codes based on words and phrases used by the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The deidentified transcripts were imported into MAXQDA 2022 (Gerson, 2023) software. Data code labels were assigned to words, phrases, or sentences in participants' responses. Data codes were analyzed during coding to identify patterns, determine common themes, and look for common or differing patterns (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Interviews and transcriptions were reviewed numerous times to explore the unique perspective of each participant's lived experience with the phenomenon and understand the general meaning of the data (Hycner, 1985).

All documents and notes related to participants were identified with their pseudonyms. Original participant interview audio recordings and other digital documents were stored on my password-protected UNE Google Drive. Handwritten notes and other physical documents were stored in a locked fire safe in my home office accessible only to me. After the data analysis, the original interview recordings were deleted. Following the publication of my dissertation, interview transcript documents will be transferred to a thumb drive stored in my personal fire safe and deleted after three years.

### **Limitations, Delimitations and Ethical Issues**

Limitations, delimitations, and ethical issues are essential for researchers to examine and account for to increase the study's integrity. Before the semi-structured interviews, I examined my own experiences and the resultant adverse effects of encountering the phenomenon of elementary students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Examining my experiences helped me become cognizant of my biases, opinions, and presumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **Limitations**

Study limitations are external characteristics that researchers may have limited control over yet could affect the study's results and the transferability of the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations are external factors that limit the study's scope or potential results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The transferability, trustworthiness, confirmability, and dependability of a study's findings are constrained by qualitative limitations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

This qualitative phenomenological study had several limitations. In qualitative studies, researcher bias is a limitation when conducting interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Another limitation was that some participants may have interacted with me previously, and those instances may have influenced their responses during the interview. Knowing me beforehand may have caused participants to act overly collaborative and provide answers they thought I was searching for to be helpful. On the other hand, participants may have been less candid with me than they would be with a researcher they do not know. My prior experiences with students demonstrating explosive outbursts could have influenced my actions during the interview and transcript analysis.

All studies have inherent limitations, regardless of how well they are planned and carried out (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). It is critical to acknowledge my study's limitations so that readers will understand them, see that I am cognizant of them, and know how I planned to address them (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). To deal with the issue of participant reactivity, I considered how and in what ways I might influence participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Careful planning of the semi-structured core questions and possible additional questions helped ameliorate my bias during the interview process. Member checking is a process in which

researchers check the accuracy of their account with participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I conducted member checking of the verbatim transcriptions to help increase the trustworthiness and dependability that I accurately captured participants' intended meanings during the interviews (Patten & Newhart, 2018). To lessen the limitation of possible bias during data analysis, I de-identified all participant names before beginning the transcription coding analysis to avoid associating any information with a specific person (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Upon completion of the study, the limitations can be used to make suggestions for future research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the parameters researchers purposefully establish to narrow a study's scope (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The researcher's parameters frequently make a study more feasible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). One of the significant delimitations of this study was that the scope was restricted to a single school district in Maine. Generalizability was not an intended goal of the study; however, the limited ability to generalize the study results to other school districts could be a criticism of the research. Another delimitation was the small number of elementary teacher participants. A purposeful sampling of eight participants allowed for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. However, due to the limited sample size and grade levels taught, the study's results cannot be presumed to represent teachers from other grade levels or elementary teachers from other locales. Readers will be able to evaluate the knowledge generated by this study for its applicability to similar contexts by reading the thick, rich descriptions and detailed information about the context and background of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

## **Ethical Issues**

A National Commission was established under the National Research Act of 1974 to protect human subjects in research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The Commission established parameters to protect the ethical rights of human subjects being studied during research, and the Belmont Report outlined the main ethical principles developed by the Commission (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The three basic ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

I followed the Belmont Report to inform my decisions to protect the ethical rights of my participants and students who were identified during the interviews. To address the respect for persons tenet, study participants voluntarily participated, could discontinue the interview at any time, and abstain from answering questions. Beneficence involves treating participants in an ethical manner, not harming, maximizing benefits, and minimizing potential harms (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I addressed beneficence by carefully monitoring participants during the interview and tailoring questions to increase their comfort with the interview process. At the beginning of the interview when I reviewed the participant information sheet (see Appendix D), potential risks were described, such as emotional responses to discussing events; as well as benefits to participants, such as contribution to knowledge about the phenomenon. If participants decided to continue the study, verbal consent was obtained. The process of the interview was designed to support participants; for example, at the beginning of the interview questioning, demographic



questions helped establish trust between the participant and myself. The mid-interview questions were the most potentially emotionally charged questions, followed at the end by purposeful questioning about support systems to enact participants' recognition of their positive coping strategies available.

Justice involves a sense of fairness about what is deserved and what constitutes equal treatment (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). During recruitment, potential participants were informed of the study parameters and participant commitment, such as 45–60-minute interviews and member checking of the interview transcription. I made every effort to treat participants with fairness during the interview protecting the confidentiality of the interview by having it in a room without others in attendance and giving participants the option to turn their cameras on or off depending on what makes them the most comfortable. My plans for maintaining the confidentiality of the data and de-identification procedures of establishing pseudonyms to take the place of participant names and deidentifying information, including students' names in the interview transcript, was discussed prior to the participant's verbal consent.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be evaluated by its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), the concept of trustworthiness is utilized to emphasize how crucial it is to do rigorous, credible qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study depends on the ethical way the researcher designs, conducts, and disseminates study information. Following policies and codes of ethics, such as outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of

Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), is one way for researchers to address potential biases in their research.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the degree to which the participants' perceptions concur with how the researcher has depicted them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that credibility is a researcher's capacity to consider all the complexities that arise in a study and to deal with patterns that defy simple explanations. To establish credibility, qualitative researchers employ strategies such as "member checking, presenting thick description, discussing negative cases, having prolonged engagement in the field, using peer debriefers, and/or having an external auditor" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 168).

Credibility concerns the accuracy with which I drew conclusions and reported findings based on collected data. In establishing credibility, I took notes during the interviews to cross reference when I verbatim transcribed the recorded interview. If inaudible words were on the interview recording, handwritten notes helped me accurately recall participant responses. Member checking to verify the accuracy of my transcription increased the accuracy and credibility of my study by ensuring my interpretation matched what the participant intended by their responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

### **Transferability**

The concept of transferability examines how well research findings can be applied to different contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research aims not to uncover universal truths but to provide descriptive, context-relevant findings that can be applied to broader contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative researchers do not expect their results to generalize to other contexts, yet it is possible that the lessons discovered in one context could be helpful in

others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Transferability does not depend on a representative sample; it refers to how well the study has enabled readers to determine whether similar processes will operate in their settings by thoroughly comprehending how the processes function at the research location (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In order to enable comparisons to be made with different settings based on as much information as feasible, methods for establishing transferability involve providing extensive descriptions of the data themselves as well as the context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), transferability is assessed by outlining the purposeful sampling strategy, the depth and richness of the researcher's descriptions, and detailed information about the context, background, data, and findings. These features allow readers to make comparisons across similar contexts.

Purposeful sampling of one central Maine public school district's kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers who have experienced explosive student outbursts was utilized in this study. Participant characteristics were specifically outlined so research audiences can determine if the lessons learned from the data can be applied to similar contexts. As recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), I provided detailed information about the context, background, data, and findings, which can allow readers to draw conclusions about the applicability of the results to other contexts.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is a term used to describe the continuity and reliability of data over time which means the study's findings are consistent and repeatable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Researchers' findings must be based on the collected data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers must ensure that their conclusions, interpretations, and discoveries are consistent with the raw data they collected and that, if other

researchers were to examine the data, they would reach the same conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that the key to achieving dependability is having a solid research design that includes well-reasoned arguments for data collection and analysis, appropriate methods to answer research questions, and the triangulation and sequencing of methods. Conducting the study in an ethical manner is essential to ensuring validity in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Confirmability**

The goal of confirmability is establishing that the researcher's conclusions and interpretations can be proven to have been drawn directly from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative researchers aim to report verifiable facts, achieving relative neutrality and having reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). One objective of confirmability is to recognize, investigate, and, to the greatest extent possible, mitigate researcher biases through structured reflexivity processes as they relate to data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), acknowledging the ways researcher biases and prejudices impact data interpretation can be addressed through reflexivity, dialogic engagement, and reflective discourse.

### **Summary**

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. The study was conducted in a public central Maine school district with approximately 60 full-time elementary classroom teachers, five elementary schools, and about

1,000 kindergarten through Grade 5 students. Approximately three-quarters of the district's more than 2,000 students qualify for free and reduced lunch which indicates a significant level of local poverty (Maine Department of Education, 2022).

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain rich, detailed accounts of participants and sites to explore the central phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Semi-structured interviews of eight participants were conducted and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcription was subjected to member checking to increase the study's accuracy, trustworthiness, and credibility. In-vivo or verbatim coding was used during the initial data analysis of the raw interview transcriptions. Interview recordings and transcriptions were reviewed several times to explore the participants' unique experiences with the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985). Codes were analyzed to discover the common themes and develop an understanding of the general meaning of the data (Hycner, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The identities of participants, places, and people discussed in the interview were protected through deidentifying the data. The study design, implementation, data analysis, and information dissemination followed the ethical tenants of the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) and the University of New England's Institutional Review Board. Limitations and delimitations of the study, including a small number of participants, length of study, and focus on one central Maine school district, limit the transferability of the study's findings. I provided detailed information about the context, background, design, data collection, and analysis procedures, allowing readers to draw conclusions about the applicability of the results to other contexts.

The beginning of Chapter 4 gives a detailed description of participant recruitment, informed consent, and the data collection process. Chapter 4 also explains the analysis method, including how the data was interpreted, coded, and organized. The results and findings of the study are reported.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Existing research frequently concentrated on overall school outcomes rather than individual experiences (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Few studies have looked at the impact of students' explosive behaviors on teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Individual interview findings from this study adds to the current research and advance the field's understanding of how explosive student outbursts affect public general education elementary teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). Improving working conditions in relation to these explosive student behaviors may significantly impact teacher retention rates and student academic growth (Curran et al., 2019). The study data could assist administrators and policymakers in developing support systems to improve teacher resilience and safety practices. Improved policies and positive school climate changes could attract highly qualified applicants and increase staff satisfaction and longevity.

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). The qualitative semi-structured interviews addressed public elementary teachers' experiences with explosive student outbursts. Recruitment emails were sent to all site district kindergarten through Grade 5 general education classroom teachers via their publicly available district email addresses. The recruitment email addresses were obtained on the district's public website. Recruitment materials emailed to potential participants included a Recruitment Poster (see Appendix B), Recruitment Email (see Appendix C), and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D). Teachers self-identified as meeting the study selection criteria of:

- being a full-time, employed public school teacher in the study site district, age 18 or older,
- teaching in a general education elementary classroom kindergarten through Grade 5 and
- have experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

The study recruitment phase remained open for 6 weeks. Initial recruitment emails were sent after receiving University of New England Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix A). Additional recruitment emails (see Appendix C) including the recruitment poster (see Appendix B) and the participant information sheet (see Appendix D) were sent 2 and 4 weeks after the first recruitment email. Zoom interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. Eight participants were interviewed using an interview protocol (see Appendix E). The following research questions were used to explore public elementary teachers' experiences with explosive student behaviors:

**Research Question 1:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school?

**Research Question 2:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts?

Before the interview, I reviewed the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D), answered participant questions, and obtained informed verbal consent to conduct and record the interview. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes were recorded using Zoom Video Communications (2023). The interviews were verbatim transcribed using the Zoom recording. Assigned pseudonyms protected participant anonymity and other individuals discussed in the interviews. Participants were emailed the interview transcripts to check for



accuracy after deidentification, which involved removing places and personally recognizable information. After member checking, the transcripts were coded.

### **Analysis Method**

Qualitative phenomenological studies seek to understand the shared experience of participants who encountered the phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) steps to analyze qualitative data guided my analysis method. The first three steps in their analysis process are detailed in this section. The remaining steps are discussed in subsequent sections in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

### **Preparing and Organizing Data for Analysis**

After the interview, the first step in preparing and organizing data for analysis was verbatim transcribing the interview using the Zoom recording. I downloaded the Zoom audio auto-transcription and pasted the text into a Word document, which was stored securely on my University of New England password-protected Google Drive. Next, I deleted the original Zoom audio transcription. I changed the participants' names to pseudonyms in the password-protected transcription document.

Then, I listened to the Zoom recording and edited punctuation and content. I listened to the Zoom recording on the second document editing and double-checked my edits from the first listen. Since there was a lot of stopping and starting to revise during the first transcription edit, listening to the interview a second time in its entirety with fewer interruptions helped me ensure the edits I initially made were accurate when listening to the overall flow of the participants' responses. Next, I reread the transcription and deidentified names, places, and identifying characteristics. Additionally, I put clarifying information in brackets, such as when a participant said "she," I would note in brackets [principal]. Before sending the transcription to participants

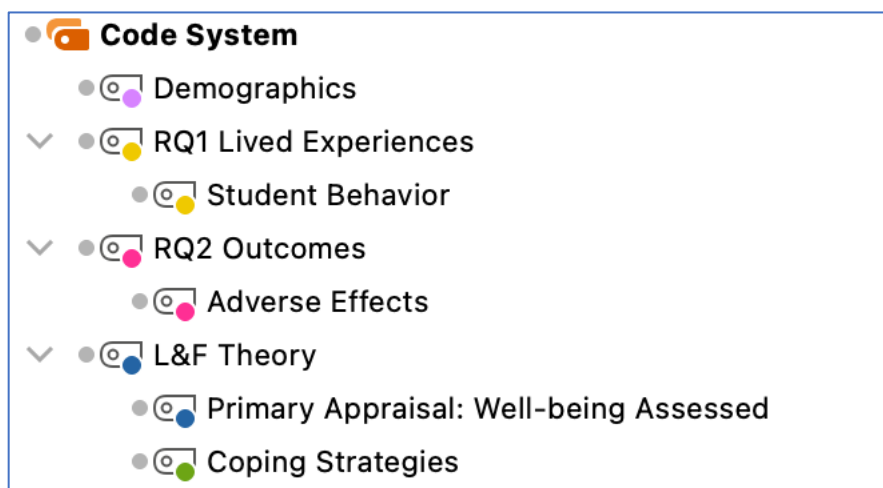
for member checking, I reread the document to check for any final items that needed editing, clarification, or deidentifying. The deidentified interview transcription was emailed to participants. They had five calendar days to review the document and make revision suggestions or add information. Participants emailed me their recommendations or acceptance of the document as accurate. One participant clarified a comment and added another adverse effect and a coping strategy she remembered after the interview. Another participant changed one word in one of her responses. All other participants indicated that the documents were accurate.

### **Initial Data Reading and Coding**

After participants verified the transcription for accuracy, I began the coding process. I uploaded the transcribed interview into MAXQDA 2022 (Gersen, 2023). Prior to coding the first interview, I set a general coding scheme (see Figure 1) based on my interview questions, theoretical framework, and research questions. As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) recommended, I used different colors for each research question. I highlighted portions of participant responses and attached a code to begin to organize the data. Participants' responses were examined for relevance throughout this stage. Any information deemed irrelevant based on the study's conceptual framework or research questions was not coded.

## Figure 1

### *Initial Code System*



*Note:* L&F Theory stands for the theoretical framework guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping.

As I coded interviews, I added to and refined my coding system based on participant responses. Throughout the transcription analysis, I preserved the four main elements of my initial coding system: demographics, theoretical framework labeled L&F Theory, and the research questions labeled lived experiences and outcomes. I changed the order, adjusted colors, and added numerous subcodes. Interview transcripts were reviewed numerous times. As the code system evolved, previously coded transcripts were updated to reflect changes in the coding system.

While preparing for writing Chapter 4 results, I further refined the coding system. For example, explosive student behaviors involved 182 interview mentions. To help organize the data, I looked for similarities and sorted data into additional subcategories. In the explosive

student behaviors category, I sorted data into the following subcategories: involving objects, involving others, vocal and verbal behaviors, and other actions.

### **Using Codes to Develop a General Picture**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), data analysis must be directly linked to the study's research questions and be guided by the conceptual and theoretical framework. I extrapolated the coded participant responses across all the interviews into their various subcodes. Next, I reviewed the responses for commonalities and differences. As suggested by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), I examined the codes and participant responses for overlap or redundancies. Then, I collapsed the codes and participant responses into broader themes. The themes and categories are discussed in the next section.

### **Presentation of Results and Findings**

Qualitative phenomenological studies aim to understand the essence or common meaning of participants encountering a shared phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative phenomenologists collect data from participants who have experienced a central phenomenon, and such experiences can be sensitive, emotional, and frequently intense (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), organizing data by research questions is a useful strategy to effectively communicate findings and preserve consistency over chapters. Codes were grouped into themes based on the research questions and theoretical framework. Each of the themes are described in detail in this section. An overview of the themes and frequency of

participant responses is outlined in Table 1. The background of the eight participants is introduced in this section.

**Table 1**

*Themes and Frequency of Participant Responses*

	Theme	How many times it was mentioned across all interviews
Theme 1	Primary appraisal: Well-being assessed	23
Theme 2	Coping strategies	141
	Student centered coping strategies	83
	Personal coping strategies	58
Theme 3	Lived Experiences	338
	Explosive student behaviors	182
	Teacher reflections and insights	49
Theme 4	Outcomes	242
	Adverse effects on teachers	127
	Outcomes for explosive student	67
	Outcomes for other students	42

### **Introducing the Participants**

The first series of questions in the semi-structured interviews asked each participant to describe their background, including how long, where, and what grades they had taught. Background information also included how long they have been in the site district and their current position. The following descriptions provide background information about the

participants in this study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant.

***Ava***

Teaching is Ava's second career, and she has approximately 20 years of teaching experience. After completing her master's degree in education, Ava moved to Maine and began working in the site district. She taught in various district schools as a literacy interventionist before accepting a classroom teaching role. She has served as an elementary classroom teacher in the same grade for over 10 years.

***Beth***

Beth has more than two decades of teaching experience. She has taught solely in the site district. Earlier in her career, Beth taught middle school and upper elementary grades. Her most recent position, spanning more than a decade, has been teaching an upper elementary grade. Beth prides herself in creating strong relationships with her students. Beth has experience with a variety of administrators.

***Carrie***

Carrie has worked less than five years at the study site. She attended a local university and had numerous practicum experiences in a local district. Following graduation, she got a job at one of the site schools and has served in the same lower-elementary grade level since then. Carrie has experience with one administrator.

***Emma***

Emma has more than 15 years of diverse teaching experience. She has worked for numerous districts, administrators, and in several elementary grades. Geographically, Emma has taught in the most varied districts of all the study participants. She taught in four other Maine

districts before coming to the site district. Emma taught in lower and upper elementary grades and special education in southern, central, coastal, and urban Maine districts. She has worked at the same school in the site district for seven years in lower and upper elementary grades. She is working on her administration master's degree.

***Kim***

Kim is an experienced educator with over a decade of elementary teaching experience. Kim has taught primarily at the lower elementary level, yet she had some middle school experience early in her career. Her middle school teaching experience was in a Maine school outside the site district. All of Kim's lower elementary teaching has been at the same site district school.

***Laura***

Laura has less than a year's teaching experience. She is a new staff member in the site district and is teaching an upper elementary class. Laura had long-term substitute teaching experience in two other Maine schools before she began teaching at the site district. Laura holds a dual bachelor's degree in child development and family relations and elementary education and child development from a Maine university.

***Maria***

Maria has less than five years of teaching experience. After graduating college, she taught students from various grades at a local elementary school outside the site district. In her current position, Maria has taught the same lower elementary grade level at the same school since beginning at the site school.

## *Tessa*

Tessa has more than a decade of elementary teaching experience. Tessa has taught in the site district her entire career, primarily in one school. Most of her teaching experience has been at the lower elementary level; however, she also has upper elementary experience.

### **Theme 1: Primary Appraisal: Well-being Assessed**

The transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC), developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), proposed that humans continuously examine the stimuli in their surroundings. During this appraisal, people determine whether any dangers to their well-being exist (Cooper & Quick, 2017). Six participants described appraising the explosive situation and assessing situations' potential impact to their well-being.

Participants shared some questions they asked themselves during their primary appraisal of explosive student outbursts. Carrie was concerned, "What's going to happen to either her [explosive student], myself, or the other kids in my room?" Ava wondered, "How can I anticipate that maybe they're going to escalate?" and "What is the implication for my students when they're hearing this [explosive outburst] going on?" Ava recalled having "Is this going to escalate?" in the back of her mind when she heard or saw signs of a student's behaviors beginning to deteriorate. Ava contemplated, "Is this going to escalate to where they're [other students] in danger?" Kim questioned, "What should I do?" While Maria stated, "I don't know what to do next."

In addition to the questions, Carrie, Maria, Ava, Kim, and Beth discussed watching for warning signs of a potentially explosive episode. Some early warning signs described were name-calling, negative self-talk, unexpected walking around the room, growling, and desk tapping. Carrie said that with one of her students demonstrating explosive outbursts, there



were “no flags” of concerning behaviors shared by the prior teacher and that explosive outbursts or behavior concerns were not marked in the student’s cumulative file. Similarly, Ava explained that she reviewed students’ files for “indicators of past behavior” concerns, which she used to plan for proactive interventions.

Several participants shared concerns about protecting the other students in their class. Carrie explained about the other students and herself witnessing explosive student outbursts: “Something has to give. Like we can’t keep doing this every day.” Maria described protecting students by evacuating due to an explosive outburst in which a student was throwing furniture. Ava detailed she was a colleague's buddy classroom for safety evacuations. Ava expressed her concern for her class and neighboring coworkers when her colleague had a student who frequently displayed explosive behaviors.

During primary appraisal in Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping, individuals focus on assessing a situation’s level of threat to their well-being. Participants discussed appraisal of threats to their welfare, the explosive student’s safety, and protection of the other students in their classrooms. Primary appraisal was used to inform teachers’ decisions about which coping strategies to utilize.

## **Theme 2: Lived Experiences**

The second set of semi-structured interview questions asked participants to describe their experiences with students demonstrating explosive outbursts. There were plenty of experiences to pick from, Tessa, Emma, and Beth said. In addition to the general descriptions of the events, two sub-themes were noted during data analysis. All participants described explosive student behaviors and reflected or gave insights about their experiences.

Carrie detailed experiences in her first year with a student demonstrating “very explosive outbursts. Very frequently.” She explained that the student’s file had no information indicating behavior concerns from the previous teacher. The student’s behaviors were so significant that an educational technician was temporarily placed with the explosive student until an individual educational plan meeting was held in December. Carrie shared that neither she nor the educational technician knew what to do with the student and how to respond to her outbursts because they were both new to their positions. Carrie described additional explosive students she had in her third and fourth years. In her fourth year, Carrie received a student transfer who demonstrated explosive behaviors in his previous class. Carrie described receiving this student as a “roadblock for my other kids” because she had to spend a lot of time getting “him situated in a good spot” by helping him learn expectations and supporting his behavior plan. She reflected that the time she could support other students was diminished by the need to support her new student. Carrie shared her frustration that it took many months to get additional support for her students demonstrating unsafe, explosive behaviors.

Maria and Emma reflected on their experiences in different schools with explosive students. Maria had explosive students each year she taught and two students in the same class in her first and fourth years. In her previous school outside the site district, Maria reflected that she was told to “just deal with it (explosive student episodes) and that there was nothing anybody could do about it.” However, she shared that she did not know what to do because she was a first-year teacher. Laura echoed Maria’s difficulty with it “being my first year” and that “this has been the first time that I have experienced and had to also handle explosive behaviors in the classroom.” Maria “felt a lot more supported” in her current school, and she felt “much better to be able to get my 16 other students out of the room” when a student was having an explosive

outburst than in her previous school. Conversely, Emma reflected that her previous district administrators were more supportive than her current administration, and her prior districts had better protocols to manage challenging student behaviors than her current school.

Some of the participants shared the frequency of students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Maria detailed that her student got mad “five to seven times a day,” and another student in the same class had explosive episodes about once daily. Ava reported that last year, a student exploded “at least three times a week at the beginning of the year.” Kim shared that one of her student’s verbal outbursts happened every couple of minutes last year and that he eloped outside the classroom “probably 10 different times during the year.” Tessa reflected that one year two students screaming outbursts lasted “pretty much the whole year.”

Kim, Carrie, and Beth detailed their experiences receiving transfer students who demonstrated explosive behaviors. Two students transferred from another classroom in the same school, and the third and fourth students transferred from another school. Carrie reflected that before the student transferred into her class, she had established expectations and routines and that “my class was kind of smooth sailing.” Kim explained that “upon coming to our classroom, it was apparent that she (the transfer student) was in crisis because, from day one, she was eloping” and hurting others. Beth explained that “Vince” transferred into her class from another school in the district. Vince’s previous school provided highly individualized supports not officially documented in his file, so he was not permitted those supports in Beth’s school. Vince’s behavior escalated. Beth also explained that “Anthony” transferred into her class in October and demonstrated “severe behavior issues.” Anthony suffered abuse and neglect at home. Beth recounted that Anthony had an abscess in his tooth, which was rotting, and he was in a lot of pain. She remembered him saying, “It felt like the devil’s pitchfork was stabbing him.”

Anthony did not receive any services despite documentation of multiple diagnoses in his file, such as oppositional defiance disorder, attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder, and post traumatic stress disorder. Beth explained that she was “always trying to extinguish fires that are starting, and oftentimes you’re putting so much attention on that child” with the explosive outbursts that “other (students’) needs are being unmet.”

Throughout the interviews, participants sometimes disclosed whether students had an individual education plan (IEP), or other supports provided through other avenues, such as a 504 plan. Of the 29 specific students described, participants disclosed that 10 students did not have support services when the student started in the classroom with the participant. The IEP, 504 status, or additional supports were not discussed for 11 students mentioned during the interviews. Participants noted that eight students described in the interviews received additional services such as special education or counseling.

### ***Explosive Student Behaviors***

During the interview, participants were asked to talk about times when they experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Some participants generally described explosive student outbursts they had experienced; however, all participants recounted specific experiences with three to seven students. They described the students’ behaviors during an explosive outburst. Participants reported verbal or vocal responses, actions involving objects, behaviors involving other people, and overall explosive student behaviors (see Figure 2). Most participants gave background information, described events that led up to the explosive episodes, and the outcomes.



explosive outbursts threw chairs. Maria also shared examples of students kicking furniture. Beth and Maria discussed students hitting furniture. Beth told about students who held “furniture over their head as if they were going to throw it.”

Interactions with tables were described 13 times in five interviews. Examples of students’ interactions with tables included pushing, flipping, throwing, jumping on and off, kicking, and crawling or hiding under tables. Chairs were also commonly discussed, including examples such as hopping from chair to chair, throwing, and banging chairs.

Participants related details of several specific incidents involving scissors. Laura explained that one of her students ripped scissors apart. Emma recounted that her early elementary student:

became very explosive and started running around the classroom with scissors. And at this time, students brought bag breakfasts into the classroom, so there were juices, and milks, and breakfast items. And he started stabbing the breakfast bags. So, juice and milk were going everywhere. And he was destroying things.

Kim detailed an example of a student using an object to injure others. “Kids were stacking their lap desks, and ‘Zoe’ saw that the kids’ hands were in between it and pushed down on it with her body weight,” pinching her classmates’ hands between the lap desks. Kim explained that another student threw a pencil and hit a classmate in the face during an explosive outburst.

Carrie told about a student climbing on counters, and Ava recounted another student sweeping things off counters. Beth explained that one of her students destroyed classroom property when he was angry, such as breaking classroom clipboards, and that “he’d rip the

bulletin board down.” Beth, Laura, and Emma gave examples of students ripping up papers, tearing things, and destroying school property.

**Involving Others.** Explosive student behaviors directly involving other people were mentioned 42 times by the eight participants. Among the explosive student actions mentioned that involved other students or school staff were hitting, biting, grabbing, pushing, spitting on, punching, poking, stepping on, and kicking. Hitting was the most mentioned of the behaviors involving others, with six participants describing 11 hitting examples. Half of the participants described being hit by one of their students. Tessa explained she went “near the door” to get away from an explosive student after evacuating the rest of her class but that he “came after me and started hitting me.” Similarly, Beth pointed out that during one of her explosive student outbursts, “it was not an impulsive thing” when she was hit. Beth said her student was “mad, and I’m going to hit her.”

Kim shared that one of the noteworthy instances of explosive student behaviors involved another child being “hit in the privates.” Additionally, Kim described that when students were on the rug, Zoe would purposefully step on other students’ hands when she got up from the rug. Laura shared that she got kicked because her student’s “body was so out of control.”

There was some crossover between examples of explosive behaviors involving other people and instances with students using objects or verbalizing, such as Kim’s descriptions of an explosive student throwing pencils and erasers at classmates and poking classmates with a pencil. Maria gave examples of a student calling other students and herself names or yelling at peers and staff. Kim provided an example involving an object and other classmates in which the explosive student would “take her laptop and put it on top of somebody else’s hand and press down on it.”

**Vocal and Verbal Behaviors.** All participants described at least one example of students exhibiting vocal or verbal behaviors during an explosive outburst. Some vocalizing behaviors explained by participants included growling, yelling, shouting, and screaming. Verbalizing examples included refusal, name-calling, saying mean things, negative self-talk, and swearing. Eight participants described 24 instances of vocalizing or making audible noises, whereas 14 occurrences of verbalizing or using language occurred across five interviews. Yelling, shouting, and screaming were the most described vocalizations. Beth explained, “he would also scream at his classmates and adults in the room.” Ava described that her student would “start yelling in the classroom, screaming in the classroom, would elope from the classroom (and) often be in the hallway screaming” while a safety care team responded. One of Kim’s lower elementary students engaged in negative self-talk during an explosive outburst, saying things like “I’m so stupid I wish I could die” and “I want you to take a BB gun and shoot me in the head.”

**Other Actions.** Participants described other explosive student behaviors that did not involve other people, objects, or vocalizations. Some examples described include crawling, refusing to join the group or come inside, crying or sobbing, throwing themselves on the ground, stomping, hiding, and spitting. Four participants detailed eloping incidents. Ava’s and Emma’s students eloped from the classroom but never left the school. Kim described several students she had over the years who eloped out of the school building. One of the students eloped “into the wetlands” bordering the school property, and another eloped into the school’s parking lot.

### ***Teacher Reflections and Insights***

During the interviews, all participants reflected on their experiences and gave suggestions or shared insights about the situations. Emma said that when there were clear-cut steps and follow-through to manage students with challenging behaviors, she felt supported and was more



able to teach academics than continually putting out behavioral fires all day. There were numerous examples of participants recommending additional behavioral supports for students. Other categories uncovered during interviews were that the participants realized they are not alone in experiencing this phenomenon, that they should not take the situations personally, and that their experience level and lack of necessary training impact their abilities to manage explosive student situations.

**Advocating for Additional Supports.** Carrie shared that “it does feel like the timeline of them getting any kind of support does take a long time [and] like it’s usually a six-month process.” She further detailed that sometimes “we deal with it for a whole year in [the lower elementary grade] and then hopefully, by the time they get to [the next grade], support services are more in place for them.” Similarly, Beth explained that she carefully documented outbursts and interventions for four to five months and was still unable to access additional support for her student. Emma echoed Carrie and Beth’s sentiments about needing more timely support. Emma detailed her frustration at being required to document for a long time because “it can be really challenging when the child’s behavior is so challenging that you need more immediate support.” Emma elaborated that, in her opinion, elementary schools have more students who need more behavioral support than in the past.

Numerous participants wished for more student supports. Tessa wanted every classroom to have two adults in it. Beth explained that she thinks it is a larger issue than the school. She specified that the state needs additional supports for children in crisis and that Maine needs more mental health services than are currently available. Beth said that without appropriate supports and programming in place, “the work of a classroom teacher is near(ly) impossible.”

Kim explained that her pleas for help went unheeded until “other students were getting hurt, and the nurse had to call home, and parents were notified.” She detailed that a meeting to discuss additional safety supports for the explosive student was scheduled quickly after parents of injured students started calling the school inquiring what was being done about their children getting hurt multiple times weekly. Kim added that she believed if students “get the support they need, they *can* be successful in the classroom,” yet without adequate resources, it is an “impossible task of teaching this child that is having such a hard time.”

Beth cited a discrepancy between what interventions students received in their previous school and what interventions were officially documented in a student’s file. She explained that the student required far more support than was called for in their file. Furthermore, Beth emphasized the importance of including all stakeholders at student programming meetings. She shared an example of a meeting held without her between staff members unfamiliar with her student, and they made decisions about his programming and interventions without her input.

**Not Alone.** Maria and Laura explained that it felt better knowing that other people were going through similar circumstances and that they were not alone in experiencing challenging student behaviors. Maria shared that it was comforting to know she had a teaching partner close by that she could rely on to evacuate her class if needed. Relatedly, Beth stated of experiencing numerous explosive student outbursts, “I know I’m not alone in this. I know that just working with other teachers that, this is their experience as well.” Laura explained that it helped to hear from her principal that “I’m not the only one in this.”

**Taking it Personally.** Reminding themselves not to take the student’s explosive outburst personally was described by half the participants. An insight Maria offered was that “it’s really important to remember that it’s (the explosive student’s outburst) not your fault or a reflection of

your teaching.” Kim explained that when she was younger, she “really took it personally and thought, ‘Oh, my gosh! If I was just doing something different, I wouldn’t be having these problems’” with students’ explosive behaviors. Ava shared, “It’s not my fault” that students are struggling with explosive behaviors because there are so many factors beyond her control, such as home circumstances. Ava explained that she does as much as possible to mitigate factors such as challenging home situations while students are at school.

**Level of Experience.** Some participants reflected on their level of experience with managing students’ behaviors. Kim explained that administrators and mentors made her feel to blame for not using better management strategies to handle students’ behaviors. Kim reflected that as a younger teacher, she did “not know a lot about trauma-informed education,” and she “didn’t always know the most effective strategies.” Now that Kim has more teaching experience, she described teaching as a balancing act between doing her best, realizing she is not perfect, reflecting, and seeking resources and strategies to improve her practices.

Maria explained that when the explosive student behaviors happened in her first year, “I would not really know what to do.” She said, “There was probably two or three times where I literally just had to leave the room and go because I needed to cry.” A reflection Maria made was that earlier in her career, she had more “empathy for my students who had to watch” the explosive outburst than for the explosive student. She recounted, “over the years, I’ve kind of learned more and experienced more, and I know that it’s both groups of students that are struggling and need support.”

**Lack of Training.** Experienced educators, Beth and Emma explained that they lacked the training to manage situations involving explosive student behaviors effectively. Beth said she did not “have the training for some of the severe behaviors that we’re seeing in the elementary

classroom.” Emma shared that she attended a workshop training session in a prior district about the calming effects of doodling, drawing, and coloring. Beth mentioned that the district says, “we’re trauma-informed,” but that she is “not necessarily sure what to do with the trauma” and that she has not received training that has been helpful in learning strategies of how to manage explosive student outbursts. As fairly recent graduates from local colleges and universities, Maria, Carrie, and Laura did not feel prepared to handle challenging student behaviors when they started their first year of teaching.

### **Theme 3: Coping Strategies**

General coping strategies and more specific student-centered or personal coping strategies were discussed in interviews. *Coping strategies* are generally defined as the processes and strategies used to "mitigate the harmful effects of stress" (Folkman, 2011, p. 4). Participants described more student-centered coping strategies than personal coping strategies (see Table 1).

#### ***Student-Centered Coping Strategies***

All eight participants described using student-centered coping strategies. Carrie and Beth conducted file reviews to find out what had been done by students’ previous teachers. After an explosive outburst, Ava, Kim, Beth, and Emma reflected on the situation and evaluated antecedent events, possible triggers, student actions, functions of students’ behavior, staff responses, and outcomes. When Ava reflected, she asked questions like:

Did I do anything to set the child off? And if I’m fairly certain that’s not the case, then I’m like, what do I need to do to help this child? What can I do for the student? Do they need a behavior plan? Do they need to take a break spot more often? And if that doesn’t work, what am I going to do next?

Some participants described coping strategies they used directly with students who demonstrated explosive outbursts. Maria offered, “You can go rest” to a tired struggling student and prompting another student to take a break in the partner teacher’s room. Ava explained that after a student had worked with behavior specialists and implemented a positive behavior plan, the student responded well to Ava’s verbal prompting about the student’s goals and how to earn a reward. Laura talked about modeling positive school behaviors for her students. Other strategies used were having the nurse call home, contacting the principal, and contacting the student’s parents.

Kim, Beth, and Emma discussed documenting student behaviors and the explosive events. According to Kim and Emma, documentation was sometimes time-consuming and cumbersome. As Beth described, she was required to document four to five months of dangerous student behavior, and she still had to “fight to say he needs a referral” to qualify for additional support services.

Several participants explained strategies they used to support all students after an explosive outburst. Beth emphasized the need to address the situation with her whole class. She shared an example of telling her students, “That person didn’t want to do that. That probably didn’t feel good that they did that. So, let’s be accepting of that and help welcome them back into the classroom.” Beth explained she would always do “Go Noodle kind of stuff with breathing exercises to just kind of bring everybody back.” Similarly, Emma described teaching her students to take deep breaths, walk around the classroom, or get a drink of water to help calm down. Furthermore, Emma played calm, quiet music after an explosive student outburst and allowed her students to doodle, color, or sit quietly.

**Collaborating with Colleagues.** All participants cited talking with colleagues as one of the most helpful coping strategies. Talking to the principal or administrator was the most often cited colleague collaborator across all the interviews (see Table 2). Reaching out to coworkers, colleagues, and partner teachers was described by all participants. The types of colleagues, frequency of discussions in the interviews, and the number of participants mentioning a particular colleague type are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Colleague Collaboration Participant Responses*

	How many times it was mentioned across all interviews	How many participants mentioned it
Principal/Administrator	17	7
Coworkers/Colleagues	11	7
Partner Teacher	8	5
Behavior Coach/ Behavior Support Staff	6	4
Academic Coaches	4	2
Guidance Counselor	4	2
Student's Prior Teacher	4	2
Mentor	3	2
Nurse	2	2
Student's Case Manager	2	1

Carrie described one principal as being “good at listening,” giving her ideas, and “different articles.” Maria explained that the principal “stepped in and helped me out” with explosive student situations. Kim reflected that “administrators definitely tried to be supportive

in a lot of different ways.” Tessa and Laura explained that their principals were good at being there for them. Finally, Beth and Emma shared that they had varied experiences with principals. Beth explained, “Administrators supported me in different ways. Some of them better than others.”

All participants who highlighted coworkers, colleagues, grade-level teammates, and partner teachers did so in a positive light. Maria said she can “bounce ideas off from and talk to them.” She also explained that colleagues help her reflect after an incident and “think about what I could have done differently to help solve that problem.” She would get “advice or feedback” from her coworkers about the situation. Kim and Beth discussed the situation with a student’s previous teacher to find strategies the prior teacher used and to see if they had advice about handling the situation. Kim shared that her “biggest support is definitely coworkers and partner teachers.” She asked them for assistance, and they provided her guidance on various situations. Kim also looked to colleagues for modeling different ideas she could implement in her room. Tessa shared that colleagues helped her with talking the incident over, exploring what caused the outburst, and finding ways to work on it. Tessa cited “co-teachers and case managers have been the biggest” help and support. Beth shared “colleagues were always wonderful supports.”

**Safety Measures.** Participants implemented a variety of safety measures in response to students’ explosive outbursts. Evacuating classes during a student’s explosive outburst was described 11 times by six participants. Other safety measures included calling the office to request support and having the explosive student taken to the behavior room to de-escalate. Ava explained that her school has a specially trained safety care team that responds to emergencies, such as explosive student outbursts, in case a restraint is warranted. Maria, Kim, and Emma mentioned calling for another staff member to come to the classroom to support the explosive

student. Kim explained that the police were called several times for two of her students who eloped outside the school.

### ***Personal Coping Strategies***

Personal coping strategies are used to mitigate or control the harmful effects of stress/distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts. In this study, personal coping strategies were techniques participants used to reduce the physical or emotional effects of experiencing explosive student outbursts. Seven participants brought up receiving support from their families and engaging in different activities to help alleviate stress resulting from experiencing explosive student outbursts.

**Family Support.** Participants revealed that parents, significant others, siblings, spouses, and pets were family members who provided personal support. Participants described family members as good listeners, and Carrie shared that her sister was “very good at kind of relieving some of the stress.” Maria and Kim highlighted how supportive their partners were, how well they listened, and that they provided a viewpoint beyond a school perspective. Three participants disclosed that their spouses were their primary sources of support outside of school. Five participants explained that they could rely on their parents or moms for support. In connection with family, two participants explained that supportive friends helped them after difficult days at school.

**Restorative Activities.** There were 14 responses from seven participants describing various activities they use to help them personally cope with the adverse effects of experiencing student's explosive outbursts at school. Maria shared that exercising and doing yoga every night helped her prepare to return to school the next day. Likewise, Beth emphasized that exercise and physical movement were critical in helping her to take “care of myself before I went into the



classroom.” Some strategies Kim used were taking a shower when she got home and changing her clothes, going for walks, and listening to music. Laura shared that activities like shopping and going out to lunch helped to remind her she is “still a person outside of being a teacher.” Hiking or going out to dinner with friends helped Beth with stress relief. Carrie said it was important to take time to do things she loves, like reading, to help her manage stress.

**Taking a Break.** After experiencing a student’s explosive outburst, five participants found taking a break during their school day helpful. Examples of taking breaks included using the bathroom, stepping away and allowing another staff member to manage the explosive student for a little bit, listening to calming music, taking a movement break, and doing breathing exercises. Conversely, Ava and Emma explained that getting right back to work was helpful for them in coping with the aftermath of experiencing a student outburst. Laura explained she often needed to rest after work to “just decompress away from it.” Similarly, on the day of experiencing an explosive student outburst, Emma described needing to go home as soon as school was released to relax and have “that downtime before I felt like I could kind of start talking to people and thinking about the next school day.”

**Disconnecting.** Several participants emphasized the importance of not taking the explosive situations and student’s actions personally. Kim, Laura, Carrie, and Ava discussed leaving school difficulties at work rather than taking them home. Kim summarized that she “had to disconnect sometimes from school and just say, ‘I did what I could today.’ And I’m going to go home, and I’m going to be with my family, and I’m going to try and disconnect from school.”

**Venting.** As discussed previously, participants related that they used colleagues as student-centered supports. Participants also revealed that colleagues were important parts of their personal support system. Maria and Emma explained that having someone to vent to alleviated

some of the stress from the school situation. Numerous participants explained that having a colleague check on them or having a coworker to talk to after the event were important coping strategies.

**Other Strategies.** A few participants cited other personal coping strategies. Examples included overindulging in food, drinking a lot of coffee, and answering emails at 11 p.m. before being able to sleep. One participant reported needing to go on antidepressants. A participant explained that she changed job positions because of experiencing so many explosive student outbursts at a particular grade level. Another participant described holding the stress inside because she did not want to bring the harmful effects into her personal life.

#### **Theme 4: Outcomes**

All participants discussed the outcomes of explosive student outbursts. *Outcomes* are the result or consequence that was caused by the student's explosive outburst. There were three sub-categories in the outcomes theme: adverse effects on teachers, outcomes for explosive students, and outcomes for other students. Adverse effects on teachers are organized into physical effects, emotional effects, and questioning their career choice.

##### ***Adverse Effects on Teachers***

Adverse effects are conditions causing detrimental impacts to the person (Zhao, 2017) that can negatively impact physical, physiological, and emotional health (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017). The problem to be explored in this study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts. When asked to describe their experiences with students demonstrating explosive outbursts, all participants described numerous adverse effects because of the incidents.

**Physical Effects.** Seven participants spoke of adverse physical effects from encountering students' explosive outbursts. Maria, Kim, Beth, and Laura reported that after an explosive student episode, they felt exhausted, fatigued, or very tired. Several participants discussed how explosive student outbursts affected the quality and length of their sleep. Kim shared:

I end up waking up and thinking about the classroom or thinking about things that happened. Or thinking about a student, and why they did that, or wondering about, you know, where did this (explosive outburst) come from? How could we solve this problem?

Beth explained that she had trouble sleeping because of the stress of the explosive circumstances at school. Like Kim and Beth, Emma also reported having trouble sleeping.

There have been many nights that I have lost sleep as I lay in bed and just go over the day, and what I could try to do differently, what I can do to try to help that child. So definitely loss of sleep over the years when those sorts of things (explosive student outbursts) happen.

Four participants reported physical injuries inflicted by students during an explosive episode. Getting hit was described by all four participants in this subsection. Getting bitten or pushed were two more physical contacts that occurred during a student's outburst. Carrie witnessed a colleague suffering injuries while supporting one of Carrie's students in her classroom. Carrie's student "would grab on and squeeze or dig her nails in (her colleague's) arm."

Participants recounted their physical reactions both during and immediately after student outbursts. Carrie said she felt "hot, shaky, and tingly." Tessa reported that when the student "came after me and started hitting me," she had "almost panic attack" feelings such as increased heart rate, shaking, and profuse sweating.

Further outcomes after the outbursts included participants suffering migraines and headaches. Emma described, “I had an ulcer a few years ago. I can’t say that that was because of teaching, but certainly, the stress that I have endured because of that (teaching), I’m sure it didn’t help.” Kim shared that she ate more sugary and salty foods during times of stress caused by student outbursts.

**Emotional Effects.** All participants reported adverse emotional effects due to experiencing explosive student outbursts. Participant responses were plotted in Wong’s (2019) Feelings Wheel, an adaptation of Dr. Gloria Willcox’s 1982 Feeling Wheel, to help sort their reported emotional effects into primary feeling categories. The feelings categories reported the most by participants were feeling sad, bad, and afraid. There were some indicators reported in the angry and disgust categories as well.

The highest number of responses fell in the sadness category. Seven participants reported 31 instances of sad emotional effects, including feeling down, upset, and defeated. Maria, Laura, and Tessa felt they must be doing something wrong, were at fault, or had done something to cause students’ explosive outbursts. Beth, Laura, and Maria reported feeling isolated and alone. While Carrie and Maria explained, they felt unsupported.

Beth shared that she sometimes felt the situation was hopeless and devastating. Similarly, Kim felt powerless to change situations and was disturbed by one of her explosive student’s traumatic events of being “sexually abused at the homeless shelter like days before.” Laura explained that her students’ behaviors laid “heavy on my heart (and) weigh on me day to day.” She felt herself dwelling on thoughts of school and concerns for her students.

All participants reported adverse emotional impacts that fell in the “bad” feelings category on Wong’s (2019) Feelings Wheel. Bad feelings indicators were reported 27 times.

Maria said she felt bad for the explosive student. Feeling stressed was reported by six participants and was mentioned 11 times. Beth shared, “The amount of stress that I was bringing home...oh! It was awful.” Likewise, six participants stated 10 times that experiencing and handling explosive student outbursts was hard. Additional bad feelings reported were being overwhelmed, feeling out of control, not feeling okay, and feeling tired.

Experiencing students’ explosive outbursts caused seven participants to feel afraid. Participants noted they felt scared, panicked, nervous, and fearful during the outbursts. Tessa explained that even long after experiencing a student’s explosive outburst, she felt “fearful of what you’re going to walk into” when she went to school daily. Feeling anxious was described five times by Laura, Beth, and Carrie. Half of the participants disclosed that they felt worried about students and worried the outbursts would reoccur. Laura shared that after experiencing outbursts, she had a “new awareness every time that I walk into the room. I sometimes do feel I’m walking on eggshells with this student.” She also detailed that she felt “anxiety every morning coming into the room.” Additional afraid feelings reported were being flustered, unsafe, and helpless. Ava reflected that it is “disconcerting when an explosive outburst comes out of the blue.”

Feeling frustrated was the most reported emotion from the “angry” category. Frustration was mentioned seven times by four participants. Beth reported being tense and short with family members after experiencing explosive student outbursts at school. Some of the “disgust” feelings reported by participants included feeling disturbed, awful, and gross.

**Questioning Career.** As a result of experiencing explosive student outbursts, more than half of the participants admitted questioning their career choice or if they wanted to remain in education. Kim admitted about the beginning of her career, “I almost did not come back to

teaching after that second year” because she had so many students with behavioral challenges that year. Kim revealed she has been unsure whether she will remain in education for the past few years. Tessa shared her dread about returning to the classroom after experiencing a student outburst. Likewise, Laura experienced anxiety going to her classroom, thinking about the previous explosive episodes, and worrying about another one. The uncertainty of not knowing if an outburst would happen again made Tessa not want to return to school.

Beth questioned herself “as an educator that year. What am I doing? Am I making an impact? It was awful. I questioned whether I would continue being a teacher.” Emma echoed Beth’s sentiment that the explosive outbursts made her “reluctant to want to continue” teaching. Similarly, Maria reflected, “After days like that, it’s like, holy! I do not want to come back (to school) tomorrow.” Emma shared that she feels like “teacher burnout is extremely high” and that she does not know how she has remained in education.

### ***Outcomes for Explosive Students***

Participants described some of the outcomes for students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Receiving additional support through the district’s behavior intervention program was described by five participants. Two participants’ students received additional staff support through educational technicians. Beth, Carrie, and Kim explained that their students went through an individual educational plan (IEP) referral process to qualify for additional support. Several participants described calling for in-school help during the explosive outburst. Maria detailed that she contacted the student’s family after school. Kim said that the police were called several times to manage situations with her students who had eloped out of school. Students receiving in-school suspensions were discussed in two cases. Beth detailed that one of her students was hospitalized and later went into the foster care system. Several students transferred

to a different classroom in the district specializing in highly structured behavior interventions and supports for students demonstrating consistently unsafe behaviors. Kim shared that one of her former students, who was highly impulsive and demonstrated explosive outbursts at school, died in a dirt biking accident.

Outcomes for students demonstrating explosive outbursts included behavior interventions. *Behavior interventions* are management strategies used to target skill deficits and guide children to become proficient with the skill (Reynolds et al., 2020). Students receiving additional adult support was the most common intervention mentioned by participants. Participants described additional adult support provided by behavior classroom teachers, the behavior specialist, school counselors, outside-of-school counselors, and educational technicians. Kim shared that one of her explosive students started,

seeing a counselor every week at school. And she was really good about getting him strategies to use. He gained a lot of self-worth with that counselor being able to tell him what he'd been experiencing was not his fault and that he had strategies that would help him.

Ava, Kim, and Beth described that one of the outcomes for their students was a positive behavior support plan in which students could earn rewards for improving on target behaviors. Ava reflected that the behavior plan “was kind of a step to give him a little bit of autonomy to make a right choice, and that helped.” Tessa and Emma explained that their school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Response to Intervention (RTI) system, meetings, and data were helpful. Beth shared that having a behavior educational technician who provided earns, such as playing a game, doing a preferred activity, or choosing a prize, for behavior plans was a helpful support for her student.

### *Outcomes for Other Students*

All participants discussed the outcomes for classmates of students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Five participants described student evacuations. Emma explained that she needed to evacuate her class when a student started running around the classroom stabbing items with scissors. Carrie described that two of her explosive students caused many evacuations and that with one of the students, the class would “evacuate four times a day.” Maria shared that her students were scared, and she evacuated them quickly when an explosive outburst occurred. Likewise, Tessa acknowledged needing to evacuate the room, and she described her biggest concern regarding this phenomenon was the “long-term effect on teachers and other students.”

Carrie explained that after experiencing a classmate’s first explosive outburst, the other students were “still okay with her, but they were nervous.” However, after experiencing more explosive outbursts, “their reactions of not wanting to be around her definitely were shifting. And you could tell that they also didn’t want to be there.”

As outlined in the previous theme describing explosive student behaviors, participants described numerous examples of other students getting injured by a classmate during an explosive outburst. Kim explained that the other students “didn’t really know how to react” to a classmate’s negative self-talk. She elaborated that other students were frustrated with the class being interrupted by verbal outbursts and being injured by the explosive student. Furthermore, Kim explained that parents began calling the school to find out what was being done to protect the safety of their children, saying, “My kid got hurt again for the third time this week. What is going on?” When a student eloped and the police were called to intervene, Kim shared that the other students were very upset and stressed. Beth explained that the other students were



physically hurt and traumatized by experiencing a classmate's explosive outburst. Additionally, Beth shared that her students did not feel safe at school.

Ava, Beth, Laura, and Kim reflected that their students' verbal outbursts were distracting and disruptive to the class. Beth explained that the explosive student behaviors made paying attention difficult for others in the class. Emma said academic time was negatively impacted for "the students that were ready to learn" by explosive student episodes.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight full-time public elementary school teachers from the site district. The participants discussed their lived experiences with encountering explosive student outbursts.

Following analysis of the verbatim interview transcriptions, codes were assigned to the participant responses. To effectively capture the experiences of the teachers who participated in the study, emerging themes were created from the coded data. The four themes derived from the data were primary appraisal of well-being, lived experiences, coping strategies, and outcomes.

Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized the stressful nature of encountering students' explosive outbursts, citing adverse physical and emotional effects. The participants consistently emphasized the value of having supportive colleagues. Participants described utilizing a combination of student-centered coping strategies, personal coping strategies, and behavior interventions and supports to help mitigate the adverse effects of explosive outbursts. Furthermore, participants advocated for more student supports and highlighted that classroom teachers have not received the training necessary to cope with explosive student outbursts.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Explosive outbursts by students can have various adverse effects on teachers, including physical and emotional distress (Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Increased headaches, tiredness, bodily ailments, and bruises are examples of physical effects (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2019). Anger and self-blame are common indicators of emotional discomfort experienced by teachers encountering students' explosive outbursts, as are feelings of sadness, self-blame, or depression (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019). Teachers cite students' behavior problems in school as a primary stressor at work (Reinke et al., 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who encountered explosive student outbursts at school. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

**Research Question 1:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school?

**Research Question 2:** How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts?

Eight general elementary education teachers from the site district participated in one-on-one semi-structured Zoom interviews. Following verbatim transcription and deidentification of the interviews, participants reviewed interview transcripts for accuracy. After member checking, I analyzed the transcripts, assigned codes, and reviewed the codes for emergent themes. Based on the coding process, the following four emergent themes were identified: (a) primary appraisal: well-being assessed, (b) lived experiences, (c) coping strategies, and (d) outcomes.

In this chapter, I discussed the interpretation and importance of the findings of this study in relation to the two research questions and the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, based on data collected and explained in Chapter 4, as well as the literature review detailed in Chapter 2, I explored the implications of this study and made recommendations for action. The study's limitations, delimitations, and participant responses informed the recommendations for further study section outlined in this chapter.

### **Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

In this qualitative phenomenological study, participants shared their experiences encountering explosive student outbursts in public elementary classrooms. This section focuses on how the two research questions which guided the study were answered based on participant interview descriptions of their lived experiences. Additionally, the interpretations and importance of the study findings for each of the study's guiding questions are presented.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research question one stated, "How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school?" Explosive student outbursts are common in general elementary classrooms and cause significant frustration, stress, and sometimes teacher injuries. It is important to understand the lived experiences of elementary teachers because many educators are leaving the profession prematurely and cite student behaviors as one of the primary reasons for leaving their position, school, or the profession. Understanding teachers' lived experiences can help policymakers and administrators develop systems to support teachers. Eight public classroom teachers currently employed in a site district elementary school provided in-depth reflections on their experiences encountering explosive student outbursts at school.

### *Threat Appraisal*

During interviews, six study participants described appraising students' explosive outbursts for threats to their well-being. Participants also described evaluating the situations for threats to the well-being of the student demonstrating explosive behaviors and the other students in class. Carrie questioned, "What's going to happen to either her (explosive student), myself, or the other kids in my room?" She explained, "It was definitely scary in the sense that she had no flags (shared by prior teachers), and she wasn't marked (in her file) as being (an explosive) student." Emma described her swift appraisal and intervention during an explosive student outburst. "He became very explosive and started running around the classroom with scissors. I had to do a room clear as soon as he started displaying that unsafe behavior. We did go immediately." Likewise, Maria and Emma recounted quickly deciding to evacuate their classes upon seeing a student's behaviors had exploded beyond what was safe for others to be nearby.

Ava, Kim, Tessa, Beth, Maria, and Carrie described watching for warning signs of a potentially explosive episode with students who had demonstrated explosive behaviors in the past. Ava recalled wondering, "Is this going to escalate to where they're (the other students) in danger?" Ava further described that she thought, "How can I anticipate that maybe they're going to escalate (because) sometimes we have indicators because of past behavior."

Carrie, Beth, and Laura described reviewing student files to understand information from students' previous teachers. Beth recounted that she "had a student last year who came to me in October and had severe behavior issues. His file came, and he had been in five different classrooms. He had been suspended for hitting a child." Additionally, Beth and Kim said they spoke directly to students' previous teachers to gain a better understanding of students' needs and potential triggers.

The lived experiences shared by study participants appeared to indicate that explosive student outbursts in a public general education setting are complex events that affect numerous people. Participants' interview responses reflected that teachers considered many factors when appraising explosive situations. Gathering all they knew about a student and assimilating that knowledge with their experiences with students demonstrating explosive behaviors, and assessing their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, teachers made critical decisions, often in split seconds, that impacted the safety of their students and themselves.

According to Romas and Sharma (2022), the primary appraisal stage assessment of environmental stimuli entails determining the stress level based on past experiences, self-awareness, and knowledge about the event. Applied to this study, Romas and Sharma's (2022) description implies that teachers use all that they have experienced in the past, their instincts, and knowledge about specific students to develop a primary appraisal schema of the explosive situation. Data collected during participant interviews supported this premise. During an explosive student outburst, study participants described assessing threats to themselves, the explosive student, and other students. This finding suggests teachers' primary appraisals of explosive student outbursts reach further than solely evaluating threats to their personal well-being, as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping suggested.

### ***Explosive Behavior Characteristics***

All participants in this study reported explosive behaviors that involved verbal or vocal behaviors, using objects during an explosive outburst, and behaviors involving others. Object-related explosive student episodes were reported by all eight participants. Maria witnessed explosive students "flipping tables, kicking furniture and the door, and throwing chairs." Laura and Emma gave examples of students using scissors during an explosive episode. Laura

explained that the student “yanked and ripped” the scissors apart, while Emma described that her student “became very explosive and started running round the classroom with scissors and started stabbing the (other students’) breakfast bags. So, juice and milk were going everywhere.”

According to Beth, some students held “furniture over their head as if they were going to throw it.” Furthermore, Carrie, Maria, Ava, Kim, and Emma explained that their explosive students pushed, flipped, threw, leaped on and off, kicked, and crawled or hid under tables. Kim described a student using classroom materials such as a lap desk and a computer to pinch classmates’ fingers. Kim also explained other students’ explosive episodes involved “throwing pencils and dice at kids.” Beth reported that when angry, a student in her classroom broke class materials such as clipboards and pencils, and that he tore down a bulletin board. Examples of students tearing items and damaging school property were provided by Beth, Laura, and Emma.

All participants described explosive student outbursts involving other people. Study participants reported that during explosive episodes, students hit, bit, grabbed, pushed, spit on, punched, poked, stepped on, and kicked other students or school personnel. During Carrie’s interview, she described that explosive students would “bite you, kick you, go after adults, grab, squeeze and dig her nails in (the educational technician’s) arm.” Similarly, Beth recounted times when explosive students “physically hurt others, grabbing (another student’s) arm, spitting on them, and hitting them.” Kim revealed that a prominent example of a pupil exhibiting explosive behavior involved another child getting hit “in the privates.” In another example, Kim explained that when students were on the rug, the explosive student “got up she would step on their hands on purpose.” Laura described getting kicked by an out-of-control student. After evacuating her class, Tessa recalled, she walked “near the door” to escape an explosive student, but he “came after me and started hitting me.” Likewise, Beth reported being hit by a student, and Maria said

that students hit and pushed her during outbursts. Ava recounted that one of her students “got into a fist fight that resulted in blood-shedding with another student.”

All participants described students’ vocalizing or verbalizing behaviors during explosive outbursts. Growling was a vocalization described by Carrie, Maria, and Beth. Maria explained one of her students was “yelling at me and friends that were looking at him.” Likewise, Carrie, Ava, and Emma described students yelling during explosive outbursts. Screaming during an explosive student outburst was reported by Ava, Beth, Laura, and Tessa. Ava explained that her student would “scream in the classroom and would often be in the hallway screaming.” Beth shared that her student would “scream at his classmates and adults in the room.” Tessa stated that her student “just laid on the floor screaming” during an explosive outburst. Kim detailed that one student shouted out “every couple of minutes” throughout the day.

Beth, Carrie, Kim, Laura, and Maria reported verbalizing instances when explosive students used recognizable words during an explosive episode. Student refusal was described by Beth, Carrie, and Laura. Maria detailed students calling her names and “telling me that I was dumb and that I didn’t know what I was talking about.” Laura explained that a student verbalized, “You’re stupid. This conversation is stupid.” Laura further described that the same student would come “at the other student personally say(ing) things like ‘You’re fat.’” Kim told about a student who exhibited negative self-talk during an explosive episode, and he would say things like, “I’m so stupid. I wish I could die.” Or “I want you to take a BB gun and shoot me in the head with it.”

Participants recounted other explosive student actions that did not involve other persons, things, or vocalizations. Ava, Emma, Kim, and Maria described student elopement during an explosive episode. Ava told about one student who “mostly eloped from the classroom. He never

left the building.” Kim mentioned student elopements eight times during her interview. She explained one student “probably (eloped) 10 different times during the year outside of the classroom.” Of another student, Kim recounted, “It was apparent she was in crisis because from day one (in my classroom) she was eloping.” Additionally, Kim described that during an explosive outburst, one of her students ran into the wetlands behind the school, and a different student eloped to the school parking lot. Carrie and Emma talked about students crawling around the room. Carrie detailed an incident when another who, on the second day of school, “refused to come in from a fire drill.” Maria and Emma explained that during explosive outbursts, some of her students cried. Similarly, Laura recounted students sobbing and crying. Maria told about a student who threw “himself on the ground” and another who was “stomping his feet.”

The ease and number of examples shared by participants suggest that experiences with explosive student outbursts in public general elementary classrooms are common. Beth described, “There’s so many students that are in crisis (and demonstrating) these explosive behaviors.” Likewise, Emma noted that more elementary school students than ever before require more behavioral support. The conclusion that elementary school students’ explosive outbursts are common is consistent with Bostic et al.’s (2021) report that explosive student behaviors occur frequently. Similarly, McMahon et al. (2019) cited that explosive outbursts are common and threaten student and staff safety.

Participants’ descriptions of explosive student outbursts appeared to be generally well-aligned with existing literature. Bostic et al. (2021) and Musu et al. (2019) reported that screaming, throwing objects, damaging property, or physically assaulting others were common elementary school explosive classroom behaviors teachers encounter. Like Carrie, Maria, Tessa, Beth, and Laura’s descriptions of being hit or kicked during an explosive student outburst, Irwin



et al. (2022) found that 9% of public elementary school teachers reported being physically attacked by a student.

As mentioned previously, half of this study's participants described *elopement* as a characteristic behavior of explosive student outbursts. This finding differs from the literature review results presented in Chapter 2. Elopement was not explicitly described as a characteristic behavior of explosive students in the literature reviewed for this study (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Bostic et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2022; Connor & Doerfler, 2021; Musu et al., 2019).

### ***Coping Strategies***

All participants described using student-centered coping strategies after experiencing an explosive student outburst. Ava, Kim, Beth, and Emma analyzed the circumstances following an explosive outburst and assessed prior events, potential triggers, student behaviors, purposes of the student's behavior, staff reactions, and results. According to Ava, one of her students showed significant improvement after Ava worked with a behavior specialist to develop and implement a positive behavior plan. She said the plan "seemed to work really well. I was able to get him under control pretty quickly with just talking to him." When Maria recognized signs of her student escalating from being overtired, she offered intervention strategies such as resting at the quiet spot in their classroom or taking a break in her partner teacher's room.

Carrie and Beth mentioned conducting a cumulative student file review to find out what past teachers had used for interventions to address explosive outbursts. Contacting the student's family and calling the principal for help were strategies described by Kim. Emma listed teaching students calming strategies such as taking deep breaths, going for a walk, and getting a drink. She also emphasized how "therapeutic just doodling or coloring can be," and she said that she

often puts on “calm and quiet music (while) everyone takes five minutes to kind of color, doodle, sit quietly” after they experienced an explosive student outburst.

After student outbursts at school, all study participants reflected on personal coping strategies they used to help overcome the stress from the situation. Maria and Beth emphasized the importance of engaging in regular exercise such as yoga, hiking, or going to the gym to help handle school-related stress. Both Kim and Tessa recounted that taking walks helped them. Carrie described that she has “a good family support system. Both of my parents definitely have a good understanding. My sister is very good at relieving some of the stress when needed.” Similarly, Laura, Maria, and Emma explained their moms are good listeners. Carrie, Maria, Laura, and Emma mentioned talking to their parents or a sibling as a personal coping strategy.

Maria explained she has a “great partner who lets me bounce things off of him and talk to him about things.” Similarly, Kim described that her “partner is super supportive. He’s really good at listening to what’s going on. He’s good at posing questions to me from a lens that’s not a school employee.” In a similar vein, Beth, Emma, and Tessa mentioned their spouses as significant sources of support. Some other personal coping strategies mentioned by Carrie, Kim, Beth, Laura, and Emma included taking a shower, taking deep breaths, listening to music, going out with friends, and taking time to do things they enjoy.

Beth, Carrie, Emma, Maria, and Tessa found it helpful to take breaks during the school day or after school when they experienced an explosive student episode. Examples Emma shared of taking a break during the school day included listening to calming music, going to the bathroom, and doing breathing exercises. Carrie and Maria described asking a colleague to take over for a little bit so they could take a break. Examples of taking a break after school included Emma’s strategies of leaving work as soon as possible and “go(ing) home (to) lay in bed and

relax. I have to go home and have some me time before I start planning or thinking about the next day.”

All participants reported contacting partner teachers, coworkers, and colleagues following an explosive student outburst. The colleague collaboration most frequently mentioned in the study interviews was speaking with the principal or administrator. Contacting the principal or administrator was described by seven participants. Maria and Emma admitted that having someone to vent to about their students' behaviors helped alleviate some stress. All participants painted a positive picture of their coworkers, grade-level teammates, and partner teachers; however, there were varied reports about the effectiveness of the support offered by administrators or principals. Kim shared that her “biggest support is definitely coworkers and partner teachers.” Maria said colleagues help her reflect after an incident and “think about what I could have done differently to help solve that problem.” Of her colleagues, Beth reported they “were always wonderful supports.” Kim explained that “administrators definitely tried to be supportive,” and Carrie shared that her principal “was really good at listening and gave (her) ideas and would print off different articles” to help her learn strategies to cope with student situations. Beth described that “administrators have supported me in different ways. And some of them better than others.” Likewise, Emma noted “differences in schools (and she) found that depending on the administration and the support they provide as well as the programming,” she either felt “very frustrated and reluctant to continue” teaching or she felt valued and supported.

Not all participants turned to others for support. Emma and Ava explained that they found getting back to work was the most effective strategy for them to cope with the stress of experiencing explosive student outbursts. The other six participants gave examples of turning to family, friends, and spouses for support. However, Emma and Ava explained they did their best

to leave school events at school and not to bring school concerns into their personal lives.

Similar to Emma and Ava's efforts to leave school-related concerns at work, in a recent study, Go et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of schools creating a supportive atmosphere to reduce employees' need to rely on families to manage school-related stress.

Effective coping skills are critical to improving teacher job satisfaction and student achievement. In a study conducted by Herman et al. (2018), the authors reported that teachers with high stress levels and low coping skills correlated with low student achievement. Conversely, teachers who reported high stress and high coping skills experienced low levels of burnout, and students did not experience adverse effects in their classes (Herman et al., 2018). Like this study's participant reports, numerous studies indicated that teaching is a high-stress profession, and educators need coping skills to manage the intense job demands, maintain their well-being, and continue to be effective in the profession (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018; Kebbi, 2018).

After threats to personal well-being are appraised, Lazarus and Folkman explained in their transactional theory of stress and coping that individuals enact coping strategies to manage or resolve the stressful effects (Cooper & Quick, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In a study conducted by Anderman et al. (2018), educators used two main types of responses following a violent or explosive student episode: communicating with others and using direct interventions with the perpetrator. Participants in this study gave numerous examples of talking to others and some specific examples of student-centered intervention strategies. In a study of Finnish primary school Grade 1 through Grade 6 teachers, Go et al. (2021) reported that teachers used social support more than any other emotional coping strategy. Participants echoed what was found in

the literature about collaborating with colleagues being one of their main coping mechanisms to manage the aftereffects of explosive student outbursts.

This study's findings were aligned and different from teachers' reactions to experiencing school violence (Anderman et al., 2018). Teachers reported in Anderman et al.'s (2018) study that after experiencing school violence, they provided feedback, reprimanded the student, or spoke to the student's parent. Like the Anderman et al. (2018) study, Ava shared an example of giving her student specific feedback when she described following a positive behavior support plan and reminding her student of the rewards for expected behaviors and follow through for undesired behaviors. None of this study's participants described reprimanding students, as reported in the Anderman et al. (2018) study. Like the Anderman et al. (2018) study, Kim described explosive situations in which the "nurse had to call home (and the) parents were notified." The Anderman et al. (2018) study was a large-scale exploration and gathered responses from 2,505 kindergarten through Grade 12 teachers. There were certain coping strategy similarities between the Anderman et al. (2018) study and this much smaller sample of eight elementary school teachers.

Finnish teachers described using religion and mindfulness coping strategies when their students made them angry (Go et al., 2021). Unlike the findings of Go et al. (2021), none of this study's participants reported using religion as a coping strategy. All but one participant in this study reported using coping strategies such as listening to music, deep breathing, or taking a break that could be considered mindfulness techniques as described in the Go et al. (2021) study. Life experiences shared by Beth, Carrie, Emma, Kim, Laura, Maria, and Tessa echoed some of the findings reported by Kebbi (2018) in a study that surveyed 100 general elementary teachers and 39 special educators. Kebbi (2018) reported that doing relaxing activities, taking a day off,

setting priorities, and exercising were effective stress-coping strategies. Similar to Kebbi's (2018) findings, this study's participants reported doing relaxing activities such as yoga and resting, taking time to themselves, setting family time as a priority, and exercising. There was no mention by this study's participants about taking a day off as a coping strategy.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question two was, "How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts?" Explosive student behaviors use substantial school resources to manage and often result in injury or property damage (Bostic et al., 2021; Musu et al., 2019). Understanding the outcomes of explosive student outbursts is critical so that appropriate responses and support can be provided to staff and students. Understanding the outcomes and matching the necessary resources to address the situations could help decrease the loss of instructional time and physical and emotional adverse effects on explosive students, school staff, and other children. This study's findings included adverse effects on teachers, the need for more student services, and teachers reporting self-blame for their students' explosive outbursts.

### ***Adverse Effects***

When questioned about their experiences with children exhibiting explosive outbursts, every participant listed numerous negative consequences resulting from the occurrences. Study participants described adverse physical effects. Beth, Kim, Laura, and Maria explained that they felt exhausted after experiencing an explosive student outburst. Beth described years of losing sleep when she lay awake, thinking about the explosive outbursts and what to do about them. Likewise, Kim admitted waking up thinking "about a student, and why they did that, or wondering about where did this come from? How could we solve this problem?"

Beth, Carrie, Maria, and Tessa reported being hit by an explosive student. Tessa reported experiencing “almost panic attack” feelings such as increased heart rate, shaking, and profuse sweating when an explosive student hit her. Carrie said she felt “hot, shaky, and tingly” after a student outburst.

All study participants reported emotional adverse effects resulting from experiencing students’ explosive outbursts at school. Beth, Laura, and Maria shared feeling isolated and alone. Carrie and Maria felt unsupported when experiencing and trying to manage their students’ explosive outbursts. Beth revealed that she occasionally thought the explosive student’s circumstances were devastating and hopeless. Likewise, Kim reported feeling powerless to change situations related to her students’ explosive outbursts.

Study participants reported feelings of fear and stress. Laura, Beth, and Carrie described feeling anxious, and half of the participants admitted worrying if the outbursts would reoccur. Laura detailed that she feels “anxiety every morning coming into the room.” Tessa reported experiencing feelings of panic when her student “came after me and started hitting me.” Feeling overwhelmed was reported by Beth and Maria. All participants said that explosive student outbursts were stressful.

Adverse effects reported by participants in this study were like those cited in recent literature. Kim’s report of experiencing increased migraine headaches from the stress of experiencing students’ explosive outbursts mirrored a study by Curran et al. (2019), which found that educators experienced increased physical issues such as headaches. In this study, 50% of the participants shared that their students had hit them. Irwin et al. (2022) stated that 9% of public elementary school teachers reported being physically attacked by students. The higher percentage of occurrences for this study could be due to the selection criteria.

Teachers' personal and social lives were significantly influenced by physical and emotional exhaustion, which necessitated giving up time with friends and family to recuperate from stress, student misbehavior, and behavioral issues (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Responses from Laura and Emma mirrored the Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) findings. Laura reflected that after experiencing explosive outbursts, she was exhausted and needed "to go home and take that entire afternoon away from school and just decompress away from it. I do find myself kind of missing out on those things in life that I want to do." Emma mentioned how, on the days of explosive student outbursts, she had to leave school as soon as it was over to unwind and have "that downtime before I felt like I could kind of start talking to people."

Beth, Carrie, Emma, Kim, Laura, Maria, and Tessa reported feelings of sadness, including examples such as feeling down, upset, and defeated. This finding aligned with study results reported by Anderman et al. (2018), in which teachers expressed adverse emotional reactions, including crying, feeling angry or scared, and despair after encountering workplace violence. Additionally, seven participant responses of feeling afraid aligned with the Anderman et al. (2018) study. Carrie shared she "definitely cried multiple times," which also aligned with the Anderman et al. (2018) study.

This study's participant responses paralleled McMahon et al.'s (2019) study findings that teachers reported feeling frustrated, powerless, unsafe, unsupported, and dissatisfied with their profession when they perceived a lack of administrator support or consequences for perpetrators of violent school incidents. Carrie, Emma, Kim, and Maria expressed that explosive student outbursts were frustrating. Handling the outbursts was difficult, according to six participants. Kim reflected that "it's really, really stressful. And it's having an impact on my health at times. So, I've been thinking about it and trying to figure out" if she wants to remain in education.



Two studies found that managing student behavior caused teachers to be fatigued and lack energy (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019), which aligned with half of this study's participants reporting feeling exhausted after experiencing a student's explosive outburst. Beth, Kim, and Emma described their sleep as being negatively affected by encountering students' explosive outbursts. These findings were consistent with a study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), which found that educators experience problems sleeping resulting from teaching.

Tessa described an outcome that was not explicitly revealed in the literature review. She reported that the explosive outburst of a student had a lasting negative emotional impact on her. Even long after an outburst, Tessa reflected that she felt "fearful of what you're going to walk into" daily. Tessa described feeling anxious when she heard loud noises. She clarified that when she heard the noise, she was afraid it might be a student starting to have an explosive outburst. While most of the participants' adverse effect responses were reflected in current literature, this finding suggests the need to explore the long-term effects on teachers who experience explosive student outbursts.

The frustration, increased stress, and numerous adverse effects reported by seven participants were clearly shown through the descriptions of their lived experiences. Ava admitted, "Luckily, those are pretty much the only two (explosive students) I've ever had." It was a noteworthy discovery that Ava only had two explosive students because she taught in the same school as some other participants with fewer years of experience than her and what appeared to be more explosive students in their classes based on the interview examples. The study parameters may be responsible for this apparent anomaly. Participants may have thought they needed numerous examples, and thus, teachers who had fewer students demonstrating explosive outbursts might not have volunteered for the study.

### ***More Student Services Needed***

Participants reflected on the need for additional student services to cope with students demonstrating explosive outbursts in general elementary classrooms. Beth explained that even after meticulously recording her student's outbursts and interventions for months, she was still unable to get access to more support. Emma described situations where students demonstrated explosive outbursts as "so challenging that you need more immediate support," yet none was available. Emma went on to say that she believed more elementary students than ever before needed behavioral support.

An insight shared by Beth echoed the sentiment in Kaufman et al.'s (1998) Indicators of School Crime and Safety (ISCS) report when she said that without appropriate supports and programming in place, "the work of a classroom teacher is near(ly) impossible." Since 1998, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has released yearly reports on the ISCS (Irwin et al., 2022; Kaufman et al., 1998; Musu et al., 2019) to provide legislators with up-to-date, reliable data enabling them to take steps toward ensuring safe learning environments. Kaufman et al. (1998) explained that "without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach, and students cannot learn" (p. 5). Likewise, Kim said that she believed if students "get the support they need, they *can* be successful in the classroom, (yet without adequate resources, it is an) impossible task of teaching (children who are) having such a hard time."

### ***Self-Blame***

Half of the participants in this study felt they were to blame for their students' explosive outbursts. Kim explained that earlier in her career, she took students' explosive behaviors "personally and thought, 'Oh, my gosh! If I was just doing something different, I wouldn't be having these problems.'" Maria, Laura, and Tessa believed that their actions caused their

students' explosive outbursts. Maria shared that her students' explosive behaviors made her "feel like I was doing something wrong." In a similar vein, Laura stated, "I must be doing something wrong. I must be causing this all to happen." Tessa said she put much of the responsibility for a student's explosive outburst on herself. She shared that she felt that "I did something wrong to cause this."

Participants' statements that they were to blame for their students' explosive actions were consistent with findings from research conducted by Go et al. (2021) and Anderman et al. (2018). Go et al.'s (2021) results indicated that primary school teachers experienced high levels of self-blame after student-related stressful incidents. Similarly, Anderman et al. (2018) reported that self-blame was commonly reported by teachers who experienced workplace violence.

Policymakers and researchers have given teacher safety little attention despite it being a critical topic (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019). In a large-scale United States study, general indicators linked the effects on teachers who experience violence with decisions to leave the profession (Curran et al., 2019). Many teachers leave their schools and the profession due to the negative impacts of handling challenging student behaviors (Curran et al., 2019; Yarrell, 2022), and there are not enough applicants to take their place (Mullen et al., 2021). Policymakers and researchers must address this phenomenon to retain educators, provide a safe learning environment, and attract new teachers.

### **Implications**

This section covers the study's implications in alignment with the purpose, rationale, and significance outlined in Chapter One. The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). According to Curran et al. (2019), the most

challenging factors influencing teacher resiliency and attrition rates were working conditions, which included workplace safety, disruptive pupils, and classroom management.

In a national study, Irwin et al. (2022) described that elementary school teachers reported higher rates of being physically attacked than middle- or high-school educators. The results of this study add to the limited research on general elementary teachers' experiences with students' explosive outbursts. Individual interview results from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding how explosive student behaviors affect teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). According to Curran et al. (2019), better working conditions concerning student behaviors may have a positive impact on students' academic development and teacher retention rates. The results can help guide Maine school district professional development groups to offer meaningful training opportunities to support teacher growth and development of positive coping strategies and improved classroom management techniques.

Administrators and policymakers may find the material helpful in developing support networks that boost teacher resilience, attract highly skilled applicants, and enhance staff longevity and retention. District administrators can utilize the findings to help guide policy choices that will increase school safety (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Administrators and school boards who seek to improve school climates may benefit from understanding this phenomenon from teachers' lived experiences (Curran et al., 2019). Learning about the successful strategies employed by study participants may be helpful for teachers who are challenged by their pupils' explosive outbursts.

This study has reflected participants' voices regarding the challenges of explosive student outbursts in the general education setting. The study results can be used by mentors, administrators, colleagues, and school board members to create support systems for teachers.

Furthermore, Maine teacher preparation college instructors and deans could use the study to reflect on and improve classroom management instruction. Thus, the study results could improve not only the working conditions for currently employed teachers but also increase pre-service teachers' learning about various classroom management and coping strategies.

As Bohnenkamp et al. (2021) disclosed, existing studies usually focused on whole-school effects and not individual teachers' experiences. Large-scale survey research on discipline and school safety (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021) highlighted the need for smaller, customized qualitative investigations that concentrate on individual experiences rather than broad, quantitative markers. Lastly, because teacher safety has received minimal attention, study results need to inform researchers and policymakers (Curran et al., 2019).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Information regarding the lived experiences of study participants was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The following recommendations for action were based on the literature review, data collected in the one-on-one interviews with eight participants, and the identification of emergent themes from interview information.

The first recommendation is based on participant responses. When teachers face students demonstrating explosive outbursts, clear district and school safety protocols and referral processes to request additional help must be outlined and followed. Additionally, emergency measures should be taken to protect the explosive student, staff, and other students. Rapid response times are necessary when staff call for help. All schools must have emergency response teams trained to manage explosive student outbursts. Safety protocols regarding when, how, and

where to evacuate a class must be established and provided in the staff handbook. These procedures need to be reviewed with staff before school begins in the fall and periodically throughout the year. In addition to the emergency response teams' rapid response to unsafe situations, clearly delineated procedures for prompt implementation of additional support must be enacted and appropriately staffed.

Carrie shared that it was usually at least a six-month process, and sometimes “we deal with it for a whole year” before a meeting where she can request additional testing or supports and services for students demonstrating explosive outbursts. Likewise, Beth revealed that even after meticulously documenting her student's outbursts and classroom-based interventions for four to five months, she could still not get her student more support. Carrie, Beth, and Emma all expressed the need for earlier support for students demonstrating explosive outbursts. “It can be really challenging when the child's behavior is so challenging that you need more immediate support,” Emma said, expressing her frustration at having to document for an extended period without any in-class or other support for a student demonstrating unsafe behaviors. Kim reflected that her requests for interventions went unheeded until parents started calling the school inquiring what was being done about their children who were getting injured multiple times weekly at school by an explosive classmate. Emma stated that she felt more supported and could teach academics more effectively when there were defined procedures and follow-through for handling children with difficult behaviors rather than spending the entire day putting out behavioral fires.

The second recommendation is based on feedback from participants and the literature review. Teachers need more classroom management training. When considering how to manage their classrooms, many teachers said they were unprepared to deal with the behaviors of their

pupils (Caldarella et al., 2020; Carroll et al., 2021; Chuang et al., 2020; Niwayama et al., 2020). Research study participants said that their classrooms and professional satisfaction were significantly impacted by inadequate pre-service classroom management training and a poor school climate (Carroll et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020). Furthermore, teachers were unprepared to handle the challenges of dealing with students' increasingly explosive behaviors (Chuang et al., 2020). Lastly, insufficient or ineffective classroom management training can have a detrimental impact on teacher resilience (Carroll et al., 2021; Mullen et al., 2021).

In this study, less experienced and highly experienced teachers alike discussed the lack of adequate training to manage student behaviors they were encountering in their classrooms. Kim shared that she did not know effective strategies to use. Additionally, Beth declared she did not "have the training for some of the severe behaviors that we're seeing in the elementary classroom." Furthermore, Beth reflected that she knows her colleagues have experienced explosive student behaviors as well, and they have shared that they also lack the necessary training to manage the episodes effectively. When Carrie, Maria, and Laura began teaching, they felt unprepared to handle explosive student behaviors. Maria shared that she did "not really know what to do," and there were times when she had to leave the room because she was so distraught about a student's explosive behavior.

Workshops and training can help teachers learn critical strategies and improve classroom management skills. Increased resiliency has been associated with teachers receiving proper training and ongoing professional development to improve their ability to handle difficult situations (Mullen et al., 2021). According to Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020) and Mansfield et al. (2020), instructors' job satisfaction, student experience, and classroom

management skills can all be improved by giving teachers access to positive behavioral methods, sufficient resources, and continuous professional development.

Participant responses and the literature review support the final recommendation that more teacher and student resources are needed to manage explosive student outbursts. Curran et al. (2019) reported that disruptive students, unsupportive administration, and working in a difficult class or school can negatively impact teacher resilience. Teachers experience greater job satisfaction at schools that provide social and behavioral supports (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). The resilience of teachers was reportedly enhanced by small class sizes, supportive structures, and sufficient resources (Curran et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2021).

Beth explained that she believes that explosive student behaviors need to be addressed at the state level. She advised that:

We need more supports within our state for these children that are waiting or beds in a hospital. There're so many students that are in crisis, especially post-pandemic. I see more and more issues. I think that district-wide and state-wide, there just needs to be more programming in place to do this work. Because without it, the work of a classroom teacher is near(ly) impossible. So many of these students are not having their basic needs met. And it's not just they're hungry or tired. It's mental health stuff going on.

In Emma's opinion, elementary schools have more students who need behavioral support than in the past. She explained that she has seen a difference in schools. Emma detailed that some schools have programs that provide services for explosive students, such as behavior programs, special education, or Response to Intervention for behavior. She described that these schools "provided teachers the support they needed, so that if unsafe behavior was happening or behavior that was impacting teaching, that it was being addressed so that you could teach."



Schools must have adequate staffing, programming, and provide the necessary training and ongoing professional development to meet student and staff needs.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

All research projects have inherent limitations, no matter how carefully they are designed and executed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Research constraints, or limitations of the study, may help guide the design of subsequent investigations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The total sample size of eight participants and the qualitative phenomenological study design were two study limitations. Phenomenological interview research designs usually involve a small number of participants to collect in-depth data, in contrast to quantitative surveys that can gather data from any number of people (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The study included the experiences of kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary school teachers in one school district. The transferability of the study's findings is restricted by the scope and research design limitations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Thus, the study results cannot be generalized to other teachers and locations.

The first recommendation for further research would be to recreate the study, interviewing participants from other locations. In qualitative studies, researcher bias is a limitation when conducting interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Replicating the study with another researcher and in a different site district would add to the limited information on public general education classroom elementary teachers' experiences with explosive student outbursts.

As advocated by Wink et al. (2021), the second recommendation is to conduct additional research to explore the lack of support or training for teachers in managing emotional and behavioral challenges in the classroom. Examining the programs that colleges and universities offer for teaching classroom management and interviewing new teachers may lead to discoveries

about the gaps in the preservice preparation curriculum and the needs of increased classroom behavior management instruction. Study results could be used to make specific recommendations for improving preservice college programs.

Additional studies could focus on the phenomenon of student elopement during explosive outbursts. The literature review did not explicitly reveal student elopement as a characteristic behavior during an explosive episode. Nevertheless, half of this study's participants described numerous examples of student elopement during explosive outbursts. More research on this topic is warranted, given the information found in this study regarding elopement being described as a characteristic behavior of explosive outbursts.

### **Conclusion**

The problem explored in this qualitative phenomenological study was the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021). According to Curran et al. (2019), the most difficult factors influencing teacher resiliency and attrition rates were working conditions, which included workplace safety, disruptive pupils, and classroom management. Children's explosive outbursts pose a threat to the environment, other people, and themselves (Spring & Carlson, 2021). Following student's explosive outbursts, teachers can suffer adverse effects which have negative impacts on their physical, physiological, and emotional health (Anderman et al., 2018; Curran et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017). Student aggression, violence, and explosive outbursts are frequent and pose a risk to the safety of both staff and students (Bostic et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2019). However, policymakers and researchers have given little attention to the topic of teacher safety (Curran et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Few studies have examined the impact of students' explosive episodes on teachers, and most existing research has concentrated on the consequences on the entire school rather than individual experiences (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). Two research questions were used to guide this study: How do public general education elementary teachers describe their lived experiences with explosive student outbursts at school? How do public general education elementary teachers describe the outcomes of explosive student outbursts? Individual interview results from this study contribute to the body of knowledge regarding how explosive student behaviors affect teachers (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Ghandour et al., 2019). By using the study data, administrators and policymakers may be able to establish support networks and improve working conditions, which can strengthen the resilience of teachers, attract highly skilled applicants, and enhance staff longevity. According to Curran et al. (2019), better working conditions concerning student behaviors may positively impact student academic progress and teacher retention rates.

Topics related to explosive student outbursts were examined in the literature review conducted for this study. The main themes uncovered in the literature review included explosive outburst characteristics and terminology, behavior intervention strategies, adverse effects on teachers, teacher coping strategies, and protective and straining factors on teacher resilience. Behavior intervention strategies were organized into the subcategories of punitive and positive practices.

The findings of this study provided insights into the lived experiences of participants and answered the research questions. Eight public general elementary teachers from the site district

reflected on their experiences with explosive student outbursts. Participants described numerous student explosive episodes and detailed the types of behaviors they witnessed during an outburst. Teachers described evaluating the situation for safety concerns regarding themselves, the explosive student, and other pupils. After they assessed the situation, participants explained the coping strategies they employed to manage the well-being of all involved.

Study participants reported numerous physical and emotional adverse effects. Additionally, data collected indicated that teachers need more classroom management training to be able to handle the challenging behaviors that are commonly encountered in general education elementary classrooms. Participants also emphasized the need for more supports for students demonstrating explosive behaviors.

Several recommendations for action were developed based on the literature review, data collected from the semi-structured interviews, and the emergent themes. First, it is imperative that policymakers and educators establish and adhere to explicit safety measures within the school and district, as well as referral procedures for seeking further assistance when dealing with students who exhibit explosive outbursts. The second recommendation for action is to provide more classroom management training and ongoing professional development for preservice and in-service teachers. The final recommendation is that elementary schools need more resources for students demonstrating explosive outbursts.

The study's limitations and design guided recommendations for further research. The first suggestion for additional research was to replicate the study, interviewing participants from other locations. As endorsed by Wink et al. (2021) and participant responses, the second suggestion was to carry out further investigation into the deficiency of instruction provided to educators in handling emotional and behavioral challenges within the classroom. The final recommendation

was to carry out research on the phenomenon of student elopement during explosive outbursts. Although elopement was frequently addressed during four participant interviews, the literature review did not include elopement as a specific explosive behavior characteristic. Insights shared by study participants, information from the literature review, and study recommendations could improve outcomes for students and school staff. Stakeholders can use the study data to reflect on, plan, and improve current practices and supports.

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## APPENDIX A

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Office of Research Integrity  
Institutional Review Board

Biddeford Campus  
11 Hills Beach Road  
Biddeford, ME 04005  
(207) 602-2244 T  
(207) 602-5905 F

Portland Campus  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, ME 04103

**DATE OF LETTER:** August 22, 2023

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Sarah Young  
**FACULTY ADVISOR:** Rosette M. Obedoza, Ed.D.

**PROJECT NUMBER:** 0823-11  
**RECORD NUMBER:** 0823-11-01

**PROJECT TITLE:** Public Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Explosive Student Outbursts: A Phenomenological Study

**SUBMISSION TYPE:** New Project  
**SUBMISSION DATE:** August 18, 2023

**ACTION:** Determination of Exempt Status  
**DECISION DATE:** August 22, 2023

**REVIEW CATEGORY:** Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The Office of Research Integrity has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above-referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

You are responsible for conducting this project in accordance with the approved study documents, and all applicable UNE policies and procedures.

**If any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the research proposal summary, data collection instruments, and/or other approved study documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment for review to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.**

If you have any questions, please send an e-mail to [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu) and reference the project number as specified above within the correspondence.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bob Kennedy, MS  
Director of Research Integrity

APPENDIX B  
RECRUITMENT POSTER

## Research Participants Needed



**Are you a K-5 Classroom Teacher?**

**Have you experienced explosive student  
behavior at school?**

**Share your experiences!**

The purpose of my dissertation study is to explore the experiences of K-5 public general education teachers who have experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

If you are interested in participating in an interview that will contribute to this topic, please email Sarah Young at [syoung18@unc.edu](mailto:syoung18@unc.edu)

## APPENDIX C

## RECRUITMENT EMAIL



## PUBLIC ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH EXPLOSIVE STUDENT OUTBURSTS:

## A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

SARAH YOUNG

## RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear K-5 Teacher,

I am currently a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am conducting a study titled *Public Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Explosive Student Outbursts: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study* for my dissertation. The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who have experienced explosive student outbursts at school. An aggregate of the de-identified study results will be reported to district staff, administrators, and the school board. I am seeking eight people to participate in my doctoral research study.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are:

- Full-time, employed public school teacher in the study's site district age 18 years or older.
- Teaching in general education elementary grades kindergarten through grade five.
- Have experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participation will consist of one audio recorded interview of approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted via Zoom at a mutually convenient time. Recruitment will remain open for six weeks or until eight participants have been interviewed. All data will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of respondents. All identifying information, including school names, locations, student names, or staff, will be deidentified.

Please review the attached Participant Information Sheet which outlines the specific details of this study including confidentiality and privacy measures.

If you are interested in sharing your experience with me, please contact me via email at [syoung18@une.edu](mailto:syoung18@une.edu) and we can set up a mutually convenient time for an interview.

If you would like additional information or have any questions, please reach out to me at the above listed email.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in this study.

Sincerely,

*Sarah Young*

Doctoral Student

University of New England

## APPENDIX D

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Office of Research Integrity  
Institutional Review Board

INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

## Participant Information Sheet

Version Date:	<i>August 21, 2023</i>
IRB Project #:	0823-11
Title of Project:	Public Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Explosive Student Outbursts: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator (PI):	<i>Sarah G. Young</i>
PI Contact Information:	<a href="mailto:syoung18@une.edu">syoung18@une.edu</a> 207-323-8320

### INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes. Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with important details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- The use of the word 'we' in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The general purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who have experienced explosive student outbursts at school. Eight participants will be invited to participate in this research as part of the principal investigator's dissertation research.

### WHY ARE YOU BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you meet the following criteria:

1. Full-time, employed public school teacher in the site district age 18 years or older.
2. Teaching in a general education elementary classroom kindergarten through grade five.
3. Have experienced explosive student outbursts at school.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?**

- You will be asked to participate in one semi structured interview with the principal investigator that will last approximately 45-60 minutes over Zoom.
- You can choose a pseudonym to be used in place of your name for the study.
- You will be given the opportunity to leave your camera on or off during the interview, and your interview will be recorded using Zoom.
- You will be emailed a copy of your interview transcript to review for accuracy. You will have five calendar days to respond or the PI will assume that you have no comments and the transcript will assumed to be accurate.
- An aggregate of the de-identified study results will be reported to district staff, administrators, and the school board.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include an invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality. You have the right to skip or not answer any questions, for any reason.

Please see the ‘WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY?’ section below for steps we will take to minimize an invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality from occurring.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

There are no likely benefits to you by being in this research project; however, the information I collect may help us understand K-5 public school teachers’ experiences with explosive student outbursts at school.

**WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

**WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University of New England such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

- Data will only be collected during one on one participant interviews using Zoom, no information will be taken without your consent, and transcribed interviews will be checked by you for accuracy before they are added to the study.
- Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and any personally identifying information will be stripped from the interview transcript.
- All names and e-mails gathered during recruitment will be recorded and linked to a uniquely assigned pseudonym within a master list.
- The master list will be kept securely and separately from the study data and accessible only to the principal investigator.
- The interview will be conducted in a private setting to ensure others cannot hear your conversation.
- You will be given the option to turn off your camera during Zoom interview.
- After you have verified the accuracy of your transcribed interview the recorded Zoom interview will be destroyed. Once all transcripts have been verified by the participants of this project, the master list of personal information will be destroyed.
- All other study data will be retained on record for 3 years after the completion of the project and then destroyed. The study data may be accessed upon request by representatives of the University (e.g., faculty advisors, Office of Research Integrity, etc.) when necessary.
- All data collected will be stored on a password protected personal laptop computer accessible only by the principal investigator.

### **WHAT IF YOU WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS PROJECT?**

You have the right to choose not to participate, or to withdraw your participation at any time until the Master List is destroyed without penalty or loss of benefits. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in this project.

If you request to withdraw from this project, the data collected about you will be deleted when the master list is in existence, but the researcher may not be able to do so after the master list is destroyed.

### **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints, or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

**WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?**

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).



## APPENDIX E

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Public Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Explosive Student Outbursts:  
A Qualitative Phenomenological Study**Introduction**

Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in my study.

The information shared today will be kept confidential. I am following protocols set up by the University of New England regarding participant anonymity and de-identification of data.

I will audio record our interview using Zoom. You can choose to have your camera on or off. The purpose of the audio recording is so I can accurately transcribe the interview verbatim. I will be the only person to see or hear the interview. To maintain the confidentiality of participants and any other individuals mentioned, my written information will be de-identified. You will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy.

Now we will review the information on the Participant Information Sheet. [Display Participant Information Sheet on the screen while verbally reviewing it.]

Do you have any questions or concerns about the Participant Information Sheet or the study? [Discuss any questions or concerns.]

The problem to be explored in this study is the adverse effects on elementary school teachers resulting from experiencing students' explosive outbursts (Bostic et al., 2021).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of public general education elementary teachers who have experienced explosive student outbursts at school. In this study, explosive outbursts will generally be defined as spontaneous impulsive reactions (Scott et al., 2020) such as "screaming, throwing furniture, verbally assailing others, [and/or] ...physically assaulting staff and students or destroying property" (Bostic et al., 2021, p. 491) that is out of proportion with the situation or provocation (Carlson et al., 2022).

Do you have any questions before we start? [Discuss any questions.]

Would you like to participate in the study?

And finally, do you consent to the audio recording of this interview?

[If yes, begin audio recording and continue with interview.]

[If no, thank teacher for his/her time and consideration of participating in the study. End meeting.]

## Demographic Information

*We're going to start off with some of your background information.*

- What is your teaching background?
  - How many years have you taught?
  - Where have you taught?
  - What grades/ages have you taught?
  - What is your current position?

## Semi-Structured Core Questions & Potential Sub-Questions

*Thank you very much. Now we're going to start talking about your experiences with students demonstrating explosive outbursts.*

- Please tell about a time or times when you experienced a student exhibiting explosive outbursts at school.
  - What was that experience like for you?
  - Can you think of any other examples of times you've experienced a student physically or verbally erupting unexpectedly?

*Thank you for your responses. Next, we will discuss what effects you have experienced as a result of encountering explosive student outbursts.*

- How do you feel when you experienced students demonstrating explosive outbursts at school?
- What physical or emotional effects, if any, did you have as a result of experiencing students' explosive behaviors?
- What do you do after you experience a student demonstrating explosive behaviors?
  - What sorts of coping strategies do you use for yourself?

### Closing Questions

*Thank you for sharing information about your experiences. My final questions are about your support systems.*

- How are you supported at school?
- Outside of school, how you are supported after your workday?

### Conclusion

Before we conclude the interview, is there something else about your experiences with explosive student outbursts that we haven't had a chance to discuss yet?

After I have transcribed the interview, I will send the transcribed interview to your district email for you to check for accuracy.

Do you have any questions or further comments?

Thank you so much for your time and willingness to participate in this interview. [Stop audio recording and end Zoom meeting.]