# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM TEACHERS AND OVERLY ACTIVE, DISTRACTED STUDENTS

by

Elizabeth Irene Minney

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream elementary teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory was the lens through which this study was examined. In essence, social learning theory suggests that individuals learn what they know and how they should act through formal and informal interactions with others. The central research question around which this study revolved was: *What are the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to first initiate in-classroom instructional modifications to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for testing*? Using a qualitative research method, guided by Moustakas (1994), data collected consisted of lived experiences shared by participants. To collect this data, the online study was structured to include a semi-formal individual interview, four written reflective prompts, and one focus group. Triangulation among the data collection methods contributed to validity. The ten teacher participants were current or former mainstream classroom teachers, who had taught for a minimum of four years, at any combination of grades K-6, who preferred to initially modify instruction for overly active, distracted students before referring them for a formal ADHD assessment. Saldana (2021) informed data collection, analysis, and eclectic coding and synthesis. The central research question and three sub-questions were all successfully answered using different combinations of the three emergent themes: Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents.


*Keywords*: ADHD, teacher self-efficacy, self-agency, social learning theory, school leadership, labeling students

**Dedication**

For Mike

Dandy, Laura, Chris, Ed

**Acknowledgments**

Thank you, Lord, for everything.

Many thanks to my dissertation committee, Amy Jones Ed.D. and Brian Jones Ed.D.

Much appreciation for those who participated in this study.

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## List of Abbreviations

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Disability Critical Race Theory (Dis Crit Theory)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Intentional Professional Network (IPN)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Overview

An overly active, distracted child is constantly active, fidgety, mentally restless, and displays difficulty attending (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Bob & Konicarova, 2018; Lange et al., 2010). The introduction of an overly active, distracted student to a mainstream classroom requires teachers to draw upon their own professional judgement on how best to serve that child's needs. Some teachers will initially make instructional modifications for the wiggly child. However, often classroom teachers will immediately recommend that the active distracted child be evaluated for ADHD (CDC, 2022; Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Gascon et al., 2022; Kulakowski et al., 2020). Teachers' professional judgements are the product of countless factors among which are their own life experiences, beliefs and prejudices towards groups and individuals, their personal mental health, and their feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; D'Urso & Petrucceli, 2021; Verkuyten et al., 2020). This phenomenological study explores, in the teachers' own words, why they personally choose to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students. Social, academic, and personal and professional experiences that have influenced their attitudes and classroom practices were explored. This chapter delves into the background of the issue, and identifies the problem, purpose and significance of the study. The background examines the issue through historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The problem is discussed, and the purpose of this study explained. Significance is described theoretically, empirically, and practically. The chapter concludes with the research questions and definitions.

## Background

At issue is the tendency of some mainstream elementary teachers to refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation before they attempt in-classroom instructional modifications (Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Gascon et al., 2022; Kulakowski et al., 2020; Maki et al., 2020; Smith, 2012; Verkuyten et al., 2020). To appreciate the importance of this qualitative phenomenological study it is necessary to examine the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the issue. The historical context includes the purpose and evolution of identifying special educational needs of students in the United States (Groark et al., 2011; Kauffman et al., 2018; Smith, 2012), and the emergence of ADHD as a unique field of study. The social context examines teacher perceptions of students as a function of their own learned beliefs (Gemmink, 2021; Skiba et al., 2019) and the implications of labeling a child (Gnas et al., 2022; Hetrick, 2021; Mueller, 2021). The theoretical context suggests external and social factors working in unison to affect behavior, specifically teacher behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bogdanov, 1912; Vygotsky, 1978). Framing the issue in its' historical, social, and theoretical contexts underpins the foundational knowledge necessary to better understand the problem.

### Historical Context

Attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and the evolution of special education in the United States must be examined as it developed over time. Attention deficit and hyperactive behaviors have been identified as unique conditions in people for over 200 years. Barkley and Peters (2012) noted some of the earliest references to hyperactive distracted behavior were found in early German medical textbooks written by Weikard (1742-1803) in 1775. References to inattention were found in writings by Crichton (1763-1856) dated to 1798. And Still (1868-1941), is recognized as the individual responsible for the dawn of modern ADHD. He wrote

about children with these symptoms in 1902 (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Lange et al., 2010). According to Barkley and Peters (2012), Weikard described ADHD as a state of constant activity, doing many things at a shallow level and incompletely. In addition, afflicted individuals were represented as reckless and failing to finish what they started (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Lange et al, 2010). Weikard's description of ADHD behavior was seminal as it made no reference to astrology or religion (as cited in Barkley & Peters, 2012). Weikard noted physical manifestations and possible origins of ADHD as environmental, physical, or biological.

Twenty-four years after Weikard (1742-1803), Creighton (as cited in Lange et al., 2010) described ADHD as restlessness of the mind. Creighton did not mention hyperactive behavior when discussing attention deficit. Lange et al. (2010) noted that according to Creighton, there were two origins of ADHD: one present at birth and the other a consequence of an accident. In both cases, it was an inability to attend. In addition, Creighton suggested attention deficit present at birth often diminished with age (as cited in Lange et al., 2010).

Still (1868-1941), a British pediatric physician, described children with an inability to sustain attention and who were extremely fidgety (as cited in Bob & Konicarova, 2018). Still's focus was mainly children whose behavior was extreme. He attributed their extreme behavior to biological, psychiatric, and moral maladaptation. Still lay the groundwork to frame ADHD conduct as a mental disorder (as cited in Lange et al., 2010).

The encephalitis lethargica epidemic of 1917-1928 left nearly 20 million damaged people in its wake. Countless children suffered residual effects of brain damage that included destructive behavior, impulsivity, being easily distracted, and learning difficulties (Shorter, 2021). Extensive post-epidemic research conducted by Hall (1866-1951) documented severe overactive distracted behavior related to a brain physically damaged by encephalitis (Kroker, 2021). In 1937, Bradley

(1902-1979), using the stimulant Benzedrine to alleviate headaches in children, discovered that the drug also improved academic performance and behavior in school age students who displayed ADHD behavior (as cited in Strohl, 2011).

Prior to the 1970's, children who succeeded in traditional classroom settings were funneled into higher education, and children who displayed an inability to learn as quickly as the general population were steered toward training for blue collar jobs (Hanford, 2014; Smith, 2012). Children with disabilities were often not served at all by public school districts (Smith, 2012). The start of the space race in the United States marked the beginning of a change in attitudes about the role of schools. Anything that hindered the advancement of math and science in public schools took a backseat. This included students with disabilities. At best these students were lumped into classes with mainstream students, and at worst they were denied any education (Kauffman et al., 2018; Smith, 2012).

Mills v. D.C. Board of Education 1972 was a landmark case for students with disabilities. It was one of several cases from which federal legislation arose. This legislation protected the rights of handicapped children and required that they be provided an equitable education (Groark et al., 2011). The courts found that taxpayer education provided to any group must be provided to all groups. Groark et al. (2011) noted that children who had previously been denied public education were now afforded the opportunity to attend school. These court cases resulted in Federal Law 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Children Act. It was renamed The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act in 1990. Renamed again in 2004, The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act was reauthorized in 2017 (Kauffman et al., 2018).

The 1970's ushered federal funds into public schools to assist with the cost of educating any child with a designated disability (Macht, 2017). The CDC (2023) classifies ADHD as a

neurodevelopmental condition. The CDC does not identify ADHD as a *Specific Learning Disability*, but rather categorizes it under *Other Health Impaired* which does not automatically qualify a student for special or additional educational services. According to the National Resource Center on ADHD (2023), students with ADHD can qualify for educational assistance in the form of an IEP if the student also has an accompanying identified learning or emotional disorder, or if the child needs special services to succeed in school. In addition, the student may qualify for services under Section 504 if they have been formally identified as having ADHD and it significantly interferes with learning. As a result, many easily distracted hyperactive children have been marshalled in front of behavioral psychologists and psychiatrists often to be identified with additional cognitive and behavioral deficiencies that interfered with their ability to learn. According to the CDC (2022) half of all students with ADHD are also diagnosed with a behavior or conduct disorder. It was the identification of comorbidities, not ADHD itself that qualified the student for additional in-school educational assistance. Some of this student behavior was previously attributed to childish immaturity (Smith, 2012). Macht (2017) noted that now these cognitive and behavioral deficiencies justified the need for additional educational resources. By 2009, nearly 10 percent of all public-school students were diagnosed with ADHD, with 60 percent of them being medicated (Herr, 2009). In 2016 the CDC counted 6.2 million public school students identified as having ADHD with 62 percent of those children receiving medication for symptoms (CDC, 2022). Regrettably, according to Smith (2012), the behavior of many of these now labeled students was once considered to be normal immature behavior.

**Social Context**

The social context of labeling a child includes the individual teacher's perception of the situation, the child's behavior, and the potential impact on the student. An examination of

teacher motivation can help explain a teacher's rationale for referring a student for ADHD assessment (Gemmink, 2021; Owens et al., 2018; Polizzi et al., 2021).

The social context of the problem must be addressed from two perspectives: the first one is the social lens through which a teacher interprets a child's overly active, distracted behavior (Bandura, 1977; D'Urso & Petrucceli 2021; Mowrey, 2020; Wexler, 2019); and the second lens is the social effect of labeling a child (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2020; Tran & Burman, 2019; Zeinalipour, 2022). Teachers do not exist in a vacuum. An aggregate of experiences shape teachers' perceptions of student behavior (Crawford & Brandt, 2019; D'Urso & Petrucceli, 2021; Evans et al., 2019). Individuals initially internalize attitudes toward people and events through the lens of family and caregivers (Osborn et al., 2021). As human beings grow, the lens through which the world is analyzed and understood is further influenced by interactions with friends, school, professional associations, and society in general (Bandura, 1971).

Teachers harbor beliefs about students based on their own life experiences and in the contexts of their interactions with them (Gemmink, 2021). The strength of the teacher-student affective relationship mediates a teacher's interpretation of overly active, distracted student behavior (Crawford & Brandt, 2019). Teacher's beliefs about demographic groups also shade their perception of certain children's conduct (Cruz et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2019). African American children are up to four time more likely to be identified as having behavior problems than their classmates (D'Urso & Petrucceli, 2021. Teachers often interpret the behavior of younger students in a class as inappropriately active or distracted; not taking into account the difference in students ages (Karlstad et al., 2017). Teachers also project negative sub-intellectual traits on to quiet students, although teachers' views of quiet students can be somewhat mitigated by their own tendencies toward those same behaviors (Coplan et al., 2011).

In addition to preconceived notions about people, teacher attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their academic surroundings. A school's overall climate, administrative support and expectations, mastery experiences, in-service educational opportunities, and interactions with other teachers also shape classroom practice (Bellocchi, 2019; Castro-Felix et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2018; Polizzi et al., 2021). The intimation that a child's behavior and intellect is aberrant and warrants a formal assessment is also not lost on a child nor on his or her peers (Gnas et al., 2022; Metzger & Hamilton, 2021). If the well-being of a child and the safety of those around him or her is at stake due to compromised impulse control and intellectual faculty then medical and behavioral intervention is in order (Smith, 2012). However, nearly 11 percent of the entire U. S. student population is officially labelled with ADHD with over half of them medicated (CDC, 2022; Herr, 2009; Wienen et al., 2019). It is often a teacher's arbitrary tolerance for a student's activity level and inattention that lead to families seeking a formal evaluation for ADHD (Gnas et al., 2022).

Countless life experiences influence teacher thinking and classroom practices. At the same time, the decision to recommend assessment and possibly label a child should not be made lightly (Metzger & Hamilton, 2021) as it will have consequences for a student beyond the immediate classroom. A student's relationship with future teachers can be affected by a label (Dort et al., 2020; Owens, 2020; Wienen, et al., 2019). A student's perception of his or her own abilities are often compromised by labeling. Labeled children often place limitations on themselves, affecting goals, and aspirations that follow them into adulthood. (Bauer et al., 2022; Mueller 2018). The self-fulfilling prophecy is one of the most dangerous effects of labeling (Mueller, 2021). Relationships with peers can be affected by labeling (Bong et al., 2021; Wood & Orpinas, 2021). In addition, Gnas et al. (2022) suggest that teachers' opinions of students can

sometimes be influenced by observing relationships among labelled students and their peers. And, although unintentional, a teacher can perceive a student to be less than competent based on a labeled student's interactions with classmates (Gnas et al., 2022). A multitude of factors influence a teacher's decision to try modifying in-classroom instruction or to immediately refer a student for an ADHD assessment. Therefore, the impact on a student socially, academically, and personally should moderate any decision to proceed with an ADHD assessment (Mueller, 2021).

**Theoretical Context**

This study explored with mainstream classroom teachers those life experiences, both personal and professional, that shaped their tendency to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for their overly active, distracted students. Human interactions shape people's beliefs, behavior, and moderate the way they make sense of life. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory was the theoretical guide for this study. According to Bandura (1986), learning occurs as new information is encountered, processed, and synthesized with existing knowledge. This can occur with active participation or through observation. What an individual incorporates from others influences his or her behavior, thought process, and ability to successfully function alone and in a group (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1989). Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning requires interaction or attending between an individual and others. Although social learning describes the influence of social interaction on learning, it fails to identify the influence of motivation, self-confidence, and faith in one's abilities. These influences are addressed with Bandura's 1977 theory of self-efficacy. The theory of self-efficacy examines the factors that contribute to the self-belief that one can in fact successfully execute steps necessary in the pursuit of a goal (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is influenced by several factors: mastery experiences, internal visualization, observing others, verbal encouragement, and

mental well-being (Bandura, 1977). Social learning and self-efficacy theories guided the exploration of events and life experiences that shaped how some elementary classroom teachers initially react to overly active, distracted students.

An older theory that influenced social learning theory is Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory. Social constructivist theory dates to Russian educator Vygotsky (1896-1934). Like social learning theory, this theory also suggests that learning is socially constructed. It suggests that learning occurs through language and cultural interactions. Learners seek meaning by critically engaging with knowledge while using social engagement to actively solve problems (Anderson & Johnston, 2016). Understanding is constructed by the individual within the context of social interaction (Thomas et al., 2014). Social constructivist theory explains a teacher's classroom behavior as a product of the individual teacher's lifelong personal and professional interactions with others.

There is no single unified American philosophy of education (Chambliss, 2009). Even the most passionate theoretical scholars are divided in their opinions (Pendlebury, 1998). Macht (2017) suggests, regardless of stated philosophy, many American mainstream classrooms wedge children into pre-set curricula, static instructional methods, and unvarying rubrics of success. This unwavering uniformity inherent in much of American mainstream education presupposes teacher neutrality and objectivity regarding the students in their care. But teachers are humans and themselves products of society (Bandura, 1977; D'Urso & Petrucceli, 2021). Social learning theory frames teachers' beliefs and behaviors as a product of the teacher's upbringing, experiences with workplace peers and policies, feelings of self-efficacy, preconceptions and prejudices, and the teachers' interactions with social media. The aggregate of life experiences influences attitudes, behaviors, and decisions (Bandura, 1986).

Social-learning, self-efficacy, and social-constructivist theories explain learning as it occurs in the context of culture, experience, and social interaction. As individuals, teachers are both instructors and learners. Teachers communicate, imitate, observe, and model the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of others (Bandura, 1977; Hammer, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). The sum of life experiences, personal and professional, can influence whether a classroom teacher will initially attempt to modify in-classroom instruction before referring a student for formal assessment.

## Problem Statement

The problem is that some mainstream elementary classroom teachers refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation before implementing in-classroom instructional modifications (Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020). The gap identified in the literature is the scarcity of qualitative phenomenological research exploring the life experiences that lead some mainstream classroom teachers to initially implement in-class instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020). This scarcity of literature is problematic for several reasons. For the student, the social, emotional, and cognitive impacts of labeling can be negative and substantial (Gibbs et al., 2020; Owens, 2020). For school districts, frequent immediate referrals suggest teachers who possibly lack self-efficacy or the skills necessary to try to meet the needs of students who require more creative instruction (Zayac et al, 2021). Frequent immediate referrals can also indicate personal intolerance (Verkuyton et al., 2020), teacher burnout (Martinez-Ramon et al., 2021), or general insensitivity (Boda, 2021; Cuba et al., 2021). If we know the lived experiences that lead to greater teacher motivation and feelings of self-efficacy it is possible to incorporate it into teacher training.

ADHD is currently diagnosed in one student in 10 in the United States (Metzger & Hamilton, 2020), with over 62 percent of diagnosed children prescribed medication (CDC, 2022). The number of children diagnosed with ADHD continues to rise, with many displaying only minimal symptoms (Owens, 2020). The effects of formally labeling minimally symptomatic students with ADHD are not inconsequential as it can affect the child's self-perception, peer relationships, and present and future interactions with teachers (Franz et al., 2021; Gibbs et al., 2020; Owens, 2020). For strongly symptomatic children medication can contribute to short and long-term quality of life. But minimally symptomatic children who are diagnosed with ADHD, and receive medication, often experience social and personal upheaval later in life, often as the result of a negative self-fulfilling prophecy (Metzger & Hamilton, 2020). In addition, some teachers routinely and disproportionately refer students from certain demographic groups for ADHD evaluation (Maki et al., 2020). The problem is fraught with consequences for children (Owens, 2020). The study was empirically relevant as it drew upon mainstream classroom teachers to discuss those lived experiences that shaped their propensity to initiate in-classroom instructional for their active distracted students before recommending an ADHD evaluation.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predisposed some mainstream elementary teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. The study was conducted online with interviews managed via Microsoft Teams and written prompts sent through e-mail. An overly active, distracted student described a child who was constantly active, fidgety, mentally restless, and displayed difficulty attending (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Bob & Konicarova, 2018; Lange et al., 2010). Bandura's

(1977) social learning and self-efficacy theories guided this study. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory humans learn through a combination of personal, social, and symbolic experiences. Self-efficacy is the degree to which one believes they can successfully implement steps necessary to affect a positive outcome (Bandura, 1977). This study examined lived experiences of mainstream elementary classroom teachers who displayed propensity to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active students before referring them for ADHD evaluation. To put it simply, the study explored why some teachers want to try in-classroom instructional modifications for their overly active, distracted students before or in lieu of referring them for ADHD evaluation.

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was examined theoretically, empirically, and practically. The theoretical importance of this study illuminated the direct and indirect impact of others shaping what we know and how we behave (Bandura, 1977; Gare, 2000; Gweon, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). The empirical significance is strong as this study revealed how teachers' emotional wellbeing (Carpentier et al., 2019; Gonzalez-DeHass er al., 2021; Lauerman & Berger, 2021; Lu & Guy, 2019), social interactions, and preconceptions about children (Kulakowski et al., 2020; Schutt & Turner, 2019; Verkuyten et al., 2020) affect decisions made in the classroom. Most crucial is the pragmatic significance of this study. Data from the study helps administrators better understand those lived experiences of mainstream teachers who prefer to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before recommending an ADHD assessment (Hong & Mastko, 2019; Scallon et al., 2021). In turn they can better address effective continuing education opportunities for teachers specific to the problem. The ultimate beneficiary of the study is the child who is neither

unnecessarily labeled nor the casualty of an erroneous administrative decision (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2020).

**Theoretical Significance**

Social learning theory, a lens through which this study was examined, suggests that humans learn through direct experience, communication, observation, and imitation (Bandura, 1986; Gweon, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Humans internalize not only concrete knowledge but also attitudes, behaviors, and how to interpret experiences. Sources of information can be symbolic, fictional, and tangible (Bandura, 1977). Learning is rarely the result of a single occurrence but rather a synthesis of life experiences (Bandura, 1989; Gare, 2000). Thus, innumerable events combine to shape a teacher's world view and influence their behavior. In addition, self-efficacy, as suggested by Bandura (1977), examines combined factors that lead one to believe that they are competent to affect a positive outcome. This phenomenological study was an opportunity to explore those lived experiences that made these teachers more prone to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before suggesting an ADHD assessment. The theoretical significance of the study is the examination of how society, interactions, and experiences with others affect how teachers think and behave.

**Empirical Significance**

Teachers interpret overactive distracted student behavior according to personally held beliefs and experiences (Greenway & Edwards, 2020). Given several students displaying identical behavior, some teachers judge the behavior as more problematic based on different factors including the child's gender (Meyer et al., 2020; Slobodin & Davidovitch, 2019), perceptions of their intellect (McCoach et al., 2020), age in a grade (Oner et al., 2019), the child's socioeconomic class (Simoni, 2021), and sometimes racial biases (Fadus et al., 2020;

Wexler et al., 2022). Further complicating teacher judgement is job burnout, which leaves teachers with compromised feelings of self-efficacy (Vidic et al., 2021) and the influences of administrators and school bureaucracy (Hu et al., 2019). This study chronicled the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who prefer not to initially refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation, but instead prefer to first modify their in-classroom instruction. Greenway and Edwards (2020) argue that there is a lack of qualitative research examining the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who serve students with ADHD. They suggest it is discouraging that the overwhelming number of studies are quantitative, with little attention paid to teacher attitudes and life experiences. Gascon et al. (2022) emphasize that the numerical data driven nature of most ADHD studies neglects the human components of teaching. They also note that the questionable rigor of ADHD evaluations suggest caution before recommending a student for testing. There is a scarcity of qualitative studies examining why some mainstream teachers prefer to initially try in-classroom instructional modifications for their overly active, distracted students before suggesting an ADHD evaluation (Greenway & Edwards, 2020).

**Practical Significance**

The practicality of this study is three-fold. First, informs administrators as they search for meaningful training for teachers with overly active, distracted students in their classrooms (Schachter et al., 2019). Relevant continuing profession education includes not only strategies for instructional modifications, but more importantly raises awareness of teachers' own possible internal biases, assumptions, and beliefs about some children (Damianidou, 2021). The second use of this study is to assist parents. Many children referred for ADHD evaluation do benefit greatly from medication and possible access to additional services (Verlenden et al., 2021), but

there are also many whose behavior is misinterpreted as worrisome, but are in fact just immature, wiggly, and bored (Huguley et al., 2021; Pica, 2020; Rickert & Skinner, 2021). As advocates for their children, parents should be informed about the complex factors that go into a teacher's decision of if or when to refer a student for an ADHD assessment. (Huguley, 2021). Finally, the students themselves are the beneficiaries when mainstream classroom teachers mindfully choose how to best serve the academic, emotional, and physical needs of the children in their care.

## Research Questions

This transcendental phenomenological study gathered data from the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers to answer the main research question and three sub-questions.

### Central Research Question

*What are the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to first initiate in-classroom instructional modifications to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for testing?*

### Sub-Question One

*What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers have led them to immediately refer an overly active, distracted student for ADHD assessment instead first trying in-classroom instructional modifications?*

### Sub-Question Two

*What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers led them to first try in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation?*

### Sub-Question Three

*What lived experiences beyond the classroom have influenced mainstream teachers who implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation?*

## Definitions

1. *Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder* (ADHD) - An impairing condition marked on a spectrum that includes inability to consistently attend, and impulsive overly active behavior. There are currently no biomarkers or biological tests to confirm diagnosis (Gledd, 2019; Rigoni et al., 2020).
2. *Educational Influencers* – Educators whose goal is to use social media to monetize brands and followers (Carpenter et al., 2022; Wanless & Pamment, 2019).
3. *Mainstream Classroom*- Classroom where an average uniform level of academic skill in each subject is assumed. Age homogeneity is stressed. Students generally have not displayed a need for additional academic assistance (Brannstrom, 2021).
4. *Overly Active, Distracted Students*- Students who are constantly active, fidgety, mentally restless, and displaying difficulty attending (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Bob & Konicarova, 2018; Lange et al., 2010).
5. *Self-Efficacy* – Self-belief that one can successfully carry out steps necessary to achieve a goal (Bandura, 2011).
6. *Social Learning Theory*- Humans learn through observation, communication, imitation, and modeling of others (Bandura, 1977).
7. *Social Media* – Technology and its' associated software and infrastructure that provides a platform for engagement and connectivity between users (Dijck, 2013).
8. *Student Referral* – A request for extra academic assistance for a student (Liu et al., 2020).

9. *Teacher Burnout*- A response to stress resulting in feelings of detachment, cynicism, exhaustion, and lack of feeling accomplished (Salovita & Pakarinen, 2021).

## Summary

This chapter detailed the foundational information pertinent to the study. Included were the overview, background and contexts, problem and purpose statements, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions. The problem is that some mainstream elementary classroom teachers refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation before implementing in-classroom instructional modifications (Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation. The theoretical significance of this study is that a teacher's propensity to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications before referring an overly active, distracted students for formal evaluation is determined by learned attitudes, practices, and habits (Cruz et al.; 2019, Greenway & Edwards, 2020). Empirically this study suggests that teacher behavior might be based on erroneous, or emotionally self-constructed beliefs (Braun et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2020). The practical significance of this study is three-fold: (a) its usefulness in offering in-service training relevant to teacher needs; (b) informing parents that a strong rationale for student referral should be provided; and (c) understanding the benefits versus detriments of referring a child for testing. Labeling a student can have long-term ramifications for that child (Cuba et al., 2021). Data produced from this study furnished administrators, teachers, and parents scholarly research to consider when facing decisions concerning overly active, distracted students.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

This chapter examines the literature relevant to the problem and purpose of the study. The theoretical framework, related literature, and chapter summary substantiate the need for further exploration of the subject. Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning is the theoretical framework through which this phenomenon was examined. The review of literature includes studies associated with possible causes and effects of referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment. Literature topics include personal prejudice, the use of social media by teachers, teacher self-efficacy, teacher burnout, effects of student labeling, medicine and classroom management, and fellow teachers and administrators. The summary synthesizes the theoretical framework and reviews of literature to validate the rationale for this study. The empirical gap in the literature that this study addresses is the lack of qualitative exploration of personal and professional experiences that influence some mainstream classroom teachers to first try in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment.

## Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning suggests that human behavior and thought processes are heavily influenced by an ongoing cognitive synthesis of observations and experience. This cognitive synthesis influences a teacher's decision whether to initially refer an overly active, distracted student for ADHD evaluation, or to first try in-classroom instructional modifications to meet their learning needs (Cruz et al., 2019).

The evolution of Bandura's social learning theory originates with the Russian scientist Pavlov's experiments with classical conditioning in 1927 (Price & Archbold, 1995). Pavlov

(1904), a physiologist, suggested a machine-like interaction between an organism and its mind. His theory of classical conditioning was the result of studies which demonstrated that the nervous system played a large part in the regulation of the digestive system. Operant conditioning, introduced by Skinner, contended that a reward increased the probability a behavior would be repeated, while punishment decreased a given behavior (Skinner & Skinner, 2002). Both Pavlov and Skinner attributed behavior to conditioning. Bandura (1977) suggested that conditioning alone was inadequate when explaining the failure to develop a phobia, the ease of eliminating conditioned responses, or phobias that exist without trauma (Price & Archbold, 1995). Unlike Pavlov and Skinner, Bandura (1977) suggested that motivation for change in behavior can be related to the personal context in which past events were experienced and interpreted if prior events possessed enough merit to be remembered.

The decision of a mainstream classroom teacher to initially refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation or to first implement in-classroom instructional modifications begs an examination of teacher motivation. A teacher's propensity to first implement in-classroom instructional modifications was examined through the lens of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Learned behavior is a product of social interaction, internal regulation, modeling, interpretation, and personal assimilation (Bandura, 1986). Social interaction is the catalyst for all learning (Bandura, 1986). How one acts and acceptable behavior and attitudes toward individuals and groups are learned at home, among friends, and from professional peers. In the classroom, the sources of a teacher's attitude and opinion of a student's behavior are a combination of personal and professional experiences. According to Bandura (1989) internal regulation is the process by which an individual measures self-behavior against personal beliefs and standards of self-behavior. In the classroom this is displayed when a teacher judges the best

first course of action for an overly active, distracted student. Modeling, observing the behavior of others, is the primary way individuals learn (Bandura, 1977). At school, teachers' prior learning experiences are continued by watching other teachers, participating in faculty meetings, and in-service training. Whether experienced passively or actively, modeling by others not only teaches but also reinforces and inhibits behavior and thoughts (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1989). Interpretation and assimilation allow individuals to analyze and categorize new information with previous beliefs (Bandura, 1977). In the classroom, teachers compare what they see and hear against what they already believe. Prior knowledge is reinforced, modified, or challenged.

Bandura's (1986) social learning theory suggests that humans learn from one another. This study, guided by social learning theory, explored lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students. Other teachers will benefit from this study as participants explore personal and professional experiences that shaped their attitudes and referral practices for overactive students.

Social learning theory informed the research questions and reporting results. Research questions explored the influences of society and the workplace in some mainstream teachers' decisions to initially modify in-classroom instruction for overly active, distracted students. Results reflect the data shared by participants.

## Related Literature

What follows is an exploration of current literature with the goal of justifying the proposed research. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory is the cornerstone of this literature review. The review synthesizes current research to examine how preconceptions and prejudice, teachers use of social media, teacher self-efficacy, teacher burnout, labeling students, medication

and classroom management, and the influence of administrators and fellow teachers influence teachers' judgements of the best way to initially address overly active, distracted students. Following Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, teachers' perceptions of the needs of overly active, distracted students are learned. A teacher's level of self-efficacy, classroom management skills, potential for job burnout, and general attitudes toward students also influence how a teacher chooses to address the needs of a student (Bandura, 1977; Davis & Yi, 2022; Droogenbroeck et al, 2021; Mowrey, 2020).

**Preconceptions and Prejudice**

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory contends that most things are learned the way they were originally taught. The theory also asserts that people often behave the way they have seen others act. Prejudice is belief that has formed in the mind prior to personal experience (D'Urso & Petruccelli, 2021) and can influence actions and behaviors. It is difficult to pinpoint the origin of prejudice in humans. A search of literature on this topic is important because the personal lens through which overly active, distracted students are evaluated predicts the course of action most likely prescribed by a classroom teacher. Generally, the more limited a teachers' definition of acceptable classroom behavior the higher likelihood of a student being tagged as an outlier (Crawford & Brandt, 2019; Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021).

It may be uncomfortable to think that some teachers come to the classroom with preconceived feelings and beliefs about demographic groups, but these preconceptions can influence their interactions with individual students. Stereotypes influence teachers' attitudes, interactions, and academic decisions about their students (Lessard & Juvonen, 2020). Preconceptions and prejudices do play a part in some teachers' tendencies to proactively refer overly active students for ADHD evaluation before modifying in-classroom instruction (Cruz et

al., 2019). Classroom teachers often perceive overweight students as academically challenged. They believe these students are lazy, unsuccessful, and unintelligent. Overweight females are projected to have reading difficulties and overweight males as mathematically challenged (Lessard & Juvonen, 2020; Nutter et al. 2019).

Student dialect is another source of teacher preconceptions. Individuals with Appalachian dialects are often viewed as unintelligent (Brashears, 2014). Effeminate sounding voices are interpreted as more musically inclined and organized while straight sounding masculine voices are assumed to be mature with leadership qualities (Taylor & Raadt, 2020). Black vernacular is frequently and erroneously all lumped into one category, (Milu, 2021) resulting in students often being identified as linguistically inferior. Ethnic biases influence teacher perceptions of student cognitive functions (D'Urso & Petruccelli, 2021). Additional studies have found that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are disproportionately identified as requiring special education (Cruz et al., 2019).

A combination of biases can further complicate a classroom teachers' judgement. Disability and critical race theory (Dis Crit) examines the intersection of race and disability. It addresses the phenomenon of intolerance combining both racial and ableist perspectives (Fisher et al, 2021). Studies measuring disparities between white and black male ADHD students demonstrate higher rates of diagnosis and disciplinary action for black students (Cavendish et al., 2020; Connor et al., 2019; Fisher et al., 2021). Furthermore, ableism, sexism, and racism are often unwittingly combined by teachers resulting in intolerance toward a child on many levels (Connor et al., 2019).

According to Metzger and Hamilton (2020) males are twice as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD as their female classmates. Asian children are rarely labeled with ADHD. White and

Puerto Rican children are diagnosed with ADHD at half the rate of black children. The authors further note children with less educated parents and lower income households are more likely to be referred for ADHD evaluation than students of other demographics. Gibbs et al. (2020) raised another poignant observation that children who display a fidgety, active, disinterested behavior regardless of degree are usually only tested for one disorder, ADHD. Additionally, the authors noted that a teacher' assessment of the degree to which active distracted behavior is problematic is completely subjective.

ADHD is viewed by many as existing on a continuum (Chowdhury, 2019; Speerforck et al., 2019) since it can vary in its severity of symptoms. Many prefer to socially distance themselves from individuals labeled with ADHD, believing them to be unstable and potentially dangerous (Godfrey et al., 2020; Speerforck et al., 2019). Some teachers perceive these students as performing at a lower academic level than their classmates (Metzger & Hamilton, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2022) and rarely acknowledge when the labeled students do in fact display subject matter competence (Metzger & Hamilton, 2020).

Theoretical learning experiences alone do little to attenuate bias toward individuals diagnosed with ADHD (Godfrey et al., 2020). Direct experiences between teachers and students result in the greatest decrease in potential bias and increased changes in favorable attitudes (Ewe & Aspelin, 2022). They also point out that the combination of both direct and vicarious learning opportunities reduce intolerance and promote enhanced student-teacher relationships.

Students exhibiting symptoms of ADHD do experience intolerance and are often victimized by classmates (Lee et al., 2021). Developing friendships can be difficult as overly active, distracted students are routinely ostracized by their peers. Lee et al. (2021) suggest the population of labeled students most likely to be victimized by peers are those labeled with

ADHD. As many as 34% of these students are bullied without provocation. An additional 10% of ADHD students provoke bully behavior from their peers (Winters et al., 2020). Loneliness and rejection are common experiences for early and middle school students with ADHD. Younger students are often emotionally and physically shunned because they are not understood by their peers. High school provides greater opportunity for socialization as the larger pool of students creates a greater opportunity for inclusion by individuals with whom they have common experiences (Beristain & Wiener, 2020).

Future studies might seek to develop more consistent and precise definitions of ADHD within the literature (Verkuyten et al., 2020). It. is difficult to compare findings or suggest interventions when terms are not always congruent. In addition, replication of previous studies adding more diverse groups would serve to close some gaps in the literature (Crawford & Brandt, 2019).

**Teachers' Use of Social Media**

This section examines the personal and professional use of social media by classroom teachers. The literature explores why and how social media has become integral as a learning and decision-making tool for teachers. The potential benefits and pitfalls of social media platforms as sources of professional information are presented.

The use of social media continues to rise across all demographics (Pew, 2021) with 80 percent of American adults accessing at least one platform. It increases with the level of education and income. Females are slightly more active than males. There is little difference in social media access among Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and other demographics. The greatest variances are by age and education (Khoros, 2022; Statista, 2022). The most notable disparity is among communities, with greater usage in urban settings, followed by suburban, and rural with

the least on-line presence (Bekalu et al., 2020). According to Pew (2022) the most used platforms are YouTube and Facebook, then Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Politically partisan differences are embedded in many platforms, some leaning more strongly than others. The exceptions are Facebook and Pinterest where bias is minimal (Vogels et al., 2021).

### *Productive Uses of Social Media by Classroom Teachers*

Through access to on-line groups, it is possible to connect with experts and experienced people with whom interaction would otherwise not exist. In most cases users are not limited by social or professional status, nor by geographical boundaries. Instead, ideas are exchanged among a broad cross section of people who voluntarily make associations (Karimi et al., 2020). Self-driven education is the foundation around which much knowledge is amassed (Greenhalgh et al., 2021). The authors note that social media has the potential to support the teacher both emotionally and professionally. According to Karimi et al. (2020) the format of social media allows for diffusion of information quickly among groups as well as through association via hashtags.

Both formal and informal knowledge spreads through interactions within the immense network of users (Karimi et al., 2020). In years past teachers' sources of information were limited to those with whom they physically interacted. Social media now provides for unlimited and timely interaction at times convenient to the user (Aguilar et al., 2021). Productive platform experiences are reflected in increased teacher confidence, fresh ideas, and improved academic results for students (Simoncini et al., 2021).

Teachers also seek out a professional community with other teachers for purposes of social comradery, sharing professional experiences, professional assistance, and learning about teaching related products (Carpenter et al., 2020). The immediacy of social media and the vast

amount of information available on a global level at any time or any day portends opportunities for both personal and professional development (Shah, 2018). Through media platforms like-minded educators can coalesce, creating and benefiting from both professional and personal communities (Malik & Haidar, 2020).

Instagram, created in 2010, has over a billion followers and provides opportunities to share videos, photos, and hashtags associated with posts. This facilitates users' abilities to find groups or individuals with common interests (Carpenter et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Over 87 percent of educators using Instagram for professional purposes report a desire to learn or obtain new ideas from other teachers (Carpenter et al., 2020). As with other social media platforms Instagram requires a posted disclosure of association with financial or commercial connections.

### *Social Media and Misinformation*

The requirement for disclosure of financial connections is often ignored or presented in a manner easily overlooked by a viewer; consequently, many posts present a multitude of unsubstantiated and erroneous claims (Lee et al., 2020; Veirman & Hudders, 2020). Conflicts of interest can be less than apparent to the viewer. Teachers seeking information on social media can find themselves making questionable decisions based on the content of posts they view (Trust et al., 2022).

Viewers follow influencers with whom they identify. Educated individuals, like teachers, tend to seek out influencers offering information relevant to their careers and interests (Croes & Bartels, 2021). Many educators consider social media groups to which they belong akin to virtual teacher lounges. But the reality of influencers suggests an often-intentional commodification of teachers with the actual product deceptively unidentified (Croes & Bartels, 2021; Davis & Yi, 2022). Notwithstanding the mercenary implications of social media, it is indeed responsible for a

large transfer of culture and practice through text and video communication. Ideas and values that reinforce or disrupt culture and accepted beliefs are disseminated freely (Davis & Yi, 2022). It is often impossible to determine the point of financial gain or the genuine purpose of most posts (Carpenter et al., 2020). With large audiences, educational influencers are de facto salespeople promoting merchandise and marketable ideas to teachers and parents (Donelson, 2021). The key quality of successful influencers is their ability to effectively engage with their target audiences (Gil-Quintana & de Leon, 2021). Social media is replete with podcast videos and text dedicated to the subject of ADHD. Some information is produced institutionally and some independently. Unfortunately, as noted by Donelson (2021), when an individual is interacting with social media it is often difficult to determine the genuine motivation of the influencer. And the true source of the content can be difficult to discern.

Social media is fluid in its' volume, content, and availability. Peer reviewed literature analyzing the quality of general ADHD content on social media platforms is scant at best (Ward et al, 2020). Ward et al. (2020) noted that the ADHD content on the YouTube platform has been the most scrutinized. They further suggest that 85 percent of ADHD content videos do not include a medical professional. Some examples of ADHD video topics on YouTube include: ADHD is not a real disorder; drug companies created ADHD; ADHD medications have created drug addiction; and ADHD is just overactive behavior. There are also narrations of personal and family experiences, ADHD information, and entertainment (Kang et al., 2017; Thapa et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2020). According to Thapa et al. (2018), 57 percent of YouTube ADHD related videos are less than five minutes long and 38 percent are misleading. TikTok has over one billion monthly followers and the *#adhd* hashtag is the seventh most popular health related search on the platform. JAMA benchmark criteria demonstrates that more than half of TikTok

videos related to ADHD are classified as misleading. Most of the videos are created by non-healthcare professionals (Yeung et al., 2022).

The benefits of social media must be tempered with the reality that a user is often unable to clearly recognize the motivation behind the material presented (Shelton et al., 2020). The phenomenon of the educational influencer and their perceived command of authority allows them to influence the purchasing, professional, behavioral, and personal choices of countless followers (Carpenter et al., 2022). The influencers' goal is to monetize their following by promoting ideas, products, or practice (Carpenter et al., 2022; Shelton et al., 2020). Although followers often interact and form other loose networks, the primary purpose of social media interaction with teachers is to create another category of consumers (Davis & Yi, 2022; Schroeder et al., 2021).

### *Social Media and Professional Growth*

Educational technology (EdTech) is a thriving industry within social media that reaches teachers through blogs, social media platforms, and private podcasts (Team Leverage Edu, 2021). These platforms provide channels for ideas to flow freely between teachers, parents, industry, and institutions (Morgan, 2022). Social media posts range from those produced by the International Society for Technology in Education (South, 2022) to privately produced and less formal posts (Duffy, 2020). Popular education influencers on Instagram can draw as many as 100 million followers (Team Leverage Edu, 2021). YouTube is a prolific source of theoretical and instructional videos with some educational channels boasting over 13 million subscribers (Day, 2022). Twitter followers can also access educational influencers including some with over 100,000 followers (Twitter, 2022). And TikTok educational influencers routinely boast over 800,000 followers (Donelson, 2021). Social media is neither inherently good nor bad but rather a

technical platform available to all for community, the exchange of ideas, education, and commerce. The use of these platforms by teachers parallels general population demographic norms. (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019).

Social media has also become a useful tool for administrators and school districts to direct in-service teacher education with the teacher often a passive participant. Other in-service educational opportunities facilitate active participation of teachers, providing opportunities for teachers to initiate searches and interact with other teachers around topics, ideas, or products (Karimi et al., 2020; Yildrim, 2019). With this structure, the teacher enjoys ownership of not only the intellectual product but also the process of learning. More structured professional development can also be conducted on social media platforms (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Nelimarkka et al., 2021). But a lot of individual learning and research is casually self-directed (Shah, 2018). Professional development offered within state and school districts are by necessity broad in nature (Aguilar et al., 2021). It is not possible for the nuance of every topic to be addressed by in-service training. According to Carpenter and Harvey (2019), district administrators must logically tailor training to the broadest possible audiences. Unfortunately, broad training is at times inadequate and can fail to meet the specific needs of teachers. There are districts with limited funding that are unable to bring quality training to teachers. In addition to unproductive professional development, teachers sometimes find themselves in situations where proximal teachers are unwilling to provide guidance or assistance (Simoncini et al., 2021). In these situations, teachers who wish to be successful sometimes look outside their immediate educational community for help. Aguilar et al. (2021) suggest these teachers often turn to social media for community and learning opportunities.

Future research should address making the availability of better evidence-based ADHD research more accessible to classroom teachers via social media (DuPaul et al., 2020). According to Aguilar et al. (2021), teachers will continue to turn to social media for camaraderie, information, and professional purposes. Studies raising educator awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of social media as a source of reliable information would be valuable (Carpenter et al., 2022; Shelton et al., 2020).

## Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy plays a role in the likelihood that a teacher might implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring an overly active, distracted student for ADHD evaluation. Self-efficacy is the belief that one possesses the ability to assess and execute measures toward the attainment of a goal, or the expectation that one is competent to execute steps needed to produce a given outcome (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy functions as a measurement of self and is inseparable from one's motivation (Lauerman & Berger, 2021).

### *Importance of Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy in the classroom includes teachers' beliefs that they can successfully influence student learning. A combination of teacher inner resilience and the ability to establish and meet effective teaching goals contributes to successful outcomes for students, which in turn increase teachers' feelings of self-efficacy (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2021). The attainment of goals is the catalyst for internal empowerment. Setting and achieving attainable goals builds feelings of competence which then leads to improvement in other teaching situations. Self-efficacy is also reflected in a teacher's willingness to respond to the needs of a student, outside of his or her direct experiences (Cruz et al., 2019). Teachers possessing higher degrees of self-efficacy display more persistence and resilience than those lacking self-efficacy. A lack of self-

efficacy might explain the lack of motivation needed to attempt to teach overly active, distracted students. Teacher self-efficacy is not static and is improved or diminished through experience (Outlaw & Grifenhagen, 2021). Experience can be enhanced through productive training situations and mentored interactions with students. Teacher self-efficacy matters as there is a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement (Daumiller et al., 2021; Perera & John, 2020).

It is nearly impossible to examine teacher self-efficacy by itself. It is inextricably intertwined with teachers' beliefs about students, job burnout, and peer interaction (Daumiller et al., 2021; Kim & Buric, 2020; Prilop et al., 2021). Self-efficacy needs to be properly addressed in this study given that it does influence teacher-student relationships and teacher practices. To be effective, a teacher must believe that he or she can in fact successfully address the needs of most students in their classroom (Daumiller et al., 2021; Gonzalez-DeHass et al, 2021).

### *Building Teacher Self-Efficacy*

For the teacher facing a crisis of self-efficacy or self-confidence, school support is imperative (Carpentier et al., 2019). If the intention of a school is to maintain and develop successful qualified teaching staff, it is necessary to help unconfident teachers to develop their self-efficacy through productive mentoring that builds a solid base of knowledge (Toropova et al., 2021). The choice by school administrators to ignore or punish teachers who fail to modify their instruction is to further erode any convictions of competence or efficacy they may have possessed.

Teachers experiencing a crisis of self-efficacy can be assisted in several ways: providing them pedagogical and educational learning opportunities, mentoring, and encouragement (McCullough et al., 2022; Toropova et al., 2021). Self-efficacy is often affected when a

mainstream teacher is presented with a student whose behavior, appearance, language, or knowledge level seems outside what the teacher deems normal for his or her classroom (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2021). This can influence the decision of mainstream elementary grade teachers to either refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation or to implement in-classroom instructional modifications (Cruz et al., 2019). Deterrents to teacher self-efficacy must be recognized and addressed (Outlaw & Grifenhagen, 2021).

Several factors contribute to building self-efficacy of teachers. The cornerstone is an understanding of the skills involved with successful completion of a given task (Bandura, 1977). Understanding how to address the cognitive, physical, and emotional needs of overly active, distracted students is fundamental (Fernandez et al, 2021). Watching an event successfully carried out by another person indicates to an individual that success is indeed possible. In essence, if one person can do it, it is highly likely that another person can as well (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021). Self-efficacy can be built by watching an efficacious classroom teacher as he or she attempts to initially address the instructional needs of overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation.

Another element of building self-efficacy is encouragement from others (Innes et al., 2020). The purpose of encouragement is stimulation of growth or action for another. It is the sharing or transmission of faith or confidence from an observer to the doer (Innes et al., 2020; Keller & Szakal, 2021). The knowledge that others believe one can successfully develop and complete a task builds that belief in oneself.

Emotional health also affects self-efficacy. Emotional well-being and self-efficacy are positively related (Muenchhausen et al., 2021). In this context the state of poor emotional health is defined as a tendency to experience depression or emotional disorder. Any state of affective

chaos affects one's ability to rationally assess oneself, and depression effectively hampers self-efficacy (Muenchhausen et al., 2021; Tak et al., 2017).

Formal mainstream classroom teacher education does initially establish self-efficacy in the general population of student teachers. Teachers are academically acquainted with subject matter and classroom management techniques. They experience student teaching where they observe and assist classroom teachers (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; Moody, 2022). A student teacher receives feedback on their abilities from their professors, institution, and state and national competency exams. Eventually finding themselves on their own in a classroom the feeling of self-efficacy can be challenged (Carpentier et al., 2019). Faced with challenging students and lacking direct academic and classroom support, new teachers may question their own ability to effectively manage and teach (Hu et al., 2019; McCullough et al, 2022). Teachers with self-efficacy will seek out solutions to these situations. Utilizing academic research or reaching out to more experienced teachers, the self-effective individual can develop and implement a plan of action.

Teachers work in an ever-changing environment of student demographics. This is true not only in the United States but globally (Clark & Andreasen, 2021). Currently White students comprise 50% of the U.S. student population, Hispanics 25%, Blacks 15%, Asians 5%, and Native Americans 1% (NCES, 2022). The statistics also reflect that approximately 9% of students speak English as a second language, 20% speak a different language at home, and nearly 22% of all students live in poverty. The demographics of the U.S. student population is changing, but the demographics of classroom teachers remains predominately White and middle class. Clark & Andreasen (2021) reported that educators must feel that they can effectively teach all children. Teachers' beliefs about groups of individuals can affect their ability to instruct, and

this includes willingness to adapt lessons and modify instruction (Clark & Andreason, 2021; Kunemund et al., 2020).

Teachers possessing self-efficacy believe that they can affect learning outcomes for students with overly active, distracted behavior (Hanisch et al., 2020). Teachers provided with strategies for students with ADHD reported that their levels of self-efficacy stayed the same or increased after training (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Creating an inclusive instructional environment for a hyperactive distracted student requires a high degree of self-efficacy from a teacher. Successful teaching outcomes with overly active, distracted students increase teacher self-efficacy (Hanisch et al, 2020; Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

A feeling of self-efficacy benefits not only a teacher, but also coworkers and students in their classroom (Toropova et al., 2021). Teachers with self-efficacy believe they can contribute to positive outcomes within a group. They are inclined to participate and contribute because they trust their knowledge base and competence as an asset to the school. Likewise, teachers who enjoy self-efficacy have a positive effect on their students learning. These teachers maintain that their students are capable of learning (Werner et al., 2021). They view themselves adept at analyzing a student's needs and developing and executing instructional plans. This results in a successful student and minimal classroom disruption. Werner et al. (2021) suggest that students with self-efficacious teachers are not singled out for their differences or shortcomings but rather are celebrated upon the attainment of goals and consequently can feel a sense of camaraderie with their classmates.

### *Inadequate Self-Efficacy*

Teachers lacking self-efficacy contribute little to the growth and climate of a school. They believe they have little to give and even less to affect positive changes or solutions

(McCullough et al., 2022). Teachers who believe they cannot influence positive outcomes tend to blame others for problems and see most situations as beyond their control. This often results in teachers refusing to try in the face of difficulties (Lauermann & Berger, 2021). In the classroom a teacher lacking self-efficacy generally believes that there is little they can personally do to help a student struggling with academics or behavior issues. And because teachers occupy a position of implied authority, individual students often begin to doubt their own ability to affect change or control the outcomes of their own efforts (Perera & John, 2020). The most unfortunate consequence of a teacher who lacks self-efficacy is failing those students who are most vulnerable and would benefit from additional classroom assistance, emotionally or academically (Lauermann & Berger, 2021; Perera & John, 2020). Failing these students can set them up for present and future defeat as they see themselves as problems. A classroom teacher who lacks self-efficacy can believe themselves to be incapable of addressing the instructional needs of an overactive distracted student. They are more inclined to initially refer an overly active, distracted student for ADHD evaluation instead of first trying in-classroom instructional modifications (Lauermann & Berger, 2021).

Consequences of low teacher self-efficacy include not only poor student academic outcomes, but also ineffective classroom management and inconsistent discipline (Okoro et al, 2022). In addition, teachers with low self-efficacy are more apt to focus on student differences and are less welcoming of inclusion and accessibility (Woodcock et al., 2022). Teacher self-efficacy can become clouded within a mismatch of student and teacher demographics. Racial mismatch often results in a significantly greater perceived incidence of behavior disorder and student conflict (Kunemund et al., 2020). Restless behavior and subsequent conflicts by students can indeed impact teacher efficacy negatively. Culturally focused teacher training can possibly

mitigate some perceived classroom problems and improve teacher self-efficacy (Bentley-Edwards et al., 2020; Kunemund et al, 2020). Some teachers express fear, racial stress, and a lack of perceived classroom self-efficacy when faced with the prospect of teaching in a predominately African American and Latino urban school (Bently-Edwards et al., 2020). Management of this stress is necessary as it affects self-efficacy; and teacher self-efficacy is crucial for a quality education experience for students.

Future studies might examine the efficacy of pre and post service training opportunities. This training could assist teachers with tools for culturally inclusive instruction (Clark & Andreasen, 2021; Cruz et al., 2019; Kunemund et al., 2020). Clark and Andreason (2021) suggest that these studies could increase teacher self-efficacy and directly improve student learning by identifying productive pre-service and in-service opportunities for teachers. The gap in the literature addressed by this study is the scarcity of qualitative investigation examining the life experiences of mainstream elementary teachers who prefer to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020; Owens, 2020). As noted by McCullough et al. (2022) and Toropova et al. (2021), self-efficacy can be assisted by providing teachers with pedagogical and educational learning opportunities, mentoring, and encouragement. Positive teacher self-efficacy is reflected in a teachers' inclination toward student inclusivity in their own classrooms (Cruz et al., 2019). This study explored with mainstream elementary classroom teachers, among other factors, the contribution of self-efficacy in their own decisions to implement in-classroom instructional modifications before recommending overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment.

**Teacher Burnout and Work Fatigue**

Professional inefficiency, emotional exhaustion, and general cynicism define teacher burnout according to Martinez-Ramon et al. (2021). Over 30% of current teachers suffer from these symptoms of burnout. An emotionally exhausted teacher can lack the motivation or energy needed to address the academic and emotional needs of an overly active, distracted student (Salinas-Falquez, 2022).

### *Causes of Teacher Burn-Out*

Burn-out from lack of job resources and constant administrative demands is the overwhelming reason teachers cite for leaving the profession (Russell et al., 2020). Another contributing factor to burnout is moral injury, exposure to situations that conflict with one's conscience, and no just results are possible (Sugrue, 2019). According to Sugrue (2019), knowing that children live in dangerous neighborhoods or are treated unkindly when they are at home are two examples of moral injury experienced by teachers. There are also codes of conduct, broadly expected behaviors within a society. Breaches of these codes of conduct can contribute to burnout. Examples include lack of time to provide support or instruction that specific students require, difficulty caring about certain students, and thinking about or planning to quit their job. Sugrue (2019) further suggests that when a teacher feels overall social and economic factors are stacked against the general student population of a school, and the teacher feels powerless to improve student conditions, the teacher suffers the strongest moral injury.

The emotional labor required to act professionally in the face of cognitive dissonance contributes significantly to teacher burn-out (Kariou et al., 2021). In other words, the effort necessary to behave friendly, caring, and professionally in the face of stressful negative conditions consumes emotional energy and drains teachers (Lu & Guy, 2019). Given that teachers spend most of their time with students, classroom environment contributes to the

emotional fatigue and burn-out of teachers (Jensen & Solheim, 2019). Class size and pupil to teacher ratio strongly impact the learning environment. Teachers feel more academically effective with smaller classes; they witness less violence; and they enjoy better relationships with students (Jensen & Solheim, 2019; Sugrue, 2019).

Admittedly burnout is an internal function (Droogenbroeck et al., 2021), but external factors contribute to the phenomenon. The socioeconomic home situation of students is identified as a large predictor of teacher burnout followed by the collaborative nature of the school's culture. Scheeler et al. (2021) suggest administrative support, or the lack thereof, is also a contributing factor. According to Droogenbroeck et al. (2021), another large predictor of teacher burnout is the degree to which teachers are subjected to both verbal and physical intimidation. In the elementary grades intimidation can come from students, parents, administration, and professional peers. Intimidation from professional peers is a staggering 36% higher in poor urban schools than in other school settings (Scheeler et al., 2021; McMahon et al, 2020).

Minority teachers outpace their non-minority peers leaving the profession at a 20 percent higher rate (Solomon & Lambie, 2020). The authors note many of these minority teachers cited the following challenges: (a) they were physically and emotionally exhausted and unable to help the children in their economic circumstances; (b) classroom management was a challenge; (c) they perceived covert discrimination from peers and parents; (d) they viewed administrative support as inadequate; and (e) felt compassion from peers was often lacking. In addition, male teachers often feel they are assigned the most difficult students.

Teachers report that bullying from students and peers would decrease if administration acted before the behavior escalated (McMahon et al, 2020; Scheeler et al, 2021). A more subtle

form of bullying is identified by Aronson et al. (2021) who suggest there has been a shift in society. Teachers are no longer always regarded as heroes, but rather identified as the face of what is wrong with schools today. Aronson et al. (2021) also noted, with the public not understanding that education policy is created by individuals far removed from the classroom, many teachers suffer at the hands of frustrated unhappy parents and students. This lack of parental and student support is often another external factor that contributes to teacher burn-out (Droogenbroeck et al., 2021).

Society tends to give accolades to individuals that work long hours after the school day has ended and when school is not in session. They are lauded as heroes with their loyalty and never-ending passion always on display (Amos et al., 2019). Amos et al. (2019) noted while this works for some, for others it is a burdensome expectation and not necessarily an accurate representation of teaching effectiveness.

### *Effects of Teacher Burn-Out*

According to Martinez-Ramon et al. (2021), burnout in the workplace diminishes a mainstream classroom teachers' ability to effectively deal with an overly active, distracted student. As they approach burnout, a teacher lacks the emotional and intellectual store from which to address individual student's needs (Dexter & Wall, 2021). As some teachers detach from their work environment, they slowly cease to be an effective force for their students. The tendency to procrastinate that accompanies work fatigue leads to demotivated learners (Laybourn et al., 2019). Restrained teacher emotions result in students with negative outlooks, negative classroom behavior, and emotional distress (Braun et al, 2020). The emotional well-being of teachers has an impact beyond themselves (Braun et al., 2020; Laybourn et al., 2019). In fact, a teacher's emotional and cognitive state of being has a significant effect on students in the

classroom. Teacher burn-out or work fatigue is partly to blame for the tendency of some teachers to proactively refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation (Salinas-Falquez et al., 2022). Studies do indicate a correlation between teacher burn-out and a lack of self-efficacy (Kim & Buric, 2020). A burned-out teacher is an ineffective teacher, coworker, and employee.

### *Coping with Teacher Burn-Out*

It is possible to mitigate some sources of stress. Self-care and assistance from peers and administrators are effective methods to address this crisis (Camacho et al, 2021). Teachers themselves should be acquainted with signs of burnout that include feelings of hopelessness, lack of self-worth, fatigue, and withdrawal from peers (Brasfield et al., 2019). Each negative symptom reinforces the others in a downward spiral. However, Camacho et al. (2021) suggested teachers who are aware of and able to regulate their emotions can project a more positive outlook which ultimately results in students experiencing increased feelings of well-being.

Self-care is one of the first suggestions given for teachers experiencing work fatigue (Murphy et al., 2020). Although well intended, this advice potentially shifts all the blame for work-related stress onto the suffering individual. There are steps that can be taken by an individual teacher to help alleviate some worry and anxiety. Although difficult, a teacher can stop bringing work home, both physically and mentally. One can also find a confidante with whom to share and access advice (Camacho et al., 2021). One can attend to one's own physical, spiritual, and emotional health in the order of personal priorities. A teacher can also take steps to become better educated on professional issues of concern. Teachers can find interests outside the workplace in which to invest emotional and intellectual capital. Self-care is not a panacea but is a good step toward alleviating work-related fatigue (Murphey et al., 2020).

A school administrator must be cognizant of healthy work boundaries and encourage employees to take personal time. Accolades must not be reserved primarily for those who blur professional and personal boundaries (Amos et al., 2019; Hester et al., 2020). School administrators bear responsibility for creating a supportive environment for teachers, staff, and students. This requires school principals to be sensitive to teacher needs while providing proactive and real-time assistance when needed (Brasfield et al., 2019). Several impactful steps principals can implement include insisting teachers use their time off and that they leave schoolwork at school at the end of the day. Administrators can provide meaningful continuing education, facilitate mentoring opportunities, maintain open channels of communication, and allow uninterrupted time for classroom instruction and regular peer interaction. Administrators must also appropriately deliver professional and personal recognition (Brasfield et al., 2019; Camacho et al., 2021; Hester et al., 2020).

The effective principal understands that productive professional development is individual by nature and should address the unique needs of each teacher (Brasfield et al, 2019). Understanding that improving self-efficacy includes vicarious learning, administrators should provide quality mentoring and opportunities for observations. The opportunity to watch another teacher successfully address a troubling issue not only models effective behavior but also assures a teacher that a positive outcome is possible (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021). Providing teachers uninterrupted time for classroom instruction, adequate time for planning and administrative work, and time to interact with peers combine to minimize stress and alleviate anxiety. Finally, an open line of communication between a teacher and principal allows for time to share concerns and opportunities to request assistance (Scallon et al., 2021). It is not always possible to prevent

a teacher from experiencing work fatigue, but an engaged principal can recognize and reinforce healthy work habits to minimize teacher burnout (Brasfield et al., 2019; Scallon et al., 2021).

Future studies might examine characteristics fostering work engagement as it appears to mitigate burn-out (Russell et al., 2020). McMahon et al. (2020) suggest studies examining intimidation among teachers and their peers. In addition, teacher-administrator relationships could be further examined as possible mitigating factors of work exhaustion (Scallon et al., 2021).

This study addressed a gap in the literature specific to the lack of phenomenological qualitative research exploring why some mainstream elementary teachers initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020; Owens, 2020). It explored with mainstream elementary teachers the possible effects of work fatigue and burn-out on their decisions to first attempt in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment.

**Labeling Students**

The mainstream classroom teacher is often one of the first adults in a position to note student behavior that might seem out of the ordinary. A student that is more active and more easily distracted than his or her peers presents the teacher with two immediate choices: teachers can initially try to modify their classroom instruction to meet the learning needs of the student, or they can initially refer the student for a formal assessment. Private school teachers are often freer to suggest to parents that their child be assessed for ADHD by a doctor or professional. Teachers in public schools often must follow more formal district procedures for student assessment

referrals. Whether public or private, when the classroom teacher requests a formal assessment of the problematic student behavior, they are seeking a label for that child.

ADHD is a rapidly growing diagnosis with the associated symptoms continually expanding (Owens, 2020). In the last 10 years ADHD diagnoses have risen 41%. This amounts to 6.4 million individuals, which is over 10% of all U.S. children (Owens, 2020; Wienen et al. 2019). ADHD is currently classified as a mental disorder (Metzger & Hamilton, 2020) which is both an advantage and disadvantage for students. While the classification opens the door for treatment and medication, the associated stigma and lowered expectations from classmates and teachers often result in self-fulfilling prophesies by the diagnosed students themselves.

The subjective nature of evaluations can result in either an over or under representation of demographic groups (Slobidin & Davidovitch, 2019). One standard of the American system of education is the measurement of the ability of each student against the behavior and academic output of a theoretically average learner. Those who fail to match speed, learning proficiency, or behavioral patterns are classified within a set of boundaries. Students in the higher and lower subsets are typically referred for evaluation (Boda, 2021; Cuba et al, 2021). Whether an evaluation results in modified educational procedures or not, an individual child has now been identified as different. Given the potential stigma often associated with being assessed for ADHD, an examination of the effects of labeling a child is warranted. Educators who detect the potential need of some students for instructional modifications and physical assistance will request an official assessment (Verlenden et al., 2021). When results of this testing fall between predetermined parameters students are labeled and then become eligible for targeted assistance.

At this time, with no detectable biological markers, ADHD is classified as a mental illness or neurodevelopmental disorder (CDC, 2022). The CDC lists common observable

behaviors to indicate ADHD. They include difficulty attending and completing many tasks, impulsiveness, and excessive activity. Symptoms can present in varying degrees and combinations. Educators can unwittingly project biases and assumptions onto children's behaviors. Boda (2021) suggests that some teachers unintentionally minimize the recognition of overly active behaviors in some children and exaggerate the degree of activity in others.

### *Beneficial Effects of Student Labeling*

Medication and more tailored educational accommodations allow the most severely affected overly active, distracted students to enjoy a more productive school experience. Student assistance can come in the form of physical accommodations, instructional modifications, and emotional support (Schmitterer & Brod, 2021; Verlenden et al., 2021). When possible, modifications for these labeled students are made within mainstream classrooms as this is the least restrictive learning environment (Wilson et al, 2020). Some students benefit more from a hybrid educational plan where they spend time in both the mainstream classroom and in a specialized learning environment. Others are best served in an entirely self-contained learning environment (Giangreco, 2020). The intended benefit of testing and labeling students is to secure the most productive learning opportunities for their specific needs (Verlenden et al., 2021). In addition, specific labels make state and federal funds available to schools and districts to assist with the added expenses incurred for their education. Many students benefit from special academic accommodations that accompany being labelled with certain learning requirements (Sperling, 2020). For these students, special accommodations are the difference between success and failure in school.

### *Negative Effects of Student Labeling*

Typically, in the rush to label a child with ADHD a single instrument, often a behavioral checklist, is used for diagnosis (Lawrence & Mathis, 2020). According to Lawrence and Mathis (2020) the children identified as at-risk tend to fall academically behind the general student population. These students slowly accept that they are different from their peers (Zeinalipour, 2022) and begin to regard themselves as less competent, less able, and less intelligent.

With some exceptions, a referral for assessment generally infers that a student is deficient in some way (Cuba et al., 2021). Depending on the outcome of the assessment, a combination of counseling, teaching modifications, and medications are initiated. When changes to the mainstream educational process are officially recommended for a student, that student has been labeled (Boda, 2021). This label can come at a significant cost to the student. The benefits of a diagnosis must be weighed against the drawbacks. Diagnostic labels unintentionally act as cues to the general population and often trigger associated stereotypes (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2020). Again, many students benefit from special academic accommodations (Sperling, 2020). Special accommodations can be the difference between success and failure. But, according to Boda (2021), for other individuals labeling can bring with it a lifetime of low expectations from themselves and from society.

The interaction between teacher and student is one predictor of how a student identifies who they are socially and academically (Tran & Burman, 2019). The onus of deciding to have an elementary grade student referred for labeling is not without consequence for the child (Bauer et al., 2022) nor should it be taken lightly. According to Owens (2020), this is significant for students who are minimally affected by active distracted tendencies. These children are often diagnosed with ADHD after beginning formal schooling. The labeled students often suffer over

the long term, faring worse academically and socially than their undiagnosed active distracted peers (Owens, 2020; Tran & Burman, 2019).

For a student, self-efficacy is the belief that their personal effort can positively affect the outcome of an endeavor (Bauer et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) identify three types of self-efficacy affected by formal confirmation of a disability: performance, self-regulation, and learning. A student's assessment of their own physical and intellectual shortcomings affects their belief that they have control over their ability to learn, perform, and successfully live in society (Tus, 2020). Unnecessarily or prematurely inferring to a child that he or she is possibly defective can rob them of hope which is a crucial component of all self-efficacy (Zeinalipour, 2022).

Children as young as seven years of age are aware of the concept of success at school. Primary school students compare themselves to other students. As labeled students watch their classmates succeed, often with different curriculum requirements or grading scales, they can feel powerless and socially subordinate (Hargreaves et al., 2021). The talents that these students do have are often not recognized by teachers as they are not valued to the same degree as math or reading (Frances et al., 2017; Hargreaves et al., 2021).

Many teachers expect less academically from diagnosed students and the students consequently expect less from themselves (Owens, 2020; Wienen et al. 2019). Metzger and Hamilton (2020) suggest that an ADHD diagnosis is a double-edged sword. Students can gain access to extra learning resources but are often seen by current and future teachers as less capable and less productive than their non diagnosed classmates. A teacher's beliefs regarding students with ADHD affect his or her own behavior when working with them. Negative teacher beliefs also reinforce negative student behavior (Dort et al, 2020). This can lead to the

continuous decline in student conduct and academic progress. In other words, results of the Dort et al. (2020) study suggested teachers can behave toward students in ways that elicit unintended student behavior.

Another consequence of labeling a student with ADHD is the effect it has on fellow classmates (Beristain & Wiener, 2020, Normand et al., 2022). Many of their peers neither make accommodations for nor bully a labeled child. They interact just as they do with their other classmates (Normand et al., 2022). A percentage of classmates display overtly helpful behavior, assisting them as they are able. They interpret the label to mean that the student is less capable in some way and in need of assistance (Zava et al., 2019). This message is conveyed to and is internalized by the labeled student, affecting their self-efficacy and motivation to try.

Finally, there are the students who are ostracized, called names, hit, or are the target of rumors. This scenario is not uncommon whether or not observed by a classroom teacher (Wood & Orpinas, 2021). It is naïve to think that a labeled student will not be the target of school and home bullying. Some of the bullying episodes can be brought about by themselves. Those suffering with severe symptoms of ADHD often initiate aggressive and socially inappropriate behavior eliciting hostile and forceful responses from classmates (Bong et al., 2021). The authors determined most bullying does not fall into the bully-victim category. Most bullying is initiated by a classmate or family member for the sole purpose of tormenting the victim. Wood and Orpinas (2021) suggested children who require special educational modifications are four times more likely to become victims of school related violence than their peers.

As with so many things done with good intentions, there are unintended consequences of labeling children. Further research is recommended on the social interaction between children

labeled with ADHD and their peers (Normand et al., 2022). A mindful approach to dealing with overly active, distracted students could mitigate unnecessary victimization of some students.

**Medication and Classroom Management**

The management of students with ADHD has been studied from both psychiatric/psychological and educational perspectives. Unfortunately, the literature suggests that there is too little communication between the two professions (Dort et al., 2020); consequently, a disconnect exists. There are several approaches to management of students diagnosed with ADHD. One approach suggests that proper medication should precede instructional classroom modifications (Schatz et al., 2021). Dort et al. (2020) recommend a system of instructional modifications be used before the move to medication. The third targets behavior using action-consequence or reactive responses to shape desired classroom behavior (Henley, 2022). Each approach has both strong proponents and strong critics.

The last 20 years have seen an increase in the percentage of mainstream classroom teachers who initially recommend an ADHD assessment for overly active, distracted children before trying in-classroom instructional modifications (Schatz et al., 2021). In 1999 most teachers implemented instructional and behavioral modifications before referring students for ADHD testing. According to Schatz et al. (2021), by 2019 labeling and medication for overly active, distracted students had become the path of choice for many teachers.

Medication for a child first requires a medical diagnosis, a label. The decision to initiate the process of labeling a child should be carefully considered as it often carries with it life altering repercussions (Hargreaves et al., 2021). ADHD is the most diagnosed neurodevelopmental condition in U.S. children ages 2-17. (Chang et al., 2020). Psychosocial interventions alone are often effective but less than half of identified children are ever offered

any behavioral treatment. The CDC (2022) concludes nine out of 10 children identified with ADHD are treated with medication alone with dosing usually adjusted up toward the maximum dose for that child (Coles et al, 2020). For pre-school and elementary school children the most frequently prescribed psychostimulants include methylphenidate, mixed amphetamine salts, and dextroamphetamine. Atomoxetine, clonidine, and guanfacine are also prescribed for children as young as 6 years of age (Chang et al., 2022).

### *Medication First Approach*

Among teachers surveyed in 2019, the majority prefer initializing the administration of nervous system stimulant treatments prior to or in leu of instructional modifications and classroom management (Schatz et al., 2021). Schatz et al. (2021) suggested many current in-service teachers note the need for support and training to improve their classroom management skills. These teachers simply do not feel qualified to adapt their classroom instruction or management to meet the needs of students exhibiting overly active, distracted behavior. They believe problems can be solved more quickly and easily with medication (Schatz et al., 2021).

There are critics of the medication-first approach to the management of students with overly active, distracted behavior. ADHD is a condition that is often misdiagnosed and excessively diagnosed in children (Schefft et al., 2019). In addition, critics note conflicts of interest inherent in advice given by some individuals. Most notable are those compensated by pharmaceutical companies and those who stand to gain financially from assessments and testing. Schefft et al. (2019) contend that before exposing children to various stimulants, restless distracted behavior should be addressed with non-pharmacological therapies. When provided access to behavioral counseling, nearly half of students five to 13 years old diagnosed with

ADHD were able to successfully minimize or eliminate nervous system stimulant treatment (Coles et al., 2020).

Labeling a child with ADHD and proceeding to immediately medicate is fraught with potential consequences, not the least of which can be a diminished sense of self-efficacy and powerlessness (Hargreaves et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Many teachers, present and future, expect less from these labeled medicated students, and the students learn to expect less from themselves (Owens, 2020; Wienen et al., 2019). In addition, labeling and medication can negatively affect a child's relationships with schoolmates (Wood & Orpinas, 2021). Minimally symptomatic overly active, distracted children who were immediately placed on medication managed much worse academically and socially over the long run than their undiagnosed active distracted peers (Owens, 2020; Tran & Burman, 2019).

### *Classroom Management*

In 1999, teachers were more apt to initially address overly active, distracted student behavior using classroom management and instructional modifications (Schatz et al., 2021). Most teachers in 1999 felt competent to address behavioral and management issues associated with symptoms of ADHD. Classroom management of overly active, distracted students is not necessarily an either-or proposition. The choice does not need to be made between a pharmacological or management remedy. Multimodal treatment is often the most effective strategy (Coles at al., 2020).

Proactive and reactive management strategies are two approaches to creating and maintaining an effective classroom. Proactive management attempts to prevent classroom problems (Henley, 2022). According to Alasmari and Althaqafi (2021), students in a proactively managed classroom stay engaged, the teacher is active and physically near students, and

expectations are understood in advance. Reactive management, on the other hand, responds to misbehavior with pre-set understood consequences. Studies suggest that proactive management can result in an environment that is generally less stressful for the teacher and students. There are benefits to both proactive and reactive approaches (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2021; Henley, 2022). And despite in-service training and knowledge of proactive classroom management most teachers and staff report using reactive management techniques in the classroom (Domsch et al., 2022; Szep et al., 2021).

### *Instructional Modifications*

Given the abundance of instructional modification research available to educators, strategies for adapting to the needs of individual learners is within the understanding of the classroom teacher (Strelow et al., 2021). Research suggests there are several reasons that teachers hesitate to implement instructional changes in their classrooms (Domsch et al., 2022; Szep et al., 2021). The three most cited reasons for lack of instructional or managerial modifications reported by teachers are actual class sizes, the number of ADHD students within one class, and time constraints (Szep et al., 2021). Studies indicate that these same teachers' rationales are also echoed by their support staff (Domsch et al., 2022). Szep et al. (2021) note many in-service teachers agree that instructional modifications should be tried before medication is recommended, but the reality is that school and district academic expectations often make it impractical.

There is a substantial gap between clinical findings and classroom practice. Future studies must go beyond existing short-term and clinically situated settings. Evaluation, treatment, and classroom management studies must draw on actual classroom environments and allow for variables in age and social situations (DuPaul et al., 2020).

## The Influence of Administrators and Fellow Teachers

Teachers do not work in a vacuum. Attitudes and professional practices are influenced both formally and informally by the individuals with whom teachers interact. While education mandates originate at federal, state, district, and school levels (Guenther, 2021) the behaviors and attitudes of most teachers originate with their principals, fellow teachers, and previous experience. Teachers do not fall neatly into one level of experience. There are teachers new to a school freshly out of teacher education programs, seasoned teachers who are new to a school and district, and seasoned teachers changing disciplines or grade levels (Zhang et al., 2020). Each new teacher brings varying levels of knowledge and classroom competence. Assistance sought from fellow teachers can run the spectrum of how it is done, to how it is done here.

### *Influence of School Administrators*

Scallon et al. (2021) suggest that a school principal often influences the selection of professional education and mentoring opportunities for his or her teaching staff. Exposure to instructional techniques specific to the needs of overly active, distracted students, and opportunities for collegial interaction are directly within the purview of the school principal. According to Scallon et al. (2021) the types and quality of professional education for teachers is often influenced by a principal's personal longer-term goals (Scallon et al., 2021). This matters for the teacher and the school. Scallon et al. (2021) noted that a principal whose primary goal is his or her advancement in a school district will often manage differently from one whose aim is to tailor a learning environment optimal for teachers and the students in their care. The agenda of a politically motivated principal often originates with those who control their career opportunities. Their school management practices might seem impersonal and regimented as the approval they value rests outside the school itself (Guenther, 2021). Scallon et al. (2021) further

note the agenda of a facility-oriented principal is generally shaped by the needs of teachers and students in their school. The type of principal management has a great deal of influence on teacher practices.

The role of principal leadership in quality teacher mentoring is illuminated by Hong and Matsko (2019). The authors report that strong principal leadership better facilitates new teacher access to quality mentors. This mentoring includes organization, management, and best practices. Conversely, poor school leadership provides little formal support for new teachers who by necessity turn to informal and personal sources of information and support. Strong leadership facilitates teacher empowerment, professional development, collaboration, and quality mentoring of individuals new to the organization (Hong & Matsko, 2019; Scallon et al., 2021). A strong principal protects new teachers from the effects of poor mentors (Scallon et al., 2021).

### *Influence of Fellow Teachers*

Much practical and emotional support springs from teachers' peers. However, one must acknowledge the different needs of new teachers, seasoned teachers but new to a school, and seasoned teachers changing certifications. These differences must be addressed in the types of help offered. Each teacher needs comradery and direction specific to their needs (Rodriguez-Triana et al., 2020). It is normal for a new teacher to want to be accepted by the group. New teachers find value working with more seasoned teachers (Wexler, 2019). A new teacher is also likely to begin to adopt the foundational attitudes and practices of their fellow educators. New teacher expectations of students and parents often originate from their peers and are reinforced through experience (Mowrey, 2020). The assistance provided by fellow teachers in the form of formal mentoring and informal guidance shapes teachers feelings of competence, resilience, and classroom practice (Morettini et al., 2020; Mowrey, 2020).

Teacher beliefs and practices can be fluid and depend in part on the teachers with whom they associate (Mowrey, 2020). Ideally, the new teacher-mentor relationship would be carefully designed and implemented in a way that supports and guides the beginning teacher in both day to day and theoretical circumstances (Wexler, 2019). Wexler (2019) suggests that mentor feedback that includes reflection and inquiry are productive techniques for new teacher guidance. Mentoring of new teachers should include social relationships, an understanding of observable professional competence, knowledge of pedagogy, and opportunities for professional development (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Quality mentoring is extremely important but difficult to successfully execute or maintain often due to barriers of cost and maintenance. Although monetary limitations can affect formal sources of new teacher advice, collaboration with fellow teachers can continue informally.

New teachers themselves feel that the most important sources of support they can receive during their early years of teaching are informal individual relationships followed by pedagogical knowledge and mentoring (Morettini et al., 2020). Morettini et al. (2020) note the importance of the identification and development of capable peers. Wilhelm et al. (2020) found that teachers use informal sources of information which they refer to as *Intentional Professional Networks* (IPN). IPN's are individuals that teachers choose to go to for advice about teaching, collegiality, and emotional support. Over time these informal IPN's exert influence over teacher behavior and practice in the classroom. Marz and Kelchtermans (2020) suggest that the reality faced by new teachers is often not fully acknowledged or addressed through formal mentoring programs. Formal mentoring can lack collegiality, emotional support, and classroom specific relevance (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020; Wilhelm et al., 2020). Sikma (2019) prioritized the influences of both formal and informal support systems for new teachers giving the highest value to emotional

support provided by informal relationships. In addition, new teachers value co-planning and collaboration as well as interactions with other teachers (Redding & Smith, 2019). Those who experienced higher levels of emotional support and peer interaction expressed greater job satisfaction and personal well-being. New teachers who were denied opportunities for emotional support and teacher interaction reported a lack of well-being and job satisfaction (Guenther, 2021; Sikma, 2019).

Peers influence the practice of teaching, classroom management, and general school climate for newer teachers. (Sikma, 2019; Vasiliki et al., 2020). Generally, formal mentoring opportunities encourage administrative compliance, familiarity with pedagogy, and strengthen cognitive skills. Informal mentoring can provide this assistance, but it also addresses social and emotional needs of new teachers. (Morettini et al., 2020). Informal associations develop freely and the bonds between individuals often more deeply influence future attitudes and behaviors of new teachers (Colognesi et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Vasiliki et al, 2020).

According to Vasiliki et al. (2020), seasoned teachers new to a school also benefit from mentoring and can find informal relationships often more impactful than those more formal. Seasoned teachers, including those changing areas of certification, often arrive with established attitudes about students. However, in a new environment those attitudes can be influenced by administrative directives and other teaching professionals (Vasiliki et al., 2020).

Despite the positive impact of mentors on new teachers, little research has identified salient qualities, dispositions and traits of the individuals who provide the mentoring experience (Aresi et al., 2020). The greatest predictor of mentor success is the quality of personal relationship between the two teachers. Aresi et al. (2020) suggest motivations for someone to undertake the responsibilities of mentorship are as varied as there are individuals. Some are

prompted by a desire to be recognized as important. Some are inspired by a belief in teamwork and driven by altruistic and humanitarian motives (Teye & Peaslee, 2020). Official mentors are most often recruited by word of mouth or using cash incentives (Biggers et al., 2019).

The effect of both formal and informal mentors should not be underestimated. A negative mentor-protegee relationship can be detrimental to both individuals and it can sour the climate of schools as easily as contribute to a wholesome work environment (Hu et al., 2019). The subject of informal mentors in schools is incomplete without mentioning informal leadership. Apart from the official administrative chain of command, leadership that is found among the ranks of teachers themselves influences teachers' attitudes and practices (Clohessy et al., 2021). These informal leaders hold sway among fellow teachers as they are recognized by their peers as possessing knowledge and experience worthy of acknowledgement and imitation (Gordon et al., 2020). Successful mentor modeling in an authentic teaching environment, along with the opportunity to co-teach with the mentor, equips new teachers with the skills and confidence to implement these techniques in their own classrooms (Moody et al., 2022). A mentor can effectively provide a mentee with the determination that that they can attempt in classroom instructional modifications before referring an overly active, distracted student for an ADHD evaluation.

Much like a mentor, an informal leader can contribute to a cohesive productive teaching staff or a destructive work environment detrimental to academic or scholarly success (Merritt & Wang, 2022). Much attention is paid to the impact of the unofficial school leader usually concentrating on the positive skills of individuals. The authors suggested the converse must be acknowledged as well, conceding that sometimes an informal leader contributes to a discordant atmosphere for learner and teacher alike.

New teachers are often impressionable as they lack real life classroom experience against which to form a judgement. More seasoned educators can draw from their own experiences when weighing the influence of an informal leader, but social pressure can still sway an individual toward conformity (Gordon et al., 2020; Merritt & Wang, 2022). School administration, mentors, and informal leaders can shape teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. The influence of each affects individuals differently based on teaching experience and level of self-confidence.

Considerations for future research must include the quantitative measurement of peer and mentor influence at differing points in a teacher's career (Mowrey, 2020). Biggers et al. (2019) suggest more research is needed to identify the traits of a quality teacher mentor. Research should include a demographically varied selection of teachers and their mentors (Wexler, 2019). New and experienced teachers are different and bring with them varying strengths and weaknesses. Hong and Matsko (2019) recommend that studies include variables associated with the quality of the principal and the acknowledgement that new and experienced teachers possess different degrees of academic and social skills. Research targeting informal teacher support systems is needed (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020). Shank and Santiague (2022) suggest further studies exploring the benefits of experienced educators and mentors modeling successful and productive classroom management.

## Summary

Teaching does not exist in a vacuum. Teachers are social creatures and much of their behavior is learned through direct experience and by watching others (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory guided this search for relevant literature. The literature selected for this review is a compilation of studies examining factors that influence teachers' decisions to implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active,

distracted students for testing. Results of these studies quantified and qualified teacher behaviors and measured the impact of teachers' decisions on students. Seven categories of literature were investigated: (a) teacher bias and prejudice; (b) teacher self-efficacy; (c) teacher burn-out; (d) teacher burnout, (e) student labeling; (f) administration and peer influence; and (g) teacher use of social media. The literature selected examined the influence of these categories on general teacher behavior toward students exhibiting overly active, distracted behavior.

An understanding of influences affecting teachers' professional experiences would add to the body of knowledge. This study contributed more than a numerical explanation of what has already been studied. This study provided an opportunity for mainstream classroom teachers to explain in their own words the factors that led them to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. Overly active, distracted students are defined as constantly active, fidgety, mentally restless, and displaying difficulty attending (Barkley & Peters, 2012; Bob & Konicarova, 2018; Lange et al., 2010). This chapter begins with an explanation of transcendental phenomenological research and why it is applicable for this study. The research questions are followed by a description of the setting and participants. Researcher positionality identifies my role in the study as well as my values, beliefs, and views on the subject (Holmes, 2020). Social learning and self-efficacy theories guide the exploration of teachers' lived experiences (Adams, 2006; Bandura, 1986). Permissions and recruitment of participants is addressed under the procedure section. Data collection explains individual interviews, writing prompts, and focus group facilitation. Data synthesis explains all three collection methods, analysis, triangulation, and synthesis. The final part of chapter three examines trustworthiness and the quality of qualitative research which is defined by credibility, transferability, confirmability, and ethical considerations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O'Kane et al., 2019).

## Research Design

The problem that was the basis of this study is that some mainstream elementary classroom teachers refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment before implementing in-classroom instructional modifications (Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020). Qualitative research is inductive (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Induction is

explorative and remains open to unexpected insight relying on experiences and observations from which generalizations and conclusions can be drawn (Corley et al., 2020). Qualitative research seeks to build knowledge and understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This study wanted to understand those lived experiences of mainstream teachers that predispose them to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD assessment.

This design used a transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology attempts to understand the meaning of a lived experience, or phenomenon, as perceived by individuals directly involved (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In this study the phenomenon was a teacher's decision to implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referral of overly active, distracted students for ADHD assessment. The term *transcendental* refers to the way a phenomenon is interpreted. Moustakas (1994) separates the transcendental experience into two categories: *noema*, and *noesis*. *Noesis* can be understood as the subjective interpretation or description of an actual event or phenomenon with which one has direct knowledge. It allows an individual to physically describe an outward event as they perceived it, less the accompanying emotions or affective interpretation. *Noema* can be described as the subjective reaction to a phenomenon by an individual with first-hand knowledge. Noema provides an opportunity for an individual to attach meaning to the phenomenon. The author suggests that it is through the blending of *noema* and *noesis* that an individual forms understanding and interpretation of an event (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, transcendental refers to both the perceived description and personal interpretation of the phenomenon that occurred.

As noted in Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research begins with a phenomenon to be explored. In this study, the phenomenon was the practice of some mainstream

elementary teachers of overly active, distracted children to postpone referral for formal testing and diagnosis until after in-classroom instructional modifications are tried. A transcendental, phenomenological, qualitative study was most appropriate for several reasons. The term *transcendental* refers to the referenced event being recalled in a fresh way (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were encouraged to share their experiences in their own words. According to Moustakas (1994) the term *phenomenological* suggests that the essence of the study is based on the actual experience of each participant, not the researcher's interpretation of the event. Participants' own words were used as the source of data. Van Manen (1990) suggests that *qualitative* data is exclusively human based, tapping into experience as uniquely understood by an individual. In this study participants were asked to describe experiences as they occurred in their own life. Following the explanation of the phenomenon and philosophical assumptions I will discuss how I collected data through interviews, focus groups, and written prompts. From the data, themes and clusters of meaning evolved. This enabled me to develop and report significant findings.

## Research Questions

The central research question reflects the purpose of the study. Sub-questions are informed by the framework of Bandura's (1977) social learning and self-efficacy theories.

### Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who initiate in-classroom instructional modifications to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation?

### Sub-Question One

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers have inhibited initially implementing in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students?

**Sub-Question Two**

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers forged their use of in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation?

**Sub-Question Three**

What lived experiences beyond the classroom have influenced mainstream teachers who implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for an ADHD evaluation?

## Setting and Participants

The Internet was the platform for this study. A study conducted completely on-line is rife with not only opportunity but also obstruction. As noted by Marks et al. (2017) recruitment of participants is a key component of research, and the Internet can provide broad geographical access to potential volunteers. As a high percentage of individuals use the Internet daily (Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2017) real time interaction with participants is possible. Lack of physical proximity requires a researcher to be creative as they sell the research project to potential volunteers and keep participants engaged through frequent reminders and virtual contact. In addition, the hesitancy of some individuals to invite close inspection of their lives is made even more suspect by the electronic nature of the potential relationship (Nichols et al., 2021). Extra time requirements arising from unanticipated obstacles due to glitches in technology were built into the study (Marks et al., 2017).

## Setting

The study was conducted on-line utilizing technology and social media. Charbonneau-Gowdy (2017) suggests that research is changing and is starting to incorporate more technology for methods of data collection. Researchers will often be physically located far from participants as will participants be separated from one another. The author reminds the reader that physical distance must not be used as an excuse to maximize data at the expense of personal communication and subjective interpretation (Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2017). To the contrary, socially driven technology allowed for a collection of data derived directly from individuals across broad geographical locations. With expanded use of technology and less physical proximity it is vital that precautions be taken to assure the safety of participants (Beck, 2005; Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2017). Data security must be attended to as technology becomes a common tool for distance data collection (Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2017; McLeod & O'Connor, 2019).

It was unrealistic to think that there would be a surplus of teachers in one geographical location willing and able to participate in this study. The criterion for participation was narrow. The number of available participants was unknown; therefore, it was anticipated that the study would need to enlist teachers from across a broad U. S. geographical boundary.

## Participants

This study invited participants: (a) who were current or former licensed classroom teachers; (b) with four or more years of mainstream classroom teaching experience; (c) in any combination of K- $6^{th}$ grades; and (d) who as a professional practice initiated in-classroom instructional modifications for overactive distracted students before referring them for ADHD assessment. Both private and public-school teachers were considered for participation. The intent

of this study was to explore why some teachers initially try in-classroom instructional modifications before a referral for assessment. According to the CDC (2022), when a teacher suspects a child has hyperactive distracted symptoms, they are referred for an evaluation and possibly medication. Teacher participants were solicited from across the United States using on-line social media, on-line groups, and personal referrals. Personal referrals, also called snowball referrals, allowed participants to recommend other individuals who possibly fit the criteria for participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews and discussions utilized audio and/or video technology available to both the researcher and each participant.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest phenomenological research utilizes from five to 25 individuals who have experienced a given phenomenon. This study initially recruited between 10 and 23 participants. Allowing for attrition, the final number of participants was 10 individuals. Eligibility for participation required individuals (a) be a current or former classroom teacher, (b) with a minimum of four years mainstream classroom teaching experience, (c) at any combination of K - 6$^{th}$ grades, and (d) who routinely initiated in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD assessment (Lowe et al., 2019). Data was collected until saturation, which according to Creswell and Poth (2018) is the point at which interviews result in no new data or information being disclosed. Qualified participants were identified via questionnaires or phone interviews (Appendix H). The questionnaires or phone calls posed identical qualifying questions, the answers to which allowed me to identify or reject potential participants. After a volunteer was identified as qualified, they were e-mailed a consent form for electronic signature. As noted in Creswell and Creswell (2018), purposeful selection of participants helps the researcher truly understand the problem. It increases intentionality which assists the researcher in maintaining participant focus on the

phenomenon (Vagle, 2018).

## Researcher Positionality

The motivation for this study was to understand why some teachers in mainstream K– 6th grade classrooms choose to implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD assessment. The study solicited teachers who fell into this category. Data gained from participants did shine a light on unifying personal and professional experiences and beliefs that these teachers have in common. The study was guided by three philosophical assumptions: ontological, axiological, and epistemological, which are discussed in the following sections.

### Interpretive Framework

This study was interpreted through a lens of social learning and self-efficacy theories. Social learning theory suggests that people are products of their cumulative experiences, hence they understand a phenomenon through the complex filter of their personal backgrounds (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Self-efficacy examines the successful experiences, encouragement, mental well-being, modeling, and visualizing that result in an individual believing they are competent to attain a goal. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research gathers and records the lived experiences of individuals and from that data generates patterns. An individual's social and personal experiences influence the way they interpret a given phenomenon. What is determined to be a problem and how that problem should be addressed or solved is very much constructed socially (Bronack et al., 2006). It is the social nature of learning that informs this framework. The premise that all learning occurs on a social level guided the collection of data (Vygotsky, 1978). Building on the framework of social learning and self-efficacy theories, this study fleshed out an understanding of participants' personal and

professional lived experiences, and why these teachers elect to delay or avoid sending overly active, distracted students for an ADHD evaluation.

## Philosophical Assumptions

Investigating social and behavioral phenomenon requires an examination of experiences as interpreted by individuals. This naturalistic inquiry differentiates itself from rationalistic inquiry in the positionality of theory. In naturalistic research, theory is grounded in the collected data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982); the naturalistic researcher does not look for data to prove a preconceived theory. In contrast, rationalistic research begins with theory and collects data to substantiate that theory. Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest that the values and beliefs of the naturalistic researcher influence the way a study is selected and conducted. Understanding a researcher's values and beliefs, their personal philosophies, helps a reader better understand how and why a study was organized and data was interpreted. The following sections will briefly address my own *ontological*, *epistemological*, and *axiological* assumptions.

### *Ontological Assumption*

Jacquette (2014) defines ontology as the nature of being, but not in the biological or scientific sense. It can be described as one's belief about what is real. My own ontological assumption is reflected in the words of St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) "All truth is God's truth" (NAE, 2015). This is not to imply that every thought or interpretation by a human is God's truth. To the contrary, humans are fallible and prone to base judgements and conclusions on faulty preconceptions and clouded interpretations. There are not multiple realities, but multiple interpretations of individual experiences. I believe that the lived experiences of others, shared, grouped, and honestly analyzed, can bring us closer to understanding what and why things are perceived to exist as they do.

### *Epistemological Assumption*

As defined by Gutek (2011), epistemology refers to knowledge and the ways that knowledge is known or understood. For a constructivist researcher it is reflected in the assumption that knowledge will be constructed through individual perceptions of social experiences **(**Cuthbertson et al., 2020). My own epistemological assumption is that knowledge gained through qualitative research is fluid. To be effective it is necessary to stay flexible and open to providing participants with opportunities to relay their own experiences through their own understanding. It is also important to maintain a presence that facilitates transmission of information, simultaneously keeping interactions on topic, and remaining sensitive to opportunities to expand participant contributions (Guest et al., 2017).

### *Axiological Assumption*

In qualitative research the axiological assumption defines the nature of values and ethics that inform the study (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). Here I repeat my ontological assumption based on St. Augustine's teachings "All truth is God's truth" (NAE, 2015). From this position my values and beliefs in relation to this study originate. I measure every interaction between a child and the educational system in relation to how it affects the child cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. There are few things that concern me more than the lasting effects on children of decisions made by adults charged with their care. I hold that one should be extremely hesitant to have a child labeled or to, without question, accept the label of a child who enters their classroom. Children unconsciously live up or down to expectations placed on them, and it is unconscionable to unnecessarily codify a child's limitations, if at all avoidable.

Acknowledging these values and beliefs it was imperative that I effectively bracketed that bias while conducting this research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The purpose of questions and

follow-up questions posed during interviews, focus groups and written prompts was to reflect the experiences of participants, not my experiences. Each participant's life experiences and history in the classroom is unique. The purpose of this research was to understand how and why these teachers react to certain students the way they do. Participants' experiences are due respect and freedom from judgement. 

**Researcher's Role**

My teaching experience in elementary and early childhood classrooms has spanned nearly 20 years. It has included public and private schools, at all economic levels, and working alongside both seasoned and inexperienced teachers. Through those years, I observed teachers who as a matter of practice made in-classroom accommodations for overly active, distracted students, as well as teachers who immediately referred students exhibiting the same behaviors for testing. Appreciating more active and interesting educational settings myself, I seldom see overly active or distractable students as problematic.

As the human instrument in this study my goal was to provide participants adequate questions and opportunities to holistically explore the meaning of their own experience with the phenomenon of overly active, distracted students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As with any instrument, constant effort was made to keep the instrument calibrated correctly. In this case, calibration required that I, the human instrument, remained focused on the participants and on the phenomenon (Becker, 2019). Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013) suggest that a researcher must remember that the reality of the phenomenon comes only from the participant. Appropriate responses by me encouraged participant sharing and promoted receptivity to participants sharing unexpected information.

I selected a transcendental phenomenological design because I wanted to understand those lived experiences that led teachers to prefer to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students. I am not interested in the number or percentage of teachers that proactively refer students. A Likert type questionnaire would not provide the depth of understanding that a qualitative study could explore. I had no relationship with any of the participants. Participants were drawn from volunteers responding to requests posted on social media and referrals from participants and education professionals. My role in the research setting consisted of directly interviewing participants, facilitating focus groups, sending out reflective writing prompts, and analysis. As Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013) note, research is about the participants and recording and analyzing their personal experiences accurately. Synthesis and analysis of data was carried out objectively.

## Procedures

To promote credibility, this transcendental phenomenological research followed outlined steps in the execution of this study which included obtaining permissions and explaining procedures. Moustakas (1994) encourages researchers to approach research systematically and analytically. According to Moustakas (1994) thoughtful reduction requires targeted collection, careful interpretation, and synthesis of data when looking for a reasonable universal essence. The aim of transcendental phenomenology is to systematically collect each source of data independently and through analysis and synthesis identify unifying themes (Creswell et al., 2007). Each step should be presented clearly and logically to the reader. The authors note that most modern funding of research requires concrete descriptions of procedures and processes followed. In the absence of seeking research funding Gaudet and Roberts (2018) suggest transparent consistency and rigor be recorded throughout the study to lend validity and

credibility to the research.

**Permissions**

To protect participants, permissions and consents were necessary for conducting an ethical study. As suggested by Crow et al. (2006), informed consent addresses several issues critical to volunteers. The first issue is that participants are given sufficient details of the study to be able to make an informed decision about involvement. The second is that they understand participation is completely voluntary and that there will be no repercussions from withdrawing from the study.

This was an Internet-based research study that did not involve the use of a physical site. The use of the Internet allows for a larger geographical pool from which to solicit participants as it does not involve the necessity of travel (Kaiser, 2009). The lack of a physical setting dictated that permissions and consents be sent, signed, and returned electronically or via mail. The use of technology was discussed in detail in the *Settings* section.

The permission process began with an application to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensures a study is structured ethically and that participants are protected mentally and physically (Moon, 2011). Following Liberty IRB approval (see Appendix A), a search for participants commenced. Qualified potential volunteers were furnished with details of the study, and if they agreed to participate, all necessary consent forms were provided. All consents, including the right to withdraw without repercussions, were signed and securely stored before participation in the study began.

**Recruitment Plan**

To secure an adequate pool of participants requests for volunteers were advertised in a private Facebook group (Appendix C) and e-mailed to associates and potential participants

suggested through snowball recommendations (Appendix D). Facebook was an established private teacher-only group. All volunteers answered the qualifying questionnaire (Appendix H). They were then sent a consent form for electronic signature (Appendix B). The purpose of the study was to examine K-6$^{th}$ grade mainstream classroom teachers who make in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for testing. Using the purpose of the study as a guide, participants qualified by: (a) being a current or former mainstream elementary teacher; (b) in any combinations of grades K-6; (c) having taught at this level four or more years; and (d) routinely implemented in-classroom instructional accommodations for overly active, distracted students before referring them for testing. A $25.00 gift card was provided to all study volunteers who participated in all three modes of data collection, individual interview, focus group, and reflective written prompt.

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend five to 20 participants to achieve saturation for a qualitative study. This study initially recruited between 15 and 20 volunteers (Lowe et al., 2019). Allowing for attrition, the final sample size was 10. Lowe et al. (2019) suggest that four to six years of experience teaching in the classroom is the amount of time necessary to establish individual job stabilization. For this study, the requirement of four or more years teaching in a mainstream K- 6$^{th}$ grade classroom provided adequate time for a teacher to incorporate learning from other classroom teachers and to have developed their own habits of classroom management. Data was collected until saturation which according to Creswell and Poth (2018) was the point at which no new data or information was collected from interviews. Before being accepted potential participants were informed of precise study details and requirements, provisions made for their own anonymity and safety, voluntary protections, and digital consent forms.

## Data Collection Plan

No data was collected until all necessary IRB approvals were received. Data was collected only from volunteers that satisfy all participant requirements. Data derived from experienced-based sources provides a higher degree of validity than data from sources presented with hypothetical situations (Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995). Therefore, teachers who routinely refer students for testing before implementing instructional modifications were excluded from the study. This helped ensure the same phenomenon was being examined by all participants. Each participant saw and experienced the same phenomenon uniquely to some degree (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

This study triangulated using three sources of data to determine themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Van Manen and van Manen (2021) suggest that a phenomenon is simply a thing. It is the data, the individual detailed perception of the phenomenon, that conveys the unique properties of the experience and provides dimensional understanding. This study collected data from three sources conducted in the following order: (a) semi-structured individual interviews; (b) written reflective prompts; and (c) a focus group. The following sections describe the data collection type and provide the reasons and rationale for each.

### Individual Interviews

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend the adoption of epoch, bracketing one's own feelings about a phenomenon as one begins research. Suspension of a researcher's preconceived notions and interpretations, concentrating solely on exploring an event as experienced by participants, is vital to objective research and is the essence of phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1901). Whereas structural description allows for participant recollection of an event,

imaginative variation invites a less mechanical interpretation of an event or phenomenon (Turley et al., 2016). Questions and follow-up questions encouraged imaginative variation.

Guest et al. (2017) note that an extremely important factor in interview and focus group data collection is the degree to which participants are comfortable and identify with the interviewer. The individual interview was an effective way to gather information that contains precise details. This is echoed by Baillie (2019), suggesting that most individuals are comfortable discussing personal details of an experience during a one-on-one interview. An interviewer can better control the narrative during individual interviews. Baillie (2019) also raises the notion that a drawback to individual interviews is that some participants are less quick to disclose sensitive information in the absence of others with the same experience. This was remedied by including a focus group later in the study.

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define an interview as the process of a researcher questioning individual participants and recording their replies. When direct observation of a phenomenon is neither possible nor practical an interview allows a researcher to reconstruct a phenomenon through accounts rendered by participants as they reply to questions (Taylor et al., 2019). In an interview setting data is collected by asking the participant questions. A semi-structured interview allows a researcher to begin with predetermined questions, but with the flexibility to follow up with questions specific to participants responses. All interview questions were approved by experts before being presented to participants. Following receipt of the signed consent form I provided each participant with a choice of dates and times for an individual interview. For this study, the individual interview was hosted on Microsoft Teams. In addition, Microsoft Teams transcription software ensured responses were accurately and securely recorded. In the event of a Microsoft Team software failure the individual interview was

transferred to a Facebook chat platform. Following two general get-to-know-you questions meant to make the participant feel at ease a projected five questions with follow-up were asked using a semi-structured interview format. The individual interview was estimated to last one hour. I closed by allowing participants the opportunity to add unsolicited thoughts. Conducting an individual semi-structured interview first enabled me to establish a relationship with the participants (Moustakas, 1994) before asking them later to respond independently to journal prompts or with others in focus groups.

***Individual Interview Questions***

1. Briefly describe your professional and educational background. CRQ
2. How do you define an overly active, distracted student in your classroom? CRQ
3. Why do you choose to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for evaluation? SQ2
4. Which overly active, distracted students do you feel are most likely to benefit from in-classroom instructional modifications? SQ2
5. How might student demographics affect your decision to attempt in-classroom instructional modifications or to immediately refer them for evaluation? SQ1
6. Describe how personal and professional stress impacts your desire to try in-class instructional modifications before referring students for an evaluation. SQ1
7. What personal or professional experiences have most influenced your tendency to attempt in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation? SQ3

8. What recommendations would you suggest that would help more mainstream classroom teachers initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation? SQ3

The purpose of interview questions one and two was to establish a rapport with and learn about the participants (Baillie, 2019; Moustakas, 1994). Question three directly addressed the topic of research. Question four probed teachers' positive experiences and expectations with in-classroom instructional modifications (Taylor et al., 2019). Interview questions five and six explored negative influences that affect teachers' willingness to try in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for testing. Questions seven and eight invited participants to add information they felt was pertinent to the issue and possibly left unexamined (Moustakas, 1994). Minor changes to questions unaffecting interview substance were made following the initial interview.

Participant responses allowed me to measure the salience of questions. Salience is the measure of how often a topic is mentioned in response to open ended questions (Weller et al., 2018). The wording of each question clearly framed the context of information sought. Salience of responses helped determine the direction of later exploration incorporating reflective prompts and focus group questions.

***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan***

Analysis is the process of coding data, organizing themes, and begins the process of synthesis and interpretation. Individual interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Before beginning any data analysis each participant was given the opportunity to review their personal transcript for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest that transcripts can sometimes be transcribed incorrectly because mechanical voice to

text programs often misunderstand speech patterns. Consequently, it was a good idea to allow each participant to verify their own transcript for errors and accuracy. Following return of the transcripts I examined any edits, added memos as needed, and horizontalized significant verbiage and statements. Horizontalized coding identified individual contributions of data. This allowed me to organize clusters of themes, and eventually led to descriptions of what happened, and how it happened (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Finally, the overlapping invariant, the essence of the experience, began to emerge. To assist in triangulation, all interview transcriptions, notes, and horizontalizations were made in a color specifically assigned to individual interviews. Coding cycles were recorded in chart form. The need to adjust questions became apparent as the study unfolded. Any adjustments did not alter the substance of the study.

Transcendental phenological study is inductive in nature and requires analysis that fleshes out experiential commonalities from which to identify an invariant essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The invariant essence is the common or unifying experience of all participants (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that steps for data analysis in a phenomenological study are not carved in stone and often evolve as the study proceeds. These interrelated steps, however, do follow a logical sequence. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), they are spiral in nature, repeating and refining data until resulting findings are revealed. Moustakas (1994) describes the process as columnar. According to Moustakas (1994) the initial step in phenological data analysis is *horizontalization*. Moustakas describes horizontalization as placing all data related to the phenomenon before the researcher, assigning equal value to every participant statement. Every initial statement is assigned equal value at this time. The second step involves assignment of *meaning* to the statements. Next the assigned meanings are *clustered* into what are called *themes*. At this point duplicate statements are removed. Moustakas (1994)

suggests it is from themes that *textural and structural descriptions* are extrapolated and the quintessence of the phenomenon is recognized.

**Reflective Prompts**

Creswell and Poth (2018) include journaling in their list of acceptable types of documents from which to collect research data. Reflective writing prompts, like journaling or solicited diaries can elicit more visceral, emotional, and complex participant thoughts than other data collection methods (Filep et al., 2017). Personal writing lacks the strict time constraints inherent in interviews and focus groups. The authors maintain that rigor designed to strengthen validity is as important in written prompts as it is from other data sources (Filep et al., 2017). Prompts should be narrowly phrased so written reflections address specific topics. Rigor and validity require that reply content be recorded as the writer intended (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The journal reflections consisted of four total prompts. The reflective prompts were e-mailed or texted to participants one week after the individual's semi-structured individual interview. Each prompt included the due date.

***Reflective Prompt Questions***

1. **First 2 prompts** (*following individual interview*) –
    a) What personal experiences have you had that influenced your feelings about modifying classroom instruction before referring overly active, distracted students for assessment? SQ3
    b) What professional experiences, whether as a student teacher or professional, have influenced your propensity to modify in-classroom instruction for an overly active, distracted student before referring them for ADHD evaluation? SQ3
2. **Second two prompts** (*following focus groups*) –

a) Why do you not immediately refer overly active, distracted students for ADHD evaluation? CRQ
b) Why do you personally try in-classroom instructional modifications first for your overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation? CRQ

The first journal reflection asked two questions that investigated professional and personal influences on classroom practices (Adams, 2006; Bandura, 1986). The second reflection posed two questions inviting any data that might be unexpected or was overlooked (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflective prompts were adjusted for relevance based on data collected during individual interviews or focus groups. Adjustments did not alter the substance of the study but were necessary to prevent redundancy or to elicit additional data.

***Reflective Prompt Data Analysis Plan***

Epoch, bracketing one's own feelings about a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018), was important to developing and analyzing the reflective prompts. Participant replies were examined as intended by the participant, not as interpreted by the researcher. The structure and content of written prompts explored events as experienced by the participants. This is the essence of phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1901). Structural description allows for participant recollection of an event, and imaginative variation invites a less mechanical more creative and personal interpretation of the event or phenomenon (Turley et al., 2016).

Following the individual interview, written reflective prompts were provided to participants. Prompts were sent to and received from individual participants via email. In the unexpected instance of email failure, a text message was sent. Participants were asked to complete and return the prompts within one week. Because data from the reflective written prompts came directly from the participant, they were not returned to the participants for

clarification. Analysis of reflective prompts included coding data, organizing themes, and interpretation. I examined all the completed written reflections, added memos as needed, and horizontalize significant verbiage and statements. To assist in triangulation later, all notes and horizontalizations were made in a color specific to the reflective written prompt. From horizontalization coding themes emerged. Following horizontalized coding I organized clusters of themes describing what happened, and how it happened according to participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Finally, the overlapping invariant, the essence of the experience, began to emerge (Moustakas, 1994). Coding cycles were recorded in chart form. Coding data, organizing themes, and synthesis and interpretation of responses is the task of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was seeking the common or unifying experience of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Focus Groups**

As mentioned in the individual interview section, Guest et al. (2017) suggest that the most important factor in interview and focus group data collection is the degree to which participants identify or are comfortable with the interviewer. The focus group setting can encourage individual participants to disclose sensitive information of a more personal nature because they often feel more secure among others with the same experiences. Interviewer presence is less noticeable so interaction among participants often encourages deeper discussions (Baillie, 2019).

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define a focus group as a collection of individuals gathered for the purpose of data collection. The composition of a focus group can be determined by its purpose (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Each focus group meeting was anticipated to include four to six participants and last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggest that a productive focus group will include

individuals who share similar characteristics or experiences and will contribute to investigation as their combined experiences allows for more in-depth topic exploration. For this study, I attempted to assign participants to a focus group based on similarity of responses to the interview questions and the reflective written prompts. Every participant would participate in one focus group. Two focus groups were anticipated. Focus groups encouraged participants to explore more deeply each other's experiences and continued the discussion of teacher reactions to overly active, distracted students in their mainstream classrooms. The suggested topics of exploration for each focus group were intentionally crafted so as not to repeat previously covered questions but followed up on prior interview and writing prompt findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Focus groups were scheduled at times convenient to all participants. The Microsoft Teams platform was used. Microsoft Teams transcription software transferred sound recording to transcription. In the event of a Microsoft Team software failure the focus group conversation transferred to a Facebook chat platform. The necessity of adjustments to focus group questions became apparent as the study unfolded. Any adjustments did not alter the substance of the study.

With focus group research, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend the adoption of epoch, bracketing one's own feelings about a phenomenon. I suspended preconceived notions and interpretations concentrating solely on exploring an event as experienced by participants (Husserl, 1901). Questioning that supports imaginative variation invites less mechanical interpretation of the event or phenomenon (Turley et al, 2016). Focus group questions and follow-up questions encouraged imaginative variation.

### *Focus Group Questions*

As the atmosphere in a focus group often feels less formal than the other data collecting settings participants are often more willing to share their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants in a focus group can feel more supported and less vulnerable. Therefore, I remained flexible with my line of questioning and with follow-up questions.

1. What are your concerns when you initially realize a child in your classroom is more distracted and significantly more active than his or her classmates? CRQ
2. What do you think a typically overly active, distracted student in your classroom is feeling? CRQ
3. When deciding between modifying your in-classroom instruction or immediately referring an overly active, distracted child for evaluation, what are your priorities? CRQ

Focus group questions were intended to isolate affective responses to overly active, distracted students in the classroom. They were intended to give relevance to the central research question by examining teacher feelings and their interpretations of student feelings. Focus group questions were subject to modification to meet research needs but changes did not alter the substance of the study.

***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

Each focus group participant was offered a transcribed copy of the focus group conversation for review and an opportunity to clarify their own contributions. Following return of the written transcripts from participants I examined the edited transcripts, added memos as needed, and horizontalized significant verbiage and statements. For confidentiality, Sim and Waterfield (2019) suggest each participant review only their own group's transcript for accuracy. Volunteers were informed that in a situation where participants might know one another, in-group sharing could affect the confidentiality of focus group transcripts. In this study, participants were expected to be unknown to one another, and locations were not shared. All focus group data was recorded in one color specific to focus groups. This aided in triangulation

later. From horizontalization, coding, themes emerged allowing me to develop participant descriptions of events, and how they interpreted that event. Finally, an overlapping invariant, the essence of the experience, was identified (Moustakas, 1994). Coding cycles were recorded in chart form.

Data analysis aligned with the method proposed by Moustakas (1994) for use with a transcendental phenomenological study. The initial stage of analysis was horizontalization. At this stage all collected data was laid out and considered equal in importance. Next, each bit of horizontalized data was assigned meaning. From meaning units data was clustered by common meaning called *themes*. According to Moustakas (1994), it is from these clusters of meaning that the researcher will develop textural descriptions of the phenomenon. It was these textural descriptions that provided structure for the discovery of the essence of the phenomenon. Rather than a columnar form, Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the shape of data analysis as a spiral. They suggest a spiral infers that each layer of analysis is dependent upon both prior and subsequent layers. Though the number of steps and vocabulary differ slightly, both Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018) begin analysis by scrutinizing original data and then systematically regrouping the data into meaningful units from which to construct the essence of the phenomenon.

**Data Synthesis**

The result of a study, the invariant essence, is the common or unifying experience of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Coding data, organizing themes, and interpretation of responses is the task of analysis. From this analysis the invariant structure of the phenomenon will emerge. Creswell and Poth (2018) use the illustration of a spiral to describe qualitative data analysis, circling steadily through an overlapping shrinking sequence from general data down to invariant

themes. Phenomenological research approaches data analysis through systematic steps and guidelines. Regardless of the source of data, the process of assay follows the same general steps. This transcendental phenomenological study required bracketing of the researcher, also called epoch (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing called for me to remove myself from the study. I was not an interpreter nor part of the study but instead objectively collected and organized data. Data analysis begins with horizontalization, where data is examined for significance and repetition (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The authors go on to note that significant statements are grouped into clusters of meaning and eventually themes. From these themes structural and textural descriptions of participants' experiences, what happened and how, are formulated into the essence of the experience, the invariant. The invariant is defined as that which is constant and does not change (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

The same individuals participated in each method of data collection, so all data received equal weight (Carter et al., 2014). Charts displaying clusters and themes amassed from data gathered through interviews, written prompts, and focus groups, were revisited for convergence, similarity, redundancy, and disparity. Recurring themes among the three sources of data - interviews, focus groups, and reflective prompts - were summarized and tabulated. It is important to maintain the intended meaning of the data source as reflective of the phenomenon (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The first round of analysis of each individual document was coded and reviewed for similarities or inadvertent redundancy. Relationships among sources of data including both similarities and outliers must be reflected as synthesis is conducted. Data displays and cross-classified matrices allow for comparisons and the emergence of the essential invariants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

In addition to testing the validity of research findings, triangulation is another tool that assists in understanding the data (Carter et al., 2014). Creswell and Miller (2020) describe triangulation as a systematic process of data convergence. Through triangulation, I corroborated data gathered from several different sources. Following analysis of interviews, written prompts, and focus groups, data was analyzed and synthesized seeking to answer the larger research questions. According to Carter et al. (2014), this use of data gathered using different methods called is method triangulation. The authors submit that using several methods of data collection allows for the discovery of information that may have been overlooked by a researcher using just one method.

Using triangulation, data and themes from each collection method was recorded and then evaluated against the results of each of the other methods. An additional check for validity is called disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2020). During this process, I examined the totality of data and themes for evidence of conflict or inconsistency. The authors note that the search for disconfirming evidence is contrary to the search for data that supports themes, but its use as a tool contributes to validity of results. Creswell and Miller (2020) suggest disconfirming evidence supports the validity of final findings because real life is complex and imperfect.

All steps of data analysis and synthesis followed a clearly defined plan of action and a transparent audit trail provided me a point of reference, minimized bias, reduced uncertainties, and avoided duplication (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This contributed to trustworthiness. As recommended by Moustakas' (1994), synthesis consisted of horizontalization of initial data, followed by clustering, identification of themes, and finally a description of structures and textures. All steps were thoroughly documented.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in a study (Connelly, 2016). To establish trust in methods and results a qualitative researcher must effectively and transparently collect and manage data (White et al., 2012). It was suggested by Guba (1981) that naturalistic inquiry, which includes phenomenological study, follows systematic procedures to increase the trustworthiness of studies. Guba (1981) recommended naturalistic studies address four aspects of trustworthiness: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability. While collecting and analyzing data to answer research questions all four aspects of trustworthiness were incorporated into this study.

### Credibility

Credibility is the degree to which the researcher accurately reflects the experience, or phenomenon, as described and understood by participants (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2001). As oral and written contributions of participants are gathered and analyzed credibility is established through documentation that reflects sensitivity and demonstratable understanding of participant intent (van Manen, 1984). The readers have confidence that what is reported in fact reflects the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who routinely initiate in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for assessment. To ensure written results were credible, and that I correctly interpreted communication from participants the following techniques were used: (a) I personally interacted with participants individually and in groups; (b) I provided opportunities for participants to check written interview and focus group transcripts for accuracy and clarification; and (c) there was both triangulation and disconfirmation of data.

### Transferability

Tracy (2010) compares transferability to generalizability. Are the findings of a study applicable in other situations? For qualitative research transferability can be compared to quantitative external validity. To enhance transferability, IRB guidelines were strictly adhered to beginning with the IRB application process. The final judgement of the transferability of a study rests with the reader (Tracy, 2010). This research included thorough thick, and rich descriptions of methods and findings that informed readers of possible applicability or pertinence to other studies.

**Dependability**

The degree to which a study can be replicated in its entirety, resulting in the same findings each time, is a measure of its dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), dependability can be addressed by allowing participants to evaluate findings, recommendations, and interpretations based on participant provided data. Following each individual interview, a written transcript of the conversation was emailed to the participant. This gave the participant the opportunity to review the written transcript for perceived errors or needed clarifications to ensure the record accurately reflected the experience of the participant. Each focus group participant was emailed a transcribed copy of their groups' conversation and asked to evaluate that it accurately reflected their own words and lived experience. In addition, I maintained a clear detailed audit trail throughout the study. At Liberty University, dependability was addressed via an inquiry audit by the Qualitative Research Director and dissertation committee.

**Confirmability**

Dependability addresses consistency, and confirmability addresses neutrality (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Neutrality requires findings and results that are not swayed by the researchers'

opinions, prejudices, or preferences. As with dependability, confirmability can be addressed with a thorough and transparent audit trail. An audit trail detailed each step taken throughout the entirety of this study. This helps to demonstrate that findings were driven by data not opinion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study informed confirmability using participant reviewed transcripts and detailed audit trails.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that ethical considerations include all potential issues that the researcher can anticipate. In addition, issues of ethics can arise at any time during the research process. Ethical considerations in this study began with Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A). No site approval was necessary as the study was on-line, soliciting participants through Facebook, personal, and snowball recommendations. Care was taken that there was no semblance of power dynamics. Participant volunteers were presented with both a consent form (see Appendix B) and a prospectus of study details listing the voluntary nature of their participation, details of researcher-participant interactions, confidentiality, anonymity, security of data, and purpose of the study. Risks and benefits of the study to the participant and to the educational community were also addressed. Confidentiality remained paramount throughout the study as it encourages accurate and thorough contributions from participants. Participants were aware of the study's purpose, their own voluntary status, and their freedom to withdraw at any time. Creswell and Poth (2018) also suggest a researcher should display sensitivity to participants differences, therefore formal consent of participants was collected (see Appendix B). They also suggest that while collecting data the researcher build trust with participants, inform participants of the purpose of the study,

maintain participant privacy, remain neutral, and keep data safe. Participants were able to review written transcripts of their own conversations before data was recorded by the researcher.

Data and all identifying paperwork were secured on password protected hardware locked away from public access. When analyzing data, I included data from several sources and included conflicting data. Names and locations used in the study were given fictitious pseudonyms. Also, in accordance with Creswell and Poth (2018), to ethically report data I was honest, kept language appropriate for the audience, and incorporated accurate composite stories.

## Summary

Chapter Three addressed the framework of the study, the bones that provided its shape. Rossman and Rallis (2017) remind the reader that it is not possible to examine all aspects of any given topic. A study requires a researcher to narrow down what is to be examined and how it is to be accomplished. Circling back to the beginning of this chapter, Rossman and Rallis (2017) suggest that it is the structural framework that keeps the qualitative study consistently within its stated boundaries, topic, questions, and ensuing procedures and methods.

The chapter began by explaining why a transcendental phenomenological approach was most applicable for this study. Following the research questions were descriptions of the research setting and participants. Researcher positionality presented my role in the study, my values, beliefs, and views (Holmes, 2020). Social learning and self-efficacy theories explored teachers' lived experiences (Adams, 2006; Bandura, 1986). The procedure section addressed permissions and recruitment of participants. Data collection explained individual interviews, writing prompts, and focus group facilitation. All three collection methods, analysis, triangulation, and synthesis were described in the data synthesis section. The chapter three conclusion examined trustworthiness and the quality of qualitative research which was defined by credibility,

transferability, confirmability, and ethical considerations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O'Kane et al., 2019).

Qualitative research seeks to understand why and how individuals behave the way they do (Sutton & Austin, 2015). According to the authors, unlike quantitative research, it is not the intention of qualitative research to generalize beyond its own participants or sources of data. Consequently, the sources and results of qualitative data collection allow for rich descriptions reflecting the experiences of participants. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) mention steps required of all ethical research: (a) data is never falsified; (b) participants have access to reports; (c) data is provided in its' entirety; (d) plagiarism is avoided; (e) conflicts of interest are disclosed; and (f) authorship is clearly defined.

"How far that little candle throws his beams" (Shakespeare, 1596/2022, Act V Scene 1). If a reader concludes that trust cannot be placed in any one of the methods or results reported in a study, it is rendered effectively meaningless. Each step of this study was presented with transparency and sufficient detail to instill confidence in the reader. Guba (1981) suggests four foundations on which trustworthiness can be built: (a) transferability; (b) confirmability; (c) dependability; and (d) credibility. This study included ethical considerations as a seminal foundation. Like Shakespeare's candlelight, integrity and transparency in all reporting supported the trustworthiness of this study.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream classroom teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is the lens through which this study was examined. Tables and narratives identify and describe the participants and explain their positions within the study. Using induction, data is organized and synthesized into the essential themes and sub-themes. Chapter four concludes by answering the research question and sub-questions. Tables detailing participant contributions are included throughout.

## Participants

**Table 1**
***Teacher Participants***

| Teacher Participant | Years Taught | Highest Degree Earned | School Type | Grades Taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anne | 16 | Education Specialist | Public | 2 - 3 |
| Adelle | 8 | Bachelor's | Private Secular | K - 5 |
| Beth | 25 | Master's | Public | K - 5 |
| Chris | 38 | Master's | Private Christian & Public | 1 - 5 |
| Deb | 20 | Master's | Private Christian | Pk – K & 2 |
| Fran | 23 | Education Specialist | Private Christian & Public | 1 - 5 |
| Gwen | 23 | Bachelor's | Private Secular & Christian | K - 2 |
| Lori | 6 | Bachelor's | Public | K - 2 |
| Meg | 15 | Master's | Public | 3 - 4 |
| Pam | 16 | Education Specialist | Public | K - 2 |

Participants were a combination of ten current, former, or retired teachers who had spent a minimum of four years teaching in a mainstream K-6 classroom. The most crucial criterion to be accepted as a volunteer was acknowledgement that they preferred to modify their instruction for overly active, distracted students before referring them for any type of formal assessment. All willingly joined the study and met all of the participation criteria. Two participants were solicited

through a private Facebook group, three teachers volunteered to participate after teaching associates told them about the study, and five were referred by those three volunteers. They all resided within the United States; one in Florida, one in Pennsylvania, and the remainder in different cities in the state of Georgia. They were all Caucasian and females, and ages ranged from 30 to 68. Two of the ten were recently retired. One was currently a full time K-3 reading consultant working in a public school system. One split her time between administrative duties and mainstream classroom teaching. Two were currently teaching gifted students. And four were currently teaching in mainstream classrooms. All teachers had spent a minimum of four years teaching mainstream classroom students in grades K-6. See Table 1 for participant professional descriptors.

In this section narratives and tables familiarize the reader with the participants. Their specific lived experiences varied, but without exception, each person held the belief that mainstream classroom teachers should modify or adjust instruct for overly active, distracted children to afford them every opportunity to succeed before steps are taken toward a formal referral for assessment. Using their own words, participants described overly active, distracted children using much the same verbiage, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**
***Overly Active, Distracted Student Descriptors***

| Participant | Description of Overly Active, Distracted Students |
|---|---|
| Adelle | "a lot of fidgeting and wiggling - pen clicking - unable to stay in their seat" |
| Anne | "makes poor choices – play in their desk – short attention span" |
| Beth | "disturbing others. - probably making noises - can't control impulsive behavior" |
| Chris | "difficulty attending - wound up inside like a motor is activating them" |
| Deb | "struggle to sit still - struggle to attend - weren't as engaged - overly explorative" |
| Fran | "can't stay in their seat - I say their name several times - constantly redirect" |
| Gwen | "they're all over the place - easily frustrated - not participating with classmates" |
| Lori | "struggle to sit still - doodle all day - struggle to stay engaged" |
| Meg | "tapping - unable to stay in their seat - lack of impulse control – always running" |
| Pam | "talks a lot - less focused - more energy - hard time with body control" |

**Meg**

Meg is currently a public-school elementary teacher. She is perusing an Ed.D. in educational leadership. Her experience as a parent is instrumental in how she approaches children in her classroom. In her interview she shared, "My middle child has all the symptoms of having ADHD. We really wanted to not medicate her. Your first instinct is to teach her strategies and mechanisms to cope". In addition, professionally she feels that some overly

active, distracted behavior of students is a result of prior teachers' negligence or unstructured classrooms. Meg suggested that through no fault of their own some students "just don't know how to behave because they've never been in a really structured environment."

**Gwen**

Gwen is currently a secular private school kindergarten teacher. Gwen's school caps kindergarten class size at 12 students. As a youngster, Gwen's own overly active child often suffered at the hands of classroom teachers. Gwen shared during her interview, "I remember some teachers that would lift my child up. I also remember that my child would come home and cry because of some teachers, every day…every day!" As a teacher Gwen's empathy for overly active, distracted students is tempered with professional expectations, her own, and school administrators. My job is to teach every child in my room." She stresses the difference between her school and public schools. "This isn't a public school where the masses come. Our families are clients, and expectations for children here are higher."

**Lori**

Lori is a public-school 5th grade math and science teacher. Lori herself was that overly active, distracted child growing up. During her interview she said,

> I was one of those goofy, can't sit still types. Teachers made accommodations for me. It's kind of a pay it forward thing. Like I would rather do everything I can to make school enjoyable for you rather than force you to go through an evaluation, or be on medication, which I don't personally believe in.

In Lori's words, "I'm a boy mom, and boys sometimes have different learning needs." Lori shared that she does tend to "look out for the wiggly boys in class." It is her observation that

"boys are often referred for testing more frequently than girls, for behavior that should be addressed in the mainstream classroom."

**Anne**

Anne is a retired public-school teacher. Anne was also that wiggly child in class. But unlike Lori, her personal experience in the classroom was not encouraging or uplifting. During her interview Anne remembered, "I had trauma in my life at that (*elementary school*) age. I always thought I was stupid…never thought I was smart enough." Anne prefers to assist overly active, distracted students herself as evaluation tools are onerous and "more trouble than what I was actually implementing in my own classroom." Anne graduated from college as an older individual. She suggests "being an older woman gives me a bigger toolbox (*to meet student needs*) than young teachers right out of college."

**Pam**

Pam is currently a K-2$^{nd}$ grade reading specialist in public school and consults with mainstream teachers when requested. She is currently perusing an Ed.D. At one time she found herself alone in a kindergarten containing more than 20 students, two of whom were extremely active and distracted children. In addition, Pam had no assistant teacher and was denied any type of support when she reached out to her school leaders for help. She shared during her interview, "I will try, and I will always give the best that I can for my kids….yea, that was hard." She notes, "There is no such thing as a true teacher manual. Teaching is an art as much as a science." Her belief is "Do what's best for each child."

**Chris**

Chris currently teaches gifted children in public school. Many of Chris' students come to her from impoverished homes and neighborhoods. In her interview she shared, "Getting to know

what's going on with kids behind the scenes…we have to know what these kids are living with." She has experienced first-hand that there are many factors affecting classroom behavior. Chris also shared that regardless of her personal beliefs, her school requires compliance with Response to Intervention (RTI). "I'm expected to go through a litany of procedures. I'm expected to do that because our district adopted the RTI." Her school adopted the inclusion model over ten years ago, consequently, a special-ed teaching partner is usually in her classroom. The addition of that extra teacher allows her to be more sensitive and supportive to overly active, distracted students.

**Fran**

Fran is currently an education specialist teaching gifted students in public school. For Fran, holding off a referral for an overly active, distracted child is more pragmatic. During her interview she remembered,

> If you go through the whole process (*of a formal assessment*) and then they don't meet certain things, then they're done with them. If they're not eventually identified as something, ADD, ADHD, other health impaired, then if they don't fit whatever their parameters are, it's like you're done and you're back to square one.

She is also a parent to a child that she describes as "different." She shared that it gives her a different outlook on other children as a whole. Fran also team teaches gifted children, so she always has support when there's a "different" child in the classroom.

**Deb**

Deb currently works in a private Christian school. Her time is split between teaching second grade and administrative responsibilities. In addition to classroom duties, she is responsible for teacher development at her school. During her interview she noted her attitude toward overly active, distracted students, "Address the whole child, always. Why wouldn't we

modify?" She believes modifying how you teach can be the difference between a person finishing high school or dropping out. Deb's beliefs stem from her strong Christian values. "I feel like everyone is created the way they're supposed to be. I don't think of it as a negative. If you learn differently, I think that it's on purpose." For Deb, the minimum goal of education is producing a person who "can finish high school, get a job, and take care of their family" Deb wants teachers to remember the long-term goal.

**Beth**

Beth is a retired public-school teacher. In her interview Beth remembered reading a book about "a teacher working with a special ed child." She shared, "No one else was able to get to that child." She also has strong memories of her experience with a handicapped child that she used to babysit. That profoundly influenced her thoughts about children in the classroom. For Beth, working with overly active, distracted students is like "solving a puzzle." "It's kind of detective work…figuring out what a child needs to succeed," she noted. She loves prescriptive teaching.

**Adelle**

Adelle teaches in a secular private school. During her interview she shared that at one time she worked in a pediatric office. She saw first-hand the challenges many parents encountered trying desperately to help their wiggly, distracted children. "We had parents who tried really hard to keep their children off medication. Just seeing all the things they did in order to make things work (*for their child*)." For Adelle, how a teacher helps a child in class "gives them tools to use later in life." To her, a teacher teaches children how to help themselves in the future.

## Results

Three themes emerged as data was analyzed and synthesized: Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents. To arrive at these themes three methods of data collection were used: an individual interview, four written reflections, and a focus group. To mitigate the subjectivity of data inherent in a qualitative study, and to increase validity of results, triangulation was employed. Codes, sub-themes, and themes were determined for each of the three collection methods. Triangulation, findings that were confirmed by the other two collection methods, suggested validity. There were no outliers identified.

**Table 4**
***Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes***

| Themes | Sub-themes | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1<br>Self- Agency | Motivation | Self -Driven<br>Career Goals<br>Professionalism<br>Personal Ethos |
| | Influential Experiences | Self- Experiences<br>Family Experiences<br>Other Experiences<br>Successful Students |
| Theme 2<br>School Leadership | Unhelpful | Lack of Administrative Support<br>Lack of Training<br>Inadequate Staffing |
| | Supportive | Clear Policies<br>Accessible Relevant Training<br>Adequate Staffing |
| Theme 3<br>Parents | Subversive Parents | Undermine Teacher<br>Disinterested |
| | Supportive Parents | Consistency Between Home and School<br>Reinforce Teacher<br>Support Teacher Authority |

**Theme 1 – Self-Agency**

The first of the three themes identified is Self-agency. The findings in this study suggest Self-agency combines motivation and first-hand experiences. The self-expectation to proactively adjust their instruction for overly active, distracted children was well articulated by Chris during

her interview, “It’s my training but it’s also my nature. I’m going to try to handle it myself.” During the individual interviews all 10 of these teachers suggested that they were motivated to adjust instruction for the overly active, distracted students absent any school mandates or parental support.

***Sub-Theme 1 – Motivation***

For this group of participants, personal values, professional work ethic, and self-efficacy strongly influence their classroom practices. Taken separately, any of those findings could be motivating. Together they suggest an individual who feels both a duty to act and capacity for action. In their personal interviews or written reflections, six of 10 participants cited spiritual or personal beliefs as a motivating factor in their classroom practices. Deb’s spiritual beliefs, shared in her written reflection, reflect her belief about the intrinsic worth of each child, “If you learn differently, I think that’s the way God made you. So, I try to intervene myself.” In her written reflection Pam echoed those feelings,

> The traits these children have are not by accident. It’s part of who they were designed and created to be. Providing for them I am serving my God who put each of these students in my care.

Work ethic was another motivating finding. In her interview Gwen shared that she is motivated by the pride she feels from a job well done. “It’s my job. I have a responsibility to the school, parents, and the kids to earn their respect.” And in her written reflections Chris also wrote about her professional motivation, “I believe there are many types of giftedness and that we all have unique strengths. I am the adult in charge of the atmosphere of acceptance in my classroom.”.

The motivating finding of self-efficacy is illustrated in Fran's written reflection, "I always want to see improvements in student learning. I am always looking for 'lightbulb moments' for struggling students". Meg too shared in her written reflection, "It is important for me to understand these students' behavior. I am always developing a bank of instructional resources that will support these students." In their own words, participants suggested that strong work ethic, personal principles that recognize the value of all people, and self-efficacy moderate the motivation of mainstream teachers who prefer to modify their instruction for their overly active, distracted students.

***Sub-Theme 2 – Influential Experiences***

Teachers' own first-hand experiences with wiggly, distracted individuals are foundational components of their motivation. Personal first-hand experience was common for seven of 10 participants (Table 3). Fran summed up her personal early experience during her interview,

> I have a whole different outlook on those (*overly active, distracted*) students who can't memorize even one word a week because my second born is different. She helped me with my empathy for struggling students and their parents.

Also shared during her interview, Lori said that she was herself a wiggly, distracted student, "I was one of those goofy, can't sit still types, and teachers made accommodations for me. I try to pay it forward."

Two of 10 participants shared influential professional first-hand experiences with overly active, distracted children that affected how they later interacted with these children in their classrooms. In her interview Fran shared,

> There was a little African American fellow who just wouldn't sit still or pay attention. I thought both he and his mom disliked me because I was White. And

> she never cared enough to come to a parent meeting. Finally, she came to one. I let her talk and she revealed she was a single mother who was diagnosed with stage four cancer… Yea, that popped into my mind.

Deb recalled an influential experience that happened during her first year of teaching. She shared during her interview, “I had a couple of really challenging kindergarten students my first year. They weren’t just wiggly. They had lots of life for being so young. Lots of life. They graduated high school last year and are headed to college with big dreams.” She continued, “ Along the way I have found that accommodations and accountability make all the difference for these wiggly kids.” First-hand experience with overly active, distracted is a common experience among participants. Eight of 10 teachers explicitly said first-hand experiences with other overly active, distracted individuals influenced their desire to help these children themselves.

**Theme 2 - School Leadership**

Participant experiences of unsupportive and supportive leadership is described in the sub-themes. In their written reflections, eight of eight participants noted that the search for assistance intensifies when facing a difficult classroom situation. During her interview Pam recounted finding herself in one of these tough circumstances with an overly active, distracted student “ I remember asking for help from my principal; telling him I want to do right by this child. I didn’t have enough time or enough hands. I was told there wasn’t any help.”

All of the participants try to support overly active, distracted students in their classroom, regardless of the support provided by school leaders. These mainstream teachers welcome guidance and support from their school leaders as they work to meet the needs of overly active, distracted students in their classrooms. Unfortunately, five of 10 teachers have no policy

directives from their schools (Table 4). And seven of 10 participants suggested in their written reflections that they are not offered opportunities for professional training to address the learning needs of overly active, distracted students.

***Sub-theme 1 – Unsupportive School Leadership***

It is unfortunate that many schools do not provide policy or training opportunities for teachers with overly active, distracted students. Meg wrote in her written reflection,

> My school has not provided me with any training, resources, or physical material that would prepare me or help me implement any instructional modifications or accommodations in my classroom. I am solely responsible, which is quite frustrating.

And in her written reflection Gwen shared that her school offers no training or guidance. "My school provides no in-service days to focus on working with wiggly, distracted students. If I want to attend a class they might help financially, but that's it." In Pam's written reflection she related,

> We are required to use the MTSS system…They have provided little training…My school has not provided any formal professional development for that…I turn to colleagues who are gifted working with these kids. It's how I pick up skills and strategies.

And Chris shared in her written reflection that her school mandates teachers follow RTI but at the same time "focus very little on training and implementation." Later she wrote,

> My peers are often baffled by the fact that, while the district expects them to regularly monitor these students (*RTI*), they have never provided the tools to do

> so. Sometimes a good teacher will document faithfully for an entire year only to find the instruments they used are not accepted in the program.

***Sub-theme 2 – Supportive School Leadership***

According to Table 3, five of 10 participants note that their school leaders require compliance with specific policy regarding overly active, distracted students. But according to participant input from interviews and written reflections, only three of 10 teachers feel supported by leadership to carry out these mandates. One of those three is just recently. Supportive schools provide direction and support for teachers through policy or mandate, professional training opportunities, adequate staffing, and ample time needed for duties.

Deb's work time is split between teaching second grade and directing teacher development at her school. Her school has, up until last year, provided no help to teachers working with overly active, distracted students. With the addition of her new administrative responsibilities, her school is taking steps to develop teachers to more effectivity meet the needs all students, including those of overly active, distracted students. In her individual interview she shared, "I am the one leading the charge here to help teachers provide accommodations and teaching modifications to support all students." From her written reflection Beth wrote, "At our school we are instructed on RTI procedure annually, and we are provided resources for accommodating instruction." And in her written reflection Fran shared,

> Our district has provided mandatory online tutorials for professional development. Additionally, our faculty attends IB conferences to enhance our knowledge of best practices. Our district has PBIS committees that visit the school to assess the implementation of PBIS. As a result, modifications to in-class instruction can be done to foster student success.

**Theme 3 - Parents**

The third theme is Parents. During the focus group eight of eight teachers suggested support from parents is a strong factor in student success in the classroom. Beth put it succinctly in her written reflection, “Trust between the school and the family must be built to be successful in meeting the needs of the student.” And in her interview Meg stated, “Parental support plays a part in whether classroom modifications work.”

***Sub-theme 1 – Unsupportive Parents***

Tremendous damage can be done to the teacher-student relationship by unsupportive parents. This damage can result in a student who is unwilling to cooperate in their own learning. Gwen’s experience with parents has resulted in strong feelings on this topic. She shared in her individual interview,

> When there’s no support by the parent there can be drastic consequences to the student. I had a student who at home was told he was a prodigy, and that the teachers don’t know what they’re talking about. The student offered no cooperation in class. He failed on every level. You have to have parent support.

Chris noted in her interview,

> Sometimes I go nine months trying to help a student that I don’t seem to be reaching. I know that child goes home and hears parents say bad thing about me. It’s a testament to the human spirit that they even come back to school and trust me.

In her interview Lori mentioned, “Sometimes I have a parent that’s pushing for it (*ADHD assessment*) so that’s when I really keep an eye out.”

***Sub-theme 2 – Supportive Parents***

Parents who are supportive of teachers' efforts can provide struggling students with continuity of expectations and assistance needed for their success. Anne shared her approach to building parental support. "Parents of wiggly, distracted children already know how their child is. For me great relationships begin when I send home notes praising their child early in the school year. They never expected praise reports." In the focus group Emily shared, "For me, any parent who supports me, who reinforces consistency with the child between home and school, is the greatest ally I can have."

Pam shared during her interview that she has no problem reaching out to parents because they can make a difference for a child. She related,

> I remember contacting a parent and saying we need to fight because your child can be successful in my classroom. He reads better than 3/4 of my class. He's happy and thriving. School administration just didn't want to provide support or put a person in there to support him.

In the focus group Chris discussed her relationship with the parent of one former overly active, distracted student,

> The family of a former wiggly, distracted student still considers me a friend. It is because out of concern for his falling grades I offered to tutor him (at no charge) the year after I was his homeroom teacher.

## Research Question Responses

**Table 5**
***Alignment Between Themes and Research Questions***

| Theme | Sub-theme | Research Question |
|---|---|---|
| Self-Agency | | CQ |
| | Professional Motivation | SQ2, SQ3 |
| | Personal Experiences | SQ2, SQ3 |
| School Leadership | | CQ |
| | Lack of Support | SQ1 |
| | Supportive | SQ2 |
| Parents | | CQ |
| | Subversive Parents | SQ1 |
| | Supportive Parents | SQ2 |

### Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who initiate in-classroom instructional modifications to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation? The answer to the central research question required a synthesis of the three themes: Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents. According to the participants, life experiences both negative and positive, personal, and professional, contributed to their preferences to make in-classroom instructional adjustments for overly active, distracted students. This was reflected beautifully by Adelle. “If you don’t acknowledge that your whole job is to get the child to learn, if you’re unwilling to learn yourself, and make

changes in order for your goals to be accomplished…there's no reason for you to be there." The sentiment was continued by Gwen. "No child wants to be labeled. No child wants to be told they aren't capable. By not modifying the overly active child's environment they are just telling the kid they're not good enough. To me, when a kid gets labeled, it's all over."

**Sub-Question One**

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers have inhibited initially implementing in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students? The answer to sub-question one draws from a synthesis of themes two and three: lack of School Leadership support and negative interaction with Parents. Participants responses indicated that a lack of professional training can inhibit their ability to respond appropriately to a student. Lack of parental support also has detrimental effects on the teacher-student relationship. From Gwen's experience, "Instructional modifications done wrong can make a kid not even want to come to school…and also when there's no parental support there can be drastic consequences for the child."

**Sub-Question Two**

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers forged their use of in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation? The answer to sub-question two integrates themes one, two, and three: Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents. Teachers' responses reflected combinations of professional and personal experiences, and school leadership and parental experiences. Anne's professional values are reflected in her words, "Teachers have a job to do. If you don't want to do it, you're in the wrong profession." Chris explained why it was necessary for her to take control of instructing the wiggly children in her class, "My peers and I are often baffled that the

district expects us to carry out their policies without providing any of the tools to do so." And Pam explained the importance of parental support, "Parents are the experts on children because they know them best. When we can communicate openly and regularly the student benefits…we celebrate successes together."

**Sub-Question Three**

What lived experiences beyond the classroom have influenced mainstream teachers who implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for an ADHD evaluation? Self-Agency is the essence of theme one, and it answers sub-question three. The participants voiced that their own personal motivations stemmed from professional and personal values, and personal experiences. Fran shared from personal experience. "There might be kids along the way that impacted how I work with struggling kids, but the one that impacted me the most was my own kid." The value of professionalism is reflected in Lori's comment, "There's no such thing as a student who can't learn, who doesn't benefit from some kind of instructional adjustment. Whether it's a wiggle chair, an exercise ball, a standing desk, or just space to pace back and forth, there's no student who won't benefit from some sort of modification…period."

Table 3 illustrates the lived experiences of participants that influenced their attitudes toward attempting to assist overly active, distracted students in their own mainstream classrooms. Responses fell into five categories: personal experiences, classroom experiences, professional values, personal values, and school policy. Every participant had more than one influence.

**Table 3**
***Experiences That Shaped Teacher Attitudes About Overly Active, Distracted Students***

| Teacher | Personal Experience | Classroom Experience | Work Ethic | Personal Values | School Policy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adelle | X | | X | | |
| Anne | X | | X | X | X |
| Beth | | | X | | X |
| Chris | | X | X | | X |
| Deb | | | X | X | |
| Fran | X | | X | | X |
| Gwen | X | | X | X | |
| Lori | X | | X | X | |
| Meg | X | | X | X | |
| Pam | X | X | X | X | X |

## Summary

Chapter four presented the results of this study, the exploration of lived experiences of mainstream teachers who prefer to modify their classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overactive, distracted students before they recommend them for a formal assessment. The participants welcomed exploration of their lived experiences, and the in vivo data collected was unambiguous and detailed. Analysis of this data resulted in three themes: Self-Agency, School Leadership, and Parents. The theme of Self -Agency was defined by first-hand experiences, professional and personal values, and self-efficacy. The theme of School Leadership culminated from participant experiences of strong and poor school administrative practices. These examples

included classroom support, professional training, policies, and adequate staffing. The third theme was Parents. This was informed by participant recollections of positive and negative parent interactions. The three themes rejoin the central research question and inform the sub-questions. The findings of this study suggest that themes of Self-Agency, School Leadership, and Parents strongly influence mainstream teachers who prefer to modify their classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overactive distracted students before they recommend them for a formal assessment.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

## Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream elementary teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. Gascon et al. (2022), Greenway and Edwards (2020), and Owens (2020) concur that there is a need for qualitative research examining mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to address the needs of overly active, distracted students in their own classrooms. The study is examined through the lens of Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory and self-efficacy theory. This chapter begins with a general discussion about the study followed by a summary of thematic findings. The summary includes both empirical and theoretical discussions as well as implications for theory, empirical research, and practice. Next, limitations and delimitations describe the parameters that constrain this study, followed by two recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

## Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream elementary teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. Qualitative studies exploring this topic are limited. Gascon et al. (2022), Greenway and Edwards (2020), and Owens (2020) suggest the need for qualitative research examining mainstream classroom teachers with overly active, distracted students. Social learning theory suggests people learn how to think and how to behave from others (Bandura, 1977), and is the lens through which the study was examined. This phenomenological study

examined the lived experiences of ten mainstream classroom teachers relayed through their own words. Data collected were the recollections of those lived experiences as recounted by the participants. The answers to four research questions were sought through individual interviews, written reflections, and a focus group. A set of codes and sub-themes emerged following analysis and synthesis of participant contributions. Further scrutiny of the findings suggested three themes: Self-Agency, School Leadership, and Parents. These findings confirm and extend previous studies noted in the literature review. Overly active, distracted students benefit when mainstream classroom teachers create supportive learning opportunities, school leaders provide critical professional support for their teachers, and parents reinforce teachers' efforts.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

The thematic findings of this study were sufficient to answer the four research questions. As discussed in Chapter Four, a synthesis of data resulted in three essential themes: Self-Agency, School Leadership, and Parents. Self-Agency suggests that first-hand experiences, personal values, work ethic, and self-efficacy have a significant impact on the willingness of teachers to work outside their comfort zones to address the needs of individual students. The theme of School Leadership conveys how school leaders impact teachers by making available professional development, classroom support, policies, and adequate staffing. The third theme is Parents. Both supportive and subversive parents can influence the willingness of teachers to modify their instruction for a student. These themes satisfactorily addressed the research questions.

**Implications for Practice**

Productive implications for practice were suggested by participants during the individual interviews. All 10 teachers unequivocally voiced the importance of their work ethic. Findings of the study suggested work ethic is an important sub-theme of Self-agency. Self-agency both girds

and provides the foundation for mainstream teachers who prefer to modify their in-class instruction for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD assessment. Self-agency is clearly a critical attribute for the teachers of these students. Self-agency develops in part through experience, and both the teacher and school leadership bear responsibility for its development and reinforcement. School leaders are uniquely positioned to support the development of self-agency of all teachers, especially teachers struggling to assist overly active, distracted students. Providing recognition of effective teaching and facilitating a broad range of support that includes professional continuing education and mentorship opportunities would contribute to increased success in mainstream classrooms.

The teachers in this study were all receptive to useful information that would make their teaching more effective. School leaders who provide appropriate learning opportunities can minimize teachers hunting for classroom solutions that don't support best practices. It is imperative that school leaders offer on-going professional education to all classroom teachers. All students will benefit when even the least skilled and least motivated teachers become acquainted with techniques that better meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students.

Eight of 10 participants in this study related their own first-hand experiences with overly active, distracted individuals. First-hand experiences often mitigate erroneous preconceived beliefs. First-hand experiences, provided by school leaders, often change teachers' expectations of students with whom they have previously lacked personal interactions. Opportunities for teachers to be mentored by successful effective peers can bolster understanding by providing these teachers examples of successful interactions with overly active, distracted students.

Study participants want School Leadership to be active and competent. Effective school leaders make sure teachers are well supported so they can carry out their jobs. To serve the needs

of overly active, distracted students, classrooms must be adequately staffed with reasonable teacher to student rations. Teachers must be provided with sufficient instructional and planning time. They need access to continuing professional development that helps them do their jobs. And they need the materials and classroom furnishings that will help their overly active, distracted students succeed.

Teachers in this study also shared their own experiences with building relationships with Parents. Although not always critical to student success, parental support can be very important. Cooperative parents reinforce their children that they are capable and reinforce the self-discipline that students will need in order to be successful at school. Consistent reinforcement of goals and expectations always benefits students. School Leadership and teachers must make Parents aware of the pivotal position they hold in their child's educational journey. Teachers should establish relationships that demonstrate respect for parents and support for their children.

## Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The findings in this study are important because of the lack of current qualitative phenomenological research exploring the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to address the learning needs of their overly active, distracted students themselves. The study's themes in the context of current literature are discussed here.

### *Empirical Implications*

This study examined the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to modify instruction for their overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD assessment. The study added to literature about effective mainstream classroom teachers who work with overly active, distracted students. It addressed a need for more qualitative research on this topic (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020; Owens, 2020).

Participant input was shaped only by the questions asked in the interviews, written reflections, and the focus group. Each teacher was free to explore her own personal experiences. Open-ended and follow-up questions encouraged deep exploration of why they prefer to address these children's needs themselves. This methodology contrasts with quantitative research that is limited by numeric variables. The qualitative nature of this study considered all data, and ultimately recognized the findings and themes that emerged.

In the individual interview participants were invited to describe their own first-hand experiences with overly active, distracted individuals. Two participants recalled no special first-hand interactions with any overly active, distracted people. Six of 10 participants shared influential first-hand experiences that happened outside the classroom. One participant had strong first-hand experiences both outside and within the classroom. And one teacher's attitudes about overly active, distracted individuals were shaped from first-hand experiences in the classroom (Table 3). Previous first-hand experience emerged as an influence on participant preference to modify instruction for overly active, distracted students before referring them for assessment. The findings suggested that first-hand experience contributed to self-efficacy, and in turn self-agency. Mentoring opportunities that provide successful first-hand experience with overly active, distracted students may be pivotal to helping teachers who lack self-efficacy improve academic outcomes for these children.

Open-ended questions provided a platform for teachers to recount their unique experiences with school leadership, and how those experiences influence their practice in the classroom. There were no constraints on participant answers. Table 3 shows five teachers out of 10 worked in schools where there was a specific policy regarding student referrals. It was discovered during the individual interviews that those five teachers were

initially expected to address overly active, distracted students' needs in their own classrooms. Unexpectedly, data collected in the written reflections suggested that of those five teachers, only two were provided with any training to address those specific student needs. The other three teachers had to manage as best they could. The remaining five teachers taught in schools without any specific policy or training. In total, eight of 10 teachers were provided no guidance for serving the needs of overly active, distracted students in their mainstream classrooms. Responses from individual interviews, written reflections, and the focus group suggested that eight of 10 participants were disappointed that school leaders did not offer more support for teachers. Qualitative research allowed for open-ended questioning and the ability to ask if there was anything participants would like to add. Meg shared it best in her written reflection,

> My school or district has not provided me with any training, resources, or physical materials that would prepare me for implementing instructional modifications in my classroom. I am solely responsible for determining student needs and instructional modifications and instruction, which is quite frustrating.

And Pam commented during her interview, "Usually administration doesn't provide any help. I don't know, I just have to figure it out."

The semi-formal structure of questions led participants to explore their answers in the context of their own experiences. A thread loosely woven throughout many of the individual interviews was the influence of parental support on academic success of overly active, distracted students. This was also unexpected. In the individual interviews, no questions specific to parents were asked. Yet the topic of 'parents' found itself casually inserted into individual interview responses by nine of 10 participants. Four teachers

mentioned the influence of supportive parents on improved academic outcomes for their overly active, distracted children in the classroom. Three participants shared stories of uncooperative parents who undermined the teacher's efforts with their children. And two teachers brought up the importance of understanding the child's parental situation, and how that might affect the outcome of modifying instruction for their children. Participants in this study relayed experiences that suggested parental attitudes might influence the success or failure of instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students.

This qualitative research offered an opportunity to explore with these effective mainstream teachers why and what led to their preference to address the needs of overly active, distracted students themselves. Teachers own words were the source of the data collected. That data was analyzed, coded, and synthesized to discover the essence, the unifying nucleus of participant experiences (Table 4). The results suggested the essential themes of Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents. The findings in this study are noteworthy because of the scarcity of qualitative research on the topic (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020; Owens, 2020).

An unexpected theme that emerged from this study was Self-agency. In this study Self-agency included motivation and first-hand experiences. Self-agency is incredibly important. To put it into context, these specific teachers choose to modify their in-class instruction for overly active, distracted students often without the support of school leaders or parents. Self-efficacy explains these teachers' feelings of competence, personal values and work ethic drive the implementation. In other words, they do what they believe needs to be done for the student.

Despite the wide range of lived experiences among participants, the one constant is Self-agency, the self-drive they feel to help these children learn. Chris explained,

> A mechanic knows what to do if I drive in and say my brakes are squeaking. If I've got a third grader who's squeaking, I'm going through my litany of procedures. I'm in charge of what's happening in my classroom. I have lots of experience with young children so I'm going to try and handle it myself. It's my job as that child's teacher.

10 of 10 participants expressed work ethics and professional competence during their individual interviews. They conveyed that addressing the individual needs of each student, regardless of the effort involved, is their job. It is why they are in the classroom. It was clearly apparent that all of these effective mainstream classroom teachers working with overly active, distracted students had high professional work ethics to which they held themselves. This is well summed up in the words of Adelle, "If you don't acknowledge that your whole job is to get the child to learn, if you're unwilling to learn yourself, and make changes in order for your goals to be accomplished…there's no reason for you to be there."

Self-agency aligns with Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy which he defines as believing one can and should determine and carry out one's responsibilities. Self-agency also confirms other research addressing teacher confidence and professionalism. According to Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2021), the ability of a teacher to assess a learning situation, set, and then achieve goals reinforces confidence in that teacher. In addition, a teacher's willingness to acknowledge and respond to the needs of a given student, even outside of that teacher's experience, indicates self-efficacy (Cruz et al., 2019). In this study all 10 teachers indicated during their interviews (Table 3) that it is their professional duty to determine the learning needs of any overly active, distracted

student, and then to accommodate or modify their instruction to best help that child to learn. Based on participant responses to individual interviews and written reflections, each teacher was open to accommodating children. Deb noted during her interview, “If I can intervene myself, I feel like I can protect a little person from a label or lots of doctor visits, or medicine that might not be so good for them as people think…so I do.” They were also open to learning new teaching approaches and techniques that would help these children become successful learners. These findings corroborate Daumiller et al., (2021), and Gonzalez-DeHass et al., (2021), who suggest that teachers with self-efficacy believe they can assess and address the needs of their students. In her interview Deb noted,

> Some children have true learning disabilities, and some are just really active…The academic struggle can get in the way of a kid who just needs a lot of modifications…So little Johnny who truly had ADHD is going to respond really well to wiggle seats, alternative activities, a little check-in chart…and students who have a hidden issue like dyslexia, usually the accommodations don’t help them.

The findings of this study concur with research that suggests the detrimental effects on students of teachers who lack self-efficacy. A lack of self-efficacy is reflected in the behavior of teachers who fail to give any classroom assistance to overly active, distracted students. These teachers believe there is little they can do that will help the student, and they often refuse to try (Lauermann & Berger, 2021). Teachers who lack self-efficacy take a staggering toll on the students in their care. Overly active, distracted students begin to doubt their own abilities (Perera & John, 2020). They begin to see themselves as inadequate (Lauermann & Berger, 2021), and this self-fulfilling belief unfortunately can set them up for a dismal future.

A mainstream classroom teacher who believes that their own actions can influence academic success for an overly active, distracted student enjoys positive self-efficacy. According to Gonzalez- DeHass et al. (2021), both teacher and student benefit when the teacher feels self-efficacious. These teachers measure their abilities against their goals and are motivated to take necessary steps to increase their chances of success (Lauerman & Berger, 2021). Anne is an example of one of those teachers. She shared in the focus group,

> I got a student that was targeted by her previous teacher as a behavior problem student. When I got her, I was able to work with her and help her see her gifts. When it came time for her to move to the next grade all the teachers had discussed that they did not want her in their classrooms. I saw this as a system failure and decided to loop up with that class so none of those teachers would get that student. This student is an adult now and an engineer. Highly gifted, and still wiggly and distracted!

The theme of Self-Agency emerged from a synthesis of personal motivations and influential experiences. These influential experiences with overly active, distracted students included self-experience, experiences with family members or friends, and having successful outcomes with students. 8 of 10 participants had a significant meaningful interaction with at least one overly active, distracted individual outside the classroom over their lifetimes. This first-hand experience affected their willingness to modify instruction or accommodate the learning needs of students in their classroom. In her individual interview Fran recounted,

> I told my first-grade team I have a whole different outlook on students who can't sit still and can't learn since having my second child…My second born is different…(*Before her*) I used to send out emails saying your child ought to be

> able to do this and that. And along came my own child and she couldn't do it. She really helped with my empathy for struggling children and their parents. It influenced what I do in the classroom.

Pam's first-hand experience included her brother. She shared,

> My own brother struggled with ADHD and school. He is extremely smart. I watched first-hand what he needed to be more successful. He needed a lot of additional prompting and extra reminders. His cognitive abilities were strong, and he needed to be in a regular classroom with regular instruction, not limited expectations. If he had been evaluated for ADHD, he would have gotten an IEP and maybe been put in a classroom that wouldn't have given him the learning he needed.

Findings of this study are in agreement that teachers' classroom practices and attitudes are informed by many factors, not the least is previous experience (Zhang et al., 2020). Attitudes toward students are subjective (Gibbs et al., 2020) and student behaviors that are interpreted as problematic differ among teachers (Boda, 2021). Findings also align with Slobidin and Davidovitch (2019) who note that the evaluation of a student's behavior is incredibly subjective. This subjectiveness can result in under or over representation of some demographic populations.

Inarguably, first-hand experiences with any target student population affect teacher attitudes (Lee et al., 2021). First-hand experiences of this study's participants with overly active, distracted students influenced the way these teachers interpreted, reacted to, and addressed their needs. The participants believe they can attend to the learning needs of these students in their own classrooms. These teachers feel that they have the ability to teach almost any child (Clark & Andreasen, 2021). Similarly, beliefs a teacher has about groups of individual students, and their

own ability to meet the students' needs, affect their willingness to modify lessons and adapt instruction (Clark & Andreasen, 2021; Kunemund et al., 2020).

A second theme that emerged from this study was School Leadership. There is little research exploring school leadership and teacher access to targeted in-service education. In-service learning refers to educational opportunities offered to teachers who are already working in the field. Teachers who possess Self-agency welcome in-service learning opportunities. They want access to targeted classes that will help them better address the needs of their overly active, distracted students. The teachers in this study want to do their jobs well. They want to serve the learning needs of their overly active, distracted students, and they welcome any and all learning opportunities for themselves. The teachers in this study also want to strengthen their professional knowledge and they have several available avenues. They can wait for school leadership to provide appropriate learning opportunities, they can seek out mentors, and they can find information on their own. Findings in this study agree with Carpenter et al. (2020) that teachers actively look for a professional community. They want to share professional experiences and find sources of information and solutions to classroom problems. Given the depth and breadth of quality information available on technology platforms it is not unreasonable to expect that school leadership could assimilate it as a resource for teacher continuing education. This study supports Carpenter and Harvey (2019) as they suggest that it is the responsibility of school and district leaders to tailor training to teacher needs. Social media and educational technology platforms can be prolific reference points for teachers who desperately want solutions to their classroom issues (Team Leverage Edu., 2021). Findings of this study also agree that when on-site training fails to meet teacher needs or available mentors prove to be unproductive, teachers who enjoy self-

efficacy look outside their professional community for classroom solutions (Simoncini et al., 2021). In her written reflection Gwen shared,

> Our school has never provided in service days to focus on modifications for distracted students. I look around for information. Now if I found a professional development class I wanted to attend on my own, they might would help out financially.

Aguilar et al. (2021) predict that teachers will continue to access social media and technology platforms for professional development and professional camaraderie. Most participants noted a lack of opportunities for targeted professional development which aligns with Brasfield et al. (2019) who notes the importance of professional development that is unique to each teacher's needs.

Effective School Leadership establishes policy and provides ongoing professional education for teachers. It also provides the physical tools that allow teachers to implement those policies. Teachers want School Leadership that works to increase the academic success of their overly active, distracted students. Participant classified School Leadership as either unhelpful or supportive. Participant experiences suggested that unhelpful School Leadership was reflected by lack of administrative support to both response to student behavior and a lack of teacher training and classroom staffing. There were several examples of school leadership failure shared by participants during the focus group. Chris' experience was as follows,

> One failure for many, if not all wiggling, distracted students has been our school system's required RTI process. The behavioral aspect of the process is a joke and teachers know it. Diligently keeping records and behavioral charts on students result in nothing.

Lori shared,

> I taught at a school that would remove wiggly students who disrupted the learning of others, fill them up with sugar or junk food and return them to class very quickly. This was always very unhelpful and oftentimes the student escalated, and the class had to be interrupted again. Yea, it was super frustrating. Eventually I stopped calling for help and just handled stuff in house (*myself*).

And Pam added, "Teachers can't give what they don't have, so we need to make sure they have the tools that they need to be successful."

Conversely, supportive School Leadership included clear policies, accessible relevant training, and adequate classroom staffing. The findings of this study aligned with current research that suggest the quality of School Leadership can quite simply be the difference between a seamless integration of an overly active distracted student into a mainstream classroom, or a stressful unproductive experience for both teacher and student. Frankly, excessive administrative demands often result in emotional fatigue and teachers' inability to function productively in their own classrooms (Russell et al., 2020). This reflects in the words of Pam, shared during the individual interview,

> Teachers are stressed and overwhelmed. Some are management issues and behavior that is hard to manage. A lot of teachers just don't have anything left in the tank to give…Sometimes I don't have the time or enough hands to give a student what he needs.

The finding of this study concurs with Scallon et al. (2021), in that an teachers needs adequate planning time, uninterrupted classroom instruction, and time set aside to work among peers. Scallon et al. (2021) note the importance of comfortable and receptive communication with

administrators. Teachers need to feel comfortable requesting assistance. Feelings of overwhelming stress can lead to teacher burnout. This study's findings agreed that large classes sizes and excessive teacher to pupil ratio prevent teachers from establishing productive relationships with their students (Jensen & Solheim, 2019; Sugrue, 2019).

Parents emerged from this study as a third essential theme. Several participants highlighted their experiences with subversive parents. Findings suggested that Parents who undermined the efforts of the teacher effectively neutralize any academic and behavioral progress achieved in the classroom. This confirms the results of literature researched for this study. Droogenbroech et al. (2021), note that a lack of parental support is a factor that often contributes to teacher burnout. Teacher-parent conflict not only not only consumes emotional energy, but also drains teachers (Lu & Guy, 2019). Unfortunately, there are parents who actively demonstrate little faith or interest in their child's ability to succeed (Orpinas, 2021). This regrettably leads children to believe that they have no control over their ability to perform, succeed, and live well in society (Tus, 2020). Hargreaves et al. (2021) suggest that the concept of self is evident in children as young as seven years. Even at this early age they begin to compare themselves to others and start to judge their own competence. There can be no doubt that an overly active, distracted child who is poorly supported will internalize the negative messages affecting their motivation to try in school (Zava et al., 2019). A lack of support from parents can effectively rob a child of hope. And hope is crucial for self-efficacy (Zeinalipour, 2022).

Conversely, supportive parents maintain consistency of expectations between school and home, reinforce the teachers' efforts, and support teacher authority. Positive outcomes for overly active, distracted students increase with the positive participation and support of their parents. These teachers look for ways to include Parents in their child's academic experience.

This study's findings corroborate current literature. The teachers in this study possess self-agency. They believe themselves to be competent and capable and behave in ways that are productive in the classroom (Clark & Andreasen, 2021; Cruz et al., 2019). These teachers also appreciate supportive School Leadership and Parental backing (Droogenbroech et al., 2021; Russel et al., 2020). None of the findings in this study diverged from current empirical research. As previously noted, existing literature that qualitatively explores the desire of some mainstream classroom teachers to address the needs of overly active, distracted students in their own classrooms is very limited.

An unexpected finding that should be further explored within the literature is that of teacher work ethic and its possible relationship to mainstream classroom teachers working effectively with overly active, distracted students.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy were the lenses through with this study was conducted. Social learning theory suggests that humans acquire how they think and behave through interaction with others. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1987) explains the self-belief that one is competent to successfully plan and execute what is necessary to accomplish a goal. It was the intention of the study to identify lived experiences; those human interactions that led these teachers to try to address the learning needs of their overly active, distracted students by modifying their own instruction. Social learning and self-efficacy were appropriate theoretical choices as they guided the exploration of actual lived experiences that influenced these teachers' subsequent beliefs and behaviors.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory informs each of the study's three findings: Self-agency, School Leadership, and Parents. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory frames this

study, and the findings align with social learning theory literature. People learn what to think and how to behave through interactions with others.

Bandura (1986) suggests that individuals use internal regulation to measure their own behavior against how they believe they should act. Internal regulation aptly speaks to self-agency, a theme of this study. Self-agency is reflected in part in the participants self-identified professional work ethic. All 10 teachers in this study hold themselves to a very high standard of work ethic. This study's findings suggest that teachers' work ethic is honed through a variety of learning situations: personal and classroom experiences, personal values, and school policy. Effective mainstream classroom teachers enjoy strong Self-agency that is supported by their strong work ethic. This results in an openness to adjust their instruction to accommodate the needs of their overly active, distracted students.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, the theory that suggests humans know what they know by interacting with each other, is especially relevant to the theme of self-agency which includes the sub-theme of personal and professional experience. Prior first-hand experiences that teachers in this study had with overly active, distracted individuals influenced their opinions about other overly active students that they later encountered in their classrooms. Second, prior first-hand experiences also influenced their beliefs that they can effectively attend to overly active, distracted students' learning needs. According to Bandura (1977) new information is constantly interpreted, assimilated, analyzed, and categorized against what is already known. Human interaction is the catalyst for learning (Bandura, 1986).

Data analysis also suggests a theme of School Leadership. School Leadership is in a unique position to demonstrate Bandura's (1977) social learning theory at its most functional level. Social learning opportunities provided by school leaders can take the form of providing

classroom teachers access to best practices and addressing professional learning needs, opportunities for peer interaction, and quality mentors. Effective school leaders facilitate effective teaching. They provide tools, knowledge, and other support to enhance teachers' effectivity with their students. These teachers appreciate opportunities to learn from more knowledgeable others. Through direct and vicarious learning experiences, and practice alongside successful co-workers, teachers can improve their own classroom practices and ultimately improve instruction for students.

The third theme of this study is Parents. Social learning theory suggests that humans need each other in order to learn (Bandura, 1977). According to the study's participants, these teachers attempt to team with parents of overly active, distracted children for a couple of purposes; (1) to reinforce strategies for behavioral and academic success, and (2) to reinforce strategies to build in the student feeling of self-efficacy. The finding of parental inclusion corroborates Bandura's (1986) observation that social interaction is the catalyst for processing acceptable behavior and attitudes. For overly active, distracted students occurs not just at school but also among family and peers. To increase the chances of successful outcomes with an overly active, distracted child it is incumbent upon the classroom teacher to attempt to enlist assistance from parents and available adult family members. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory aligned with the findings of this study.

It must be noted that analysis of the data also strongly indicates that self-determination theory might also be considered a lens through which this study be examined. Self-determination theory (Gagne and Deci, 2005) includes individuals' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The unexpected finding of work ethic, a sub-theme of self-agency, begs an expansion of the theoretical framework. When examining mainstream classroom teachers who prefer to modify or

accommodate their instruction to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students in their classroom, self-determination theory and its' implications for motivation should be included.

Because one of the three identified themes in this study is Self-agency, it could be argued that self-determination theory might have appropriately been included as a foundational theory. Participants indicated that autonomy, competence, and personal interaction informed their desires to initially address the learning needs of their overly active, distracted students themselves. According to Gagne and Deci (2005) autonomy, competence, and relatedness is foundational to motivation. Social learning theory is appropriate in the context of first-hand experience. Self-efficacy theory does explain why teachers think they are capable of addressing the needs of overly active, distracted students. But self-determination theory would guide the exploration of personal motivation in this query and would have been an appropriate addition to the theoretical foundation. Although this study corroborates Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning and self-efficacy theories, the theme of Self-agency suggests that self-determination theory (Gagne and Deci, 2005) also comes into play with mainstream teachers who prefer to address the needs of their overly active, distracted students.

In the context of this study, Bandura's social learning theory suggests that teachers who prefer to address the learning needs of overly active, distracted students in their own classrooms have experienced some first-hand or vicarious learning from others. Eight of 10 participants had their attitudes shaped by first-hand experiences with overly active, distracted individuals in their own homes or with friends. This suggests that teachers lacking self-efficacy might benefit when school leaders provide opportunities for them to mentor with teachers who do prefer to modify

their instruction for overly active, distracted students. Before referring them for an ADHD assessment.

## Limitations and Delimitations

The following is a breakdown of the study's limitations and delimitations. Limitations, mostly uncontrollable variables, were anticipated by the researcher and minimized as much as possible during the study. Delimitations were limits set by the researcher prior to starting the study.

### *Limitations*

The uncontrollable aspects of a study are its limitations. This study lacked physical proximity to the participants, so reliance on technology was elemental to its success. Technology failure and the inability of any participant to reliably navigate an audio-visual technology platform could potentially have a serious impact on data collection. To ensure data was collected despite potential problems an auxiliary voice recorder was used during all interviews.

Demographic composition of participants was wholly dependent on who chose to volunteer. In addition to personal referrals, the study was posted in a Facebook group with diversified membership. All individuals who met the study criteria were welcome to join. It happened that all volunteers were female and white.

The decision to follow through with their agreement to participate in the study was completely at the discretion of each volunteer. Participation in all three data collection methods was not controllable. To increase the chances of successful participation, the researcher sent a text message reminder to each participant the day before and the morning of the individual interviews and the focus group. Participants were comfortable texting the researcher with any

needed schedule changes or questions. Open lines of communication facilitated robust participation by volunteers.

Another limitation of concern to the researcher was that of participant honesty. It was not possible to really know if the participants were truthful in their representations of themselves and their experiences. Eight of the 10 participants were referred by other teachers, which increased the odds of them being who they represented themselves to be. The researcher also attempted to build a genuine relationship with each participant. Again, open lines of communication created an environment where participants felt comfortable and hopefully less inclined to be deceptive.

The limitations of technology, volunteer participation, and participant honesty were addressed by the researcher. There was no way to anticipate power outages, illnesses, or accidents over which there is no control. The back-up preparations were sufficient to address the identified limitations.

### *Delimitations*

Delimitations are established parameters that define the boundaries of the study. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation.

The choice of a qualitative study was made based on an unmet need for non-numerical research in this area (Gascon et al., 2022; Greenway & Edwards, 2020; Owens, 2020). Phenomenological research allowed the researcher to interact personally with teachers. Their lived experiences with overly active, distracted students became the collected data. Established boundaries to participate in the study mandated that individuals had to: (1) be a current or former certified mainstream classroom teacher, (2) have taught for a minimum of four years, (3) taught

in any combination of kindergarten through sixth grades, and (4) preferred to modify in-classroom instructional before referring an overly active, distracted student for ADHD assessment. Participants were provided with a consent to participate form after they had been successfully screened, either by phone or via an electronically signed form.

Possessing state teaching certification ensured all participants had a roughly equal minimum level of education. A minimum of four years teaching experience allowed for individual teachers to have established their own routines and procedures in their classrooms (Lowe et al., 2019). The study was limited to teachers in grades K-6. Participants understood that the study would involve no personal proximity, and that technology, AV platforms, email, and the telephone would facilitate our communication. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend between five and 25 participants for a phenomenological study. The number of participants for this study was 10.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further qualitative exploration of effective mainstream classroom teachers and their willingness to address the learning needs of their overly active, distracted students is recommended. Findings discovered in this study suggest two areas for additional exploration. The first suggestion is an examination of effective mainstream classroom teachers who were themselves overly active, distracted children. A second area for consideration might explore the theme of Parents through the lived experiences of parents of overly active, distracted children; interactions with classroom teachers that influence support.

One finding of this study was the importance of first-hand experience for teachers of overly active, distracted students. First-hand experience supports teacher beliefs about students, and strengthens teacher self-efficacy (Daumiller et al., 2021; Kim & Buric, 2020). Teachers in

this study who were themselves overly active, distracted students view these same children through a unique lens. They personally understand the need to weigh the possible benefits of a diagnosis against negative consequences of a label (Hamilton, 2020; Owens, 2020; Weinen et al., 2019).

This study examined the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the general population of mainstream classroom teachers. It was discovered during the individual interviews that among the 10 participants of this study two had themselves been overly active, distracted students. Research could be enhanced by limiting participants to only teachers who themselves had been overly active, distracted elementary age students. They could possibly present very different lived experiences resulting in enhanced insight into the phenomenon.

A second finding of this study that warrants further exploration is parental buy-in as partners in the education of their overly active, distracted children. Parents very often misunderstand the overly active, distracted behavior of their child. They can also fail to grasp the implications of their child being diagnosed with ADHD. As such these parents often act more as impediments to their child's well-being and sometimes hamper their academic success (Orpinas, 2021). This study could be expanded with a phenomenological exploration of parents with overly active, distracted children, and their experiences of inclusion or exclusion in their child's educational journey. Examining the lived experiences of parents of overly active, distracted children could provide insight into expectations and wishes about their child's teacher and school leadership.

## Conclusion

The purpose of elementary education is to instill in children an understanding of the basic subjects. Elementary education lays the foundation for a well-rounded, self-effective, motivated

individual. It is critical that not one student be unnecessarily labeled or needlessly punished or ostracized. But the addition of an overly active, distracted student to a mainstream classroom compounds the job of a classroom teacher exponentially. This study is important as it explores personal and professional experiences that influence mainstream classroom teachers' preferences to modify their in-classroom instruction for these students.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) guides this study as people learn what they know from other people. In addition, Bandura's self-efficacy (1986), also explains teacher behavior in the classroom. Unexpectedly, the study's findings also strongly suggest that the theory of self-determination would also have been an appropriate theoretical lens through which to examine this phenomenon. Its link to Self-agency and motivation is undeniable. But this was not apparent until the after the findings and themes were recognized.

The participants welcomed exploration of their lived experiences, and data collected was unambiguous and detailed. Analysis of data collected from personal interviews, written reflections, and a focus group resulted in three themes: Self-Agency, School Leadership, and Parents. The theme of Self -Agency was defined by personal experiences, and professional and personal lived values. The theme of School Leadership included availability of classroom support for teachers, professional training, policies, and adequate staffing. The third theme, Parents, included participant recollections of positive and negative parent interactions. The three themes provided answers to the central research question and the sub-questions.

The implications of these findings suggest the following: (1) teachers with self-efficacy expect themselves to meet the needs of their students and feel competent to do so, (2) school leaders must actively take steps to improve the effectiveness and professionalism of their teaching staff, and (3) parents can play an important role in student success. The teachers in this

study want to improve, and school leaders can provide opportunities that develop the quality and effectiveness of all teachers. Effective school leaders shape and strengthen their teaching staff. With support from school leaders, mainstream classroom teachers can better meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students. It is unconscionable to allow any child to be subjected to a less than equitable education because school leaders fail to develop their teaching staff.

Further research on this topic is invited. Exploring the lived experiences of teachers, school leaders, and parents, and how they affect cognitive and affective outcomes for overly active, distracted students is critical. This is crucial because mainstream classroom teachers strongly influence what overly active, distracted students believe about themselves. And teachers also influence what other teachers, students, and parents believe about overly active, distracted students. Positive outcomes for an overly active, distracted child strongly hinge on the self-agency of a teacher, effectiveness of school leaders, and support from their parents.

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# Appendix A

## IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 14, 2023

Elizabeth Minney
Amy Jones

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1385 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAM TEACHERS AND OVERLY ACTIVE DISTRACTED STUDENTS

Dear Elizabeth Minney, Amy Jones,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [redacted]

Sincerely,
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**
*Administrative Chair*
**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B

## Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Mainstream Teachers and Overly Active Distracted Students
**Principal Investigator:** Elizabeth I. Minney, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must:

(1) be over 18 years of age,
(2) Be a current or former mainstream classroom teacher in any combination of grades K – 6,
(3) have a minimum of 4 years teaching experience, and
(4) who routinely initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active distracted students before referring for formal assessment.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

(a) Individual interview, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams, [audio to be recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant within one week of receipt],
(b) 4 Written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail – [each prompt to be returned to researcher within 1 week of receipt],
(c) Focus group, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams [to be recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

By taking part in this study participants will help to shine light on the how and why some teachers choose to refer overly active distracted students for testing before implementing in-classroom instructional modifications. Contributing to this body of knowledge will enable school administrators and districts to more effectively address teacher concerns and needs as they serve this population of early elementary students.
Volunteers who participate in all three data collection methods, individual interview, focus group, and written reflection will receive a $25 incentive gift card.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers, but if data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant names and locations will not be used during data collection nor in reporting. Pseudonyms and pseudo locations will protect the privacy of participants.
- Data will be stored by the researcher on a password protected computer and disposed of after five years following completion of study.
- The researcher will have sole access to audio recordings. Recordings will be stored on password protected computers. Transcriptions of individual interviews will be provided via e-mail to the individual participant. Neither an actual name nor an actual location will be associated with an individual transcript. The original audio recording of an interview will be destroyed 5 years following the conclusion of the study.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. Focus group participants will not be given actual names or locations of other volunteers. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Confidentiality means that only the researcher will be able to link individual participants to the information provided throughout the study, but that information will remain securely unavailable to anyone except the researcher, and never shared by the researcher.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Elizabeth Minney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] and [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Amy Jones, at [redacted]

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, [redacted] or email at [redacted]

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Please click the button to return the form after it is signed. Doing so will indicate that you consent to participle in the study.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| Printed Subject Name | Preferred E-Mail Address |
| _____ | _____ |
| Signature & Date | Preferred Phone Number |

## Appendix C

## Social Media Recruitment

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. Degree in Curriculum & Instruction at Liberty University.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation.

To participate, you must:

(1) be over 18 years of age,
(2) be a current or former mainstream classroom teacher in any combination of grades K-6,
(3) have a minimum of 4 years teaching experience, and
(4) routinely implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active distracted students before referring them for assessment

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

(a) Individual interview, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams [to be recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant]
(b) 4 Written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail or text
(c) Focus group, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [to be recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

By taking part in this study participants will help to shine light on the how and why some teachers choose to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active distracted students for an ADHD assessment. Contributing to this body of knowledge will enable school administrators and districts to address teacher professional development needs more effectively as they serve this population of early elementary students.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please text, call, or e-mail me [ [redacted] for more information, questionnaire, consent forms, and to join the study. A reminder will be emailed to you one week before your participation in the study.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential and in no way will be indicated anywhere in the study.

## Appendix D

## Verbal or Written Recruitment (E-Mail)

Hello [*Potential Participant*],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph. D. Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation. If you meet the participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

To participate, you must

(1) be over 18 years of age,
(2) be a current or former mainstream classroom teacher in any grades K – 6,
(3) have a minimum of 4 years teaching experience, and
(4) who as a professional practice initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active distracted students before referring them for assessment.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

(a) Individual interview, (45 – 60 minutes) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant]
(b) 4 Written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail or text
(c) Focus group, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential and inn no way will be indicated anywhere in the study.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please text, call, or e-mail me [redacted] for more information and to receive the screening questionnaire. Upon return of the completed questionnaire you will be e-mailed a consent form for electronic signature. The consent form must be signed and returned within one week to join the study. A reminder will be e-mailed to you one week before your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Minney

## Appendix E

## Recruitment Follow-Up (Reminder)

Dear [*Participant]*:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Last week a[n] [email/text] was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up [email] is being sent to remind you to [respond/complete the consent form] if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

(a) Individual interview (45 – 60 minutes) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [to be recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant],
(b) 4 total written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail or text,
(c) Focus group, (1 hour, some 3 – 5 participants) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [to be recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please text, call, or e-mail me for more information [ [redacted] ] for more information, consent form, and to join the study.

The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate in this study, you will need to electronically sign the consent document that will be e-mailed to you, and then click the return button to return it to me within one week of receipt. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Minney

## Appendix F

## Permission to Solicit Participants (Facebook)

[Insert Date]
[Recipient]
Facebook group

Dear *[Recipient]*,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The title of my research project is *A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Mainstream Teachers of Overly Active Distracted Students.* The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation.

I am writing to request permission to post in your Facebook group (name group here) an invitation for volunteers to participate in my research study. If they agree to be in this study, I will ask participants to do the following things:

(a) Individual interview, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams [audio to be recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant],
(b) 4 written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail or text,
(c) Focus group, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams [to be recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

By taking part in this study participants will help to shine light on the how and why some teachers choose to refer overly active distracted students for testing before implementing in-classroom instructional modifications. Contributing to this body of knowledge will enable school administrations and districts to more effectively address teacher concerns and needs as they serve this population of early elementary students.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

A copy of the actual Facebook group solicitation post is attached below.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by Facebook messenger [redacted] email [redacted] or text to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Minney

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Education at Liberty University.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore those lived experiences that predispose some mainstream teachers to initially modify in-classroom instruction to meet the needs of their overly active distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation.

To participate, you must:

(5) be over 18 years of age,
(6) be a current or former mainstream classroom teacher in any combination of grades K-6,
(7) have a minimum of 4 years teaching experience, and
(8) routinely implement in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active distracted students before referring them for assessment

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

(d) Individual interview, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [to be recorded by researcher, written transcript to be reviewed by participant]
(e) 2 Written prompts, (15 minutes each), sent via e-mail
(f) Focus group, (1 hour) via Microsoft Teams or other group meeting technology platform [to be recorded by researcher, written transcripts to be reviewed by participants].

By taking part in this study participants will help to shine light on the how and why some teachers choose to initially implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active distracted students for an ADHD assessment. Contributing to this body of knowledge will enable school administrators and districts to address teacher professional development needs more effectively as they serve this population of early elementary students.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please text, or e-mail me [ [redacted]., [redacted] ] for more information, questionnaire, consent forms, and to join the study. A reminder will be emailed to you one week before your participation in the study.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential and in no way will be indicated anywhere in the study.

# Appendix G

## Screening Questionnaire

## Screening Questionnaire

**NAME** **E-MAIL**
**DATE** **CELL (I'll fill this in)**

1) **I am over 18 years of age.**
2) **I am a current, former, or retired elementary school teacher.**
3) **I do or have taught a K-6 mainstream classroom.**
4) **I have at least 4 years teaching experience.**
5) **When presented with an overly active distracted student, I prefer to first try to meet his or her learning needs in my own classroom before suggesting an ADHD assessment.**

**SIGNATURE**_____

## Appendix H

## Individual Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe your professional and educational background. CRQ
2. How do you define an overly active, distracted student in your classroom? CRQ
3. Why do you choose to initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for evaluation? SQ2
4. Which overly active, distracted students do you feel are most likely to benefit from in-classroom instructional modifications? SQ2
5. How might student demographics affect your decision to attempt in-classroom in instructional modifications or to immediately refer them for evaluation? SQ1
6. Describe how personal and professional stress impacts your desire to try in-class instructional modifications before referring students for an evaluation. SQ1
7. What personal or professional experiences have most influenced your tendency to attempt in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for an ADHD evaluation? SQ3
8. What recommendations would you suggest that would help more mainstream classroom teachers initiate in-classroom instructional modifications for their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation? SQ3

# Appendix I

## Research Questions

### Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers who initiate in-classroom instructional modifications to meet the needs of their overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation?

### Sub-Question One

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers have inhibited initially implementing in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students?

### Sub-Question Two

What lived professional experiences of mainstream classroom teachers forged their use of in-classroom instructional modifications for overly active, distracted students before referring them for ADHD evaluation?

### Sub-Question Three

What lived experiences beyond the classroom have influenced mainstream teachers who implement in-classroom instructional modifications before referring overly active, distracted students for an ADHD evaluation?

## Appendix J

## Audit Trail

| | |
|---|---|
| Data Collection | Both individual and focus group interviews were scheduled to be conducted via audio visual software platforms available to both researcher and participant. A SONY electronic voice recorder was used to record interviews. In this study, Teams Meetings and Facetime were used for individual interviews. The focus group used Skype with a back-up private Facebook group (previously set up in anticipation of audio or visual foul-up on either end). Audio recording of each individual interview was, within 24 hours, listened to, transcribed by the researcher using MS Word, and sent to each participant to verify accuracy. Paper copies of all transcriptions were placed in a notebook and stored in a locked file cabinet. They were also stored on a password protected computer. The SONY voice recorder and thumb drive backup of all data stored (continuously updated) were placed in a locked cabinet. Written contributions by participants were not returned to them for review. |
| Data Analysis | Saldana's Coding Manual was used to guide data analysis (breaking data down to its most simple components). All data were initially transcribed on paper verbatim. Next, in vivo coding was applied to all data the first go round for each interview, reflection, and focus group question. All handwritten notes and charts and thumb drive backup of electronic files were stored in a locked cabinet. Computer files were password encrypted. |
| Data Synthesis | Focused coding guided synthesis (putting ideas together for patterns and meaning). Second go round, the four research *questions* were matched with the interview, reflection, or focus group individual *questions* that best informed their answers. Interview, reflection, and focus group data was then applied to research questions. Research question/data collection question matching, and data application was continuously scrutinized and rearranged for the most appropriate match. Further synthesis produced codes, sub-themes and themes from which research questions were answered. All handwritten notes and charts and thumb drive backup of electronic files were stored in a locked cabinet. Computer files were password encrypted. |
| Procedural Notes | Procedural notes were preserved in a physical notebook. All other handwritten notes and charts and thumb drive backup of electronic files were stored in a locked cabinet. Computer files were password encrypted. |
| Signed Forms | Participant signatures were captured electronically via Docusign on consent to participate forms and most screening forms. These were |

| | |
|---|---|
| | printed and maintained in a physical notebook stored in a locked cabinet. |
| Other | IRB approval, interview protocols, written reflection, and focus group questions and answers were printed and stored in a physical notebook, and also stored on a backup thumb drive, all in a locked cabinet. It is also stored on a password encrypted computer. Digital and physical documents will be destroyed after three years. |