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Examining Teachers' Self-Described Responses to Student Behavior Through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching Principles

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The current study examined how teacher beliefs about the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (CST)— dignity of the human person, seeking the common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable— affected self-described responses to student behavior problems. In-depth interviews with seven secondary Catholic school teachers were analyzed using methods identified in grounded theory. Analyses reveal self-described responses towards behavior differed based on teacher beliefs about the student as an individual and within the context of the classroom. In particular, teacher congruence between beliefs and self-described responses to behavior was seen more in relation to the CST tenets— dignity of the human person and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable— and less in relation to the CST tenet seeking the common good. This congruence provided insight into teacher tolerance for student differences. A discussion on implications for practice concludes the article.

DeBerri, Hug, Henriot, and Schultheis (2003) share that the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) have been described as a "best kept secret" (p. 3). Beginning with the encyclical Rerum Novarum, written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, CST has provided "the foundation of the Church's commitment to social justice and its teachings on the human person and the human community" (Storz & Nestor, 2007, p. 7). These teachings continue to guide not only the Church in addressing and responding to issues that arise in society (McKenna, 2002), but also Catholic schools (Scanlan, 2009; Storz & Nestor, 2007). In particular, three tenets of CST—dignity of the human person, seeking the common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable— have been used in previous research to discuss how student experiences in Catholic schools are grounded in justice, and how student

dignity is respected in a Catholic school environment (Storz & Nestor, 2007). In addition, Scanlan (2009) has discussed how these tenets can be applied to Catholic schools in an effort to provide an inclusive environment.

The current study used the three aforementioned tenets of CST in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of secondary Catholic school teachers' responses toward student behavior. The research question that guided this qualitative investigation was: How do teacher beliefs about the tenets of CST affect their self-described responses to student behavior? Through participation in a semistructured interview, teachers in this study reflected upon their approaches to student behavior management in light of the three tenets of CST. Although teachers indicated that, previous to this study, they had not reflected on their perceptions and responses to student behavior through the lens of CST tenets, analyses of these data revealed that given the opportunity to reflect on their approaches to behavior management, teachers were able to see how they were, in effect, following the tenets of CST, as these tenets were found to be implicit in their approach.

It is important to explore the application of CST tenets to practices of behavior management, as it allows Church teaching to be put into action. When the tenets of CST are enacted, teachers acquire a framework to guide decision making that assists them in approaching behavior management in a way that validates and acknowledges the dignity of each student. In essence, the tenets of CST challenge the practices of behavior management that focus solely on behavior; instead considering the individual who is exhibiting the behavior and addressing the behavior in such a way that the dignity of the student is not diminished or compromised (Curwin, Mendler, & Mendler, 2008; Mendler, 2007).

Literature Review

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB; 2005) identifies seven tenets of CST. In particular, three CST tenets—the dignity of the human person, seeking the common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable—have been used to discuss how Catholic schools can meet the needs of students while respecting their dignity in the school environment (Scanlan, 2009; Storz & Nestor, 2007). Therefore, for the current study these three tenets were seen as essential to examining secondary Catholic school teachers' self-described responses to student behavior. This section begins with a discussion on the three aforementioned tenets of CST as well as a review of the literature on behavior management.

Dignity of the Human Person

The dignity of the human person is a foundational tenet of CST (Scanlan, 2009). The basis of this CST tenet is that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, Imago Dei, where "the church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §105). Because every individual is made in the image and likeness of God, he or she is deserving of "equal dignity" no matter what qualities an individual may bring that could be different from others (Curran, 2002, p. 132). When applied to education, Storz and Nestor (2007) have stated that the dignity of the human person is "at the very core of our vocation as Catholic educators" (p. 10). In particular, the students Storz and Nestor (2007) interviewed emphasized the notion of care. Storz and Nestor (2007) stated the "students challenged us to see how a climate of caring is a fundamental requirement for Catholic schools committed to respecting the life and dignity of the human person" (p. 20).

Seeking the Common Good

The CST tenet seeking the common good insists that each individual has a right to participate and should seek the common good for all individuals in a community (USCCB, 2005). DeBerri and colleagues (2003) warned that this tenet is not achieved in a community that is utilitarian in nature. Rather, this tenet is realized when the community is committed to helping all of its members "achieve their authentic human development more fully" (DeBerri et al., 2003, p. 23). Storz and Nestor (2007) explained that seeking the common good can be applied to the community aspect of Catholic schools and the notion of being one family as well as to the importance of schools and teachers building relationships with students' families, school colleagues, and students (Storz & Nestor, 2007). Therefore, essential to this tenet of CST is the communal effort of both teachers and students in helping to build a community that values every individual (Storz & Nestor, 2007).

Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable has to do with promoting social justice for those considered marginalized or vulnerable within our society and ensuring that their needs are met (Storz & Nestor, 2007). In essence, this tenet challenges individuals to put themselves in the position of the poor and vulnerable when making decisions, and asking, "What effect

will it have on poor people [?]" (Curran, 2002, p. 188). Similarly, as Fasching and deChant (2001) have explained, John Rawls' (1971) theory of "the veil of ignorance" challenges individuals to do the same by forcing "one to identify, not with everyone equally, but rather with the alien, the stranger, and the outcast—since you can never be sure that you will not be placed in their position" (Fasching & deChant, 2001, p. 25). When contextualizing this CST tenet in Catholic schools, Storz and Nestor (2007) explained that it is carried out when teachers provide services to students with disabilities as well as offer help to families and students who encounter struggles.

Behavior Management

Classroom teachers face the challenge of managing student behavior in such a way that creates and maintains a positive classroom environment. A positive classroom environment not only respects the dignity of each student, but also creates an environment that is conducive to learning for all students. To create this learning environment, teachers must implement behavior management approaches that increase appropriate behavior and focus on prevention of behavior problems. This is accomplished by maintaining a structured environment, engaging students through varied instructional approaches, and responding to appropriate and inappropriate behavior (e.g., Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). In particular, strategies such as maintaining high expectations, using effective teaching and learning methods (e.g., making content meaningful and establishing relevance for knowledge and skills taught, providing concrete examples, allowing students the opportunity to engage in active learning experiences), providing choices, encouraging students to exhibit responsible behavior, and acknowledging student concerns, have been proposed as ways teachers can acknowledge student dignity as well as increase appropriate behavior (Curwin et al., 2008; Gould & Vaughn, 2000; Mendler, 2007; Storz & Nestor, 2007), thus helping teachers prevent behavior problems.

Other methods such as verbal reprimands, timeout, removal from class, and response cost are used to manage student behavior. Whereas these behavior reduction techniques are used to decrease or eliminate behavior problems, they are often seen as ineffective for producing lasting effects, do not teach students the skills necessary to make appropriate behavior choices (Rhode, Jenson, & Reavis, 2010; Scott, Anderson, & Alter, 2012), and can compromise a student's dignity through humiliation or embarrassment

(Curwin et al., 2008; Mendler, 2007). When these techniques are used, the primary focus is on how the teacher will respond after a student exhibits challenging behavior, rather than implementing strategies that prevent the occurrence of the challenging behavior and increase the likelihood of appropriate behavior (Curwin et al., 2008; Mendler, 2007). Responding to behavior through the spirit of prevention helps teachers increase appropriate behavior and, as a result, create a positive learning environment. The effectiveness of such behavior management strategies in secondary settings has been noted in the literature (e.g., Browne, 2013).

Findings have revealed that offering praise and positive feedback to students increases appropriate behavior, such as on-task behavior, and decreases disruptive behavior (e.g., Myers, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2011; Swinson & Knight, 2007). In particular, Infantino and Little (2007) found that secondary students preferred praise from teachers regarding their work and behavior; however, they preferred that teachers deliver praise in private (Infantino & Little, 2007). In much the same way, nonverbal feedback (e.g., proximity control, hand signals) decreased disruptive and off-task behavior (Dhaem & Paterson, 2012). When implemented, nonverbal feedback not only provided teachers with better classroom management, but also allowed them to continue instructing the class while redirecting student behavior (Dhaem & Paterson, 2012). Incentives and reinforcement also increase appropriate classroom behaviors in secondary settings (e.g., Chafouleas, Hagermoser Sanetti, Jaffery, & Fallon, 2012; Coogan, Kehle, Bray, & Chafouleas, 2007). When examining the effectiveness of incentives, secondary students shared that positive written feedback and free time were effective (Infantino & Little, 2007). In addition, interventions that involved the delivery of reinforcers improved student behavior—as was the case when self-monitoring and group contingency interventions were used to reduce inappropriate classroom behavior (Chafouleas et al., 2012; Coogan et al., 2007). Lastly, the implementation of specific instructional practices pertaining to transitioning, engaging students in class discussions through questioning, and monitoring student participation increased class engagement and social behavior in secondary settings (Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2008).

The previously mentioned strategies not only increase appropriate behavior, but also promote dignity and respect for the individual student (Curwin et al., 2008; Gould & Vaughn, 2000; Mendler, 2007; Storz & Nestor, 2007). When implemented, they focus on educating the whole child, as such methods express concern for the social-emotional aspect of the child's develop-

ment as well as meeting his or her academic needs (Liew & McTigue, 2010). Therefore, teachers must implement behavior management strategies that promote the dignity of each student as well as create an environment conducive to learning for all students.

Whereas research conducted at the secondary level has examined the effectiveness of behavior management strategies, it has not been conducted examining what the tenets of CST reveal about teacher responses to behavior. This descriptive study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature and gain a deeper understanding of secondary Catholic school teachers' responses toward student behavior in relation to CST tenets. In the next sections of this article, data collection and analysis procedures used in this study as well as study findings from analysis of interview data are presented. This article concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for practice.

Method

Research Design

The research question that guided this study was: How do teacher beliefs about the tenets of CST affect their self-described responses to student behavior? To address this research question, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers in secondary Catholic schools and used grounded theory methods to analyze these data. This qualitative research design allows access to multiple, in-depth perspectives and reveals the participants' inner experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The study described in this article differs from previous research examining behavior management in religious-affiliated schools, which used questionnaires and rating scales to collect quantitative data on behavior management practices (e.g., Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Romi, 2004).

Participants

Seven secondary Catholic school teachers participated in this study. Three of the teachers were female and four were male; all were White. The participants worked in four different Catholic schools in the Midwest and Southeast regions of the United States. Two of the participating teachers were religious (one priest and one brother), and five were laypeople. Additionally, five of the teachers were Catholic, one was American Baptist, and one claimed no religious affiliation. As the teaching staffs of Catholic schools

currently consist of religious (3.2%) and laity (96.8%), as well as those who are not Catholic (McDonald & Schultz, 2014) it was important for teachers to reflect this range and represent religious and laity as well as diversity in terms of religious affiliation. Table 1 shows details on each of the study participants.

Participants were recruited through key informants who were teachers and priests in the researcher's professional network that recommended individuals to be contacted by the researcher for participation in this study

Table 1

Demographics of Participants (P)

Participant	Gender	Race	Religious Affiliation	Religious Role	School Location	Years of Teaching	Subject Taught
P1	Female	White	Catholic	Lay	Midwest (School A)	25+	English
P2	Female	White	Catholic	Lay	Midwest (School A)	25+	English
P3	Male	White	Catholic	Religious Brother	Midwest (School A)	15–24	Science
P4	Male	White	No religious affiliation	Lay	Southeast (School D)	6–14	History
P5	Male	White	Catholic	Lay	Midwest (School B)	2–5	Religion History
P6	Male	White	Catholic	Priest	Midwest (School C)	2–5	Religion
P7	Female	White	American Baptist	Lay	Midwest (School B)	6–14	Math

(Weiss, 1994). When contacting a potential study participant, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and invited the individual to participate. If the individual indicated that she or he was willing to participate, the researcher then scheduled a meeting to obtain informed consent and conduct the interview.

Initially six teachers were selected to participate in the study. However, when comparing data across participants through the use of constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009), the researcher determined that one more participant was needed to ensure the point of saturation was reached (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003;

Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Because the point of saturation was reached and confirming and disconfirming cases were identified (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994) after the seventh participant, the researcher determined that additional participants were not needed.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of seven in-depth, open-ended, semistructured interviews (Bernard, 2000, 2006). The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher met with the participant to conduct a member check; together, the researcher and participant reviewed the transcript to ensure its accuracy (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997).

To examine how the tenets of CST affected teachers' self-described responses to student behavior, the researcher asked participants the following questions: (a) What do the three tenets of CST—dignity of the human person, seeking the common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable—mean to you as a teacher? and (b) How do these three tenets of CST affect how you perceive behavior problems? Participants were not given a definition of the CST tenets before being asked the first question.

Data Coding and Categorization

Data were analyzed using the methods identified in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009). After the researcher transcribed each interview, initial coding was conducted to identify relevant codes as was memo writing to document the researcher's thoughts as each transcript was analyzed (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; McHatton, 2009). The researcher then collapsed individual codes into three broad categories: the individual, the learning environment, and teacher self-described responses to behavior (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009).

Following initial coding, subsequent analysis of data was undertaken using constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; McHatton, 2009) to identify similarities and differences across participant responses and across the three tenets of CST. For instance, the researcher compared codes that emerged in response to questions on the

tenet dignity of the human person across participants and with responses pertaining to the other tenets of CST—seeking the common good and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. This analysis revealed the need to further revise the three categories to reflect the overlap of codes represented under the two categories—the individual and the learning environment. Therefore, the researcher combined the two categories—the individual and the learning environment—to create a new category: teacher beliefs. The researcher conducted an inter-rater reliability check to establish credibility (Brantlinger et al., 2005) and ensure agreement in codes and categories. Table 2 indicates corresponding codes for each category.

Table 2

Codes Collapsed into Categories

Category	Definition	Codes
Teacher beliefs	feelings or views about the student as an individual or about the student in the classroom setting	perception of individual student background student differences good for all (e.g., learning environment)
Teacher self-described responses to behavior	methods, strategies, and other ways in which teachers respond to student behavior	creating a learning environment separating behavior from person find out why hold them more responsible address on an individual basis instructional approaches not as harsh not treat differently reach out to them redirection to task reinforcement removal

Results

In the current study, seven secondary Catholic school teachers were interviewed regarding their beliefs about the tenets of CST, in general, and in relation to student behavior. Applying the three tenets of CST revealed differences in self-described responses to student behavior based on teacher beliefs. This range was most transparent when teachers shared their views of the student in the context of the classroom setting and their self-described

responses. Therefore, in this section, a discussion regarding teacher beliefs and self-described responses to student behavior are presented in relation to the following three tenets of CST: dignity of the human person, seeking the common good, and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.

Dignity of the Human Person (DHP)

Teacher beliefs. Teachers believed that the tenet DHP means each individual has equal dignity, is a reflection of the image of God, and is unique with specific gifts and weaknesses. These views resulted in teachers believing each student deserved to be respected and treated fairly. Two teachers emphasized the equal importance of every student in the classroom. For instance, Participant 1 shared, "Money doesn't talk," and noted she does not "judge any youngster in [her] classroom based on his or her parents." For Participant 5, dignity meant respecting all students "regardless of their background or experiences or what they say or do."

Three of the teachers understood individuals as a reflection of the image of God, and therefore deserving of respect. These teachers expressed sentiments such as, "Every person is God" (P2), "Each person is a child of God" (P7), and "They're [students] made in the image of God" (P6). Participant 7 explained that even if "you're a wisecrack in my class or you're the exceptional student in my class or if you're just average in my class or somewhere in between all those, you're a child of God." Participant 6 explained that seeing his students as made in the image of God means believing his students have "a soul" as well as "intelligence and free will." Acknowledging these attributes fueled his respect for his students.

Lastly, two teachers discussed the tenet of human dignity by emphasizing their belief that each individual is unique, with specific gifts and weaknesses. Participant 4 stated, "To me, dignity of each human person means treating people as individuals and recognizing that fair is not always equal." On the other hand, Participant 3 believed this tenet meant "respect[ing] yourself first of all" as "that's where your true freedom is and puts you in the dignity of a human being." To him, this meant recognizing one's temptations and not being "controlled by desires and wants and behaviors."

Teacher self-described responses to behavior. The participating teachers' beliefs in the equal dignity of their students was reflected in self-described responses to student behavior. In their interviews, two teachers described their efforts to address student behavior as discrete actions—rather than as

reflections of students' identities—and affirmed their commitment to working with students on behavior issues in ways that respect their individuality and protect them from less-responsive institutional discipline. For instance, Participant 1 shared, "If I see them all as having equal dignity, then . . . respecting their dignity has nothing to do with the discipline problem." Therefore, a student's actions had nothing to do with how Participant 1 saw the student as a person. When she responded to behavior, she was disciplining the behavior, not the person. Trying to respect his students regardless of their background or actions made Participant 5 "want to work with them more as an individual than to allow the institution to handle the problem." By handling instances of behavior, Participant 5 not only addressed the behavior on an individual level, but also worked with the student.

In light of dignity, teachers believed the individual is a reflection of the image of God. Therefore, two teachers discussed their self-described responses to behavior, which included separating the behavior from the student and holding students more responsible for their behavior. Participant 7 shared the importance of having "a new chance" when responding to behavior; meaning, she did not hold a student's actions against him or her, but rather felt the need to "start everyday with the grace of God and I hope that they do and I hope that they feel that they have that opportunity in my classroom." Therefore, by not holding a student's actions against him or her, the teacher was separating the behavior from the student as a way to start new each day. Participant 6 held students "more responsible" for their behavior. To him, being made in the image of God meant his students have intelligence and a free will, and therefore, are able to make decisions as well as handle the consequences. Therefore, he held his students individually responsible for actions, and handled instances of behavior based on the individual behavioral choices each student made.

Because the individual is unique, with specific gifts and weaknesses, two teachers discussed their self-described responses to behavior that allowed them to find out the cause of the behavior and address the behavior in a way that meets the needs of a particular student. For instance, Participant 4 shared by acknowledging, "There are no bad kids, there are just bad choices;" in light of dignity, "You have to take time as a teacher to find out what's causing the misbehavior and then you have to address it at the individual level. There's not a one size fits all solution for anything like that." As such, he shared concerns with zero tolerance policies because "you have to consider

every single case." Therefore, he separated the behavior from the child and handled each instance of behavior on an individual basis. Similarly, Participant 3 tried to help students work through weaknesses, as he acknowledged, "Behavioral problems stem off from the fact that you're, in a sense, you're being controlled by your own weaknesses." Therefore, in light of dignity, the self-described responses of Participants 3 and 4 to behavior recognized that the behaviors being exhibited were not a reflection of who the student was as an individual.

In essence, these teachers viewed their students—given the CST tenet DHP—as having equal dignity, being in the image of God, and as unique. Based on these beliefs, teacher self-described responses to student behavior included separating the behavior from the individual, working with the student on an individual basis, holding students more responsible for their behavior, and finding out what was causing the behavior to occur. Therefore, teacher beliefs indicated a strong need to consider the individual student when responding to behavior in light of DHP.

Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable (POPV)

Teacher beliefs. Teachers associated the CST tenet POPV take into consideration helping those who are "poor" in light of background or differences (e.g., academic). With regard to student background, one teacher reported that students can be "poor in heart, . . . poor emotionally, in [their] character" as a result of family life circumstances (P6). Students can also be "poor in love" because they have not had the opportunity to experience unconditional love, and "poor in good example" for not having opportunities to be surrounded by positive role models (P2). Discussion of this tenet also pertained to student background from a financial perspective, and focused in particular on the challenge of "treating everyone equally" in Catholic schools regardless of family financial circumstances (P2). In light of POPV, one teacher shared her belief that Catholic schools have a responsibility to serve low-income students: "It is our [Catholic schools'] obligation to educate them . . . give them that opportunity" as well as to try and provide students the same opportunities to participate in school events (P1). Therefore, these teachers believed this tenet referenced the impact of other individuals and influences on a child.

For three teachers, this tenet referred to student differences because, as Participant 3 shared, "We all have our skills and our talents and our weak-

nesses." For instance, Participant 7 shared that students may need extended time to complete a test because of a learning disability, or may require extra help because they were struggling or missed a day of class from being sick. Similarly, Participant 5 explained that students may not be as talented, or "maybe it's in the classroom and they're quiet and withdrawn and not engaged." These teachers believed this tenet referenced the importance of recognizing the individual needs of students and providing assistance.

Teacher self-described responses to behavior. Teachers associated POPV with helping those who are "poor" in light of their background or differences. This belief was reflected in teachers' self-described responses for behavior by considering the circumstances surrounding the individual, finding out why the behavior was exhibited, and then handling the situation on a case-by-case basis. With regard to student background, four teachers offered that they are not "as harsh" (P1). For instance, Participant 2 "gives a little slack on homework," especially if she found out that the student worked eight hours after school because "they need" the income. So, if she checked homework and noticed it was only half finished, she "won't say anything." Similarly, Participant 4 provided students more slack if he found out a student had "a horrible home life" or an "impoverished horrible environment." Therefore, if they made bad choices, he meted out more "lenient punishments," because "they didn't have role models around." However, Participant 6 offered that although he is "gentler because I see that this kid can be saved, he can be reformed," he is not going to "enable" them to act in a particular way; he wanted to see that students were trying their best and using their talents.

For students who exhibited differences in the classroom, three teachers discussed ways in which they addressed them. For fear of repercussions about how peers may view the student, one teacher expressed concern about responding to behavior in a way that treats a student differently in front of his/her peers. Therefore, he met with the student "outside of class and talks things through" (P3). This way, he can help them understand "how your misbehavior or your lack of participating can be better improved." Participant 5 reached out to his students. He shared that he responded to behavior in such a way because being part of a Catholic school and a teacher within a Catholic school "you want to help those who can't necessarily help themselves so it makes you more compelled to reach out to them." On the other hand, Participant 7 shared that just because a child may need extra assistance or time to complete an assignment/test, the teacher did not change how she perceived his or her behavior. In essence, she did not think that "giving those

kinds of options, doing that affects negative behavior," because this is "what I'm willing to do for you."

These teachers, in light of the CST tenet POPV, viewed their students in terms of their background and differences. Based on these beliefs, teacher self-described responses to student behavior included finding out why the behavior was exhibited, reaching out to students, not being as harsh, and working with the student on an individual basis. Therefore, teacher beliefs indicated a strong need to consider background and differences among students, and to respond to behavior in a way that was individualized and based on the student's situation.

Seeking the Common Good (SCG)

Teacher beliefs. Teachers believed the CST tenet SCG refers to the type of classroom environment they need to foster in order for all students to learn. Four teachers shared that what was good for all was more important than what was best for each individual. For these teachers, "a behavior problem is impeding learning. And so the common good is being . . . you can't do it. And that includes the person who is misbehaving, he or she is not learning when they are misbehaving" (P2), when repetitive behavior problems occur, other students are not able to learn, "so you got to put your foot down too. . . . respect their willingness and desire to learn" (P3), "one misbehavior shouldn't take away from [a right to learn]" (P7), and creating a "learning environment that maximizes everyone so that if someone steps out of the realm of what is good for all then that might be an issue where you have to separate that" (P1). Two teachers, in light of SCG, believed that the classroom environment poses an opportunity for everyone to work together for the good of the class. For instance, one of these teachers imparted, "We say there's no 'I' in team, and at the school we're supposed to be a team and in my classroom we're supposed to be a team" (P7). Therefore, she believed that each person in the classroom is part of a team and should work together. Participant 4 believed SCG means "helping my students feel like they're part of a community." By doing this, he taught them about citizenship and what it means to work together as part of a larger entity. These are skills he thought are needed to make good decisions that contribute to the betterment of society. Therefore, in light of SCG, some teachers believed that misbehavior should not take away from student learning while others believed this tenet involved the class working together for the greater good.

On the other hand, two teachers believed that SCG involves considering individual needs because each child is unique and different. Participant 5 shared that because each child is from a different background and experience, he does not see "behavioral problems as totally reflective of the person. I see them as more of the circumstances that surround the student." Because of circumstances, he believed the student may "act out in certain ways at school." Therefore, the circumstances of the child should be taken more into consideration to "help each kid become the best person and student they can be." Similarly, Participant 6 believed that SCG is based on the idea that each child is "unique . . . just like everybody else." In essence, he believed it is important to consider individual needs so students feel a sense of "hospitality and they feel welcomed."

Teacher self-described responses to behavior. Most teachers believed SCG meant pursuing what was good for all. This notion was based on the belief that if a student's behavior negatively "impacts the others then it can't be tolerated" (P1), and the class should work together to ensure the classroom environment is conducive to learning. This belief was reflected in two teachers' self-described responses to behavior by removing students to maintain the classroom environment. Participant 7 shared an example of how she addressed a student who was acting inappropriately in class: "Your behavior is not going to take away time in my class; out in the hallway. I've had enough. You're distracting me and you're distracting the class. I'm not going to allow you to take other's time." Similarly, Participant 4 removed students from class who were disruptive, because "sometimes for the common good, it's better to get rid of a student." It is more advantageous to the greater whole to remove one student if he or she engaged in disruptive behavior. Therefore, removal from class was used as a way to maintain an effective classroom environment.

Other ways in which teacher beliefs of what was good for all were reflected in three of the teachers' self-described responses to behavior were by redirecting students who were taking away from learning, reinforcing the appropriate behavior of other students, and adjusting instructional approaches. Participant 7 individually redirected students who were detracting from learning. She shared, "I'm going to point out you just wasted 30 minutes of time. It's just not your minute and not just my minute, but everybody's in the classroom." By responding in this way, she emphasized the importance of the group as a collective—and that one misbehavior was not going to take away from the learning of others. In the case of Participant 3, he "point[ed] out the good qualities of these other students and how well they're doing" in order

to redirect the students who were distracting the class. Two teachers shared that they adjusted their instructional approaches. Participant 3 adjusted his instructional approaches in recognition that everyone learns differently to keep the "classroom going, motivated . . . to have everyone on task as much as possible." Similarly, Participant 2 calibrated her instructional approaches by "modifying lessons as needed for kids who have learning disabilities" and "re-teach[ing] in different ways." By Participant 2 and 3 adjusting their instructional approaches, they were preventing behavior problems and engaging students to minimize opportunities for disruptive behavior.

In light of SCG, teachers felt it was important to consider the individual needs of the child. Therefore, two teachers' self-described responses to behavior involved working with the student on an individual basis, separating the behavior from the individual, and adjusting the learning environment. In particular, Participant 5 aimed to "help each kid . . . in a way cater to each kid individually and try to help each kid become the best person and student that they can be." In doing so, he separated the behavior from the individual student, as he did not see behavior problems as "totally reflective of the person," rather as "more of the circumstances that surround the student." This lens allowed him to respond to behavior that better met the individual needs of the student. Participant 6 created a learning environment that conveyed a sense of hospitality and in which students felt welcomed. He did so by providing opportunities for all to participate in class activities by calling on students using popsicle sticks with their name on it, leaving the last five minutes of class to talk with his students, and getting to know his students on an individual basis through writing assignments. While he reached out to students, he saw his management of student behavior as similar to that of a priest in the confessional, responding to the student with a problem by saying, "I'll help you, but I can't make the decision for you . . . you're going to have to." By creating a learning environment that allowed him to build a relationship with his students, he helped prevent the occurrence of behavior problems.

Therefore, examining teachers' beliefs and self-described responses to behavior in light of this tenet pertained to the individual student situated in the classroom setting. In essence, many held the belief that what was good for all was more important, with few referencing the importance of considering the individual student situated in the classroom setting. Based on these beliefs, teacher self-described responses to student behavior included removing students, reinforcing the appropriate behavior of others, redirecting students,

adjusting one's instructional approaches and learning environment, working with the student on an individual basis, and separating the behavior from the individual. Therefore, teacher beliefs indicated a strong need to protect the learning environment to ensure everyone was able to learn. While responses indicated some need to consider the individual student, in most cases, self-described responses to behavior stemmed from more of a concern for the group than the individual student to maximize learning opportunities for all students.

Discussion

Data revealed differences across the three tenets of CST based on these teachers' beliefs and self-described responses, particularly when a student's behavior impacted the classroom environment. Teachers' responses to the dignity of the human person and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable revealed congruence between their beliefs and self-described responses to behavior; that is, teachers' beliefs and self-described responses to student behavior were not in tension with one another. This correspondence was portrayed in descriptions of greater tolerance for student differences and a strong need to consider the individual person as reflected in these teachers' self-described responses to behavior. Others have discussed the dignity of the human person in terms of being made in the image and likeness of God (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004) and of deserving equal dignity (Curran, 2002). In the same way, teachers in this study viewed the individual as a reflection of the image of God, having equal dignity, and being unique. These views of the individual were reflected in self-described responses to behavior by separating the person from the behavior, working with the student on an individual basis, holding students more responsible for their behavior, and rooting out the cause of the behavior. Similarly, teacher self-described responses in light of preferential option for the poor and vulnerable reflected concern for the individual person by finding out why the behavior was exhibited and handling incidences of behavior on a case-by-case basis, not being harsh, and working individually with the student. In light of these two CST tenets, there was a sense that teachers understood that responses to behavior could "respect or diminish students' dignity" (Storz & Nestor, 2007, p. 10).

Less congruence was seen between teacher beliefs and self-described responses to student behavior during discussions of the CST tenet seeking the common good. Therefore, tension emerged between their beliefs and their

self-described responses to student behavior. Whereas teachers exhibited greater tolerance for student differences in light of the CST tenets— dignity of the human person and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable— many of those same teachers exhibited a much lower tolerance for student differences when those differences impacted the learning of others. This discrepancy was reflected most when students were removed from the classroom or verbally redirected by the teacher in front of the class in an effort to maintain the learning environment. Such responses challenge the meaning of the CST tenet seeking the common good with regard to behavior management, as this tenet is reflected in a community where individuals help one another (DeBerri et al., 2003) and "stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §164). Storz and Nestor (2007), in particular, shared that this tenet is reflected in the communal effort of both teachers and students in helping to build a community that values each individual. Although removal and verbal reprimands can decrease or eliminate behavior problems, these methods involve singling out a student in a way that compromises his or her dignity through humiliation and embarrassment (Curwin et al., 2008; Mendler, 2007) and affects his or her sense of belonging in the classroom. On the other hand, some teachers in the current study addressed the needs of individual students in an effort to increase appropriate behavior. In such cases, teachers reinforced the appropriate behavior of other students, adjusted instructional approaches as well as utilized methods to build relationships with students and help them feel part of the classroom community (Curwin et al., 2008; Gould & Vaughn, 2000; Mendler, 2007; Storz & Nestor, 2007).

Reflection on teacher self-described responses in reference to this tenet raises the question as to how teachers can manage a classroom in which individual differences can be addressed and the group remains a valued component. Study findings at the secondary level reveal that when teachers change instructional approaches (e.g., Colvin et al., 2008) as well as responses to behavior by acknowledging appropriate behavior—such as, through the use of positive feedback or praise (e.g., Infantino & Little, 2007; Myers et al., 2011; Swinson & Knight, 2007) and nonverbal cues (e.g., Dhaem & Paterson, 2012), students exhibit an increase in appropriate behavior. In essence, these behavioral approaches aim at preventing disruptive behavior by addressing the individual academic and behavioral needs of students, which affects the group of students as a whole. When the individual needs of students are addressed in a way that allows students to feel cared for and dignified, the

likelihood that those individual students will engage in disruptive behavior decreases—thus creating an environment conducive to learning for all students. Therefore, teachers in the current study who addressed the needs of individual students either through positive feedback or by adapting instructional approaches and the learning environment not only prevented behavior problems from occurring, but also allowed students to feel cared for and dignified within the classroom setting behavior—all of which fosters an atmosphere conducive to learning for all students (Curwin et al., 2008; Gould & Vaughn, 2000; Mendler, 2007; Storz & Nestor, 2007).

Limitations

This study serves as a way to explore and understand teacher responses toward student behavior in relation to CST tenets; however, this study does have some identified limitations. One limitation pertains to the sample, which consisted of only seven secondary Catholic school teachers, most of whom were in the same diocese and taught in fairly affluent Catholic schools. This may have affected teacher responses, particularly to questions on the tenet preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of how these tenets of CST are applied to practice in terms of responding to student behavior, future research should include a larger sample size as well as teachers who work with diverse populations of students. Lastly, teachers were not provided a definition of the CST tenets when asked what the tenets meant to them as teachers. Providing definitions of the CST tenets may have yielded richer data because, at times, teachers had a difficult time defining these tenets and then linking the tenets to practice. Also, interview questions that allowed teachers to describe approaches to behavior management—rather than focusing directly on the tenets of CST—may have yielded richer data about other practices that align with the tenets of CST.

Implications for Practice

This study provided an understanding of secondary Catholic school teachers' self-described responses to behavior in light of CST tenets. Consequently, findings from this study could inform practice in teacher education programs within institutions of Catholic higher education as well as teacher practice in Catholic schools. Teacher education coursework and professional development opportunities for practicing teachers should engage in discussions on the application of these CST tenets to practices in teaching.

Teacher Education Programs

Preservice teachers in institutions of Catholic higher education should not only be provided instruction on these three tenets of CST, but also be granted time to discuss what they mean to a teacher's practice and how an understanding of these tenets can be incorporated into practice in working with all students. For instance, a definition of the CST tenet dignity of the human person can be provided, followed by a discussion on how teachers would implement behavior management techniques while taking into consideration the dignity of a student. This step could be undertaken by having preservice teachers reflect on behavior incidents that occur during field and practicum experiences or by reading and responding to scenarios in class. Opportunities to role play implementation of behavior management techniques when responding to behavior in ways that recognize student dignity also help in reinforcing the importance of taking dignity into consideration. These opportunities would allow preservice teachers to reflect upon different behavior management strategies and evaluate situations in which implementing behavior management strategies prevent the dignity of the student from being diminished or compromised. Lastly, opportunities to reflect on the tenets of CST in relation to teacher practice allow preservice teachers to see that what they have learned in core curriculum courses—especially in theology courses—can be applied to the field of education.

In-Service Teachers

Findings from this study revealed a tension between meeting the needs of the individual and those of the group. As participant teachers discussed responses to behavior in light of the CST tenet seeking the common good, some reflected on the importance of being responsive to student needs even though emphasis was on the larger group. Therefore, in an effort to maximize learning opportunities for all, teachers must recognize and understand the individual needs of students when implementing instructional methods and behavior management approaches, which allow teachers to become proactive. By being proactive, teachers are able to prevent behavior problems from occurring because the teacher must reflect on each student's individual needs (dignity of the human person, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable). This consequently considers the needs of the group (seeking the common good) as well, which means that for teachers, instruction and assessment may need to be differentiated to address disparities in learning styles.

For example, teachers can vary questions and tasks, modify how content is presented and accessed by students, provide students choices that align to lesson objectives, and engage students in cooperative learning activities. With regard to managing classroom behavior, a proactive approach would consist of clearly stating expectations for all students and consistently reinforcing these expectations by providing specific feedback and praise. Considering that individual students will need additional support in exhibiting appropriate behavior, teachers should also explore strategies that can manage student behavior on an individual basis. For instance, if a student becomes fidgety, a teacher must understand what is causing this behavior and implement specific strategies that prevent it from disrupting the class.

While these approaches consider the needs of the group, they also reflect care and respect for the individual, which begins to address student comments shared by Storz and Nestor (2007). Ultimately, the tenets of CST encourage teachers to value the individuality of students. This approach means that although there may be a classroom of 30 students to manage, there are realistically 30 individual needs that must be considered in order to maximize learning for all.

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