

A Blueprint for an Educational Trajectory: The Power of Discourse in Constructing “Naughty” and “Adorable” Kindergarten Students

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Abstract—Discursive practices enacted by educators in kindergarten create a blueprint for how the educational trajectories of students with disabilities are constructed. This two-year ethnographic case study critically examines educators’ relationships with students considered to present challenging behaviors in one kindergarten classroom located in a predominantly White middle class school district in the Northeast of the United States. Focusing on the language and practices used by one special education teacher and three teaching assistants, this paper analyzes how teacher responses to students’ behaviors constructs and positions students over one year of kindergarten education. Using a critical discourse analysis it shows that educators understand students’ behaviors as deficit and needing consequences. This study highlights how educators’ responses reflect students’ individual characteristics including family background, socioeconomics and ability status. This paper offers in depth analysis of two students’ stories, which evidenced that the language used by educators amplifies the social positioning of students within the classroom and creates a foundation for who they are constructed to be. Through exploring routine language and practices, this paper demonstrates that educators outlined a blueprint of kindergartners, which positioned students as learners in ways that became the ground for either a limited or a promising educational pathway for them.

Keywords—Behavior, early education, special education, critical discourse analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN the U.S. public school system, all children are supposed to enter kindergarten with equal opportunities for accessing a quality education. Scott and Dave were two of these students: They started their educational trajectory together but ended the year in very different places. What happened during their kindergarten year that created different trajectories, one toward inclusive education and one toward a special educational program? What blueprint positioned these students so differently in relation to learning, other students, and educators, and created such distinct possibilities for them?

Students with disabilities that present non-compliant or unwanted behaviors comprise a vulnerable group that is routinely subjected to behavior management and physical control in schools, including restraint [1], [2]. The prevalent conceptualizations of disabilities and appropriateness of students’ behaviors preclude these responses, because they are deficit-based and the behavior management goal is to intervene, shape and control students’ behavior [3], [4]. From

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a young age, students’ behavior and academic achievement are used to determine not just services, for which they are eligible, but also placement and discipline methods used to respond to their behaviors.

The present study examines the use of discursive practices to respond to kindergarten students with disabilities who are considered to display non-compliant behaviors. The study also seeks to understand students’ educational trajectories at the end of their kindergarten year.

A. Deficit-Driven Approach to Special Education

Educators are inserted in different school discourses, and they juggle school pressures, theories, students’ needs, curriculum, approaches to special education, adaptations for students with disabilities and a variety of other factors to determine the everyday practices they adopt and the educator-student relationship they establish. They face several pressures in how they develop practices to respond to all students [5], [6].

Disability in traditional special education is understood as a deficit located in the individual. In this system, there is not enough space for diversity and the complexity of the human experience, thus the tendency is to force students artificially into the available standard practices and theories [7]–[9]. The dominant culture decides and enforces what is normal, accepted, and desired in the classroom [10]. Ferri and Connor [10] explained that schools function as sites that police normalcy, creating and maintaining students that look and act in accordance with the norms. In other words, students need to follow a behavioral standard to participate in schooling, particularly in general education. “Removal or exclusion of students who deviate from these norms has been understood as necessary to maintain the classroom as a normalized space” p. 128 to avoid exclusionary practices, a more complex understanding of special education must be concerned with political and social implications in society rather than just technical issues [9]. Therefore, professional in special education need to revisit the paradigm of disability this field, its relationship with societal demands, and its implications for individuals.

B. Disability Studies Framework

A disability studies framework provides new possibilities to understand difference and disability, both in implementing a just inclusive educational classrooms and understanding classroom connections with larger school and social systems.

This framework states that knowledge and reality in education are not discovered, but rather constructed by human beings [11]. “Variations according to ability do not need to be valued negatively or wrapped in stereotypes and stigma. Disability is not viewed as a condition to be cured but rather as a difference to be accepted and accommodated” [12] for Ware [13], disability studies offer a plot that “differs from that of special education, one that speaks to the humanity that we share, rather than the one that estranges and others our differences” [13]. The use of a disability studies perspective in education inquiry “interrupt[s] the ‘authorized’ silence among educators specific to the relationship between unexamined schooling practices and the material reality of disability in society” [13]. In the classroom, educators establish these unexamined practices, which include seating, placement, tracking, reading groups, and behavioral management strategies of individuals that differ from these achievement and behavioral norms. These practices affect students, particularly their positioning within the classroom and in relation to learning, other students, and adults in the room.

C. Positioning of Students in the Classroom

Several authors discuss how educators’ discursive practices can position students in the classroom. Positioning is defined as language -- used over time and in particular, environments -- that has the power to create places for and by individuals [14]. These positions are opened within the discourse determined by and for individuals’ characteristics, including issues of disability identification, socioeconomic status, race and gender.

Wortham and colleagues [15] analyzed the trajectory of a student from good to outcast. Throughout a year of schooling, all of her actions that before were not named differently were later regarded as behavior problems. A description of the student based on a disability label, highly determined by his race and perceived social class, influenced teachers’ expectations and reaction toward him throughout the year [16]. Both authors show that educators make judgments and respond to students based on their preconceived ideas and deficit thinking, which influences the student’s performance and position in the classroom.

Likewise, [17] concluded after a yearlong research study that smartness was determined by everyday practices of schooling and within the relationships between students and teachers. The authors suggested that revealing the toxic use of smartness as a tool of control and social positioning, as well as its consequences for everyday schooling practices, can be empowering for students.

Educators need to challenge and reexamine the prevailing discourses in special education. Within the complex educational context, the present paper uses a disability studies framework to examine two research questions: (a) how teachers enact prevailing discourses in classroom practices and routines. (b) How does the discourse position students and their construct and deconstruct their disabilities and behaviors within one classroom during kindergarten?

II. METHOD

This research is an ethnographic case study of Ms. Elmwood’s kindergarten classroom; a 20 to 21-student class supported by three teaching assistants. Ethnography is characterized by its emphasis on first-hand fieldwork, participant observation, and a more prolonged time spent in the field [18], [19]. Over the course of two years, the first author of this paper conducted fieldwork based mainly on participant observation, but also included formal and informal interviews with the teacher and teaching assistants. The unit of analysis is the classroom and within this unit, the researchers focused on the discursive interactions among students, the teacher, and the teaching assistants to address relationships between (a) teacher discourse on students’ behaviors, (b) teaching practices to respond to students’ behaviors and (c) students’ behaviors.

A. Setting and Participants

This kindergarten classroom was located in a suburban area in the Northeast of the United States. Twenty percent of this school’s students received free or reduced lunch, they had no students identified with limited English proficiency, and 96 percent of the student population was identified as White.

The classroom consisted of a half-day segregated classroom and half-day inclusive classroom. In both the 2010 – 2011 and 2011-2012 school years, 10 students were identified as having a disability and remained in this classroom for the full day. The students’ disability labels included speech and language impairments, autism, and orthopedic impairment. After lunch, the classroom received students who were not labeled as having a disability and it was considered by the administration as an “inclusive classroom.” However, the classroom still consisted of at least 50% of students with disability labels.

The research participants were four educators: one special education teacher, Ms. Elmwood, and three are teaching assistants (TAs): Ms. Thompson, Ms. Riley, and Ms. Nelson. The educator participants’ ages ranged from 44 to 67, and they had 9 to 20 years of experience in schools. This classroom was selected because the teacher identified she had student(s) she considered as presenting challenging behavior(s) in her classroom and wanted to participate in this research study. Another selection rationale was that it was a kindergarten classroom, and the authors were interested in how processes of labeling and placement based on behaviors occur at such an early age. Proper IRB protocol was followed and all four educators in the room agreed to participate and signed consent forms.

B. Data Collection

The research was conducted once per week during the 2011-2012 school years, and bi-monthly, during the 2010-2011 school years. Each visit lasted for a period ranging from one to six hours. Overall, the researcher spent approximately 320 hours observing Ms. Elmwood’s classroom over a two-year period. The researcher took handwritten field notes during each participant observation. She recorded any dialog she heard verbatim and with quotation marks in field notes.

The choice to use handwritten notes was based on the dynamic nature of the kindergarten classroom, as well as to ensure proximity to participants.

In addition to participant observation, we conducted formal and informal interviews with the teacher and teaching assistants. The researcher conducted four formal interviews with the teacher, one in the beginning and one at the end of each year, and one each year with each of the TAs. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to ensure accuracy of information. The semi-structured interviews with the adults began with an interview guide. We asked them to describe their experiences teaching students with disabilities, their training, their approach to behavior management, and their strengths and concerns concerning their ability to support or manage student behavior. They were also asked to describe the students in their classroom academically, socially, and behaviorally. The informal interviews occurred in an ongoing manner and consisted of questions about educators' practices, their work with the students, or about what happened in the days, which the researcher was not present in the school. The lengthy observations in the classroom were an important factor to allow for these informal interviews. In addition, one took field notes on artifacts, items such as reports, e-mails, student work, and assessments. After the data was gathered, the analysis of educators' discourses was developed as described below.

C. Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is essential to understand how discursive practices in everyday life create social and cultural reproduction, and how these practices allow change to take place [20]. Language generates discursive practices, and it is centrally involved in power and struggles over power [21]. CDA is a multidisciplinary and issue-oriented approach, mostly relevant when critically examining social inequality and injustice [22]. It "is characterized by the common interests in the de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic... investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)" [23]. Established routines in special education, particularly the ones related to the responses to behaviors of students with disabilities, are part of a systemic issue under examination in this study.

Gee's approach to CDA [24], [25] was the primary analysis approach of this paper. In a first read-through of transcripts the researchers found recurrent statements, utterances, and sentences present, then one highlighted these regularities in educator talk that relate to behavior practices, behavior management, and educator response to student behaviors. Next, an utterance-type meaning analysis of the most common expressions used by adults in the classroom was conducted. The token-meaning or situated meaning of expressions, which revealed the effects of language in everyday practices employed in the classroom [26] was the following step. Thus, the researchers described the context in which the adults were using the utterance to respond to behaviors, which was the 'use of consequences' as presented in the first part of the Findings section.

In this stage of analysis, we revealed how does teacher talk and discursive practices "function politically in social interactions" [24] and asked, "How does the discursive practice used by these educators in this classroom relate to social practices in society?" It was found that intersections of socioeconomic, family background and discursive practices employed in the classroom were relevant. In the last level of analysis, we identified that sequences of language-in-use and actions become building blocks of the realities in the classroom. This final step is presented in the final part of this findings section, where the authors deconstruct the two students' stories and how their blueprints as learners were created within this classroom, positioning them for differential placement for first grade.

III. FINDINGS

The present article is part of a larger study, which analyzes the discourses and practices of educators in this one kindergarten classroom. The findings and analysis described in this paper explain how the discourse available for teachers in responding to students results in consequences that determine students' educational trajectories.

A. Discursive Practices: Use of Consequences to Control Behaviors

In this classroom, educators were juggling pressures of the educational system, such as the time constraints of their day, trying to cover the curriculum to get students "ready for first grade," and a focus on results. As a consequence, the need arose to "control behaviors" to make fulfilling all those demands possible. Ms. Elmwood and her team were creative, flexible and well-intended educators. Overall, both students and educators are being oppressed and empowered within the discourse.

The use of certain utterances and sentence structures set the stage for how educators responded to students' behaviors. Once the researchers identified the discourse, the analyst had clues that power was exerted over students' behaviors by the use of consequences to attempt change or ensure accepted behaviors. The use of consequences shaped students' trajectories because of its role in how students and teachers constructed their relationships.

1. Time-Out and Exclusion

The use of time-out or exclusion was prevalent in this classroom, occurring daily for some students. Teachers denied membership to the classroom or to an activity when a student did not behave according to the behavioral standards pre-established by educators, and time-out usually occurred after a few attempts to provide support for students' behaviors.

Ms. Riley came over, grabbed Scott by the arm, seated him at a table, and told him, "You're going to stay there until you learn how to behave on the carpet." When the teacher started reading a book he said, "I can't see it." She said, "You can move to the side, but you won't be able to see the book if you can't behave."

2. Physical Control

Within a validated special education, discourse educators made use of physical control to make students behave appropriately based on classroom standards. This strategy helped adults maintain control of the schedule and pacing of the day. Rationalizing with or motivating the students took longer and sometimes educators perceived that there was not enough time to do so. Forcing behaviors started as a response to simple everyday tasks such as putting materials away. When students did not respond appropriately to behavior requests from adults, adults sometimes enforced behavior by pushing, carrying, and holding the students. In the above exclusion of Scott from the circle, for example, he was carried by Ms. Riley to one of the tables.

3. Prizes

When educators avoided the option of forcing students to behave in certain ways, they were more creative in how they supported and negotiated students' performance. Prizes were used throughout the school year in this classroom as a consequence for desired, standard or acceptable behavior, as in the following example: In using positive reinforcement, Ms. Elmwood reported she wanted to ensure the "order of the classroom and student participation," and as a consequence, student learning.

4. Shared Power

Adults were regularly mindful of students' needs; they could describe how students have different rhythms and the different levels of instructional support, for example. We call these types of adult behaviors compromising or "shared power." Instead of trying to impose, control over students' behaviors-for every routine in the classroom-adults compromised, negotiated situations, or shared decisions and power with students. Therefore, this shared power avoided unwanted behaviors by students and any other consequence including exclusion or restraint, as it is shown in the example below:

All students were finishing a book at the tables. Dave was playing in the kitchen area and was almost lying on the ground. Ms. Nelson saw it and asked Ms. Elmwood, "Are we allowing him to get away with it?" Ms. Elmwood looked to Dave and went over. She said in a playful voice, "So Dave, you started great work here, come finish." Dave stood up and came right away to finish his book.

The use of such practice showed educators were able to deconstruct labels and attempted a more thorough understanding of students and their behaviors; this technique was particularly used with Dave.

B. Blueprinting: Constructing Students' Stories Based on Behaviors

A blueprint is a structural map that provides the base for how a building is constructed. Educators in early grades create the basis to understand who these children are as learners. This blueprint passes through students' kindergarten education, and it could be observed while being constructed with the practices applied in this classroom.

Of the 41 students observed in this classroom, some students' experiences became more pronounced in the process of data analysis. Scott and Dave were students in which the controlling discourse, and subsequently the controlling practices analyzed were routinely present-as exposed in the previous section-and it created a map for adults to understand who they were. For a portion of their kindergarten year, Dave and Scott were both considered by the adults as a "challenging" or "defiant." Scott and Dave's story lines started together but diverged, exemplifying the positioning of students and construction of students' behaviors in the discursive practices available and applied in the classroom.

1. Scott and Dave: Students' Stories under Construction

On the second day of observation during the second week of classes, the educators were already starting to narrate students' stories:

I like him [Dave], but when he does that [kicks and curses], he's not very likable... You know, he's been seen for ED... We had to restrain him. We called Mr. Eaton [the principal]. We held him on the chair. He was biting, hitting, cursing.... Scott and Dave are going to be the real challenge.

In the observation above, Ms. Riley stated that both Scott and Dave were going to be a challenge while describing Dave's behaviors, and without any description of Scott's actual behavior. Both Dave and Scott are White, receive free and they reduced lunch, and are labeled as having speech impairment. They were two of the 10 students that received free or reduced lunch in this classroom.

The example above shows that at the beginning of the school year Dave was already being restrained for his behavior, the consequence of physical control. In the sentence structure used by Ms. Riley, the students were not presenting challenging behaviors, but rather they embodied the "real challenges" themselves. This type of discourse located the deviation within the student and thus, the classroom practices were used to suppress behaviors. For that reason, when Dave and other students displayed unwanted or non-compliant behaviors in the classroom, the adults responded with restraining practices. The excerpt below is one example of physical control, a restraining consequence applied to Dave in the beginning of the year.

All of the kids were told to put their lunch boxes away and get their pencil boxes. Dave went up and got the pencil box, but he did not put his lunch box away. Ms. Nelson carried him to make him physically put his lunch box away. He started kicking when she started holding him. She dragged him out of the classroom and they were there for about 10 minutes. Ms. Nelson called for Ms. Riley to help. Ms. Elmwood also went out as well. After a couple of minutes, Ms. Elmwood brought him in... She was holding his hands behind his back with the arms crossed in front of his body. She carried him like that to the ground and held him facing down with his arms crossed for a couple more minutes until he stopped moving.

Dave's unwanted behavior was a lunch box out of place, which in this classroom justified physical control, exclusion

from the classroom, and the involvement of three adults. Because of such practices, his behaviors escalated generating the practice of more restraint, as in the previous example. When a critical understanding of small interactions between students and educators was not present, educators used overly forceful practices to make sense of certain students' behaviors as intentional and intrinsic to them, and as a result, they physically enforced rules and applied punishments. As the reader have seen in the examples so far in this paper, both Dave and Scott were being physically controlled and excluded from activities and the classroom for their behaviors deemed as challenging. The positioning of both students started changing in the middle of the school year.

2. Not as much of a Challenge Anymore: Dave's New Story Line

Later in the fall of 2011, Dave started to receive medical treatment as Ms. Elmwood described in the excerpt below:

"Dave was taken to the doctor for ADHD and the doctor actually diagnosed him as having it.... I'm going to refer Scott though, he's just like Dave. The difference is that sometimes I'm able to bring him down, and it works fine. His ADHD is hidden there, and you can't anticipate when it's coming, it's too inconsistent."

Ms. Elmwood supported Dave's parents who took their son to the doctor and got him labeled. It is important to note that Ms. Elmwood described Scott's behavior as inconsistent, and the behavioral inconsistency was the reason why Scott should not be labeled as a child with ADHD, contrary to Ms. Elmwood's discourse. His behavior depended on the context and the environment, not internal factors. However, medical and biological explanations are available and prevalent in special education.

Dave dealt with medication changes throughout the year. He was observed being sleepy in the afternoons; sometimes he was allowed to go sleep on a mattress in the classroom. Even during mornings, he was observed fighting to keep his eyes open during class. Despite Dave's sleepiness, it became clear that the educators appreciated the positive changes in his behavior, and that they credited the medication for the change.

Once they understood that medicine had such a positive impact on Dave's behavior, the adults determined that Scott would need medicine, too. However, his mother did not think so. Because of her choice not to put her child on medication, the educators viewed her as "not being involved." This expression was used by educators and this impression was solely based on the educator's descriptions. No interviews with parents were conducted because the researchers were interested in teacher perceptions of students' behavior, which in this case was influenced by perceptions of parental involvement.

When a student was treated and believed to have a medical explanation underlying his behaviors, and as a result became a docile body, adults did not infer intent and did not feel the need to enforce control. So, in the end of the fall of 2011, the discursive practices used to understand and respond to Dave's behaviors started to change.

Ms. Elmwood said:

"Yesterday, Dave butted heads with Natalie, but he's been doing much better." Ms. Nelson said, "Yeah, but we are giving him his time."

Ms. Nelson reasoned that the improvement in Dave's behavior was influenced by respecting his time, and not providing consequences, as they routinely had been doing by then. In another interaction, Ms. Nelson shared how the educators started to respond to Dave's behavior by saying they were "allowing him to get away with it" when Dave was playing in the kitchen area, while the other students were reading, for example. Educators started implementing less control over Dave's behavior, including less physical restraint and more supports for his needs; they were sharing power with the student.

Sharing power taught the student, particularly in early grades, to develop self-regulation, without having to rely in consequences attributed by the adults all the time.

The lack of consequences for every one of Dave's behaviors demonstrated that he was being positioned differently than before, and was not a challenge for this classroom anymore. Were educators writing Dave's story differently from the one they started telling in the second week of classes? The next passage exemplifies the new support being offered to Dave and the establishment of a different relationship between him and the adults in this classroom.

Dave and Laurence, another student, had a small disagreement during lunch. Ms. Elmwood pushed Dave's chair a little away from Laurence. Dave was upset, stood up, and screamed. A little later, Dave started crying. Ms. Elmwood said, "Come up for a hug." He went up and gave her a long hug, and cried. Ms. Elmwood told Ms. Riley, "He is probably too hot, take him to the nurse." Ms. Riley went to meet him, held his hand and said, "Is that ok? I'm going to take you there, is that ok?" He nodded.

In the previous example, Ms. Elmwood and Ms. Riley were sensitive to him. They were asking him which support would be the best in order for him not to get too tense, upset, and/or display behaviors. It was completely different from forcing him physically to pick up his lunch box in the beginning of the year, for example. By being sensitive to his needs they were preventing his behaviors from escalating, which had commonly resulted in restraint or exclusion at the beginning of the year.

3. No Breaks for Scott: Hyper-Surveillance and Consequences for Behaviors

The consequences for Scott's non-compliant behaviors continued to be based on practices of control and membership. The series of examples in this section provide evidence of the physical and negative consequences for Scott's behavior throughout the year. Scott was usually the only one targeted for consequences for behaviors that many times other students were displaying, as well. The next example shows adults' responses to Scott as compared to responses shown to other students.

Scott and Will were playing and teasing each other during

story time. Ms. Riley went over, and pushed Scott's chair away. Scott stood up and said something that she clearly did not appreciate. She held his arm and pulled him out of the rug area, made him sit in a chair at one of the tables. After he sat, she yelled, "You need to learn how to behave and until then, you're going to be sitting at the table." He crossed his arms and rested his head on the table. Ms. Riley then went to Will, and told him, "Circle time is to pay attention. You need to fix your behavior." He nodded and turned his attention to the teacher.

Scott displayed the same behavior as other students, yet he was corrected and put under hyper-surveillance, while the other students did not receive any consequences for their behaviors. In the example above, Will was corrected, but not excluded from the circle. For Scott, however, the consequence regularly involved exclusion. For example, in one day of observation in this classroom, Scott was excluded from circle twice, put in time-out during an activity at the table, and almost denied a prize for a positive behavior he had performed as required. The teacher and TAs developed regular discursive practices to put him on the spot, even when his behavior was the same as other students. Adults' judgments were not based on observable behaviors, but rather on preconceived ideas and understandings of Scott as defiant, challenging and not medicated. For example during a coloring activity one TA mentioned, "He's just naughty, see he likes to set everyone off," yet when one looked over Scott was playing with Kyle. It was nothing out of the ordinary. Scott's reputation as "just naughty" made him embody the challenge and the behavior problem in the teachers' eyes from the beginning. Thus, in every situation, the teachers inferred "naughty" intent from his behaviors.

4. Blueprints Complete: Positioned by the End of the School Year

The different discourse used to describe students shaped different practices employed by adults, which resulted in behaviors and stories being constructed differently, creating different positions for students to occupy. In an end of the year interview, Ms. Elmwood positioned these students in the following ways.

"[Dave]'s come a long way, huh? Who would know in the beginning... he's such a sweet boy. His behavior is so good. He adapted to school; he learned the rules and what school is all about. He did not have any of those behaviors before; he did not know any of this before.... He would call all those names, you B., three of us having to carry him out of the classroom. Oh, so much growth.... But he um, his whole life has changed, because his parents are now volunteering, they've taken him to the physicians. He's been on medication, which is up and down, but yeah, it has made a little bit of a difference. Um, I think the biggest thing is his relationship with the children and the adults in this room. He just comes in and wants to be with us... And he is just an adorable little boy. I mean he's just a total change."

From Ms. Elmwood perspective, his growth was closely related to him learning the behaviors and what school is about: rules. Ms. Elmwood described Dave as a story of behavior improvements, as a total change. She emphasizes his relationships with adults and other students, as opposed to what the reader saw when she described Scott, who according to her "likes to set everyone off." Ms. Elmwood compared his behaviors now to the beginning of the year and showed how much he learned from the classroom rules because he was complying with the control imposed: he had become a docile body.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Ms. Elmwood ended the interview by saying that Dave was going to an inclusion class, where the special education teacher co-taught with the general education teacher. Dave learned the rules, became compliant with teacher requests, and as a consequence was considered an adorable student that could be included, showing how behavior is confounded with ability in early grades, and ability are influential on placement.

In the same interview, Ms. Elmwood talked about Scott:

"Scott came in dysfunctional. He couldn't sit and eat.

He didn't follow directions at all. He thought he could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted... He was hyperactive, [but] they [his parents] didn't want anything to do with medication, or the doctor... But, I mean, he will get up into first and second grade and he'll start jumping up and down.... I still, I do believe he's going to be learning disabled, 'because he can't retrieve his words and get out what he wants to say. And he has very [few] experiences in life that he can draw from, which is kind of sad too.... Scott was ... always smiles.... I don't think he was ever not happy. He would just love being here, but he annoyed the heck out of his peers. He drove us crazy, because he just never listened."

Ms. Elmwood used a different discourse to understand the progression of Scott's behaviors throughout the year. She indirectly mentioned improvement in terms of basic skills and learning some rules. She also talked about Scott's mother's lack of involvement as defined by her not providing him medicine. Scott's mom did not become a docile body as Dave's did; she did not conform to the rules established for parental involvement in this classroom.

By the end of May, Ms. Elmwood told me Scott was moving to a different school:

"into a special language program... I tried to call there, they were not interested, and they kept sending me to someone else.... I couldn't talk to anyone. I just sent the IEP," as she explained.

Scott ended up being placed in a more restrictive educational environment. Ms. Elmwood seemed to be upset with their decision because she tried to call the school. His placement was based solely on the IEP written by Ms. Elmwood. An excerpt of his IEP is copied below:

"Basic Cognitive/Daily Living Skills: Scott appears to understand some of the information provided given support to focus and attend, but does not always demonstrate his knowledge base on command. He

appears to often have his own ideas that he focuses on unless otherwise directed by an adult with continued support to complete an activity.”

These two sentences from Scott’s IEP show the language used to describe his abilities. Ms. Elmwood described him as understanding “some” of the information because she emphasized that Scott did not follow classroom orders, and repeated that twice in that small paragraph. Ms. Elmwood operated under a discourse of control to measure Scott’s “cognitive abilities” and “daily living skills” by his compliant behavior. This emphasis on behavior compliance, or lack thereof, was one of the subjective judgments that created Scott’s narrative and reality for his next school placement.

IV. DISCUSSION

This research found that the different discursive practices employed in this classroom were all-dependent on controlling and exclusion language and were shaped as consequences for behaviors [27], [28]. The discursive practices based on providing consequences for student behavior set up a regimented environment and conflictive relationships with students. These practices, positive or negative, and sometimes even punishing, dictate special education and general education behavior management [27], [29]. When control takes priority, the space for educators to share power and promote student agency is limited. In addition, the routine use of controlling and conditional membership discursive practices to understand and respond to students’ behavior creates a blueprint of who the students are as learners, their stories and positioning within this classroom—and ultimately their placement into first grade. Those discourses are attached to students and generate identity beliefs that are impossible to avoid. In addition, identities based on labels lead to the exclusion of the individuals, especially students who fall into an undesirable category [30].

Analyzing Scott’s and Dave’s stories is essential to understand the yearlong processes of language use in the classroom. Medical and biological explanations available for educators to explain students’ characteristics pathologize difference and justify the use of normalized special education practices [31]. Dave’s use of medication, for example, explained his improvement. For the educators, the benefits in terms of his behaviors outweighed any other concerns. Dave was not able to participate fully in the classroom due to the effects of medicine; however, Dave was then a docile body, which was desired to improve classroom control [17], [32]. Scott was the opposite: his body was not controlled by medicine, and consequently was not seen as docile, appropriate or productive [33], [34]. This status generated hyper-surveillance over Scott’s behaviors, because his body was understood as dangerous [35]. As a result, he assumed a marginal position in the classroom [36]. The teacher and TAs created reality for Scott in this classroom [37]: “He’s just naughty.” Discourses based on his family background, school compliance, and behavior standards positioned Scott as an outsider and an object of hyper-surveillance [8]. Scott was frequently negatively reinforced and punished; he was a

victim of systematic oppression and marginalization in the classroom [31], [38].

Ms. Elmwood clearly highlighted the improvement Dave made throughout the year and how proud and impressed she was with him. Ms. Elmwood also mentioned the role of developing a relationship with the student and understanding his needs, as well as being mindful of what worked for him. Ms. Elmwood could see him from through a different discourse, not a controlling or deficit in family background discourse, but one that considers singularity in the individuals [39] with an ethic of care [16]. She was able to position him differently by the end of the school-year, as “sweet,” “adorable” and “capable.”

Making use of a different discourse, Ms. Elmwood located pathology on the individual, particularly in Scott’s case: she defended medicating his condition while ignoring social systems [31]. Ms. Elmwood positioned Scott, with his family background and his behaviors, as not having much to draw from; she uses a stereotypical description view of Scott’s background [7], [40]. Ms. Elmwood described him as having potential to learn. However, she depicted him as jumping up and down in first grade. She anticipated and located the behaviors within Scott and actually diagnosed him as “learning disabled.” Ms. Elmwood clearly did not position Scott as capable, because he did not have a docile body-again, perception of ability is influenced by compliant behaviors in early grades [17]. Scott’s teacher gave a great description of his smile and good humor in class, but finished with a deficit description of how his behaviors negatively impacted his environment and his relationships. Ms. Elmwood operated under a discourse of control to measure Scott’s “cognitive abilities” and “daily living skills” by his compliant behavior [17]. This emphasis on behavior compliance, or lack thereof, was one of the subjective judgments that created Scott’s narrative and reality for his next school placement.

Using different language to describe students generated different discursive practices that then created different social positioning within their educational environments. Intersections of behavior with disability status, race, gender, and socioeconomic status became evident in these individual stories. Over the course of the year, Dave’s behaviors did not escalate. He was able to develop socially, academically, and behaviorally, as expressed by Ms. Elmwood at the end of the school year. On the other hand, Scott continued to receive consequences for his behaviors more often than any other student, including Dave. This constant surveillance and overcorrection did not allow space for educators to see him outside of those discourses. Instead, these practices created a limiting story for Scott. He ended up being positioned based on negative descriptions of his family background and his perceived intentional “bad” behavior. Based on the use of a defiant discourse, the adults never described Scott as a learner, but rather as someone with “potential to learn,” and probably “learning disabled.” Based on the documentation of such assumptions about Scott, when he moved to a different district he was placed in a special language program. In contrast, when Ms. Elmwood described Dave at the end of the year, she

recognized this improvement in terms of behavior and academic performance. He was placed in an inclusive classroom. It is important to remember that Scott and Dave had started the school year on equal footing. The discursive practices used to frame and respond to these students' behaviors made the difference in the educators' perceptions of them, which had a significant impact on their behaviors, stories and placement.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper uses a critical perspective to understand the larger social relevance of the simple and subtle classroom language and practices in one kindergarten class. A critical perspective was also important to understand teacher, TAs, and students as both the products and producers of discourse. Educators acted within a normalized special education discourse.

The language used in everyday routines throughout a school year was built from, at the same time that it constructed, the discursive practices available for educators to act upon in this classroom. These practices prioritized the control of behaviors and construction of students based on behavioral standards. This language was subtly embedded in educators' talk and the practices were implemented in everyday routines, shaping the relationships established between educators and students. Over the course of the school year, these relationships predisposed how students' behaviors were constructed and judged by the adults: a blueprint of who these children were as learners. Based on these outcomes, the students were socially positioned within the classroom.

The adults in this classroom demonstrated the power of language-in-use to deconstruct students as "challenging" and constructed the same student as "sweet," "adorable," "pleasant," and with "potential." It can be said that the educators in this classroom created a promising blueprint for Dave when they challenged their normative practices, beliefs, and assumptions about him, because they were empowered and empowered him by the simple use of more compromising practices in the classroom. However, this was not true for Scott. His blueprint was not one of promise, but one of limits, which constrained his education, since first grade, to a special program.

In conclusion, educators proved that they could—and need to—keep pushing to understand the context of the behaviors students display and not just provide consequences or take students' behaviors as intentional or personal [41]. Educators could also allow student input and participation in their decisions [42] and create relationships with students that go beyond discipline and control [6], [43].

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