

FIGURING THE EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILD: THE FUNCTION OF
TEACHER TALK ON SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS OF ELEMENTARY
AGED CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

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DEDICATION

To Charlie, Ivy, and Emery: my wild wonderful.

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PREFACE: BEGINNING THE STUDY

My first introduction to the participants in the study was awkward. We sat around a round table in the principal's office, and the participants said very few words to me. Their primary question was "Who is going to read your dissertation?" To which I— Trying (unsuccessfully) to be funny, and a little self-deprecating—responded, "Probably only the people that have to." And thus, in my first observation of the first participant, T1, her demeanor was cold to me. She barely looked at or spoke to me. When I noticed that T1 would barely look at me during the first observation of her classroom, I asked if she and the other teachers had known I was coming to talk to them about my research (fieldnotes, November 12, 2019).

"We had no idea," she told me. "We were like, 'what did we do?!' and then he was like, 'You're going to be part of a science experiment!'" (fieldnotes, November 12, 2019) I was so embarrassed when she explained how they were introduced to this study. I explained that different levels of approval for obtaining permission to research in the district had been disjointed, and that I should have been able to predict that miscommunication might happen. I told her that I had hoped participation and recruitment would be more collaborative, and administered through a request in a staff-wide e-mail, and that I got the sense their participation was very "top-down" (fieldnotes, November 12, 2019).

She agreed. So, I apologized to all the participants. When I apologized to T3, she said that the principal had come to her classroom, looked at his phone, and said to her in a serious voice, "I need you to come to the office, we have something we need to discuss" (fieldnotes, November 13, 2019).

This introduction for the teachers had an immediate impact on the way in which not only the study was framed for them, but also how I was positioned as a researcher. My feeling as I moved through the school was that I was considered not only an outsider, but as someone sent from the administrative offices “downtown.” I explained, repeatedly, that I had been a teacher for ten years, and I was coming to this study as a teacher, with the questions I had as a teacher. Accordingly, I explained to all three teachers that I understood the competing demands of teachers, and I was hoping to better understand the impact these demands have on how teachers do their jobs. This statement had impact on the findings as they are written here, as well as the following analysis and discussion.

Thus, I both summarize what teachers said, and also add directly quoted excerpts from their interviews, as well as include observational data. There are themes of the interview data that I do not focus on as my units of analysis for this research: including how teachers are positioned to their administration. However, given the way in which teachers entered into this study, I include the vignette above, as well as teachers’ responses to whether they feel supported by their building-level administrators. This is important to include because it signals the ways in which teachers are positioned organizationally. Though they have power, they are also subordinated by the ways they are positioned under administrators, and this subordination impacts the ways in which they use language to communicate.

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This interpretive study makes explicit the cultural cognitive structures on which education professionals rely as they determine an elementary-aged child as having an emotional and behavioral disorder through a critical discourse analysis of teacher talk and participant structure analyses.

Kathleen King Thorius, Ph.D., Chair

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIP- Behavior Intervention Plan

EBD- Emotional/Behavioral Disorder

FBA- Functional Behavior Assessment

IDEA- Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act

IEP- Individualized Education Plan

LRE- Least Restrictive Environment

SEL- Social Emotional Learning

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Children who are labeled as having a “serious emotional disturbance” (SED) in American public elementary schools occupy an ambiguous space in special education where their essence is as much a contentious point of discussion for research and teachers as is their actual existence (see Kauffman & Bader, 2013; Thomas & Glenny, 2000). Traditional and critical special education researchers have argued about the ambiguity of the disability category, but to different ends: traditionalists argue for more methodologically stringent means of identifying students with SED (e.g., Kauffman et al., 2007), and critical special educators call for more wholistic approaches that attend to both broader educational contexts and individual teacher biases (e.g., Harry et al., 2009). Of critical importance, however, are the material and lived outcomes for students with SED and their teachers, as well as the theoretical underpinnings that study them.

Defining Emotional Disturbances Through the Language of White Civility

The interpersonal processes between professionals that semiotically assume, mediate, and ultimately define the emotionally disturbed child (e.g., Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Rogers, 2002; Rogers & Mancini, 2010; Wortham, 2004) occur within embedded cultural and political systems that reflexively interact with teacher identity, agency, and participation (Hallet, 2016; Tefera et al., 2014). Teacher identity and agency are continually developing, and recursively negotiable depending on the positional power they hold within the varying, and often shifting, power structures of their role. Specifically, educational professionals are nested within power structures where their role in interpreting student behavior is prescribed to them by both

cultural norms and various layers of administration: culture and administrative decree acting working reflexively with each other. Teacher interpretation of behavior, then, relies on their independent evaluations of behavior, which are mediated by the power that professional hierarchies impose or withhold from them as well as the cultures within which they act.

Pertaining to children with emotional disturbances, positions of power and subjugation clash as teachers perform under the auspices of broader accountability narratives (Hallet, 2010; Oberfield, 2016; Opfer, 2001; Tefera et al., 2014) that dictate the ways in which teacher effectiveness is assessed and connected to how they address not only student learning, but student behavior. Teachers' effectiveness in interpreting, naming, and addressing the behavior of students who may or may not be suspected as having an emotional disturbance is described in research and policy as a function of instructional fidelity to prescribed initiatives, and measured by standardized academic achievement (e.g., Lane et al., 2008; Sutherland et al., 2008; Wehby et al. 2003; Wills et al., 2010).

Importantly, under initiatives intended to reduce exclusionary discipline (e.g., Serpell et al., 2020) and special education referrals for emotional disturbance (e.g., Peterson, 2020), goals of increasing educational benefit to marginalized students is subverted as teachers are less likely to engage formal disciplinary and special education processes, yet as likely to exclude and over-discipline students who they deem to be disruptive, or dangerous, through informal means. Under the cultural structures of schools, whiteness acts as a cultural governance (Juárez & Hayes, 2008; Harris et al., 2020). Teachers use coded language and linguistic mechanisms that signal racial biases,

assuming race as a logical proxy for trauma and violence, all the while subverting equity efforts and what otherwise may be the supportive elements of specialized services for students (e.g., Proffitt, 2020). This coded language is a linguistic function of the cultural norms of “white civility” (Coleman, 1996), and operates to draw attention to the ways in which the behavior of students in urban schools is juxtaposed against the presumed sensibility and colonality of behavioral expectations normed on the preferences of the white, middle class (Tobin, 1995). Historically disenfranchised students remain marginalized even under broad equity initiatives meant to reduce exclusionary discipline and over-referrals of students of Color who may be labeled as having an emotional disturbance.

Children’s Agency and Emotions

Traditional approaches to the emotions of children map emotional development along a linear continuum that moves from “dependent” to “independent,” placing self-sufficiency and independence as the height of maturity. These approaches are rooted in psychological theories pertaining to growth that maintain individuation and industriousness as the primary objectives of maturity. Critical approaches to childhood, however, posit that children do not pass through developmental milestones or markers of maturity autonomously, but instead experience the world as contextually situated and relationally defined (Coomer et al., in press; Thomson & Baraitser, 2017). That is, children—and childhood—are defined beyond a social imaginary that places them as only passive and objectified by the adults that surround them (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Critical theorists of childhood consider children as agentic (Adair, 2014), even if they are subjected to the meaning-making of the adults around them. What this means is that there

is a tension between the power children are afforded to make meaning of their lives and how they express that meaning, and the developmental significance that is assigned to them through the lenses of adults who are presumed to have more knowledge, and, in schools, have more power.

For children of Color and disabled children in urban elementary schools, their juxtaposition against a normed white, Eurocentric social imaginary of childhood as a temporal bucket of innocence (Meiners, 2017; Nxumalo, 2019) subjects them to educational decision-making that is rooted in the “crisis” of their development (Coomer et al., in press; Dumas & Nelson, 2016). This often results in the over-surveillance, discipline, and, as I argue here, disabling, of children in urban elementary schools as a function of teachers’ enacting their own identities as white women in urban schools (Dumas, & Nelson, 2016). This risks long term health impacts, as mastery—feeling in control of one’s circumstances and understood here as a function of agency—has had demonstrated effects on health outcomes throughout the life course, with discrepancies that fall along racial lines (Latham-Mintus et al., 2017).

As pedagogical trends in social emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices have proliferated professional development for teachers (i.e., [resilienteducator.com](https://www.resilienteducator.com)), a lens has magnified what is considered as normative—and non-normative—emotional experiences in children in school. Importantly, because special education is a built-in mechanism in public schools for remediation and removal (Erevelles et al., 2019), the discursive link between SEL, trauma-informed practices, and special education for emotional disturbances is materializing more readily in the language teachers use to signal mental health disorders in children. Coded language around SEL

and trauma signals the need for treatment of emotion-related issues and relies on the “cloak of benevolence” (Thorius, 2019) of providing support and services, without regard for the dangerous ways in which children, and urban children, in particular, are divested of their own agency as they are made to be emotionally unwell.

It is imperative to note that those who stand to bear the most risk of disabling processes related to mental health and (un)wellness are, largely, Black boys. Black boys are routinely expelled for disruptive behavior, and assessed, surveilled, and judged in ways that do not account for a teachers’ subjectivities—including working conditions and the teachers’ own emotions around adequacy of support (Coomer et al., in press; Gilliam, 2016; Wesley & Ellis, 2017). Similarly, positioned against white femininity in schools, Black girls are pathologized, and criminalized along axes of race and femininity, and race and disability (Annamma, 2018; Coomer., & Stinson, in press). The pathologization and criminalization of Black girls rests on the ways in which Black, feminine embodiments are discursively produced as problematic, yet unsupported, in schooling spaces where the teaching corps is predominantly white women (Cannon, 2018; Morris, 2016).

Race, Irrationality, and Being Made as Emotionally Disturbed

Importantly, culturally mediated interpretations of emotion, behavior, rationality, and educational productivity not only rely on sanist and racist interpretations of normative exhibitions of rational behavior by children and adolescents (Ahrahm et al., 2011; Thomas & Glenny, 2000), they also rely on the teacher’s position as both one of power and oppression in naming and responding to children’s behavior. Young children in elementary school in particular, are mediated, communicated, and animated through the language of the adults around them. In urban elementary schools, this positions

students of Color from working class backgrounds as subject to the interpretations of the white women who are likely to be teaching them (e.g., Bryan, 2017). In addition to circulating deficit narratives about the academic achievement of urban students, teachers uphold the norms of the white, middle class by mobilizing discourses around race that rely on linguistic conventions of “white civility” (Coleman, 1996; Hoffman, 2009; Massey et al., 1975; Tobin, 1995). Talk of violence, trauma, and urban families serve as conduits for teachers to connect urban youth to the need for mental health services. This need implicates special education processes in order provide “services,” and the most readily available disability category to address students’ emotions and behavior is “emotionally disturbed.” Significantly, the deeming of having an emotional disturbance divests children of their agency and the presumed rationality that is necessary to participate as a valuable communicant and rhetor (e.g., Price, 2009). When children are discursively made to be emotionally disturbed, they are not only subject to discourses of abnormality, but their agency in meaning making, participation, and relationship is compromised. In this way, through special education, and through the lingual mechanisms of whiteness, teachers in urban schools are able to mobilize discourses that destabilize the urban youth in their schools, as well as their families, under the guise of “service”—access to or denial of— through special education.

Teachers’ interpretations, evaluations, and expressions, then, are often coded discourses that use the language of special education to signal, or prompt, the processes by which students are labeled and segregated through special education (Ferri & Connor, 2006). These decisions, embedded within broader contexts of education, have material results for children—and specifically children of Color— that may include not only

academic remediation, but also medicalization, psychiatrization, and criminalization through and by the functions of schooling (Ahrahm et al., 2011; Annamma et al., 2018; Annamma, et al., 2014; Blanchett, 2006; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Erevelles, 2014; Gelb, 2010; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). It is thus important to examine, thoroughly, teacher participation in these processes as it is subject to the policies and procedures that are developed for them, by others, often far away from their local classrooms, and yet bears the most significant impact for students' long-term life outcomes.

Students with emotional disturbances experience “higher dropout rates, higher rates of arrest and unemployment, and lower rates of independent living than their peers without disabilities (Karpur et al., 2005). Furthermore, they are less likely to complete high school (Rylance, 1997; Vander Stoep et al., 2000), and more likely to be fired from their jobs (Karpur et al., 2005). Students with emotional disturbances are also more likely to be harmed at school (e.g., O'Neill, 2019) if not killed (e.g., Singer, 2019) as a result of a school's response to their behavior and the presumed danger of their educational disability label. Children of Color are more likely to be identified in this disability category, and are thus more likely to be underserved (Harry et al., 2009) and educated in restrictive settings away from their same-aged, non-disabled peers (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). As students who have histories of aggressive behavior, specifically, are stripped of their discursive power through the cultural processes of disablement by which they are deemed abnormal in schools (Brantlinger, 2006; Baglieri, et al., 2011; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Parekh & Brown, 2019), nuancing the hyperlocal participation of teachers within broader neoliberal reforms in naming and responding to student behavior is of urgent, material importance.

Purpose

I focus this inquiry on the performance of individual identity and agency in collective activity as it iteratively relies on and reproduces special education cultural practices that construct and maintain the abnormal child as a function of the teacher's administration of the general education curriculum within neoliberal educational reform. I focus on examining how language mediates teachers' agentic identity through policy interpretation and appropriation (Levinson et al., 2009) within the cultural activity of naming student behavior as abnormal prior to special education eligibility determination processes. I look at the ways teachers use special education language in response to a hyper-focused, yet dysfunctional, general education curricula within urban schooling contexts to focus on teacher agency. I specifically look at how language that signals the cultural processes of selecting, interpreting, translating, and enacting cultural rules and tools constructs and is constructed by both what it means to be an elementary student labeled as emotionally disturbed in school, and what it means to be their teacher.

Accordingly, in this interpretive study, I make explicit the cultural models (Mathews, 2005) and cultural cognitive structures (D'Andrade, 2005) on which education professionals rely as they determine an elementary-aged child as emotionally disturbed, through a critical discourse analysis of teacher talk (e.g., Mehan, 1993; Young, 2016), and participant structure analyses (Goodwin, 2000; Michaels, 1981). This inquiry implicates the role of teacher identity and agency in decision-making, conceptualized here as teachers' "figured worlds" (Holland et al., 1998) in order to examine the teachers' interpretations of themselves as they interact with broader, political contexts of schooling. I examine the following questions: first, what are the cultural resources

education professionals use and (re)produce in defining SED in school contexts (Mathews, 2005; Swidler, 1986; Swidler, 1998; Quinn, 2005)? Second, how do education professionals communicate with each other to define, assign (Broderick & Leonardo, 2016), or interpret what it means to be “dis/ordered,” “ab/normal,” or “emotionally un/stable” in schools? And, finally, who is the subjective teacher (Holland et al., 1998) in special education culture, and what is the function of her/his agency in talking about, working with, and making decisions for the student that the teacher suspects as having an emotional/behavioral disorder in an elementary school setting?

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMING

I examine the construction of emotionally disturbed students through two lenses: one that subjectifies the teacher, the person who is most usually responsible for describing, naming, and responding to students in regular interactions, as well as a lens that implicates the institutional organization within which the teacher works. For these purposes, a construct emerging from sociocultural theories of agency and identity development, specifically that of the Figured World (Holland et al., 1998), examines how the self-interacts with cultural processes through mediating artifacts and tools and is appropriate for this study. Examining the role of teacher identity and agency through Figured Worlds places the focus of analysis on the interaction of individual agency and identity with embodied Discourses (Gee, 2004) as teachers dynamically construct through language both the emotionally disturbed student and themselves within the cultural, legal, and political rules of an institution. Studying teacher language in this way provides an opportunity to examine interactional processes between internal identity development and external agency enactment within a school setting; providing a way to discern how a broader Discourse appears to mediate the ways teachers engage their identity and agency under and within the institutional structures that bound their roles.

I invoke the work of sociocultural theorists to acknowledge that an individual agent, or group of individual agents, does not act in discrete isolation or without context (Ortner, 2006). The act of engaging in collective activity is both an interpersonal and an intra-personal process (Ridgeway, 2006), and figured worlds draws out these processes by acknowledging the significance of “self-authoring” as it takes place within a culture (Holland et al., 1998, p. 173). This is significant to an inquiry that asks, “What is the role

of identity and agency in constructing disability within a particular context?”. Figured worlds offer a theoretical tool by which to examine how teachers, as subjective agents, internalize the culturally mediated prescriptions of their role. By examining the inter- and intra-personal interactions with the cultural activities of special education within the bounds of eligibility determination processes prescribed by special education law and policy within broader school reform efforts, I hope to illuminate the significance of the ways that language and cultural tools and artifacts not only construct the emotionally disturbed child, but simultaneously and iteratively construct the teacher, herself.

Sociocultural Theories of Identity Development

Guided by the theoretical work of interpretive anthropologists (e.g., Geertz, Bhaktin, Ortner) and sociocultural theorists (e.g., Vygotsky, Leontiev), this study focuses on the use and deployment of language by teachers. Importantly, I do not focus on school culture as an internal phenomena merely mediated by language (Goodenough, 1981), nor do I consider culture as only external and observable characteristics of a group of people (Quinn, 2005). Rather, I take the view that culture is comprised of an amalgam of activity of multiple actors, and that each actor, or agent, inter-and intra-personally interacts with material goals and resources to produce and engage in a collective, cultural activity (Holland et al., 1998; Ortner, 2006; Ridgeway, 2006) through an expressive and perceptual (linguistic and cognitive) interaction. This compels an examination not of the way that special education culture is prescriptive or causal to the actions of those who engage with it, nor a mere observation of these activities, but rather the ways in which the actors within the culture internally, externally, and iteratively use and produce linguistic cultural resources in working toward or engaging a material end (Swidler, 1986, 1998,

2001). This means that teachers, as local actors within special education, do not just receive the culture of the school or the culture of special education, either broadly or locally, but rather work to interpret the mediators of the culture— in this case, language— and iteratively produce and reproduce either new cultural artifacts, tools, and processes related to the activity to create new cultural resources or reify the old ones.

Sociocultural Perspectives on the Self

Sociocultural theorists posit that people, or the self, is socially situated (Cole, 1985; Lave, 1997; Rogoff, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). A socially situated self, then, is a subjective self (Ortner, 2006; Swidler, 1986), which is a departure from earlier theories of development that considered an individual to develop along a linear path, notably, toward individuation and industriousness (Holland et al., 1998; Kalynapur & Harry, 1999; Quinn, 2005). Sociocultural perspectives on the self, then, consider the self as “more than a fixed, internal entity that progresses on a linear path of development” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 27). Rather, the self interacts with culture through discourse that is “actively engaged with the environment” in a “historical, collectively defined, socially produced activity” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 39).

Accordingly, the self is inseparable from activity (Holland et al., 1998; Leontiev, 1975; Stetsekno & Arieivitch, 2004; Thorius, 2016). Activities, organized around working toward a material end or outcome, implicate an individual person in the iterative processes of constructing the organization within which the activity takes place (Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004). Because the process is iterative, this view considers “culturally and socially constructed discourses and practices of the self as living tools of the self and as artifacts or media that figure the self constitutively” (Holland et al., 1998,

p. 28). This involves a process by which the self internalizes the world, and then acts upon it. It is this acting upon an internalized world (and thus externalizing it) that produces the sociocultural process of developing the self. In other words, the self does not exist absent activity, and activity does not persist absent individuals. According to this view, the self is “an important agentic dimension within a profoundly social and relational view of human life and development” (Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2004, p. 476; Wertsch, 1991).

Figured Worlds

As sociocultural theories of the self consider individuals as historically and culturally situated and necessary to the processes of creating and engaging tools and artifacts within cultural activity, the process of internalization and externalization promotes the meaning-making and identity development of the person involved in the activity. Holland and associates (1998) term this process as the development of “figured worlds,” noting that these are the “socially produced, culturally constructed activities” (p. 41) within which the individual acts, thinks, and is (Holland et al., 1998; Thorius, 2016). As described by Thorius (2016) in her study of special educators’ professional identities, “people figure their identities through participating in activities and social relationships with others....such figures can be characterized both by how people cognitively make sense of who they are as individuals and procedurally perform these identities” (p. 1328). Thorius (2016) illustrates how the “innovative” use of tools and artifacts within a system can impact “how individuals make sense of themselves (i.e., cognitive identity production) and perform their new identities (i.e., procedural identity production)” (p. 1328).

The processes of special education encapsulate ways we have organized and made meaning of what it is to be disabled in school (McDermott & Raley, 2009). Accordingly, the figured world is the “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998). The process of identity development happens as teachers internalize the conceptualizations of themselves to which they have been exposed (Thorius, 2016).

Thus, identity development, or conceptualizing an identity within a figured world, happens situationally (Holland et al., 1998) as teachers shape their identity around a particular figured world: that of a teacher. As teachers internalize the narratives around teaching, and specifically special education, they develop “conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds” (Holland et al., p. 40). Holland and her colleagues (1998) argue that it is this developed sense of identity that permits a “modicum of agency” (p. 40) in controlling one’s behavior as it pertains to their identities within a situation. Significantly, this agency “takes shape in the space of authoring” that is formed through the internal interactions of an individual with the “networks of social production” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 210). This is significant to teachers because it acknowledges that special education, as it is organized around activities under the auspices of federal statute, still allows individuals to act as agentive persons (Ortner, 2006; Swidler, 1986). However, it also acknowledges that some of this agency involves, if not relies on, the internalization of a narrative that implies a cultural schema (Ridgeway, 2006) and script (Gutiérrez et al., 1995) for how and what actors within an organization should perform.

Acknowledging the importance of teachers' agency in performing these narratives, whether conscious or unconscious, draws out the implication that as teachers perform within their role, the construction of the "self" is considered its own practice within a social practice (Holland et al., 1998, p. 28). In consideration of the process of determining a student eligible for special education services under the ED label, the teacher, as an active agent in the process, is engaging in the process of determining a child's disability or abnormality (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010) while she also determines and writes herself. If the determination of a child as having a disability relies on the teacher's participation, and that participation relies on the teacher's agentic self within the process, then determining a child as having a disability develops as the teacher engages her identity and agency. Teachers are not only describing, naming, and categorizing students as ED by defining what it means to be "emotionally disturbed", they are engaging in a process that also defines themselves (Holland et al., 1998), perhaps as the knowing, professional decision-makers, as well as the arbiters of the prescribed rules of engagement for both teacher and student. Importantly, in order to acknowledge that a student is emotionally disturbed, teachers have to engage particular definitions of what it means for them to be a necessary authority to make that decision.

Critical Special Education and Disability Studies in Education

Much of the current literature surrounding students with emotional disturbances reifies the position that emotional disturbances are naturally occurring differences that need to be "humanely" (Kauffman et al., 1995, p. 546) treated through psychosocial and clinical means within schools (e.g., Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012; Farmer, 2013; Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Kauffman & Badar, 2013;

Kamphaus & DiStefano, 2013; Lan et al., 2015; Mattison, 2015; Mendenhall et al., 2013). Descriptions of emotional disturbances tend to focus on contrasting internalizing behaviors against externalizing behaviors, and although emotional disturbance is legally defined in federal statute (IDEA, 2004), trends within educational research on emotional disturbances focus on “excess problem behaviors and deficits in social skills” (Wiley et al., 2010, p. 451).

Constructing Abnormality. The significance of focusing on remediation for emotional disturbances is that it relies on the “casting of difference as abnormality” (Gelb, 2010, p. 74) which implicates an historical conceptualization of difference as an “evolutionary error or waste” (Gelb, 2010, p. 74). The focus on fixing has had critical implications for further examinations into disproportionality in special education because many forms of control happen under the guise of behavior management, with little attention to the ways in which behaviors are culturally enacted and interpreted. Historical conceptualizations of difference at the intersections of race and disability broadly rely on an assumption that difference should be randomly distributed along a bell curve, without any acknowledgment that the way we make sense of difference— through human interaction— is never, actually random and is instead always “affected by social and cultural factors” (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010, p. 3).

Relatedly, there is a long-standing debate between traditional special education theorists and critical special education theorists about the role special education plays in maintaining segregation between white and non-white students; about the maintenance function of special education in limiting opportunities to learn for mostly non-white students (Collins et al., 2016). The field of research that critically examines the ways in

which education functions to disadvantage disproportional numbers of students from minoritized identities terms this function under the broad name of “disproportionality.” Disproportionality refers to the ways in which students of Color and from working class families are more likely to receive special education services under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its provision of a free and appropriate education through the designation of a subjective disability label of learning disability or emotional disturbance (Connor & Ferri, 2005; Artiles et al., 2012). The significance of disproportionality is both how it procedurally happens, and through whom, as well the long-term outcomes of those students who experience their education in segregated settings (e.g., Bradley et al., 2003), linking special education directly to the school-to-prison pipeline (Annamma, et al., 2014; Togut, 2011).

Accordingly, the decision-making processes of deeming a student to have an emotional disturbance depends on an historical conceptualization of “abnormality” as a group of traits shared by those who are not normal (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Gelb, 2010) rooted in what are ultimately eugenicist dehumanizations of people who were thought to threaten the human potential for evolutionary progress (Gelb, 2010). Because abnormality has long been thought to be established in statistical deviation, behavioral abnormality signals a deviation in perhaps cognition, but more importantly, a deviation from the ability and propensity for rationale and rational behavior (Gelb, 2010). When researchers, then, discuss emotional disturbances through a focused lens on behavior and “social deficits,” what they are signaling is an irrationality that then gets disproportionately assigned to students of Color and from working class families. This renders both race and class as impetus for irrationality. It is not that disability is assigned

a cultural identity, it is that disability becomes proxy for culture, and the justification for remediation and control. Significant here is the dehumanizing process of reducing behavior to expressions of emotional rationality and irrationality; wherein white, middle class preferences for emotion and rationality are considered normal (Tobin, 1995), and deviations or offenses to the norm are pathologized as abnormal and in need of fixing. The process is dehumanizing because throughout it, students face the potential to lose their discursive power and ability to participate in the rhetoric that surrounds them not only from a lack of authority, but from having been established as both non-white, non-middle-class, and “irrational” (Price, 2009).

This has critical implications for students of Color who are over-represented in special education (Annamma et al., 2019; Connor, 2017; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hines et al., 2018; Losen & Orfield, 2002 as cited by Ferri, 2010; Parrish, 2002) and implicates deeper examinations into the symbolic processes by which teacher subjectivity becomes the fulcrum on which eligibility lies (Thorius et al., 2019). The stakes in which the need for critical, descriptive research into these processes, and their invocation of cultural schema, scripts, and activity are dire. As disability eligibility processes construct the “abnormal,” they also employ “discursive tool[s] for exercising white privilege and racism” (Blanchett, 2006, p. 24 as cited by Ferri, 2010).

Eligibility determination processes, then, are inextricable from examinations of the cultural schemas, narratives, and scripts involving racism. The potential for racism to take form in determining special education eligibility particularly as it pertains to students with emotional disturbances has exceptionally dangerous implications for students of

Color, away from equitable education and toward the criminal justice system (Annamma et al., 2014; Annamma et al., 2018; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Ferri, 2010).

Importantly, as research-based definitions of emotional disturbance continue to isolate the actions of the child as discrete, individualized functions of internalized need or abnormal thought visible in school (McDermott & Raley, 2009; Varenne & McDermott, 1998), the approach to education for students with suspected emotional disturbances focuses on treatment. In fact, some consider special education as the “largest treatment arm” of mental health initiatives (Forness, 2011; Kirkbride & Rohleder, 1978; Dikel et al., 1994).

Alternately, focusing on the figured worlds of teachers, and their role in the discursive processes of determining disability (e.g., McDermott & Raley, 2009; Rogers, 2002; Rogers & Mancini, 2010; Schuelka, 2018; Wortham, 2004) shifts the lens to the role of the teacher’s agentive self, including the ways they develop and perform identities as professional educators by enacting their subjective agencies (Ortner, 2006; Swidler, 1986). This puts the supposed abnormality and deviance of the child in at least one cultural and interactive context: that of the cultural activity of disability eligibility determination (Sullivan, 2011; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Thomas & Glenny, 2000). This examination simultaneously places the teacher in the activity, and provides an opportunity to examine the cultural tools and artifacts that mediate the teacher’s participation and performative authority within the collective, cultural activity of determining a child to be labeled as having the educational disability of emotional disturbance.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture as Practice

An anthropological approach to culture stresses “that culture is an abstract, organized, ideal system that need(s) to be distinguished from empirical behavior and custom” (Phillips, 2001, p. 4). Geertz (1975; 1976) suggests that culture is neither solely the outward expression of behavior (objectivist) nor internal processes (subjectivist), but rather an inquiry into the subjective importance or meanings of objects. This refers to “invisible assumptions that people share with others of their groups...(to) draw upon in forming expectations, reasoning, telling stories, and performing a plethora of other ordinary, everyday cognitive tasks” (Quinn, 2005, p. 3) and the “manifestations” of those invisible “assumptions and shared understandings that people produce” (Quinn, 2005, p. 4). This approach— a symbolic interactionist approach— to culture emphasizes the “creative role of human actors” (Phillips, 2001, p. 4).

Accordingly, from this perspective, culture does not prescribe action, but it does provide “cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action...(including) symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews” (Swidler, 1998, p. 172). From this consideration of culture, actors within a culture are not the objects upon which the culture acts (Ortner, 2006), but instead agentive actors that are able to use a cultural repertoire, including cultural schemas and shared meanings (Blumer 1969; Ortner, 2006; Ridgeway, 2006; Smith, 2004) in crafting strategies of action toward a specific end (Swidler, 1998). Swidler (1998) describes strategies of action as “a general way of organizing action that might allow one to reach several different life goals” (p. 176). In this way, this theory of culture favors neither the “social forces” of culture, nor the individuals have but instead a

“dynamic, powerful, and sometimes transformative relationship between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture, and history” (Ortner, 2006, p. 133).

Cultural-Discursive Productions

The Culture of Special Education

The “culture of special education” refers to the shared implicit and explicit rules and traditions that express the beliefs, values, and goals of a group of people” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). This view implicates not only the activity that constitutes special education culture, but also the beliefs, values, and goals that the actors within the culture bring with them. This view assumes that special education culture ‘reflects the views of the macroculture’ (p. 5), not only through local actors (Lamorey, 2002), but through the symbolic ritual of the process of deeming a child as “exceptional” (Dudley-Marling, 2010). In surfacing what codes are symbolically represented by these processes, we can look to language as reflective of the “collective schemas....embedded within (the) particular community” of special education within a school (Holley, 2011, p. 81).

Simultaneously, assuming that special education culture names the means and ends to reach a particular outcome oversimplifies the interaction between the individuals within the culture and the culture itself. A more apt consideration of the interaction between individuals and culture considers the ways in which individuals create and use cultural components (Swidler, 1998) such as “symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews” (Swidler, 1998, p. 172). Cultural components are the tools and artifacts that serve as mediators of special education activity; acknowledging that cultural components are neither exclusively created or necessitated by the culture, nor exclusively isolated products of individuals. Rather, cultural components, particularly lingual ones such as

“symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews (Alvasson, 1993; Swidler, 1998, p. 172) require “actors with in a culture who are skilled and are able to use cultural repertoires toward strategies of action” (Swidler, 1998, p. 176); in this case, within the cultural activity of determining eligibility for emotional disturbances. These linguistic cultural components, then, are both tools and artifacts that have been created by humans, but also used by humans to mediate the collective activity toward an end (Engeström, 1999). Accordingly, “culture...does not shape the ends” pursued by actors within an activity system, but does “provide the characteristic repertoire from which they build lines of action” (Swidler, 1998, p. 185).

Ortner (2006) explains the dynamic role of the individual and the culture by making visible the subjectivity of the person, or the actor, within a culture. Acknowledging the subjective “knowing” (p. 110) of an actor pulls forth the question of agency of a subject within a cultural activity. Beyond asking what is the role of a local agent in a cultural activity, we can ask how do tools and artifacts impact the “cultural performance” (Alvasson, 1993; Paganowski & Trujillo, 1983, p. 129) of the agent? Orton answers that “social actors, through their living, on-the-ground, variable practices, reproduce or transform— and usually some of each— the culture that made them” (Ortner, 2006, p. 129).

Cultural Tools and Artifacts of Special Education

Discourse, cultural schemas, and language. Applicable to the culture of special education, then, I consider the agency of the teacher as she participates in the proceedings of identifying a student as having an emotional disturbance. “Cultural schemas” as they pertain to difference and abnormality in schooling (Sewell, 1992) are reflected in the

special education laws and policies that govern special education. These include an assumed and “embedded belief” that disability is an “objective reality,” a “naturally occurring phenomena” (Dudley-Marling, 2010; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999, p. 6). An emphasis on the individualism and industriousness of a capitalist macro-culture positions disability as a deficit to be remediated toward a more desirable “normal,” and this emphasis is visible throughout research on students with disabilities, as well as the laws that stipulate the terms of their education (Dudley-Marling, 2010; Gallagher, 2010; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014; e.g., Kauffman & Badar, 2015). Significantly, and perhaps counterintuitively, acculturative processes to how these beliefs take bureaucratic and material form in schooling do not stunt the agency of a teacher as she participates in them, but rather depend on the intentional and agentive ways that teachers act on their cultural schema through their participation in the activities of schooling (Ortner, 2006). In fact, an important element of special education culture is her response to these “structures” (Giddens, 1992, p. 20), and the reproduction or transformation of these cultural beliefs.

Further nuancing the production and sustainability of a special education culture pertaining to students with emotional disturbances is the language used to delineate them. The name, itself, and eligibility criteria rely on the “typing” of children and on the school professional’s capability of deciphering social maladjustment from conduct disorder (Forness & Kavale, 2000; Sullivan & Sadah, 2014). The term requires an adherence to a psychiatric model of “mental disability” (Price, 2009), however generally applied and minimally understood by school actors (Forness & Kavale, 2000). The label “emotional disturbance” evokes symbolic images of a particular kind of disability that is culturally

and historically informed by “controlling images” (Collins, 2009; Hines-Datri & Carter Andrews, 2010, p. 13) and formula story (Loseke, 2007) that have drawn the monstrosity of irrationality (mental disability) as inhuman (Gelb, 2010). Scholars who are engaged in research around the education of students with ED assert that pervasive stigmatizations of shame, disgrace, dishonor, humiliation, and other markers of “social unacceptability” are “implied” by the “need for specialized services” (Farmer, 2013; Kamphaus & DiStefano, 2013; Kauffman & Badar, 2013, p. 17; Mattison, 2015).

Following a long academic lineage of critical special education researchers that interrogate the ways in which difference is devalued, assigned a place, and mapped onto and through race, class, and cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., Annamma, 2015; Annamma et al., 2013; Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Bal, 2008; Blanchett, 2006; Blanchett et al., 2009; Brantlinger, 1997; Brantlinger, 2006; Collins et al., 2016; Harry & Klingner, 2007, 2014; Kozleski & Thorius, 2014; Thorius, 2016; Thorius, 2019; Thorius & Graff, 2018; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016; Ware, 2005), I argue that the stigmatization is more likely attributable to the ways in which pervasive cultural narratives that animate student difference as monstrous (Gelb, 2010) co-constitutively construct and is constructed by teacher identity, and results in the need for specialized services. I contend that the cultural narratives are pervasive across traditional special education literature, and both fuel and rely on accountability measures that require a subdued, docile, and passive student. For example, Kauffman and his colleagues (2013) describe a student with an emotional disturbance:

Pat, a fifth-grade girl, is at or above grade level in all academic areas but has been highly oppositional and defiant of all teachers since kindergarten. Large for her age and strong, she pushes, hits, and threatens her peers, who are fearful of her and will not initiate any interaction with her. She

sometimes bangs her head on her desk or the floor, shouting, "I'm no good" or "I want to die." Pat was evaluated for special education only after terrorizing her classmates and a substitute teacher by tying the cord of a classroom window blind around her neck and jumping from a table, bringing the blinds crashing down with her in an apparent suicide attempt. (p. 543)

Embedded in this description are ideological representations of mental disability that focus on the abnormality of the student: her size ("large for her age and strong"), the "fearful"-ness of her classmates, and the action of tying a window blind cord around her neck and jumping from a table as an act of *terror*. The stigmatization here is not from the need for services. It is invoked by the language of the description, and reliant on cultural and historical ideological representations of normative expressions of an individual capacity for sanity, and the capability of performing expected, rational behavior. The lingual description of the disability as it happens in schools- the naming of the disability category- is "created from an intermingling, on one side, of certain systems of ideological knowledge (like psychology and medicine) and, on the other side, a need for an ideological, institutional order" (Thomas & Glenny, 2000, p. 286), all mediated through the teacher, and her interaction with the mediating tools and artifacts of special education.

This is rife with power implications for those actors—teachers—who use and appropriate (Levinson et al., 2009) processes of determining a student as having an emotional disturbance. This appropriation intimately involves the teacher's authority, agency, and ability to act as the ideological sane person against the ideological insane person. In order for a student to be deemed deviant, afflicted, impaired, and unable to adapt, there has to be those who are deemed well-adapted, well-adjusted, healthy, conforming, and able to make those decisions.

Cultural-Legal Practices of Special Education

Education professionals may become engaged in and engage special education culture within their professional roles. Building new schemas to participate in the cultural activities of special education cultural processes include the internalization of, and external acting upon, special education culture, or “enacting the structure” (Ridgeway, 2006, p. 6). This refers to the ways in which teachers build schemas through abstracting elements of a situation, such as “fundamental sentiments, identities, settings, and events” to “respond flexibly” to new “contingencies” (Ridgeway, 2006, p. 5). In addition to the everyday decisions teachers make in their professional roles, special education teachers also serve on multidisciplinary teams in the determination of special education eligibility for students who may have educational disabilities.

The process of eligibility for disability determination is outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) (McCarthy et al., 2014), which stipulates that public schools that receive federal funding, of any kind, must be in compliance with both the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Despite statutory requirements, however, the federal stipulations of IDEA are irregularly and inconsistently applied as the law is interpreted by “local education authorities” (Sullivan, 2017). Further complicating the practice of education policy as it applies to education is that after the law has been interpreted by education authorities, it is left to local actors to enact (Levinson et al., 2009; e.g., Thorius et al., 2014). This enactment is dependent on the appropriation by local actors, which is filtered through teachers’ own identities, agencies, and cultural schemas. They mediate the law and policy, internalize it, reify and create new aspects of it.

Legal Definitions of Emotional Disturbance. According to IDEA (2004), an Emotional Disturbance is defined as

A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers
- c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
- d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems

Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have emotional disturbances under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section. (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, 2004).

In considering the intersection at which aggressive behaviors and special education eligibility meets, the student with an emotional disturbance who has histories of aggressive behavior occupies a complicated legal space within schools. Though aggressive behaviors are not necessarily explicitly denoted as a requirement for special education eligibility under this disability category, the theoretical arguments surrounding the complex legal and social implications of special education services for students with emotional disturbances focus on aggressive behaviors and the interaction of those with histories of aggressive behaviors with other students, and teachers, within schools (e.g., Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012; Kauffman et al., 1995). Notably, defining “emotional disturbance” within the literature focuses almost exclusively on problem behaviors that interfere with relationships as they are understood by the people who are not suspected as having an emotional disturbance (in this case, teachers in schools that mediate and assign value to relationships with and between children) and academic outcomes. Importantly,

definitions of “emotional disturbance” tacitly and implicitly acknowledge, at least to some degree, the potential risk of those who *might* encounter the student with an emotional disturbance in school (Kauffman et al., 1995).

Emotional Disturbance or Emotional Behavior Disorder?

In a review of all of the issues of *Behavioral Disorders*, the research journal associated with the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (a subcommittee of the Council for Exceptional Children), the articles concerning the theoretical framing of emotional disturbance as it occurs in schools take a psycho-medical approach to this disability classification category, asserting that it is detectable and screenable (Lane et al., 2015), treatable (Dikel et al., 1994; Forness, 2011; Kauffman & Badar, 2013; Kirkbride & Rohleder, 1978), and a naturally occurring biological, psychological, and physiological phenomena (Kauffman & Bader, 2013; Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Mattison, 2015). Some authors further classify emotional disturbances as a psychopathology (Mattison, 2015), one that presents considerable danger to other students and teachers (Kauffman et al., 1995).

Importantly, scholars of emotional/behavioral disorders in schools have historically argued over the term “emotional disturbance” (ED), favoring “emotional/behavioral disorder” (Walker et al., 2014). Scholars argue that “ED,” coined by legislators in the development of IDEA, is confusing for practitioners, and limited in application: citing that less than 1% of eligible students receive special education under this label (Forness et al., 2012), which may be indicative of “three million students being denied services and supports” (Walker et al., 2014, p. 56) (presumably three million students who would be eligible for services under a less restrictive definition). Scholars

have argued for a more inclusive “EBD” label that relies on broader assessment, is less stigmatized, and more aptly addressed through positivist intervention method, and is also inclusive of a range of behavioral disorders that may lead to the social maladjustment otherwise prohibitive in IDEA’s ED definition (Walker et al., 2014). All maintain an eye on treatment, mediation, and collaborating with mental health to develop “behavioral and medical approaches to treating EBD” (Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Walker et al., 2014, p. 65)

Cultural Approaches to EBD

Rights-based approaches in scholarship that position accessing special education as a right, and as a presumed benefit, neglect the ways in which special education has been organizationally positioned as a response mechanism (Erevelles et al., 2019). Without regard for the ways in which disability and race have been discursively and materially co-constitutive (Annamma et al., 2014), this positioning enfolds being labeled as having an EBD as benefit, irrespective of the compounding effects of inequitable schooling that are related to students’ multiple identities and sociological markers, including race, gender, and class. Even with what have been characterized as more accurate, astute, and scientific assessment (Walker et al., 2014), children in elementary schools, especially children in urban elementary schools, remain the subject of the adults’ assessments. Even in contextual analyses, such as School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support Systems (SWPBIS) (e.g., Lewis et al., 2010), children remain the object and primary unit of analysis as they remain the object of improvement with regard to behavior (Artiles et al., 2012). This happens as teachers are positioned within competing accountability narratives and initiatives: initiatives that may promote equitable

learning environments (Kozleski & Thorius, 2014), but also implicate teachers, themselves, along a binary of competent vs. incompetent. Within initiatives such as SWPBIS, teachers have to prove themselves as competent, and do so by positioning a child's denial, or lack of access, to special education services as a failure of a broader system to provide a child their rights.

Disproportionality and Accountability Reform. Unfortunately, the benefits of support that may accompany eligibility for special education services are also often accompanied by stigmatization and segregation from the general education setting, peers, and curriculum (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Further, the benefits of special education are also more likely to hinge on other sociological privileges, such as race and class (Sleeter, 1986). As the disproportionate over- and under-representation of students with racially minoritized identities has come to the fore, so have accountability oversight measures that attend to the ways in which students of Color with disabilities have been suspended at higher rates than their peers, as well as the rates at which students of Color with disabilities are disproportionately over-represented in some disability categories (Thorius & Artiles, in press).

Accordingly, the technical administration of special education services for students with emotional disturbances in school occupies an interesting figurative space within the legal parameters of IDEA and technical application. The legal treatment of students with emotional disturbances is informed by both federal statute (IDEA, 2004, Free and Appropriate Education; IDEA, 2004 Stay-Put Provisions; 14th Amendment Due Process; 4th Amendment Search and Seizure; Section 1983 Civil Rights protections) and case law (*Valentino v. School District of Philadelphia*, 2004; *Jackson v. Indian Prairie*

School District, 2011). General assumptions around students with emotional disturbances founded on these legal parameters include: 1) they have a right to be educated by the public education system in which they reside, and 2) if that education obligation cannot be met, the public education system must find a way to provide it. Furthermore, in cases where school discipline policies were under question, as well as the school's obligation to protect students from those labeled as having emotional disturbances with histories of aggressive behavior, the burden of proof for showing that a school violated a state-created danger doctrine is quite high (*Jackson v. Indian Prairie School District*, 2011; Madden, 1998). In other words, in consideration of safety issues related to aggressive behaviors, schools have a legal obligation to ensure that students with emotional disturbances have access to a free and appropriate education (McCarthy et al., 2014).

Ensuring a free and appropriate education, under IDEA, has several implications for a) eligibility determination- the processes for determining a student has an educational disability through a multi-disciplinary team; b) establishing the Least Restrictive Environment; c) developing individualized learning and behavioral goals and objectives; and d) conducting the Individualized Education Plan meeting with parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators.

Technical Tools of Special Education, Teacher Identity and Agency, and Hyper-local Mediations. Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) are two tools with which special education teachers engage within the legal and policy process of determining a student to have an emotional disturbance (Zirkel, 2011). These tools take a on a variety of forms in local contexts. Generally, however, they rely on the subjectivity of the teacher, and are mediated, at

length, through discussion and documentation (Sullivan, 2017). Zirkel (2011) describes an FBA as “a systematic process of identifying the purpose and more specifically the functions of problem behaviors....(while) a BIP is a concrete plan of action for reducing the problem behaviors as dictated by the particular needs of the students who exhibit the behavior (p. 262). Significant to Zirkel’s description is that the legal requirements of adhering to special education service delivery as outlined by IDEA did not include FBAs and BIPs until the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations, when they were at first suggested, and then later required.

On one hand, this is an illustration of how artifacts may be produced through cultural processes: how humans develop tools and artifacts to effect the ways they participate in an activity system. On the other hand, the introduction of FBAs and BIPs implicates the role of the teacher in subjectively interpreting, describing, and assigning meaning to a child’s behavior in school, in the specific and nuanced context of determining special education eligibility. The subjective evaluation of students through screening instruments, observations, interviews, and other formal means of cataloguing behavioral “data” for the purpose of participating in eligibility determination meetings is the link between the cultural activity of determining eligibility, and teacher’s cultural schema.

The subjective responses in conducting an FBA, constructing a BIP, and then measuring the effectiveness relies on the teacher’s agency in participating in the cultural process of eligibility determination; she is not making these decisions isolated from the current cultural activity, nor the narratives to which she has been exposed, accepted, and rejected within her figured world. This positions FBAs and BIPs as cultural artifacts that

mediate the teacher's participation. Because FBAs and BIPs are discursively constructed by the multidisciplinary team, they act as the mediator between a child's behavior, a teacher's interpretation, and the cultural process of determining that child to be eligible for special education services under the label of emotional disturbance.

Moving forward, I use the term "emotional and behavioral disorder" and the abbreviation EBD to mean the same thing as "emotional disturbance." Even though I content that "EBD" and "emotional disturbance" serve the same functional ends, EBD draws the connection between emotions and behaviors, and points this inquiry toward problematizing the ways in which suspected emotional disturbances are tied to student behavior

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

Research Questions

1. What are the cultural resources education professionals use and (re)produce in defining EBD in school contexts (Mathews, 2005; Swidler, 1986; Swidler, 1998; Quinn, 2005)?
2. How do education professionals communicate with each other to define, assign (Broderick & Leonardo, 2016), and/or interpret what it means to be “dis/ordered,” “ab/normal,” or “emotionally un/stable” in schools?
3. Who is the subjective teacher (Holland et al., 1998) in special education culture, and what is the function of her/his agency in talking about, working with, and making decisions for the student that the teacher suspects as having an emotional disturbance in an elementary school setting?

Methodology

An Interpretivist Approach to Studying Teachers and Emotional Disturbances in School

Hugh Mehan (1986, 1992) has provided a foundation for investigating inequality in school through “ethnographic studies in the interpretive tradition” (Mehan, 1992, p. 3). Through ethnographic methods, including observations, interviews, and artifact analyses, researchers are able to study inequality schools by examining the microsociological interactions that comprise the “cultural sphere” (Mehan, 1992, p. 8) within the practice of schooling (e.g., McDermott & Gospodinoﬀ, 1979; Mehan, 1992; Michaels, 1981). Determining not only the boundaries and structures that constrain cultural activities within school, but the ways in which cultural schemas develop and are shared through

interactional devices, such as talk (e.g., Goffman, 1981; Keating & Egbert, 2004; Young, 2013), is essential to understanding how actors situated within a particular context construct and reproduce shared understandings of phenomena (Goodwin, 2000).

Resting on the foundation of sociological, interpretivist research in schools, and using ethnographic methods informed by both critical theory and ethnomethodological assumptions (Garfinkel, 1967), I research the ways in which teachers use their agency to cultivate and reproduce what it means to have an emotional disturbance in school through everyday, situated interactions in school. Through critical discourse analyses, I examine how that agency reflexively interacts with institutional and organizational structures to construct a student as having, or not having, an emotional disturbance. I engage participant structure analyses to understand the role of language between and among professionals as they sort and stratify students through “naturally occurring situations” in schools (Mehan, 1992, p. 47) such as conversation, participation in meetings, and clandestine conversations about administration. Having personal familiarity with special education services in the district in which the research takes place, as both professional and parent, I pay particular attention to key situations within situated activities (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Michaels, 1981) as informed by my depth of familiarity with the system.

Critical Ethnography

A critical ethnographic approach not only describes social structures, but examining the “dialectical relationship between the social structural constraints on human actors and the relative autonomy of human agency” (Anderson, 1989, p. 249). A critical approach also attends to power structures through an epistemological orientation that

does not take for granted the “relationship between power and thought and power and truth claims” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 10). Critical ethnography offers a method by which I can explore the relationship between moving parts of a cultural system, providing a broad method by which I am both a participant and observer (Behar, 1996). This is appropriate to the question of deciphering the cultural resources that are used and produced in special education eligibility determination processes. Invoking personal agency into a study of formal schooling processes compels an examination of the informal cultural rules, constraints, and boundaries of the school’s cultural practices, and teachers’ participation within them as specific kinds of actors. In consideration of emotional disturbances, I am looking for the ways that teachers understand, define, and assign value to a range of student behaviors and participation styles, including disruption, defiance, insubordination, inattention, and emotionally expressive behaviors by recommending students for special education services under the label “serious emotional disturbance.”

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology considers the degree to which members define for themselves importance, significance, means of assessment, and explanations worthy of analysis. This draws the complexity of indigenous and endogenous order and is important to understanding the meaning for utterances, euphemisms, idioms, and *entendre* in the context of everyday, social life within an organization. It also implicates my own understanding of how the school professionals with whom I interact design for themselves functional methods of social participation and order. This implicates, to some degree, a behaviorist understanding of the motivation of language: but this is significant to knowing how language builds a culture and relies on a culture of common

understanding and shared meanings of special education, adopted into practice by the speakers or not.

In accordance with the essential assertions of ethnomethodology, this study looks at the sense and order local actors develop within, under, and responsive to an established order by outside forces. Importantly, ethnomethodology also accounts for my own embodied experience, which extends beyond conversation or linguistic analyses, to implicate myself as a hearer within participant structures as they occur. This invokes my own agency and sense making, and is especially pertinent and necessary to analyses beyond observation, that could not elicit the same effect or response as watching recorded tapes of interaction. This research does not span a length of time to be considered ethnographic fieldwork. However, in the tradition of ethnomethodology, I use ethnographic methods to collect and organize data.

Reflexive Ethnography: Is Truth Dialogic?

I began this research trying to understand the ways in which a truth is negotiated through dialogue within a more complex system directly related to my own experiences in the classroom, and the ways that identity and power were negotiated in informal and formal dialogue between teachers and other actors in school. Reflecting on and analyzing the ways in which teachers (my former coworkers) discussed their students with disabilities (specifically with emotional and behavioral disabilities) with each other and with me has led me to consider the ways in which students became the object of teachers' discourse. This is significant because the discourse itself changed what symbolical representations the students were to the teachers (Young, 2016), and that representation had an impact on who that student was within the school. This had pragmatic

implications, such as determining an educational disability category within a school culture, as well as contextual implications for how that student existed in the school, and critical implications for the ways in which that student could or could not engage discursive and rhetorical power about his or her own condition in the school. The ways in which discourse maintains and reproduces power through both the public and private discourses of its actors—teachers, students, caregivers, and governance—is symbiotically dependent on the function and proliferation of identity and agency.

Accordingly, my own reflexivity in this research is important to situate: I am the parent of two children who have been recommended for special education services, both of whom receive services, one for behavior, as well as a former special education professional. Furthermore, prior to receiving behavioral support in school, my son was asked to leave his prior school due to social behaviors related to his disability: broadly described by school personnel as “disruptive,” “different,” and “special.” The use of the term “disruptive” leaves me, as a parent, to wonder to whom he is disruptive, which processes and activities he is disrupting, and also what interactions may be disruptive to him. It makes me angry to think about how he has been positioned as a singular object enacting disruption, without consideration for the ways in which his own agency is compromised when he is not considered a relational person who deserves the opportunity to exist in relationship with others. It makes me angry to think about who he and I have been made to be by an unforgiving system.

As a professional within special education and as a parent, though, I am implicated in each problematic conversation or assertion pertaining to the behavior of

students throughout this research because I, at one time, participated in similar conversations and made similarly problematic assertions as a teacher, and now, as a parent, I am left to navigate, and in some cases manipulate, these codes in the interest of my own child. Further, this is not interventionist research, even though sometime, as it was happening, I wished it was. In order to move forward with interventionist research in the future, I needed to understand how discourse is mobilized in speech as it naturally happens in school. I offer this to place myself in this study beyond researcher, and as an additional subject of the research and object of critique (e.g., Thorius, 2019).

Racial Positionality

I identify as Asian American, but I am read as white or non-white, and I rarely know how I will be interpreted until it happens. I know, though, that being read as white means I will be included in discourses that rely on whiteness, and in some cases, overt racism. The participants in this study not only make coded racist statements, they also make overtly racist statements in the context of their interviews, as well as in my observations of their interactions. It is my understanding of communication within whiteness that my racial ambiguity and own whiteness is what gave me access to the racist speech and discourses participants used to discuss students.

Analytic Autoethnography

To more wholly situate myself within this research, I begin with a preliminary analytic autoethnography of my time as a teacher of students with emotional disturbances from 2008-2012, and then as a behavior specialist from 2013-2015. Using a traditional, symbolic interactionist approach to ethnography and Leon Anderson's framework for analytical autoethnography (2006), I examined my own experiences, identity,

participation in, and resistance to constructions of madness in school throughout my four-year tenure as an "Intervention Specialist" for students with emotional disturbances in a Midwestern, suburban elementary school in an effort to examine the construction of madness as it existed in this school. I kept extensive journals from my time as a teacher, and used those to decipher and remember the language I used to discuss my students with an unknown (and absent) reader (of my private journal), as well as the conversations with my colleagues that I represented in the entries. This was an effort in understanding my own participation in the creation of the "broader social phenomena" (Anderson, 2006, p. 373) of defining and assigning emotional disturbances, particularly as the definition seemed to shift from child-to-child despite having been statutorily defined.

This preliminary analytic autoethnography surfaced my participation as a teacher within a school, classroom, and the processes designated by special education law and policy. I was embedded in the system, existing not apart from, but instead in relationship to and with my students, co-workers, and the law. Analytic autoethnography provided a framework through which I was able to examine, analyze, and theorize my individual participation and agency within a particular cultural-historical activity system, specifically in view of myself, my relevance to, and my participation in the activity around me (e.g., Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2006). The analysis revealed to me that even though I believed that I actually loved my students, I was persistently engaging in lingual gymnastics to represent students in such a way that would either stay or effect movement in the determination processes for eligibility and placement.

I offer this as I study teachers to acknowledge the ways in which I participated in the same systems, mediated by the same laws, toward similar ends: as well as to

demonstrate my engagement with the textual silences (Huckin, 2002) educational professionals engage to signal particular meanings without using exact words. Specifically, textual silences refer to words that are left out of conversations with the understanding that the receiver of a communication can presuppose what is meant by the communicator. In my case, I relied on linguistic cues, signals, and silences as I engaged law enforcement, spoke with doctors about medical and psychiatric diagnoses and placement options, communicated with parents, and described the use behavioral modification methods in classroom contexts. Importantly, I understand my use of language as a teacher as begotten of, but also supportive of, a particular power position. I engaged my professionalism through and by the use of “psychological language” (Mehan, 2000) to silence parents and my colleagues in what I argued was the interest of the child, but was also always in the interest of establishing institutional order by managing students’ behaviors through curriculum, least restrictive environment, and student restraint.

Paradoxically, my classroom was one of affection, and one of symbolic, material, and multidirectional violence. Gaining a deeper insight into the ways that teachers engage cultural agency into the enactment of their own agency is an act in analytical self-reflection— and reckoning with the system and my personal compliance within it— as well as a way to garner and gain critical insight into the cultural processes born of and by special education.

Data Collection

In considering Carpsecken’s (1996) approach to critical ethnography, I engage five methodological elements for data collection outlined by Carol Grbich (2013) (a)

collect data toward a thick description through observation, field notes, audio tape of behaviors and rituals, (b) engage a reconstructive analysis away from the field, (c) conduct preliminary data and thematic analyses, (d) collect dialogical data, and (e) position theories from data to larger theories pertaining to the topic (p. 172)

Collecting Data and Engaging a Reconstructive Analysis

I use the methods outlined by Grbich (2013) to conduct observations of and record interviews with several elementary teachers during the school year. I chose a research site identified by the district as historically having higher rates of referrals for students with emotional and behavioral disorders in order to increase the likelihood that I would be able to observe and hear the informal and naturally occurring activities that lead up to and/or intersect with eligibility determination. My inquiry pinpoints the teacher's role in the phenomenological categorizing of behavior as disordered and in need of special education services. These data will allow me to analyze a specific aspect and activity born of special education: how teachers use the resources of special education culture within their naturally occurring conversations to signal disability or disorder. Importantly, examining how actors in a local context use language to communicate their interpretation and appropriation of special education policies is a significant part of understanding how teachers use their agency to create a culture that defines disability, and mental disability more specifically, in ways that advance and subvert the spirit of the governing special education laws.

Collecting Dialogical Data

I observe and listen to teachers teach, participate in curriculum planning meetings, describe their jobs, and talk about students and other teachers in informal interactions, as

well as interview teachers about their jobs, roles, and experiences in teaching and addressing behaviors in their context. I follow Quinn's (2005) framework for encouraging the interview participant to lead so that I can later determine if there are semiotic codes that appear across interviews that signal particular cultural schemas, as well as examine the relationship between how the interviewee authors herself through her description of her relationship with colleagues, students, and special educational processes.

Research Site Selection

I chose the district in which I conducted this research based on my experience having worked for the district prior to beginning my doctorate. After seven years working as Intervention Specialist, which I always understood to mean "special education teacher," in three different districts across three different states, as well as for a literacy program in New York City, I applied for a Behavioral Specialist position with this district.

The position to which I applied, and for which I was hired in 2013, was part of a program developed to address a Civil Rights complaint for "Disproportionality," or the disproportionate determining of Black male students for special education services under the label emotional disturbance. The program was comprised of six teams: each team consisted of a Behavioral Specialist and a Social Worker, and each team was assigned to the elementary schools within a geographical boundary. My team served eleven elementary schools on the West Side of the city. My role on the team was as the Behavior Specialist. Schools would refer students to our program, and we would then conduct intake interviews with the principal, teacher, and families of the student. We completed

classroom observations and home visits, and then put “supports” in place for the student. I write “supports” in quotation marks because the interventions almost always exclusively addressed the student, and not the teacher or the school. In this way, we were supporting to one aim: the student’s adaptability to the teacher.

I came to this current study with the questions I had in that role, and the seven years as an Intervention Specialist leading up to it: I noticed that teachers were adept at using language that could trigger the beginning of special education services, and that this language was applied across settings, and addressed a vast array of student difference. Words like, “aggressive behavior,” “needs more support,” “unsafe,” and “is disruptive to other students,” were not merely descriptions: they were signals. These signals seemed, to me, to serve as signposts for the direction in which the teachers and school personnel wanted our interventions to take. And thus, interventions could be both supportive to a student, but also a box to check on the way to special education services and more restrictive environments for the student.

When I initially reached out to the director of Special Education services within this district, I was afraid that my inquiry sounded as though I was accusing or blaming the district about the outcome for processes I, as an outsider, did not understand. I wanted to stress to district leadership that the questions with which I am coming to the research are ones that are born of my intimate experience with the processes, in the insider/outsider role I played as a Behavior Specialist and my mediation between building-level personnel and district administrators.

The questions throughout this research are meant to make visible the lingual cues we use to signal disability, to other, and to make explicit the hidden rituals that occur

prior to eligibility determination. He met my inquiry with skepticism, but said that he saw value in answering the question to address the ongoing issue of Disproportionality in the district. He directed to me to the Director of Behavioral Services, who shared with me the three elementary schools with the highest rates of referrals for emotional disturbances. I reached out to the first school on the list, who declined to participate in the research. I reached out to the second school on my list, knowing that I had worked with the principal very briefly, and hoping he would be amenable to participating in the research. That principal met with me in July of 2019, and agreed to participate in this research.

Thus, this research takes place at an elementary school in a mid-size city in the Midwest. The district within which the school resides is implementing initiatives to address racial disproportionality in special education. The school was recommended by district-level special education administrators based on the school's capacity to host a researcher, assumed principal willingness to host a researcher, and referral patterns across the district.

Historical Context of the Research Site

In the early 20th Century, the land that comprises the neighborhood in which the school is located, Noble Gardens*, was owned by a wealthy family. From 1925-approximately 1945, around 300 homes were built on the land in a plotted grid pattern.

Compared to surrounding neighborhoods, the style of home built in the area is uniformly Cape Cod and noticeably modest. In the 1970s, Noble Gardens was comprised of all white, working class families: a legacy of regional real estate policies that openly guaranteed that the land in Noble Gardens would only be sold to white people. From 1970-2016, incomes have fallen from \$66,000 (in present-day value) to \$44,000. Average

income in the area remains well below state and national averages, at approximately \$44,000 per household, compared to \$54,000 and \$56,500 respectively. The median home value in the neighborhood is \$57, 212 compared to a national median home value of \$184, 700. The population of the area is aging compared to other regional areas, with over 30% of residents aged 45-64 years old. It is also important to note that 52% of residents rent their homes, and 47% of residents own their homes. This statistic is weighted by the fact that most of the older population of the neighborhood owns, and likely resides, in their home.

Census data indicates that in 2000, the area was still 97% white. However, in the 15 years between 2000 and 2016, the non-white population in the area increased by 25%. The neighborhood's Latino population surpasses average Latino households for the city in which Noble Gardens is located. In fact, Noble Gardens has become known as the fastest-rising Latino neighborhood within the city

The school that is situated in the neighborhood, Noble Gardens Elementary* serves 412 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. The school has experienced significant and swift demographic change over the last five years. With a 4% increase in Black students and 10% increase in "Hispanic" students (as reported by the district), there has also been a 12% decrease in white students. Current school demographics are: 47% white, 20.5% Black, 21.7% "Hispanic", and 10.4% multiracial. 80% of students are eligible for free lunch, 86% of students are English Language Learners, and 16% of students are eligible for Special Education services. Historically, the majority of students in the school have not passed either Mathematics or Language Arts state accountability

assessments, scoring 20 percentage points below state averages. The school went from a C+ to an F grade from the state between 2015-2018.

The school's demographics are somewhat reflective of the district's overall demographics. Districtwide, 20.7% of the students in the school district are white, 42% are Black, 31% are "Hispanic," 5% are multiracial, and 2% are Asian. 60% of students in the district are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 80% are English Language Learners, 17% are eligible for Special Education services. The district has maintained a "D Letter Grade" designation from the state since 2015.

Though the median household income for Noble Gardens is below the national median, it is above the median for the school district, which is \$33,700. Importantly, compared to the city in which the district is located, the average income for the district is about \$10,000 below the average for the city more broadly.

Noble Gardens Elementary School is a stately and historical brick building, boasting a wide front lawn and large windows across the face and rear of the building. A towering cupola crowns the center roof of the school, as impressive and elaborate masonry adorns the thresholds of east and west entrances on either side of the school. It could easily serve as the prototype for a generic, but idyllic, elementary school in any number of movies. It sits on a busy boulevard that serves as a main east-to-west artery of the city, overlooking the passing cars and the modest homes that surround it.

Participants

The primary participants of this research are three third grade teachers. The school counselor, speech language pathologist, instructional coach, and principal all also

participated in some way: through grade-level Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and informal conversations, mostly with me.

The third grade teachers will be referred to as T1, T2, and T3 throughout. All three teachers are white, and have 15, 32, and 27 years of teaching respectively. T2 and T3 have taught together for nearly fifteen years, changing schools several years ago as their former school was closed and surrendered to state takeover.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews. The intent of interviewing teachers pertaining to not only how teachers make decisions regarding students, but also how they conceptualize their job more broadly, is to surface the ways in which teachers draw on cultural resources of special education to contribute to the defining of emotional disturbance in educational settings. Through two, 60-90 minute, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with each participant, I collected data on the teachers' perceptions and interpretations of their participation in activities in special education determination processes as they pertain to EBD. I followed Quinn's (2005) framework for encouraging the interview participant to lead so that I could 1) later determine if there are codes that appear across interviews that signal particular cultural schemas, 2) interrogate the ways in which the teacher's personal narratives reflexively interact (Loseke, 2007) with cultural, institutional, and organizational narratives around sanity, rationality, and power, and 3) examine the relationship between how the violation of cultural models for school behavior, learning, and being in school becomes apparent through communication schemas pertaining to how teachers talk about difference, specifically as it relates to behavior and emotions in special education processes.

Observation. Observing participants in the school as they interact with each other within “key situations” (Michaels, 1981, p. 424) aimed at conveying particular needs pertaining to students, the ways in which teachers describe students, or in the midst of teachers’ interactions with students provides the opportunity to closely examine participation (Goodwin, 2000); that is, the ways in which teacher identity and agency (Holland et al., 1998) are socioculturally and sociolinguistically produced and reproduced and enacted as a cultural process or happening that has a direct impact on students.

I observed three third grade teachers as they interacted with students and with their colleagues, including in informal meetings and collegial conversations. My goal was to observe the discursive and rhetorical positionings that teachers use to “animate” (Goodwin, 1981, p. 178) students in conversational talk (Goffman, 1981). In these same observations, I was able to observe the classroom and teachers that directly work with children with EBD (or suspected of having EBD) to gain an understanding of the participant structures between students and teachers in the educational setting (Goodwin, 1981; Phillips, 1972). I interacted with the school sporadically from July, 2019 to March, 2020. From November, 2019- March, 2020, I finished ten observations, two-to-four hours each time, using an Observation Protocol to annotate key interactions (Appendix E). I also engaged in conversations with the school counselor, speech language pathologist, and one special education teacher, as well as observed two Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings about state test practice.

Reflexive Journal. Throughout data collection, I kept a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a means to track methodological decisions, as well as shifts in my own thinking, emotional influences, understanding, and to attend to the ways in which I drew

conclusions from data. I recorded myself talking after several observations and interviews in order to preserve my thoughts and emotions as near to the time of contact as possible. I listened to my reflections through my data analysis, noting my thoughts and feelings as the observations were occurring. My reflexive journal allowed me to process my own positionality, and the ways it shifted, throughout data collection.

Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis

In engaging critical discourse analysis to identify the cultural schemas that local actors use as they interpret and appropriate policy, I am looking for “the framework within which [teachers talk] about [emotions, behavior, and rationale]” (Quinn, 2005, p. 45) by looking for “metaphors, reasoning, and key words” to signal particular cultural cognitive structures (D’Andrade, 2005) and schemas as they are used in improvisational speech. My preliminary autoethnographical account of my own use of language toward students with emotional disturbances was laden with euphemism, particularly as it pertained to prescribing emotions to behavior that signal uncontrollability, irrationality, and illness.

It is my autoethnography of my experience and role as a special education teacher that has provided some guidance on the significance of formula stories and their linguistic representations within special education culture, and points me to key situations and utterances that are laden with meaning. My own experience in these contexts grants me some insight to a shared schema for policy interpretation, and perhaps a more nuanced understanding of particular codes and lingual signals within special education culture. As Naomi Quinn (2005) notes, “people’s talk on a subject is the best available

window into its cultural meaning for them” (p. 45). Teacher use of language to convey and construct meaning gets little attention by the literature on emotional disturbances in school, which instead favors more positivist, quantitative measures of how teachers rate behaviors, or measures that test the competence of teachers in addressing behaviors (e.g., Adera & Bullock, 2010; Center, 1993; Dunlap et al., 1993; George & George, 1995; Landrum et al., 2003; Swinson et al., 2003). There lies here a gap in understanding how teachers come to understand children with emotional disturbances, in relation to their behavior, as well as what they symbolically represent (Young, 2016) in the culture of special education.

Discourse Analysis of Narrative that Authors the Self

The way we describe and portray our own experiences becomes its own discourse, and provides the essential duty of objectifying the self (Bhaktin, 1986). Interview narratives, then, that are guided by the interviewee (asking “what story do you want to tell?”) has potential to give insight into the cultural schemas that inform the narrative, as well as the metaphor and symbols the person telling the narrative uses to make sense of the world (Quinn, 2005; Lopez-Bonilla, 2011).

In order to ascertain the ways in which depicting another reflects the self, I examine the ways that teachers narrate their experience: to others in conversational or even formal contexts, as well as through opportunities to describe their own narrative pertaining to their own experience. As “narratives of personal experience provide powerful insights into the figured worlds that render experience meaningful” (Lopez-Bonilla, 2011, p. 48), in this study into the cultural resources that inform and are

informed by teacher agency, I include how teachers choose to describe themselves, and understand that as an insight into how they have come to understand themselves.

As it pertains to teacher agency, in making visible the cultural resources teachers draw upon, as well as the language they use in the construction and enactment of a particular identity, critical discourse analysis that surfaces how teachers author themselves is a significant and important part of examining the teacher's role in the cultural activity of eligibility determination. Critical discourse analysis has the potential to highlight the subjectivity of the teacher, but hopefully also place a broader conception of teacher agency within context. Teachers are agentic actors that engage and enact a position of power in their role (Thorius & Maxcy, 2014), but they also occupy a space that, when taken to be solely powerful and oppressive, is antithetical to the critical examinations of teaching as a semi-profession, particularly in neoliberal contexts. This is not to say that teachers are not abusive (McKenzie, 2009) oppressive, or do not perpetuate oppressive structures within school, but it does call for a deeper examination as to what those structures are, and how do they inform "big-D Discourses" (Gee, 2011) and the "socially enacted identities" (Lopez-Bonilla, 2011, p. 50) that teachers engage to reflect them.

Participant Structure Analysis

Participant structure analyses attend to both the actions of the speaker, or the animator (Goffman, 1981), as well as the listener, and those actors who may not be present for the speaker, but are otherwise implicated by the speaker (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). By honing in on the ways in which educational professionals talk to teach other and engage with students who have or are suspected of having an EBD, I

hope to observe “key situations” within situated activities (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Michaels, 1981) between participants in order to “begin to investigate the interactive processes through which members of a social group come to view the world through a similar lens” (Goodwin, 2000, p. 178). Participant structure analyses provides a framework that accounts for not only the cognition of the speaker, but the complexities of the speaker’s experience with others named, referred to, or animated in their depictions (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). Importantly, focusing on interactions between professionals and interactions between students and professionals during segmented times in the course of the school or work day in order to closely examine through observation, recordings, transcriptions, and my own embodied experience provides the opportunity to examine communicative and cultural models (Mathews, 2005), schemas (Nishida, 2005), and cultural metadiscourses (Keating & Egbert, 2004) used by the actors within situated activities within the observed speech event.

Analysis of Cultural-Cognitive Structures in Interview Data

To analyze interview data, I spent 20.4 hours reviewing transcripts of each interview, six interviews in total. I listened to each interview while reviewing the text of the transcripts to first adjust any necessary orthographic changes. Next, I listened to the interview recordings while reviewing the transcript text to add final and non-final intonation markers (Gee, 1999), hesitation, self-corrections, and laughing into the transcript. Finally, I listened to the interview recordings while reviewing the transcripts to break the text into stanzas—groups of words around a similar topic (Gee, 2010). Transcription conventions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. <i>Transcription Conventions</i>	
Code	Meaning
//	Final Tone
/	Non-final tone
?	Question or pitch inflection
{LG}	Denotes laughing

Winnowing. I reviewed the transcripts of each interview, and excerpted the text into “simple propositions” (D’Andrade, 2005, p. 91). These propositions included words directly from the text, but pulled separate pieces of text around one topic into a singular proposition. The gist of the speech is meant to abstract meaning from lexical text into language that transmits an idea. Or ideas. Alongside the gist propositions, I counted nouns, verbs, and adjectives in an “object count” (D’Andrade, 2005, p. 92). By counting nouns, verbs, and adjectives, I was able to connect the abstracted idea of the gist proposition back to the text, and was able to see how many times particular objects were spoken of or about within the interview.

Next, based on the object count and gist propositions, I developed concept definitions as they were applied by the participant in the context of the interview. These definitions serve as the “basic building blocks” (D’Andrade, 2005, p. 92) of the shared cultural cognitive structure. In other words, the developed definitions make explicit what words and phrases mean within the culture in which they are used, as well as within the situated activities to which they are applied.

After I developed gist propositions for each interview, I aggregated the gist propositions across interviews into one document. I printed the propositions, and then cut each proposition into its own strip. I reviewed each proposition, and then grouped them based on subject. These groupings served as emergent themes across interviews. Then, I

was able to develop an outline of the cultural cognitive structures based on the emergent themes of the gist propositions.

Presuppositions. After grouping the gist propositions and developing the emergent themes, I studied each group of gist propositions to determine the presuppositions on which they rely. These presuppositions are the cultural cognitive structures that build the shared cognitive structures participants engage in their interviews. Presuppositions—structures and substructures—make explicit what has to be taken to be true in order to assume the discursive positions and assertions teachers take and make in their interviews. The structures that emerge from the gist propositions make up the shared cultural structure of what and who a teacher is, and simultaneously who her students are.

In this study, I do not assert the precise meaning of participants' speech by analyzing presuppositions within atomic clauses (e.g., Simons, 2013). Instead, I consider presuppositions as what has to be taken to be true for me to understand the meaning of the speaker's utterances within their interview. The presuppositions are triangulated in a number of ways: first, I break the speech into collections of utterances based on topic. Next, based on the relationship between the aggregated words and parts of speech (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) as they appear within topically grouped utterances, I derive cultural definitions of key words within the context of the interview and the addressed topic. Lastly, I connect the extracted speech of the cultural definitions back to the text by constructing broad gist propositions, using the text from the speech the participants, themselves, used.

Gist propositions serve as the broad, overarching meaning of a collection of utterances. Sub-structures of the broad gist propositions are comprised of related speech that has been thematically grouped across interviews. Sub-structures support the broad gist propositions. The next level of re-constructing the shared cognitive structures teachers use when communicating with each other is asserting the unspoken presuppositions that comprise the sub-structures and gist propositions. This section defines “presupposition” for the purpose of this study, and lays the important groundwork in defining how I came to understand what cultural narratives teachers relied on to communicate specific meanings in their own speech.

Enthymemes, Textual Silence, and Semantic Entailments. Because the nature of finding presuppositions relies on defining inferential or unspoken communication, deducing the presupposition from the speech not only relies on context and semantic structure and pragmatic meaning, it also invokes an examination of textual silence (Huckin, 2002). By studying what is not spoken directly, I study the relationship between one party’s understanding of the other party’s speech. These understandings are influenced by the presumptions of what each party assumes the other knows or takes to be true: and thus presuppositions are constructed by the omitted information that each party assumes the other already knows (Capone, 2017; Huckin, 2002). Specifically, presuppositions can be comprised of “enthymemes,” or “premises that are not explicitly stated” (Huckin, 2002, p. 350). Similarly, “semantic entailments” refer to the ways in which truth can be assumed between two propositions: in other words, what has to be true of a first statement to lead to the truth of a second, related statement. It is important to note that while semantic entailments may be necessary to follow the logic of a particular

argument, they are not necessary to ensure that a specific proposition is meant by the speaker (Capone, 2017).

Though there is debate among linguists on what has to be presupposed to understand a message or statement (e.g., Abott, 2000; Capone, 2017; Levinson, 2000; Stalnaker, 2008) what should be accommodated by the addressee (Stalnaker, 2008), what counts as a semantic entailment (Simons, 2013), and what is or can be known from speech (Capone 1998; 2000), this research takes the notion of conversational inferences (e.g., Simons, 2013) to consider what must be presupposed by both speaker and addressee to characterize the speech act or key event as being grounded in common knowledge. For the purpose of this study, I consider enthymemes and semantic entailments broadly to re-construct conversational inferences as presuppositions from the participants' speech. This reconstruction serves as the presuppositional text necessary to understand the participants' speech as reflective of broader cultural narratives around the presented themes, and through a disability studies and critical special education framework.

Importantly, in the participants' speech, enthymemes permit participants to communicate the "unspeakable," or to state information that might be taken as unprofessional, or might otherwise prompt the legal processes of special education identification; which, in this case, would be antithetical to the district's efforts in addressing disproportionality. Therefore, reconstructing the presuppositions from textual silence and through the addressee's inference is necessary to understand how the context of the participant impacts the meaning of the participant's speech. The presuppositions are supported by the connections between participant speech, as well as through the

reflexivity between the participants' personal narratives and broader narratives in field observations.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Research Questions

1. What are the cultural resources education professionals use and (re)produce in defining EBD in school contexts?
2. How do education professionals communicate with each other to define, assign and/or interpret what it means to be “dis/ordered,” “ab/normal,” or “emotionally un/stable” in schools? (R2)
3. Who is the subjective teacher in special education culture, and what is the function of her/his agency in talking about, working with, and making decisions for the student who the teacher suspects as having an emotional disturbance in an elementary school setting? (R3)

I organized my findings below in relation to each research question. Overall, I found three types of linguistic maneuvers drawn from cultural resources—namely, the language available to signal a disorder in schooling—that teachers drew from to define EBD and EBD children: violence, trauma, and urban families. Cultural resources are drawn from the language that is made available to participants, and from which participants can draw, through cultural script and formula story: cultural script as the available narrative around what it means to be a student in an urban elementary, and formula story as the narrative that provides participants with their role as teacher in an urban elementary. With regard to my second question, the educators in my study revealed two primary subtexts that they used to communicate about violence, trauma, and urban families: urban teaching is more difficult than non-urban teaching, and urban teachers need more help to teach their students. Lastly, teachers revealed a number of cognitive

and procedural ways in which they figured themselves as teachers in relation to students they suspect as having EBD, primarily as helper, as victim, and as unable to produce results due to students' home lives.

As a reminder, in order to develop these themes, I winnowed interview data into gist propositions, then grouped gist propositions according to subject. I compiled those gist propositions related to teacher identity, student descriptions, and student behavior into one document, and then listed the nouns, verbs, and adjectives that appeared five times or more in the gist propositions (see Appendix A). From these, "violent" was the most occurring adjective, and the most occurring nouns were "kids," "behavior," "students," "teachers," "trauma," "support," and "home," and the most occurring verbs were "care," "referring," and "suspend."

Violence, Trauma, and Urban Life and Families as Cultural Resources

In response to my first research question, I found three primary cultural resources from which participants drew to define what it means to be EBD and, relatedly, define children whom teachers believe to be or who had been found to have EBD. They are (a) violence, (b) trauma, and (c) urban life and families.

Across interviews, I located 85 statements that connected to this question, which I have arranged into 113 gist propositions, such as (a) a violent student throws things, destroys things, hits kids and teachers, kicks, and bites kids and teachers, (b) severe behaviors are related to trauma, (c) backgrounds of abuse, abandonment, and (d) kids don't have stability at home or parents who make school important.

Of these total 113 gist propositions, 24 related to violence, nine related to trauma, and 16 related to urban families. In what follows, I detail each of these resources and

illustrate how participants drew from these within their interviews, and how these resources inform how participants communicate, and how they understand themselves in relation to their students.

Violence: Aggressive and Unpredictable

Aggressive

Participants discussed the ways in which they felt their own safety had been threatened, as well as the positions they have had to take in the interest of other students' safety. Participants described aggressive behaviors in ways that focused on student action, and the risk posed to the student themselves or other students. As T1 described,

Um/ he would throw things/ and he would/ like/ destroy things/ and he would hit kids/ bite the- I've been bit// I was bitten by him/ I was kicked by him/ and I had to evacuate my room so many times that year just so people could come in here and get him to calm down/ and it was very hard to get him to calm down//

He would hurt himself// Like, he would bang his head against the wall/ or his desk or something—And throwing stuff at other people, chairs/ Like, these big, heavy chairs// He's throwing those as a first-grader// He stood on one of the—the green tables- And I'm like, "You can't be up there"/ and I just picked him up and put him down (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Similarly, T2 described aggressive behaviors,

I mean/ I had desks being thrown across the floor/ chairs thrown across the floor/

Anything that could get ahold of and to get kids out of the room before they could get hit/ (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

About a "difficult" student, T2 described,

Well/ last year/ I had a/ a difficult child who needed medication/ medication was not regulated yet/ and by afternoon he was pretty off and would start cussing and throwing things and jumping off of things/ and things of this sort most afternoons// And/ um/ so that became a daily thing of being called inappropriate names/ not mys- just myself with the

students and things of that sort so usually every afternoon last year was that way// (T2, interview, February 5, 2020)

About another student, T2 said,

But she's been suspended so many times already since she's been here and absent/ that even though she's been here a little over three weeks/ sh- day two she hit me and pulled my hair and did a lot of things in the classroom that- Yeah/ and then/ a few days after she had a five-day suspension/ came back and within a day or two/ while in music/ physically grabbed a kid by the hair and swung her and threw her into a chair/ (February 5, 2020)

Relatedly, on my way to my second observation, I watched a student, whom participants would later refer to as being “babied” for his behavior, arrive and walk into school:

On my way into my observation of T2’s classroom on November 13, 2019, I noticed that the principal was getting a student off the bus. It was 15 degrees outside, and the student had on short sleeves and no coat. It was clear to me that the student was the last one off the bus. The principal directed him to the main entrance, which was the direction I was heading, instead of the entry door where other students were going. I buzzed the door, and paused. I watched the principal follow the student, and heard him say “Did you take your meds today? Go...I’ll call your mom, you know I got her number right here.” He held up his cell phone.

The door had been unlocked, so I stayed at the door to hold it open for this student. I motioned my arm to him to say “Come on.” He ran toward me, through the open door, saying “thank you” as he did.

He entered the front office, and said to the school secretary, “(The principal) is already calling my mom. Fuck this school. Fuck this whole school.”

The secretary said to another student, “I need you out of here,” and shut the door behind him as he left. As she got up, the student moved behind her desk and started touching the computer mouse and keyboard. She said to the student, “Don’t play with my computer, please.” And then asked, “Why do you have holes in your backpack?”

“Because I’m a thug,” he answered.

I stood at the door, and she unlocked it without taking her eyes off the student and computer. I left (field notes, November 19, 2019).

I watched and felt the tension as the student walked into the building and began touching the administrative assistant’s desk. She was calm, but

there was tension in the air, and she assertively told the only other student in the room to get out.

That this student had been characterized as “babied” left me to understand that participants T1 and T2 thought he should be disciplined—punished— for his largely verbal behavior, not only for its impact, but for its potential escalation to physical behavior. T2 remarked that this student’s brother had been in her class the year prior, and that little had been done to discipline him, despite the degree to which he scared and intimidated her and the other students in her class (field notes, November 13, 2019; T2, interview, November 19, 2019). In on observation, T2 suggested that while she had not been abused in her prior personal relationships, working with that student had felt like abuse to her (field notes, November, 13, 2019).

Importantly and relevant to findings presented with regard to “Urban Life and Urban Families,” T2 also told me that this student’s father is “in a gang” and that this student has YouTube videos of himself rapping lyrics that are “totally inappropriate” for school (field notes, November 13, 2019).

Unpredictable

All participants discussed unpredictability as a marker of a difficult student. T1 characterized this unpredictability as “walking on egg shells” (T1, interview, November 19, 2019) and not knowing when a student will “blow” (T1, interview, November 19, 2019). Similarly, T3’s interview responses pertaining to unpredictability focused on not knowing the degree of impact of her own actions,

You notice like when you're in here that sometimes [student] is right on target// And then other times, the smallest thing// I got sometimes/ I can't even tell you what the small thing was// And he just goes// And he just loses it over the smallest little thing// That's hard// Because I sit there

thinking/ "Did I do something that set him off? Did-" So that's an unpredictable piece that you don't know// (T3, interview, February 5, 2020)

T2 referred to not knowing a student's "triggers." When recounting an instance of a student getting suspended, she said,

I just said that I didn't think it was fair for either o-/ because one/ she was new in here// I didn't know her clicks/ I didn't know her triggers/ she didn't know me and what my expectations were enough- To where the situation that arose was parsh- you know? I did have her coat// I was not going to give her her coat because she was going to try to walk out [inaudible 00:07:53] I wanted her to/ she was going to do what I said- To learn the expectations and it caused her to wig out// So she/ I don't know/ because I told him I didn't feel it was fair for her to have a five-day suspension that early without us really being in/ aware of triggers and knowing/ and I really felt she deserved another chance to get/ uh/ but/ but they kept her at the five day// (T2, February 5, 2020)

Interestingly, and importantly, when considering the unpredictability of students, the participants take their own actions to be normal, and the student's reactions to be unpredictable. Unpredictability relies on expected norms: in order for something to be unpredictable, it has to be unexpected, and in order for something to be expected, it has to be normed. Thus, a student's "unpredictability" relies on the teacher's expectations of how a student should act. For example, when T2 describes the student who had been suspended as deserving of another chance before suspension, she reflects, to some degree, on the impact of her own role in the student's behavior: T2 comments that she had taken her coat, and was not going to give it to the student in order to prevent the student from walking out. She further remarks that this student "was going to do what I said." There are two functions of T2's description of the scenario here: a) T2 reasserts her role as authoritarian, and b) T2 implies the normalcy of what she expected the student do based on a presumed relationship between child and adult, and student and teacher. Even though it seems that T2 implicates herself in the student's behavior, the student was

nonetheless suspended for five days for pulling hair and hitting: it is left to be presumed by the listener (me) that T2's request was reasonable, and the student's reaction unacceptable on its own, in some part based on the unpredictability of the behavior.

Trauma

The term "trauma" across interviews and gist propositions was directly related to the ways in which participants use and reproduce cultural scripts and formula stories of urban living, urban families, and urban schools, and trauma as a logical result of intersecting sociological factors, including race, working class wages, and under-resources and underserved neighborhoods. Importantly, participants underscore trauma the reason for, and impact of, students' "violent behavior" in school. Some gist propositions include (a) post-traumatic stress disorder may be at the root of violent behavior, (b) a lot of kids have had trauma in their past, and (c) many students with the most severe behavior have experienced trauma.

Importantly, the way participants talked about trauma referred to trauma as a cause of, and caused by, violent behavior:

Um/ just a lot of different backgrounds that clash/ and a lot of kids with experiences that you just wouldn't expect a normal eight/ nine/ ten year old to be bringing to school with them// Trauma/ backgrounds of abuse/ um/ abandonment/ trying to/ They wanna be accepted/ they wanna be just know that they're loved/ but at the same time their behaviors are severe/ act out or impulsive behaviors that they just can't seem to control towards/ not only towards me but towards their classmates/ And in one case/ a certain one in the room to himself {LG}// Who/ when he gets upset/ hits himself/ tries to choke himself/

I mean/ the past years/ maybe you had one kid who had these kinds of problems// Now you have a third of your classroom with these kinds of trauma issues/ background issues/ medical issues that caused them to act this way// (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

T2 also said,

I've just learned about some of mine/ certain things that I didn't know/ Um/ of my worst behaved students and things that they're going through at home each night and what they've gone through in the past years that I was not aware of/ Um/ to the--to the level that I've just learned I was/ So it makes sense of some/ But it makes it hard to make them understand that regardless of the past/ they've got to learn to behave appropriately to make it in society/ To--you know/ not everybody's going to be/ Know of their past and know what happened when they're out there doing things like they do in here that gets them in trouble// (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

In discussing a specific child, T1 said,

And/ to hear his life story/ it's pretty/ he had a lot going on// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Connected to this comment, T1 described this student's behavior,

Well/ and/ when/ to go back to that child: when he would melt down/ the only thing that could get him to calm down and, like, talk to you would be to talk about video games// I had to go, "Hey, tell me what level you're on in Fortnite// What are you doing right now?" And it was like Heck- Jekyll and Hyde// He would be like/ "Oh/ well/ I am on this level and I'm doing this right now//" Which/ you would see// And so/ I told every-/ I/ when he would start running I'd be/ and down the hall// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Urban Life and Families

Relatedly, all participants signaled that student violence was in some part related to, or caused by, a traumatic or unstable home life. Despite the ubiquity of trauma, the traumatic injuries ascribed to students in this school are connected to the ways in which this urban district is characterized as one that houses students from working class and low-income families, students with minoritized racial identities, and students from areas that have historically experienced economic disenfranchisement. Some of the gist propositions related to participant assumptions about students' home lives are (a) students who experience trauma at home come to the classroom with experiences they should not be having at their age; (b) severe behaviors are related to trauma, backgrounds of abuse,

abandonment; and (c) abuse and neglect from biological parents and now living with other people is traumatic for kids.

To illustrate the pervasiveness of the ways in which students in the district are culturally framed through deficit orientations, I asked each participant how others respond when they share the district in which they teach:

I couldn't tell you how many times that you would sit down and they would start talking to you just as friendly as could be// And then the second that the conversation would come around to/ where do you work? And say/ I would say I work in (district)// I could not tell you how many teachers would look at me and say/ "I feel so sorry for you"/Or they'd say/ "I'm sorry"// And every time I would have to come back with/ "Well, I'm not- I chose to be here"// And I would tell them that I feel like these kids need us more than you're needed in your schools- because these kids need a support system that they're not having// So I get that a lot and is always the same thing// "I'm so sorry"// But yeah/ teachers from other districts do not view (district) teachers favorably// (T3, interview, November, 19, 2019)

T1 sardonically quoted others' responses, saying,

"God bless you"// "I couldn't do that"// "I don't know how you do that"// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

I asked T1 if she thought that was more related to being a teacher or a reflection of her students,

I think a little bit of both// I think sometimes it's because I'm a teacher/ and then other times it's because of the district I work in// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

I asked what assumptions she thinks others make about students in the district,

Um, that majority of my students are violent/ or African-American/ or that they just don't care/ or, um, they're just so low that they're not at grade level// Um/ the attitudes// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

T1's use of the word "or" between describing students as "violent" or "African-American" conflates living in this district with living with and in trauma characterized by violence. T1 understands that the district's students are characterized as being violent or

African-American. The use of the word “or” is not a choice between two descriptors, but is instead, in this statement, an equation. This statement, in particular, is comprised of semantic entailments. A semantic entailment is a statement that makes an argument, but leaves an essential part of the argument unsaid, yet to be presumed as fact by the communicants. In this case, in order for a student who is African American to be considered violent because they are African American, the underlying argument is not only that African American students are inherently violent, but that they live in conditions (outside of school) that foster violence. The primary cultural resource that produces this understanding within this semantic entailment is the cultural script around urban students and violence: the argument relies on a narrative that maintains a position of teacher as non-violent, and urban students as violent. Because the elementary teaching corps is overwhelming comprised of white women, embedded within the cultural script of this narrative is not only the image of violent, African American students, but also the vulnerability of white, women teachers. This finding is also evident in examining how teachers communicate with each other in answer to my second research question.

Participants also directly defined student’s lives outside of school as traumatic. This happened through both concrete examples, and through participant assumption. For example, T1 describes her assumptions about students’ parents lack of participant as parents’ absence and apathy toward school,

Um/ when you try to call parents/ half the time--more than half the time, the parents don't answer// Their phone number's disconnected// Uh/ when you send things home/ majority of the time they don't come back signed or they don't come back at all// Um, so, it's--it's very hard/ Like, even parent-teacher conferences you have parents who don't sign up// You give them a time, they don't show up// Or sometimes parents don't pay attention and they just show up whenever they want to// I think this year I had 10 out of 16 parents show up// So, and I don't have any parents volunteering// It

would be awesome to have more parents in our building volunteering, running things, doing things after school like in the suburban schools// That's not--that doesn't happen here//” (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

I asked why she thought parents may not be involved. She explained,

I don't know/ because, you know, when it's your child you care about your child and you want your child to do good/ but at the same time some of these parents/ they don't care about education// That's not what their care is, I guess// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

T2 described parents not as absent, but instead mentioned abuse. When I asked what factors may contribute to a student having an emotional disability, she said, definitively,

Family life/ um/ family violence/ um/ trauma// A lot of these kids have had/ a lot of these kids don't/ don't have the stability at home// They don't have parents that are making school important// I have s- some that I don't think get proper nutrition// Not fed well/ yeah// Uh/ see/ I don't know much/ enough about that one to/ I'm trying to think// A lot/ a lot of mine/ I know this one's had trauma// This one had trauma// A lot of them have had trauma in their past with not being with their biological parents/ um/ abuse and neglect by their biological parents and now th- they're living with other people// (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

Furthermore, as noted in a previous section, when discussing two brothers, both of whom are characterized by T2 as aggressive, and also “babied,” she mentioned that their father is in a gang, and that the students want to be rappers (field notes, November 13, 2019). Both of these comments are laden with an enthymatic argument that relies on a cultural script of Black men in urban contexts as more likely to be engaged in criminal or dangerous activity. In order for the assumption that a father who is in a gang would be the root cause of a child’s aggressive behavior is a presumed criminality and exposure to traumatic circumstances with little regard for the child’s agency. In other words, by relying on a culture script of the criminality and aggression of Black men, T2 argued that students’ disruptive and aggressive behavior was vaguely related to their relationship with their father.

Conversely, when T3 encountered student distress that had been expressed by the student as directly related to their families, she acknowledged their emotion, but she did not engage enthymemes in her speech to suggest that their life outside of school was dysfunctional. For example, in my second observation of T3, she met with her students in a group for their morning meeting and scripted SEL lesson. As T3 continued the morning meeting, she noticed a student who was crying. She asked if he was okay, if he needed to talk, and if he wanted to go to the hallway. He nodded, wiped his eyes, and went to the hallway. T3 directed the rest of the students to begin another task, and told them she was going to go outside to see if the student waiting for her was okay. She then asked the class, "Does everyone understand that?" She came near where I was sitting and taking notes, and whispered, "He has a lot of problems with his dad. So that's probably why." T3 went to the hallway. When she returned, she frowned. She said to me, "I hate things like that." I asked if it was about the student's dad. She responded, "Yeah. He doesn't get to see him very often." I asked if he was able to see him over the break, and she said, "Yeah, but not for every long" (field notes, December 2, 2019). The student returned, and T3 proceeded with that day's activities.

In another instance when T3 encountered student distress, she was working one-on-one with a student on a reading comprehension assessment. As she worked with this student on a practice standardized assessment about George Washington Carver, she said to him, "See? You got it. You get yourself too worked up. They (the publishers of the state's standardized tests) don't expect you to do stuff you can't do. You get too frustrated." The student responded, "My parents...they yell at me if I'm not doing it right." T3 asked, "What do you mean?" The student then told a story about someone at

home getting mad at him for forgetting to wipe a dog's muddy paws before he walked across the kitchen. He began to cry. T3 asked if the story he told had happened that day. The student responded that it had happened a long time ago. T3 said, "Don't be so hard on yourself. You're smart. Do you want to go to the restroom and wipe your face off and get a drink?"

While the student went to the restroom, T3 came over to where I was sitting to grab some supplies. I asked how she was, and she responded, "I'm fine, after meltdown city over there." I commented, "Yeah, that got emotional really fast." She responded to me by saying, "See, this is what education is doing to kids." She showed me the practice standardized math assessment. Punctuating each word, she asked, "When. Will. We. Wake. Up?" (field notes, December 9, 2019). In this instance, T3 turned a lens onto what she broadly called "education," but what I interpret as "Education" with a capital "E" to signal the institution of public education and its accompanying regulations. In this way, the enthymatic argument T3 relies on has little, or nothing, to do with a student's family, and is instead focused on the stress placed on students by the practices of schooling.

In another instance, T3 recounted a concrete and specific example of a student experiencing trauma at home: the student's father had been shot with a gun as the student watched. The student found out he had died while she was at school. Remarking about the gravity and sadness of what had happened, T3 finished describing this instance with a broad statement about the impact of a student's home life on their ability to learn,

We've had a lot going on with violence with these kids right now// It's rough// And how do you/ how do you expect them to continue with school when life is a mess- at home? (T3, interview, February 5, 2020)

Although she characterizes students' lives as "a mess at home," she also, again, implicates the processes of schooling. The enthymatic argument underlying T3's

rhetorical approach to discussing school, or “Education,” seems related to the rigidity of school. This assertion is supported by additional findings, noted in the section “

Animating Urban Teaching in Talk: Violent Subtexts of “Urban Students”

Participants communicated about student behavior using words that rely on the listener’s interpretation within the context. As a reminder, I defined the assumptions a communicator depends on a receiver to understand as enthymemes, semantic entailments, and textual silence. These unstated assumptions form the building blocks of the shared cultural cognitive structures participants use to convey messages through speech. In relying on unstated assumptions about the violence, trauma, and urban life and families, participants were able to enfold their language into normed cultural interactions within “white civility,” which relies on the abstraction of material effect to symbolically represent the impact of broader action and ideas that in less offensive ways. In other words, white civility relies on unstated assumptions of the oppressed in order to justify oppressive action. By animating urban teaching as the effect of positioning against urban students, participants enfolded the language of special education to, civilly, suggest that students need help because they are urban, violent, and have experienced trauma, and that the need for special education is denied to both students and to themselves.

The unstated arguments participants assume others know in order to convey that a student is dis/ordered are (a) because of trauma, troubled home lives, and lack of resources, urban teaching is more difficult than non-urban teaching and (b) because of trauma, troubled home lives, and lack of resources, urban teachers need more support to teach their students (R2).

The participants of this study and the students in this school are bilaterally constructed against each other: so, when participants communicated about students, they also communicated about how they understand the ways in which they are positioned in their role. The participants of the study varied in their answers to interview questions, but there are common threads that run through the answers, positioning participants within the same circulating narratives about urban teaching, and, in some ways, dictating their role and that of their students. Gist propositions related to urban teaching, specifically, include (a) teachers are unable to support students to the degree they need to be supported because they're supposed to be producing, (b) teachers feel there is nothing they can do for kids who are impacted by kids with behaviors, (c) violent kids may be pulled out of the classroom, but are allowed to come back soon after, (d) teachers feel they can't do this or want to walk away because of some kids' behavior.

Life Outside of School: Urban Teaching is More Difficult

When asked about the impact of their job on their lives overall, T1 and T2 described an emotional, financial, and relational effect:

{LG} It has a major impact/ especially in your personal life// Because I'm always bringing things home// And I'm always bringing papers/ and doing reports/ and things like that// My little girl is five/ and she's like, "Mommy/ do you have any papers?" And she'll sit there and she'll stamp things for me/ and she's like/ "Ugh, when is this going to be over?" {LG} And my son/ he's 11 and he goes, "I am not going to be a teacher"// And my niece/ um, she came one year at the beginning of the year to help me set up my room// She goes, "Nope, never// Not going to do this// I didn't know teachers had to come in in the summer"//

It--it's rough// It really is// And then, like, um/ you think about doing clubs and things after school and you're like/ "No, I am so tired"// I used to be in Tri-Kappa/ but I was like/ "No, I can't do that anymore because I got my kids at home that need help with their homework/ I got to do my homework of grading papers--" (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Similarly, T2 said,

As I've recently learned/ I guess the stress of my job severely impacted my life because it cost me my marriage// It's from what/ at least what I've been told// I don't know if it's true or not// Um //That's/ that's he/ through our divorce he has told me many different things// Um/ but I was told I neglected my family because of my job when I first came to this building because of trying to get everything in that I had to do//

Um/ but/ um/ I've been told that impact/ that had something to do with it// I don't know// Like I said/ I think it may be the other ones cover up for the things he did wrong/ um/ to end it but I'm exhausted when I go home// I don't do much anymore because part of it's my age {LG}/ but I'm just the stress of a lot of the behaviors of the room// There's certain kids that just wear me down all day to by the time I go home/ a lot of nights I just/ I crash// I don't do much anymore/ you know? But that does impact a lot of part/ part of my life// (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

Teaching as Sacrifice

Both how participants characterized why they went into teaching and how they described the ways in which their job impacts their lives outside of school relied on two unspoken assumptions about urban teaching: a) teaching, broadly, is a helping profession, and b) teaching requires sacrifice and an emotional, mental, and physical commitment. Unspoken, yet evident, in the ways in which participants communicated their roles as teachers and the impact of those roles are underlying assumptions about urban teaching: including that inherent in urban teaching is more work, less resources, and that it requires more effort. T3 discussed the sacrifice teaching requires:

This is a extremely time consuming job// So I feel like/ I mean I have an easier time of it as far as/ because of how long I've been doing this// Plus I don't have young children// I don't know how young teachers do it with young kids at all// Because I know/ I feel like I talk about this a lot// I feel like when I pour everything into the job then my house or my home life goes down// So it's very hard to balance both// Because you honestly feel like you don't have a weekend because if you give yourself the weekend/ then you come in on Monday and you feel like you're totally behind// Um/ you feel like you don't have the evenings 'cause you go home/ you gotta grade papers/ you gotta get ready for lesson plans/ you've got- It just really never stops// And I think that you never totally turn it off in your brain// I mean/ I dream about kids/ I think about kids all night// You'll wake up thinking/ did this just happen? {LG}// (T3, interview, November 19, 2019)

Urban Teachers Need More Help: Urban Students and Special Education

When asked, explicitly, if and when a student should qualify for special education based on behavior, participants used psycho-medical speech coupled with their own position and capacity as teachers. The effect of co-constitution between characterizations of urban teaching and teachers' own identities are evident as participants described what it means to be disordered within their contexts by discussing when a student should be eligible for special education services. For example, T2 states,

But usually/ those who where medication doesn't work/ um/ how it affects/ not only them/ but the other kids in the classroom// If it's interfering with the rest of the kids/ you know/ that would be a time that they need to see if it's something else that's going on// If medication can't control/ they should not be/ I think they need to go back to either self-contained rooms/ or a special/ not necessarily a special school/ but/ I have one in here now that's not been in here enough to say much about/ but it's already b- been physical/ not with only me/ but with another student just in the last two weeks// So// Yeah/ and then/ a few days after she had a five-day suspension/ came back and within a day or two/ while in music/ physically grabbed a kid by the hair and swung her and threw her into a chair/ so then she got suspended for two more days/ but now she's at her limit because she's special ed// She already has an IEP// It was a lousy one// I guess th- they were trying get something set up for that because she/ now that she has hit her limit/ they have to decide what/ if it's her behaviors ca- disability that's causing it or if it's- (T2, interview, February 5, 2020)

Similarly, T1 stated,

And/ because he was considered a general ed student he did not receive services of special ed or EH or anything/ and then when we--when we tried to get him labeled/ taking all this documentation/ and they were like "No// " They-- it dragged on all year// This child had no services all year// It was an apparent cry for help// He needed help// The kids in the classroom were scared of him// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

In discussing the same student, T1 mentioned that he had switched schools and she had talked to his new teacher,

The teacher even emailed me and asked me/ "How did you do this?" I'm at my breaking point"/ and I go, "I was, too"// There were times when I looked and interviewed for different things to do because I was done// I

didn't have support/ and even to- it was towards the end of the year/ when our, um, other administration knew that he was leaving; so then, he finally was like "Forget the suspension thing// I'm just going to go ahead and suspend him left and right"// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Correspondingly, one of the school specialists revealed that teachers were asked to complete a “tracker” for students. The “tracker,” as part of the social-emotional learning curriculum (SEL), was intended to show which students were at risk of issues related to SEL in order to determine what kind of interventions a teacher might include in her classroom (field notes, January 30, 2020). Significantly, T1 ranked all of her students as very poorly behaved. According to this specialist, and commensurate with interviews and field observations, T1’s perception of her students is that they were “bad kids.” This is an important characterization because “bad kids” do not elicit the same kind of a sympathy a suffering child in need of support will. In this way, working the students whom T1 identified as “poorly behaved” and who maybe be characterized as inherently “bad,” are not congruent with the reasons why T1 went into teaching.

In T3’s interviews, she maintained a helping identity, but she took a different approach to talking about special education referrals than T1 and T2:

I think it takes a lot more steps now than it used to// 'Cause I've been teaching for a while/ and I think before,/ it was pretty quick to put them into those type classrooms// Um/ we do a lot of the kind of MTSS stuff,/ and all of that// I think we do a better job of putting kids on the behavior claims// And I know I'm just as guilty as a lot of teachers// It's like/ This is the last thing I wanna do is I need more- thing on my plate// Why am I gonna go put little stickers on these little charts for/ But I think a lot of these kids need that// (T3, interview, February 5, 2020)

Additionally, T3 contextualized her experiences as a teacher within the district, and alluded to how the district is treated by a broader society,

I had a student teacher one time/ and this may be more info than you wanna know/ but I had taken on a student teacher over at (school) before they closed it and she totally could not understand the demographics of

(district)// And I had a student who would come in and her clothes did not fit her well// And when she would sit/ her pants would come down and her top would come up// And I have the student teacher walk up to me one day and say to me/ “I am so sick of seeing that child's butt crack”// And I had a really hard time staying professional// But I looked at her and I said/ "Did it ever occur to you that she's sick of her butt crack showing?"// They don't buy their clothes/ they don't// They can't control this// And instead of feeling that way/ how about having some compassion for this little girl that her parents are doing the best they can do and she's doing the best she can do// And I just/ I had a real hard time working with her after that point because I couldn't get her to understand these are kids who have not chosen their lives// So I think that/ I think that's a lot of people's mentality about (district)// And I don't think they understand how hard it is for us// We don't have what they have// We don't have the resources/ all that they have// And that frustrates me because why shouldn't these kids be able to have an e-learning day? You know/ like all these other districts// So I wish somebody would help (district) a little bit// (T3, interview, November 19, 2019)

T3 finished her first interview by saying,

I just hope you can tell from this how much I want to be in (district) and even though it's an overwhelming job/ I wouldn't trade it// (T3, interview, November 19, 2019)

As such, the ways in which participants communicated that a student may be emotionally and behaviorally “dis/ordered” or in need of special education is comprised of how they understand themselves as teachers, their personal and professional capacity for their role as a teacher in an urban school, and the degree to which a student may be marked by a “chemical imbalance,” disrupting class, or aggressive behaviors. Participants drew on both symbolic representations of students that rely on broad characterizations of urban schools and urban students, including low resources, students who are “behind,” and students who need extra help, care, and attention, as well as material examples of student aggression, such as hair-pulling.

Importantly, both the symbolic and material descriptions of students work in tandem with a teacher’s identity and ability to perform in her role to produce a sense of

urgency around addressing the student's behavior. This symbolic interactionism positions the meaning of student behavior in participant communication with me as symbolically powerful- to signal not only identifying a potential educational disability, but to communicate the point at which a student so impacts a teacher's capacity to perform in her roles in and outside of school. As long as urban teachers understand themselves as not only helpers, but sacrificial, based on broader deficit-based narratives of urban teaching, then emotional and behavioral disabilities within the contexts of urban schools is bilaterally defined against a teacher's willingness and capacity. "Special education," then, does not describe a provided educational service- but is instead used to describe and define students as dis/ordered not only at the intersections of their own identities, but as positioned against that of their teachers.

The Subjective Teacher in Special Education: Valiant, Victimized, and Absolved

The subjective teacher in special education culture is iteratively constructed by how she sees herself and understands her role, by the effectiveness of her agency, and by the way she sees herself positioned in the space between her students assumed needs and her ability, or inability, to meet them. The procedural identity of the teacher within the figured world of disability and disordering in this urban elementary school relies on the teacher signaling a need for help. Because she has to signal this help, but in ways that do not implicate her own competence, effectiveness, or capability, she relies on presumed positionings of urban student and urban teacher to form her identity, and then to enact this identity not only in the classroom, but within the school culture and within her interactions with formal special education processes, special education and related service providers, and administrators. Through my analysis of the interview transcripts

and the processes I have detailed previously, I have found that there are three subjectivities by which the participants figure themselves to enact their identities as relative to signaling a disordered student as (a) helper; (b) victim in need of help; and (c) unable to produce in the face of student adversity.

Some gist propositions include (a) some children need help and being a teacher is one way to help them, (b) teaching can impact students' lives into the future, (c) teachers can comfort and encourage children, (d) the pressure to stay on a given schedule makes teaching less fun and natural, € teaching can be challenging, hard, overwhelming, and exhausting, but also rewarding (R3).

Wanting to Help: “I Really Wanted to be One of Those Teachers That Would Help Students”

A significant finding related to how teachers see themselves in relation to their students is how participants describe why they went into teaching. As participants discuss why they went into teaching, and how teaching impacts their lives outside of school, they write themselves into a narrative of teaching broadly, but also teaching in an urban school district. Two themes emerged from participants' answers to “Why did you go into teaching?” and “How does teaching impact your life outside of school?”: wanting to teach is an innate desire to help and participants consider teaching as having a negative impact on their lives outside of school.

As demonstrated by participants answers to both questions, teaching, and teaching in an urban district, is characterized by helping, and by hardship. Regardless of participants' personal commitments to the profession and to the district, the ways in which participants understand their position as teacher in this school is reflective of

cultural narratives around teaching as care work, and urban teaching as hazardous to teachers' physical, mental, and emotional health. Even though participants write themselves as helper and as sacrificial to the hardships of teaching into their own narratives, they are also positioned this way by a broader cultural and institutional system. From this position, participants interact with each other, administration, and special education professionals to determine when a student is or should be considered disabled in school.

T1 originally wanted to be a counselor after reading an autobiography about a child's traumatic experience with abuse, and hearing the author of the book speak during college:

I read the book/ "A Child Called It"/ and that series/ And I really liked it and I really wanted to be one of those teachers that would help students/ Like/ he had the problem and he actually came to (undergraduate institution) and talked and everything/ and I got his autograph/ and/ um/ that just really inspired me to be in the bat--corner for kids/(T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Both T2 and T3 described wanting to be a teacher in their own childhoods.

Just from early on that's just something I always wanted to do// Played school and neighborhood stuff like that// And it's just something/ I was determined to do I guess {LG} (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

Similarly, T3 described,

When I was a little girl/ I always played school// I was always the teacher// Um/ and then I had a fifth grade teacher that I had/ they redistricted our neighborhood when I was little// And so I was in fourth grade and found out I had to switch schools// I was devastated because I'm not good with change and I get to this new school/ I'm crushed/ terrified// And I had Ms// (name) and she was just the sweetest/ kindest// I mean she/ she could tell how terrified I was and she was right there comforting me// And then not only that/ but she pushed me so hard 'cause I was always a straight A student- but she knew I could be even more than that// And she got me into like gifted and talented programs and so it just turned into that I wanted to do that with kids// And I always just loved kids// (T3, interview, November 19, 2019)

Unable to Help: “It’s Disheartening. It’s Hard to Think About. It’s Like...I Can’t”

Problematically, generalizing students’ lived experiences and home lives as “traumatic,” and equating this presumption as cause for disruptive behavior and inability to learn, positions students as unable to meaningfully engage as agentive participants in school, while also rooting teachers’ agency in addressing student behavior in their victimization.

Describing a student as “having mental health issues,” (T1, interview, November 19, 2019) having experienced trauma, and as “violent” pathologizes and criminalizes students, while maintaining the teacher as psycho-medically healthy in this context, as well as the victim of the student’s “violence.” In other words, when a teacher describes a student as “violent,” she automatically implicates herself as victim. This victimization is essential to understand the ways in which teachers, broadly, construct their identity in relation to students they describe as having or suspect as having EBD, and is one way participants, specifically, write themselves into the formula story of violence and urban teaching. We see this in a statement T2 made about resenting coming to school because of a student whose language toward her—“fucking bitch”—she characterized as “abusive” (fieldnotes, November 13, 2019). She remarked that she was not able to respond like she “used to”: a vague description that left me to understand that disciplinary power had been stripped of her. Similarly, T1 remarked that the administration was limited in their responses to student behavior because of the “downtown area,” a phrase she used to denote the district-level administrative bodies and to vaguely refer to broad initiatives the district had implemented to reduce suspensions and expulsions (T1, interview, November 19, 2019). Taken together, these types of stories not only position

the teachers as the victim of students' behavior, and victims of administrative inaction, they leave the listener (me) to assume that the students' behavior is irrational, and that there is an assumed and prima facie case for exclusionary discipline. This formula story of victimized teachers allows participants to see themselves as actors within a script that relies on characterizing Black students from marginalized socioeconomic statuses as the object of traumatic home lives, and mentally and emotionally impaired.

Violence not only requires a recipient of the violent act, whether it is interpersonal, self, or collective violence, but in this case also requires a victim. Accordingly, formula stories around teachers-as-victim position teachers as unwittingly bearing the consequence for administrative action or inaction that limits their response to disruptive behavior: in this way, participants position themselves as both victim of student violence and victim of administrative inaction.

As T1 explained,

And every time it was where/ like/ some o- some other kids are/ um, not always with it and paying attention to what's going on around them// And they would be trapped/ and he would see them there and he would start going over to them/ and I'd have to be a bodyguard and get between// I would have to/ "Go// Go// Get out"//

All the times/ of rooms that are destroyed/ desks that are flipped over/ and I'm like/ "Oh yeah// I've done that/ been there"// And even/ like/ the thought of having another one of those types of students/ without having support and knowing what to do with that child/ it's--it's disheartening// It's hard to think about// It's like, "I can't"/ (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Regarding administration, each participant had varying expectations of the way in which building level administrators were involved in disciplinary decision-making. All participants discussed student behavior as disruptive to classroom learning, and all participants discussed place as an element of discipline and as subject to whether

administration was willing to “support” the teacher: the removal from general education and punishment of a student as the supportive element.

Notably, all three participants were hyper-aware and communicative of an approach to their own accountability that was focused on their own punishment, not that of students. Of the assistant principal, two different members of the school community (T2 and a specialist) remarked that she was apt to “write a teacher up” if they were off the prescribed schedule by even one or two minutes (T2, interview, November 19, 2019; field notes, January 30, 2020). Both building-level administrators were characterized as younger and less experienced than the third grade team, as well as “new school”; contrasted against T2’s own self-description of being “old school” (field notes, January 30, 2020). “New school” was, specifically, designated as being willing to take behavioral data over a given period of time, whereas the term “old school” seemed to imply not only a reluctance, but a refusal to consider taking behavioral data (field notes, January 30, 2020).

There was palpable tension between participants and the principal: throughout observations, participants referred to the principal as “he,” which I interpreted as “He” with a capital “E” due to the deference with which they generally referred to him. Participants rarely said either principal’s name, and when they did, they referred to them as “Mr. (last name)” (principal) and Ms. (last name) (assistant principal), and not by their first names. This was an act of positioning that reflected teacher’s limited agency within their relationship to the administrators: I observed little collegiality, and instead observed a distant deference and uneven power balance. In an anecdote, T2 described the principal as lacking a sense of humor after he had chided her for referring to a student as “sloth”

(field notes, November 13, 2019). She said that she was joking in the midst of a conversation with him and another teacher, and after she made the comment, he flatly rebuked her, saying “that is unprofessional” (field notes, November 13, 2019).

In the context of their interviews, all three participants suggested that they were building trust with the principal, and that the relationship seemed to be getting stronger. During my time there, the principal did defer to participants on their feelings around homework (that it was not heavily important), as well granted them permission and the opportunity to move away from scripted literacy curriculum and into a unit on the Boxcar children of their own design.

Administrative Support. Of the participants, T3 was the most flexibly amenable to working with administration on issues of discipline. She was notably less focused on discipline, and more focused on the object of the de-escalation. and what she thought would be best for the student for learning.

In regard to seeking support, T1 said,

They (administration) try to help you/ they will, um/ there's a system in place/ um/ coming to get students who are constantly disruptive in the classroom/ but at the same time their hands are tied as to what they can do because of the demands from the downtown area- (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

T2 described a student as being “babied” by administration,

They baby him (regarding student who had run away from school). (Another Student) was suspended yesterday- don't tell (principal) I told you that- (principal) won't want people to know he suspended her. I guess a cousin gave her a coat or something, at recess, she reached in the pocket, and there was a bag of marijuana. She did the right thing- she didn't tell anyone, she told a teacher right away. She did the right thing, and she got suspended. He (student who ran away) can throw chairs, call people a “bitch” and a “whore,” and he won't get suspended. She (T3) was actually told “let him think he has control.” (Assistant Principal), she gives him “structured choice” time. He doesn't want to go to lunch in the cafeteria,

he can go to lunch in her office if he wants to (field notes, November 26, 2019)

T3 framed administrative action differently than T1 and T2, describing administration as fairly supportive with regard to a particular student,

And/ and they're really good, too, about if he comes in rough like that/ they keep him down there in the office just to give him time to get himself under control/ when I think it's for him and it's for the other kids//

I see where some people think it's babying//And I'm not gonna lie/there's been days that I get really frustrated and I think/ "Oh my gosh//Why do they let him get away with all of this?" But then I think/ "What do I want him to do?" I mean/ I don't want him put out//

That's not gonna help him any way// Um/ I think he gets consequences// I do think/ But I think it's once again/ it's that thing of some people ... It used to be hard for me too/ that you thought/ "A kid should have to do this, this, this, and this just like every other kid has to do this, this, this, and this"// But I think there has to be difference for different situations// Um/ in my opinion/he's got a lot of emotional EH type behaviors//I don't think it would be good for him to be in a classroom like that//I think it's better for him to see/ Um/I don't know// I [inaudible 00:27:47] worried about EH classrooms breeding more emotional behaviors// (T3, interview, February 5, 2020)

Even though T3 makes an argument against removal for special education, she acknowledges special education, and "EH classrooms," specifically, as a mechanism for isolation and removal. Thus, the failure to provide special education services is positioned by T1 and T2 as not only failing to serve the child, but also failing to protect the teacher. This failure is couched in their relationship with both building-level administrators: as they build "trust," but are simultaneously subject to punitive action. Importantly, protecting a teacher and the processes of schooling is not a key element of IDEA, yet the positioning of students with EBD as mentally unwell and violent invokes special education as a protective mechanism of removal for teachers and students. In fact, characterizing students as violent acts as a necessary linguistic move to reflect an urgency

in protecting the teacher, and other students, from the danger posed by students who have been described as violent; and also to position the teacher with relation to administration as in need of support.

Teacher Support or Absolution?: Special Education, Trauma, and Separation

Trauma (having experienced or experiencing trauma) and being a student in an urban district, is then subject to discourse that shapes both students and teacher because “trauma” and “violence” are connected; and “violence” positions the teacher in need of support and students in need of “services.” The built-in mechanism in schools for teacher support and student “services” is special education. Because special education is positioned as an organizational response to general education specifically for students who are unable to participate in the processes of schooling based on a disability, special education is implicated in teachers’ speech as they discuss students’ inability to participate and their need for support.

In her interview, T2 explicitly describes a conflation of “official special education” and “trauma”: both descriptors characterized, and ending with, classroom disruption,

Well/ this year and last year/ well/ se-- last several years I've had all the special ed inclusion students/ um/ with a variety of different needs/ um/ not as many official special ed students as last year/ but a lot of students with a trauma/ um/ from home/ which then pours into the classroom experience/ that students shouldn't be having at their age/ at home or being brought into the classroom and causing disturbances there// (T2, interview, November 19, 2019)

Accordingly, T1 described a need for support when working with a disruptive student, emphasizing the difficulty in securing special education services for this student:

Um/ he would throw things/ and he would/ like/ destroy things/ and he would hit kids/ bite the- I've been bit// I was bitten by him/ I was kicked by him/ and I had to evacuate my room so many times that year just so

people could come in here and get him to calm down/ and it was very hard to get him to calm down// And/ because he was considered a general ed student he did not receive services of special ed or EH or anything/ and then when we--when we tried to get him labeled/ taking all this documentation/ and they were like "No"// They-- it dragged on all year// This child had no services all year// It was an apparent cry for help// He needed help// The kids in the classroom were scared of him// (T1, interview, November 19, 2019)

Thus, trauma-real or assumed- becomes an educational disability that is characterized by violence, both as the student has experienced it and as the student engages in it, and a presumed inability to learn, perform, or engage in schooling processes that, in many ways, absolves the teacher of accountability for that student. Importantly, violence is attributed to a students' experiences from outside of school. In this way, students who are already defined by attributes having to do with where they live, their race, and their socioeconomic status, become vulnerable to a disabling process that assumes not only are they deficient in school, but their home lives are lacking in stability and normalcy, and this is the cause for the deficiency.

Maintaining Teachers' Innocence as Cause for Student Removal.

In observations, T1 summoned help from the behavior support coordinator in the school, and though T2 did not, she did remark that "ISS" (in-school suspension) was not an option in the school the way it had been in previous years. In one of my observations, a student told T2 to "shut up," and T2 asked that the student be removed. From my field notes,

T2 walks over and gets a necklace out of his backpack, grabs it, tosses the backpack and says "go ahead and leave, at the end of the day, when you've earned it, you can get it back.

(To me): It was like this all day yesterday. His uncle has adopted him because of "issues" and he gives his uncle so much trouble. I try to be nice because I know if he goes home on bad colors, he gets beaten. He's been like this for two days, and I heard he moved homes again, maybe that's

why. They baby him in the office. He came in with a brand new coat and two days later it was ripped to shreds, but his uncle won't get him a new one and I understand why.

T2 gets papers together.

(To me): He's going somewhere else. My patience is too low. But you're my witness, all I asked him to do was put his necklace away.

(To class): As soon as I handle this situation, we're going to start reading. So finish your morning work.

Teacher comes in

"Hi do you need me?"

"He needs to go somewhere, and not to the office to be babied. To "(Other Teacher's) room." (field notes, December 17, 2019)

Through the term "You're my witness, all I asked him to do was put his necklace away,"

T2 relies on textual silence—that is the omission of full context—to position herself as innocent, her request as reasonable, and the student as the aggressor.

In T1's classroom, T1 instituted what was meant to be a positive behavior system, but instead functioned as a punitive layer of control within the classroom (field notes, December 10, 2019). In two observations, T1 called the behavior facilitator to remove a student (field notes, November 25, 2019), created behavior charts for her "top three hitters" (T1) (field notes, November 25, 2019), and created a reward ticket system to be used in addition to the schoolwide positive behavior support system, which instead functioned as a punishment as T1 threatened to take the tickets (field notes, December 10, 2019). Though T1 had implemented interventions, they were not effective or sustained throughout my time at the school.

When I was able to speak to school staff who were not classroom teachers (specialists and one district-level administrator), they shared with me that teachers are

generally unwilling to instigate formal special education processes because they are unwilling to collect the behavior data necessary to complete a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and to follow behavioral intervention plans. As one specialist said to me,

T2...has no referrals. She won't take data. If it's that bad, then I don't know. Maybe it's their mindset might be different. Might have to prove a lot more to get kids different, I don't want to say services or placements, but like to get students to what they need behaviorally. Whether that's a different placement, more interventions in place throughout the day. When at (more affluent school with predominantly white students), the parents get what they want because they're more advocates for their kids. For here, it's like the teachers have to be advocates for the kids. They think nothing is going to be done. They think it's a lot of work for nothing. But I'm like, why are we losing the focus of what's best for the kid? You should be advocating. If you think your student should be given breaks or this or that, why are we not missing the mark on that. Or taking suggestions even. It's them saying, like, it's not worth it. These kids are bad, so we're not going to do anything. Why would we take that data? Why would be put in referrals? I wouldn't say schoolwide. But I would say the complainers. The handful of major behavioral complainers. (field notes, January 30, 2020)

A district-level administrator shared with me that district-wide, when teachers did instigate special education procedures, and were asked their preferred action from the district, they typically chose one of two intensive, self-contained, behavior-focused classrooms, or homebound services.

Importantly, the ways in which participants describe students focuses on student deficit, characterizes students as disordered, and fails to implicate themselves in the processes of schooling beyond as subject to students' aggression and misbehavior. Characterizing student behavior as "need," as the school specialist does, places student behavior within the language of white civility, but still subjects students to special education processes that effect removal, and maintain the teacher and general education classroom as symbolically authoritarian. The district administrator with whom I spoke

also mentioned that she had developed a referral process that removed the opportunity for teacher to state desired outcome. Removing the option for teachers to suggest more restrictive placements—and classroom removal—will likely have the effect of preventing teachers from referring students to special education for behavior, but also from accessing needed student support.

Findings Summary: Teacher Identity and Students' EBD as Co-Constitutive Constructs

The function of teacher talk in defining behavior is that it draws formula stories of violence, trauma, and urban living in order to characterize students as in need of individualized help, and to characterize teachers as in need of student removal. In other words, teacher participants in this study are discursively victimized by students unaddressed trauma and corresponding behavior. Both disciplinary action and special education are named as mechanisms for addressing students' behavior.

Significantly, participants use “trauma” as a linguistic placeholder for EBD: this is important because the term “trauma” as participants use it is comprised of presuppositional substructures that conflate race and socioeconomic status for a traumatic home life. Similarly, EBD is conflated for aggressive and violent behavior, coupled with an ability to learn: which participants describe, but in a way that absolves them of a role in both student behavior and academic progress. As important is that this conflation maintains teacher identity and agency as both powerful as teacher, and also victimized as teacher who teaches urban children with trauma.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Rationale and Methods of the Study

Children who have been labeled as having, or are suspected as having, an emotional and behavioral disorder are essentialized in the language of special education research, and in broader cultural narratives, as violent, as victims of trauma, and as dangerous liabilities in schools. As a disability category, EBD remains ambiguous in research, policy, and practice: it is often subjectively defined, and mediated in schools through broad sweeping policies, insufficient pedagogies, and instructional trends, like trauma informed teaching. Because long term outcomes for children who have been labeled as having an EBD in schools remain abysmally low, and include adjudication, low employment, low earning, and sometimes that maintain harmful narratives about the assumed normalcy in schools, and presumed abnormality of childhood emotion and behavior.

In response to this ambiguity, I analyzed the language three teachers used to talk about student behavior, EBD, themselves, and their jobs. In doing so, I was able to determine the cultural cognitive structures- or generalized, common understandings- teachers rely on to communicate with each other about the value and meaning of, primarily, disruptive or aggressive student behavior in school.

In order to examine participant speech to determine the ways in which cultural cognitive structures and shared cultural schemas—or common understandings—are evident in interpersonal interactions, I winnowed interview data to look specifically at participant speech related to student behavior. This allowed me to see the common

cultural understandings participants had and assumed I had, in order to talk about the value and meaning of student behavior.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is its small size: the method of mapping cultural cognitive structures that D'Andrade (2005) outlined includes the generation of gist propositions and cultural definitions from a group of people that is larger than just one person. Further, the qualitative data from this study is not readily generalizable to teaching, broadly, as an applied science.

However, the methods I used in this study are expandable and can include collecting, as well as analyzing, data, in collaboration with participants. This data is also immediately applicable to developing professional learning for educational leaders and educators who may be interested in disrupting traditional notions of teaching as a unidirectional, unidimensional practice of unequal power, and instead understanding teaching as an ongoing, relational practice of identity, power, and solidarity in the interest of working toward building more just schooling systems that are worth accessing for all students.

Findings

Participants used three commonly understood cultural narratives around violence, trauma, and urban life and to assign meaning to student behavior and define EBD. These narratives implicated race and class as root causes of students' disruptive, and even maladaptive, behavior. Using discursive tools of textual silence, enthymeme, and semiotic entailment, participants were able to avoid making explicit statements that

named race and EBD as co-constitutive, while they maintained their identities as victims of student aggression and administrative inaction.

I organize the discussion around three major areas related to each of the three research questions (a) constructing the figured worlds of violence through cultural narratives of trauma, urban schools, and white teachers (b) participant identity in activating and subverting special education, and (c) rethinking teacher subjectivities as victims to consider “violence” as ecological.

Figured Worlds of Violence: Trauma, Urban Schools, and White Teachers

As a reminder, there were three types of cultural resources participants drew on (a) violence, (b) urban life and families, and (c) trauma.

Of these, violence was the most prominent in participant data. In this section, I reframe “violence” away from the product of trauma, aggression, and urban families, and instead discuss violence as a multidirectional interaction that relies on power imbalances: and that in the case of urban teaching, “white civility” (Coleman, 2006, p. 5) maintains a power imbalance between white teachers and broadly conceptualized “urban” students. Importantly, violence relies on how teachers’ understand themselves and thus figure violence in the context of urban teaching.

This finding reflects patterns of cultural narratives that largely assume urban students to be students of Color even in schools that are predominantly white such as the school in this study. Importantly, and lacking in special education literature related to EBD, is that students are constructed at intersections of race, ability, and class, in tandem with white, feminized teachers and the white civility that governs formal and informal social interaction within schools. White civility, defined as a method of interaction

governed by colonial influence that maintains violence as symbolic, upholds the privileges of whiteness and oppresses those who have been historically colonized and marginalized by institutional white supremacy (Coleman, 2006; Voronka, 2016).

In this way, the culture-specific definition of “violent students” in this study is a composite of circulating identities ascribed to students: urban, under-resourced, dysfunctional, and having experienced trauma, juxtaposed against the circulating identities of urban teacher: namely that of victim. This is reflective of depictions in popular culture of urban teachers as the victims of out-of-control students, whose language, dress, aggression, where they live, and the economic status of their families are implicitly understood to make them dangerous to school communities at large, and specifically teachers.

Thus, to enfold trauma into the definition of “violent students,” as participants did, serves as the catalyst for white civility. Characterizing students as in “need of support” due to trauma places student behavior within the language of white civility, but still subjects students to teachers’ own subjectivities as victimized.

Within the realm of white civility, discussing student aggression as in “need” of “support” maintains a characterization of urban students as the victims of traumatic home lives, the aggression as the effect of dysfunctional lives outside of school, and teacher as subject to that aggression and secondary victim of student trauma. The word “need” hides the process of disabling, and cloaks student removal as necessary, if not benevolent. Participants relied on and used cultural scripts of urban students’ aggression as a natural part of their urban lives in order to position themselves as the object of students’ violence, while also engaging a discursive process of disabling that is rooted in— and

discursively justified by— students’ trauma, and positioning students as disruptive and dangerous, and in need of support through removal.

Impacts

The claims participants made are not only evident in the culture at large, but are also undergirded by special education research. As participants spoke to me, they made assertions they could reliably trust I would understand pertaining to race, class, and disability, without stating these arguments explicitly. Participants’ speech about the intensity of student behavior that did not, specifically, mention special education, or implicate special education processes, were still understandable to me, and likely others, as signals that a child is inappropriate for a classroom because the public school system provides special education as a mechanism and response for when general education is “inappropriate for” (read: inaccessible to) a child.

Semantic Codes: From “Violent” to “Trauma”

I want to turn on a lens on special education research in order to frame participant language as not aberrant to, but instead drawn from, the ways in which “student aggression” is coded to signal race and class in special education research. The language in special education research (in *Behavioral Disorders* and *Beyond Behavior*) pertaining to students labeled as having an EBD has shifted in the last two decades, with a noticeable move from the word “violent” (e.g., Astor & Behre, 1997; Doorlag, 1986; Forstall & Rutherford, 2002; Gorman-Smith, 2017; Loeber et al., 2000; Kaplan & Cornell, 2005) in the late 1990s and early 2000s, toward “risk,” “mental health,” and “trauma” around 2015 (e.g., Cavanaugh, 2016; Houchins, et al., 2020; Gagnon & Swank, 2020; Kutash, et al., 2015; Mathur et al., 2017).

Importantly, even through these shifts in language, there is a paradigmatic commitment to the necessity of labeling students as having EBD, characterizing EBD as relative to presented danger or the propensity for violence, and students as in need of support. Within special education research are underlying and ample concerns for student safety: the safety of both students that have engaged in aggressive behaviors and those students who may be witness to or subject of these behaviors. Ultimately, maintaining EBD as an “undesirable...” yet “treatable condition” (Kauffman & Badar, 2014, p. 26) in research undergirds special education as treatment for the contexts that teachers understand as producing the environment for student aggressive behaviors to take form, namely in urban contexts. Even though neutrally describing “aggressive behaviors” may be functional in some practices and in some literature, when coded language around violent students is adopted by white teachers in urban schools, “trauma” and “violent” and “urban” become co-constructive markers of identity for students. This discursively positions special education as a savior mechanism for students in the form of “support,” the effect of which is then perceived as protecting teachers.

Implications

Research findings in applied sciences, such as education, can never be neutral because they are always working in tandem with identity and narrative, through the established cultural interactions in school. Importantly, findings are adopted into school cultures where the cultural work of narrative is already happening. In this way, when research addresses students’ aggressive behaviors, special education becomes invokable by teachers for those students they name or label as “violent.” Because “violent” is more likely to be ascribed to those without power, or those students who are members of non-

dominant racial and socioeconomic groups, violence, itself, is a social construction, and is remedied through and by special education.

In the case of aggressive behaviors in schools, we have to take a paradigmatic leap and consider that aggression is never a unidirectional imposition: and that in the case of students and teachers, the power differential always favors teachers. In this way it is important to understand that the aggression students may impose or engage in in schools does have an impact on teachers, and the students around them: but that the student who engages in this aggression is also subject to power dynamics that disadvantage them through relational and cultural interactions in schools.

Most problematically, progressive, critical special research that does not engage with instances of students' aggressive behavior except for in the abstract further maintains traditional research that positions children with histories of aggressive behavior as not only abnormal, but in need of treatment, and dangerous. A common refusal to acknowledge children with histories of aggressive behavior as anything other than harmful, traumatized, or mentally unwell delegates physical aggression to the realm of mental illness, and in the purview of special education. Because this takes place within established cultural, interactive norms, race, class, and teacher identity play a role in not only interpreting student behavior, but assigning value to it through words like "dangerous," "unsafe," and "unfair." Worth noting is that in her second interview, T3 joked that she thinks there may a syndrome called "B-R-A-T" syndrome. This brief quote is not a significant finding of the analyses of the data contained in this dissertation. But, it is worth considering that unpleasant, and even aggressive behavior, may not be

dysfunctional, may not be abnormal, and does not necessitate individualized, specialized student services.

We, as a research community, can acknowledge the material realities of aggressive behavior, but look at aggression, and even violence, as not only more statistically normal than abnormal, but as co-constructed, as relational, and as ecologically influenced and informed by processes of schooling. In this way, support for students who engage in aggressive behaviors or have histories of aggressive behavior is not isolated to the student, and is not remediated through long term removal. Instead, a paradigmatic commitment to reconstructing “violence” as an environmental and ecological construction provides a theoretical route to studying emotions and behavior in school as a relational, ecological negotiation within cultural interactions: the norms of which may be worth examining as dysfunctional, not individual students.

Participant Identity and Agency: Activating and Subverting Special Education

Participant agency in activating or subverting formal special education processes was shaped by their victimization by students, yet remained limited through their positioning as victim of administrative inaction. In describing the aggressive behavior of students, both T1 and T2 maintained that special education self-contained classrooms should be reserved for students for whom “medicine” did not work (T2, interview, February 5, 2020). T1 discussed, however, the limits of special education by explaining that students whose grades remained high may still have had “mental health problems” and have been “a hot mess” (T1, interview, November 19, 2019).

However, even outside of formal special education, T1 and T2 were both able to effect student removal without implicating themselves in special education processes that

might move toward long term student support, but would also implicate themselves in more formal processes of special education referral. In this way, resources of special education culture- including resource rooms- were activated and used, but were not implemented in ways that centered and focused on intervention, support, or student achievement in sustainable ways.

Participants signaled special education services but did not engage them because they felt it would “go nowhere” (fieldnotes, January 30, 2020): “going anywhere,” then, is defined as securing special education support, and even removal. In fact, according to the district level administrator I spoke with, most teachers’ stated preference once instigating special education referral processes was that the outcome of the referral be a more restrictive, off-site placement, including homebound services (fieldnotes, February 5, 2020). When teachers were uncertain that their referral would result in a swift placement, they avoided referring, and instead depended on their own interventions and unofficial, unrecorded removals through behavior adjustment coordinators or “reset rooms.” The spatial arrangement of the general education classroom positioned against resource rooms, reset rooms, and other alternative settings, maintained the primary goal of addressing disruptive behavior as removal, and thus the general education classroom as place of exclusion, even though it is considered the “Least Restrictive Environment.”

Implications

Reducing the number of suspensions, increasing procedural steps for referring to special education, and adding trauma-informed professional learning sessions maintain a collective focus on students as individuals engaging in behavior on their own volition, and do not turn a broadened lens on the relational and cultural aspects of schooling that

have created an environment of antagonism. Implicating teachers beyond their competency in screening for suspected trauma and implementing scripted curriculum is imperative for rethinking schools beyond places of surveillance, control, and exclusion; and for re-imagining classrooms as places of shared solidarity between teachers and students. Beyond mapping environments and examining functions of behavior through functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans, the relational processes of teaching should be made more visible and should be considered more closely as a unit of analysis for professional learning opportunities so that teachers are able to turn a lens on themselves, the language they use, and how they position themselves and are positioned against their students, rather than with them.

Policies Must Address and Disrupt White Civility

Thus, policies that are implemented in order to address the ways in which students of Color and from working class backgrounds are disproportionately identified as having an EBD or are subject to exclusionary discipline must also address the ways in which language is appropriated into the cultural interactions within schools. The findings of this study show that participants are able to navigate to the same ends (exclusion) using the language of white civility even without formally invoking special education. Making visible the ways in which coded language, particularly around “trauma” and “support,” cloaks exclusion by referring to a student’s “need” requires that the role of special education be organizationally established away from the “place” where students “go” for “help.” Participants in this study were able to name and label students as “abnormal” and request their removal from their classroom, and their abjection within it, without invoking formal special education referral processes, all the while positioning themselves as the

victim of students and victim of administrative inaction in moving students out of their classrooms.

Teachers are not victims of their students, even in cases where they are subject to disruption, and even aggression. But, as long as special education is maintained as the organizational arm that is positioned to “help” students by “helping” teachers get students the support they need, then teachers’ identities will remain positioned as in need of saving.

Instead, special education might be positioned as pedagogical and instructional commitments to considering the cultural, relational, and ecological aspects of teaching and learning. This takes into account sociocultural learning theories and pedagogies that implicate teacher and student identities not as responsive to each other (like in culturally-responsive pedagogies), and instead as co-constitutive of each other. This allows teachers not to be positioned as victims, but to consider the power differentials between themselves and their students, as well as both their own and their students’ agency in the space that they share.

Rethinking Teacher Subjectivities: “Violent” as Multi-Faceted, Multi-Directional, and Ecological

Participants saw themselves as a recipient of and counterpart to student violence, but did not see themselves as part of it. The figured world of urban elementary teaching in this study included a presumed adjacency to violence, whether through students directly or through the lives participants assume their students live outside of school. Furthermore, naming “violent” students was as reflective of power structures as it was descriptive of behavior: how violence was named, and by whom, implicated those

without power as dangerous while maintaining the power of those who had it. In this way, the urban youth in this school were already more likely to be named as violent than their teachers.

Rather than thinking of “violence” as the action an individualized student engages due to their own trauma from living in an urban space, we can think of violence as multi-faceted, multi directional, and ecological. An ecology of violence maintains aggression as a bouncing “free radical” (Michael Kieser, personal communication, February 5, 2021): between and among participants, without a grounding or neutralization. In this way, violence occurs in general education as a multi-directional exchange of identity, power, and punishment and is as likely to be enacted by teachers as it is students. Though student aggression is attributed to trauma that occurs outside of school, characterizing students as having experienced traumatic home lives is an effect of how identities of both savior and victim are materialized, and enacted upon, in the classroom using the language of special education, relying on students’ special “needs.” This has material impacts on students’ long term education and outcomes.

From the Outlier: T3, Authenticity, and Solidarity

Among participants, T3 was the most careful with her language when talking about students, families, and the hardships of teaching. T3 went into teaching to help students, but she was reticent to make negative judgements about students, even when students shared concrete examples of extreme hardship, sadness, or frustration with her. In talking about one particular student, she said the job gets overwhelming. In this instance, she was talking about the student I described in the previous chapter, whom I watched walk into the school yelling an obscenity. I saw this student walking the halls

with the assistant principal fairly often over my three months of observations, and T2 referred to him as being “babied” by the assistant principal. T3 said she used to wonder why he was not disciplined, but that perspective morphed, and she questioned the utility of sending students home for behaviors that are not immediately unsafe (T3, interview, February 5, 2020). She awarded this student a schoolwide “Star Student” award: in her words, she did not give it to him, he earned it for being one of the “kindest and most helpful kids” in her class (T3, interview, February 5, 2020). Interestingly, in a depiction of mean spiritedness from other teachers, she recounted to me that she overheard other teachers saying that the “Star Student” award should only be reserved for students who actually deserve it. T3 said she opted to ignore the comment, and was confident in her nomination.

The biggest difference between T3 and the other participants that I can decipher is that T3’s identity as an urban teacher was one of pride, and also solidarity. Even though she phrased that her commitment to the district was because she felt that students in the district needed more help than students in other districts, she pointed not to the deficits of students’ families, but to district resources: finishing with, “I wish someone would help (district) out a little” (T3, interview, February 5, 2020). She saw herself as a part of the district community, not separate from it, and not a victim of it.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Technical approaches to changing students’ behavior that focus primarily on finding the function of behavior and addressing it through behavioral conditioning will remain insufficient in changing the long-term outcomes for students, both labeled and not, suspected as having EBD. Bureaucratic measures to reduce data points, such as

reducing suspension, expulsion, and referrals for more restrictive learning environments, may result in the unofficial and unrecorded removal of students from the classroom, as it did in this study, which subverts organizational efforts to increase access to the curriculum, and it isolates a child from the cultural interactions of identity and power in which they are constantly engaged and names the child as a problem.

In early childhood and early elementary school settings, technical approaches to child behavior should be considered developmentally, but not using psycho-medical development approaches that rely on linear milestones of development that move from reliance and dependence to independence. Instead, developing professional learning that use feminist theories of development and the work of Disabled activists (e.g., Mingus, 2018; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) to consider the development that happens through and by relationship and dependence can make the relational ecologies of schools more visible to the teachers within them. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) theorists (e.g., Jordan, 2017) offer six theoretical tenets on which pedagogical theorists, professional learning designers, school leaders, and policymakers can consider in developing tools and resources for teachers to consider in their classrooms (a) growing through relationship is lifelong, (b) mutuality, not separation, marks maturity, (c) diverse relational networks encourage psychological growth, (d) mutual empathy and empowerment are essential for growth between individuals and community, (e) opportunities to contribute to relationships foster growth, (f) development is not marked by individuation, separation, and independence, but instead by relational competence (Comstock et al., 2008). As the basis for relational pedagogies, RCT provides teachers a theoretical grounding in looking at relational ecologies within their classrooms, and in considering their own relationships

with their students, students relationships with each other, and how students' agency is either fostered—or diminished—through the relationships they have in their classrooms.

In professional learning related to EBD, this implicates considering disability away from an individualized, psycho-medical condition, and instead as relationally defined and constructed. This is essential in considering a child's experience of a mental disability not as a static state of being, but instead as existing in concert with their environment, their peers, their teachers, and the processes of disablement they are subject to in schools (Coomer et al., in press; Dalkilic & Vaadeboncoeur, 2016). Importantly, this shifts the goals of professional learning away from mastering technical competencies and skills in behavior management, and instead entangles teachers' identities as urban elementary teachers with a political ethic of care that encourages bi-directional, effective, and mutual expressions of emotion within relationship that promotes both teachers' and students' agencies (Coomer et al., in press; Noddings, 2012).

Implications for Teacher Preparation

In higher education settings that are preparing future teachers, there must be a move away from pedantic pedagogies that over-emphasize, and reward, the mastery of technical method. Instead, pre-service teachers' exposure to special education should position special education as not only method in academic remediation and skill-building, but also pedagogical commitments that consider the cultural, relational nature of disability (Reindal, 2008), as well as the value of relationship and agency within interpersonal relationships. Importantly, special education is often positioned as the responsive service for when a student does not reach developmental milestones or is considered developmentally behind their peers. Rather than positioning special education

as the responsive arm for when a student is deemed abnormal, special education can be organizationally positioned as learning mechanism that supports and develops teachers' knowledge, competencies, and relational repertoires for working with students.

Furthermore, pre-service teachers need to be oriented to race and ability in such a way that develops their professional agency to disrupt the surveillance and disciplining that is often imposed upon students with disabilities in urban schools (Annamma, 2014). Further, teacher education programming should privilege communal approaches to education, rather than individualistic and competitive approaches that serve to isolate and individualize students through assigned values of smartness and belonging (Boveda et al., 2019; Erevelles et al., 2019). Research on “Families as Faculty” (Santamaría Graff et al., 2020) suggests that approaches that frame and center the expertise of families within teacher preparation programs work to redistribute power between teachers and families more equitably, and encourage collaboration between families and teachers in ways that may dispel some of the harmful assumptions participants in this study made.

Additionally, authentic collaboration between pre-service teachers and families—as in Santamaría Graff’s Families as Faculty research (2020)— may provide an opportunity to examine how future teachers may be oriented to families not as the cause of trauma, but as collaborators in fostering healthy *school* environments for children.

And lastly, as generational cohorts shift understandings of dominant, normative rules, youth resistance and counter-cultures to oppressive structures will continue to evolve. As a cohort of “digital natives,” and largely the children of Generation X, the upcoming Generation Z’s characteristics so far point to pragmatism, and a leaning toward transformation, as well as “collective security” over individual rights (Carter, 2018, p. 2;

Strauss & Howe, 1990). It is my cautious hope that as university schools of education and education departments in teaching colleges prepare for new generational cohorts of students, we, as researchers, scholars, and teacher educators, can consider disability as a “meta-curriculum” (Erevelles et al., 2019) to continuously examine how we employ critical theory to teach future educators to understand themselves within the cultural processes of schooling (Coomer et al., under review).

Closing the Story: The Politics of Children’s Emotions

The participants in this study were “volun-told” to participate. Although they were willing, informed, and generous in sharing their classrooms and their stories with me, the way in which they entered into this research was indicative of their positioning in the school. Under the scrutiny of building level administrators (e.g., the principal telling T2 she was unprofessional), pressured to follow prescribed schedules for fear of punishment (the assistant principal’s reputation for being quick to write a teacher up for being off schedule), and amidst district-level efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline, such as suspension, and the over-referring of Black boys to special education for EBD, participants used language to reflect the danger students presented, and their own vulnerability to that danger. Participants did this to stress that student removal was a necessary tool that was being denied to them. Thus, even though participants seemed to lose agency, they reinscribed it through the ways in which they discursively positioned themselves and their students.

The linguistic moves to connect race and class to EBD—the disabling process to deem children as emotionally unstable and behaviorally dangerous—undermine how deeply relational the cultural processes of schooling are. In order to critically examine

how emotional and behavioral disorders are figured through teacher identity, we have to consider that emotions, on their own, are political: and that the power embedded in emotional expression is often denied to children in the interest of preserving adult agency. We must move toward understanding emotion, and the emotions of children, as evident of the ways in which children are situationally and relationally defined. Most importantly, in schools, and especially in urban schools where power differentials continue to further marginalize urban students and urban students of Color and from working class backgrounds, children must be considered as agentive in research, policy development, and practice: children are not only the passive embodiments of their emotions, but are agentive in using their emotion and affiliate behavior to effect outcomes on those around them. Further inquiry that includes theoretical lenses that refrain from problematizing the behavior of children in school, and instead considers the exchange of emotion and behavior as relational, and behavior, specifically “violence,” as socially constructed is essential in order to truly understand the function of behavior in schools. Thus, research that problematizes pedantic commitments to “trauma informed teaching” and “social emotional learning”— pedagogies that maintain the child as a problem and in need of adapting— is necessary in reconstructing schools as places of relational development; lest children, and primarily children of Color and from working class backgrounds as evidenced in this research, continue to be pushed further to the margins of schools by having been labeled as being disordered based on their emotions and behavior.

APPENDIX A

Aggregate Gist Propositions Regarding "Behavior" from T1, T2, and T3

Stanza	Gist Proposition
I have a variety of personalities and a variety of behaviors//	Personality drives behavior
Um/ I have move-in students who are kind of shell-shocked to other students in the classroom who, um, maybe come from a different district who are not used to the type of behavior that our district has//	One of the characteristics of this school district is student behavior
Um/ I've got some personalities that are very loud and want to be heard/ regardless of if what they're saying is always nice or true at the time//	Personality results in being loud and wanting attention
Um/ I've got some shy kids who just are loners/ I guess you could say/ who just want to be by themselves and don't really talk with others/ don't want to be/ um/ associated with different kids/ and just there to get what they need to get done and move on/	
I've got kids who fall asleep in class because they didn't get enough sleep the night before/ who were up all night playing video games or watching YouTube//	Kids stay up playing video games and watching YouTube and then fall asleep in class
I have kids that truly persevere in their tasks/ who want to get their work done/ and then I have the opposite of kids who don't care and say their parents don't care/ so they don't try even though they have potential//	Some kids try very hard, and some kids don't care. Some kids' parents don't care, even though the kids have potential.
And they could, but they choose not to//	It is the kid's choice not to care.
Our school is one of the hidden gems of our district// Um/ our behaviors aren't as--student behaviors aren't as violent/ I guess you would say/ as they are in other areas of the district//	Students at this school are not as violent as students in other schools in the district
Um/ our district is/ um/ primarily white/ with/ um/ Hispanics and African-Americans//	Students are not as violent at this school because they are primarily white
I would say yes// They (Administration) try to help you/ they will, um/ there's a system in place/ um/ coming to get students who are constantly disruptive in the classroom/ but at the same time their hands	Administration is helpful when students are disruptive in the classroom

Objects of the Propositions

Nouns:

Behavior (29)
Kids (38)
Teachers (11)
District (5)
Administration (5)
Parents (6)
Students (33)
Trauma (9)
Home (10)
Medicine/Medication (5)
Special Education (8)
EH (5)
Support (5)
Help (5)

Verbs:

Care (8) (Don't care = 4)
Referring (5)
Suspend/Suspension (9)

Adjectives:

Some (26)
Violent (26)
Low (6)

Other:

Not (35)
Because (11)
With (12)
For (23)

Stanza	Gist Proposition
are tied as to what they can do because of the demands from the downtown area-	Administration's hands are tied as to what they can do to address disruptive behavior because of decisions that come from the district administrative office downtown
The higher-up// So/ they try/ but there are certain things that they can't do because of-	The higher-ups restrict administration in what they can do to address student behavior
Um, that majority of my students are violent/ or African-American/ or that they just don't care/ or, um, they're just so low that they're not at grade level// Um/ the attitudes//	Assumptions about the district include that the majority of students are violent or African American or that students don't care or are so low they are not at grade level Students are violent because they are African American, don't care, and are so low they are not at grade level
Um, I can tell you about one of my students that I had// Two years ago/ I had a student who/ very violent/ to the point where/ Like/ you had to walk on eggshells around this student// You didn't know when he was going to blow/ in not so nice terms//	Students who are violent are unpredictable as to when they will blow
Um/ he would throw things/ and he would/ like/ destroy things/ and he would hit kids/ bite the- I've been bit// I was bitten by him/ I was kicked by him/ and I had to evacuate my room so many times that year just so people could come in here and get him to calm down/ and it was very hard to get him to calm down// And/ because he was considered a general ed student he did not receive services of special ed or EH or anything/ and then when we--when we tried to get him labeled/ taking all this documentation/ and they were like "No/" They- - it dragged on all year// This child had no services all year// It was an apparent cry for help// He needed help// The kids in the classroom were scared of him//	A violent student throws things, destroys things, hits kids, kicks, and bites kids and teachers. A violent student is cause for a teacher to evacuate her classroom A violent student is hard to calm down General education students, even violent ones, do not receive special education or EH (emotional handicap) services Violence is an apparent cry for help
They didn't want to work with him// They didn't want to be by him because they didn't know if they said the wrong thing to him that he would go off// And it was just hard on everybody/ and they would take him out of the room/ and then 15 minutes later/ after something was destroyed in the room/ they expect you to have open arms// Right?	A violent kid scares other kids in the classroom Other kids do not want to work with or sit by a violent kid

Stanza	Gist Proposition
"Come on/ let's try again"// Five minutes later, ran out of the room again//	<p>A violent kid may go off if someone says the wrong thing</p> <p>A violent kid may be returned to the classroom after leaving the room for 15 minutes</p>
And/ like—he--it wasn't just my things he destroyed// He would go down the hallway and rip things down in the hallway/ and everything else//	A violent kid destroyed the teacher's things, as well as things in the hallway
<p>I've heard he's still wild- Because their—um, one of our teachers/ her student goes to that school- And so she talks to the teachers//</p> <p>The teacher even emailed me and asked me/ "How did you do this?" "I'm at my breaking point/" and I go, "I was/ too"// There were times when I looked and interviewed for different things to do because I was done// I didn't have support/ and even to- it was towards the end of the year/ when our, um, other administration knew that he was leaving; so then, he finally was like "Forget the suspension thing// I'm just going to go ahead and suspend him left and right"//</p>	<p>A violent kid may push teachers to their breaking point.</p> <p>Administration suspended a violent kid once he knew he was leaving the district anyway</p>
I tried/ I tried// Every single time/ every single time// Like, when they had MT meeting: "Have you heard anything about this child? When are they doing something?" "Well, he is general education, so"//	A teacher may try to have a violent child referred for special education, but it is difficult to get support
Try putting them in [local mental health service]// Parents didn't want that// Tried pu- I'd even be calling/ um/ like/ uh/ CPS and stuff/ too/ and they're like/ "Okay, well/ we'll investigate it/ but-"	Local mental health services and CPS may not be helpful with a violent child
But his grades// It was his grades// His grades were high enough that it wasn't impacting his learning// Except for until he got suspended all the time and he wasn't even around// And he was getting what he wanted: to be out of school//	<p>If a student's grades are high, they are not eligible for special education</p> <p>When a student is suspended, their grades drop because they are not in school</p> <p>When a student is suspended, they get what they want because they are not in school</p>

Stanza	Gist Proposition
They were like/ "His grades are fine/" and I'm like/ "Okay/ that's great// But you can still have mental health issues and still be a hot mess/ and be intelligent at the same time//"	You can have mental health issues and be a hot mess and intelligent at the same time.
"You're doing him a major disservice by not helping him//"	Being referred to special education is a way of getting help But not referring a child to special education, you may be doing them a disservice
I tried/ numerous times/ to get this child what he needed//	Referring to special education, children's services, and mental health services are some ways to help a student who is violent in the classroom
And they kind/ like/ there were certain things that I could see that also related to autism/ but it came back as being post-traumatic stress disorder// PTSD is what they said he had// This was/ like/ April/ maybe/ when/ like/ the four-hour testing was over//	Autism may look like post-traumatic stress disorder Post-traumatic stress disorder may be at the root of violent behavior
Well/ and/ when/ to go back to that child: when he would melt down/ the only thing that could get him to calm down and, like, talk to you would be to talk about video games// I had to go, "Hey, tell me what level you're on in Fortnite// What are you doing right now?" And it was like Heck- Jekyll and Hyde// He would be like/ "Oh/ well/ I am on this level and I'm doing this right now//" Which/ you would see// And so/ I told every-/ I/ when he would start running I'd be/ and down the hall/ I'd go talk to him about video games/ and any time he saw a tablet/ Like/ I had to remove the tablets from my classroom towards the end of the year because he would just be memorized* by the kids/ and even if he didn't get to be on it he was just staring over somebody's shoulder/ watching them play on the game//	A melt down requires calming down When children switch from melting down to calming down, it can be like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
And he would/ like/ just go crazy when it was time to put them away// He just/ he could not handle it// He couldn't handle it when other people had them// Um, but/ uh/ yeah// He was/ he was/ it was interesting/ because there'd be times where/ like/ he would throw things/ and/ I trained my kids to push the button to/ the black button/	A teacher may have to be a bodyguard for other students to protect them from a violent student

Stanza	Gist Proposition
<p>the emergency button that goes straight to the office instead of trying to call-/ because there would be times where you try to call and nobody's answering/ and you have a kid throwing- Pencils and everything else at everybody// I'm like, "Mm-mm (negative)// You push the button// Everybody else, run out of the room// Go to the other classroom's teacher//"</p> <p>Mm-hmm (affirmative)// And every time it was where/ like/ some o- some other kids are/ um, not always with it and paying attention to what's going on around them// And they would be trapped/ and he would see them there and he would start going over to them/ and I'd have to be a bodyguard and get between// I would have to/ "Go// Go// Get out//"</p>	
<p>All the times/ of rooms that are destroyed/ desks that are flipped over/ and I'm like/ "Oh yeah// I've done that/ been there//"</p> <p>And even/ like/ the thought of having another one of those types of students/ without having support and knowing what to do with that child/ it's--it's disheartening// It's hard to think about// It's like, "I can't/"</p>	<p>A destroyed classroom includes flipped desks</p> <p>Having a student who is violent without support is disheartening</p>
<p>I tried reaching out to all of the district areas and- [local support]/ mom didn't want it so can't do that// [local mental health service]/ already have the personal/ um/ or the/ um/ counselor from DCS// Couldn't do that// Um, the counselor would, like, try to give me ideas/ but at the same time she's like, "I've been working with--with this kid for a year and I don't know"// So, like, nobody had any ideas or any solutions on what to do with this child, except for suspend him// And then it became somebody else's problem in a different di- in a different school// And it was a/ it's a Montessori school/ so imagine what that looks like when he has a meltdown in that classroom// There's a lot more materials and things to/ Deal with//</p>	<p>Suspension became the alternative to support</p>

Stanza	Gist Proposition
I guess because as long as they have low grades// Like/ last year I had a student for two weeks that had never/ like/ never really been in a school// He was a runner// I have a radio in my room to say "He's out the door"/ because he would be out the door and outside// They had to chase him blocks down the road// Over a mile//	Low grades is what is important in special education referrals
Mm-hmm (affirmative)// Without a coat on// It was/ like/ this time period/ and I had 24 students in my room; the other classrooms had/ they were less than I was/ and one of our teachers was a--a brand-new teacher/ and this was just after the year that I had that other student I have been talking about/ and the/ So/ (name) goes/ "Hi, sweetie// Just want to let you know that we're putting a new student in your room that has EH issues/ and he's a runner/" and I'm like/ "Oh no// It's another situation all over again// I can't// I'm still recovering from the first one// " Uh-huh/ yeah// And I'm like/ "But I have the most kids in my classroom// Why am I getting him?" Well, management// Talk to management why// Not towards this one/	Another example of having an EH issue includes being a runner
He would hurt himself// Like, he would bang his head against the wall/ or his desk or something-- And throwing stuff at other people, chairs/ Like, these big, heavy chairs// He's throwing those as a first-grader// He stood on one of the--the green tables- And I'm like, "You can't be up there"/ and I just picked him up and put him down/ and	Other behaviors include hurting themselves, banging head against the wall or desk, throwing stuff at other people, and throwing chairs
T2	
Well/ this year and last year/ well/ se-- last several years I've had all the special ed inclusion students/ um/ with a variety of different needs/	Special education students means students with a variety of different needs
Um/ not as many official special ed students as last year/ but a lot of students with a trauma/ um/ from home/ which then pours into the classroom experience that students shouldn't be having at their age/ at	Students who experience trauma at home come to the classroom with experiences they should not be having at their age

Stanza	Gist Proposition
home or being brought into the classroom and causing disturbances there//	Students' home experience cause disturbances in the classroom
Trauma/ backgrounds of abuse/ um/ abandonment/ trying to/ They wanna be accepted/ they wanna be just know that they're loved/ but at the same time their behaviors are severe/ act out or impulsive behaviors that they just can't seem to control towards/ not only towards me but towards their classmates/ And in one case/ a certain one in the room to himself//	Severe behaviors are related to trauma, backgrounds of abuse, abandonment Severe behaviors include impulsive behaviors that students can't seem to control towards teachers and classmates
Well/ I know I have students who are not with their biological parents or with other relatives/ Um/ and unfortunately some of those a-- that's after going through a lot of foster care homes and being abused in those/ Um/ and then--then where they're living now is the fear of physical punishment for any--any poor/ inappropriate behaviors at school/ which make it difficult for the teacher/ for me/ to daily say if they've really had that bad day every day/	Students who do not live with biological parents, who have been through foster care homes, who have been abused in foster care, and who live with fear of physical punishment for poor and inappropriate behaviors at school make it difficult for a teacher to say when a student is having a bad day every day
To keep saying that because I know what happens when they go home// But at the same time/ things can't keep going on here/	Teachers don't want to say what happens at school because they know what happens at home, but students cannot continue to be disruptive at school
Um/ of my worst behaved students and things that they're going through at home each night and what they've gone through in the past years that I was not aware of/	One of the worst behaved students is going through something difficult at home each night, and has been for years
But it makes it hard to make them understand that regardless of the past/ they've got to learn to behave appropriately to make it in society	Students have to understand that regardless of their experiences, they have to learn to behave appropriately in society
'Cause the severity/ some places people don't care about that part// The fact is they do it// And so it's the balance of what to ignore and not to ignore based on individual kids//	Severity of behavior impacts what to ignore and what not to ignore for individual kids
Well/ last year/ I had a/ a difficult child who needed medication/ medication was not regulated yet/ and by afternoon he was pretty off and would start cussing and throwing things and jumping off of things/ and things of this sort most afternoons// And/ um/ so that became a	Medication impacts student behavior

Stanza	Gist Proposition
daily thing of being called inappropriate names/ not mys- just myself with the students and things of that sort so usually every afternoon last year was that way//	Pretty off behavior includes cussing, throwing things, jumping off of things, calling the teacher and other students inappropriate names
Um/ one is they've been allowed to do some of the behaviors too often and nothing being done about it/ but also/ too/ uh/ there's so many worries about what you can and can't say and do anymore to stop the behaviors that children are portraying in a classroom/ so/ I guess/ limitations on discipline-	Students are allowed to engage disruptive behavior There are limitations on discipline
They've already been diagnosed for behavior- For special ed// But usually/ those who where medication doesn't work/ um/ how it affects/ not only them/ but the other kids in the classroom// If it's interfering with the rest of the kids/ you know/ that would be a time that they need to see if it's something else that's going on//	For students who have behaviors, but for whom medication does not work, it affects them, and also other kids in the classroom
If medication can't control/ they should not be/ I think they need to go back to either self-contained rooms/ or a special/ not necessarily a special school/ but/ I have one in here now that's not been in here enough to say much about/ but it's already b- been physical/ not with only me/ but with another student just in the last two weeks// So//	If medication does not help a student control their behavior, they need to go back to self-contained classrooms
Yeah/ and then/ a few days after she had a five-day suspension/ came back and within a day or two/ while in music/ physically grabbed a kid by the hair and swung her and threw her into a chair/ so then she got suspended for two more days/ but now she's at her limit because she's special ed// She already has an IEP//	After a suspension, a student grabbed another kid by the hair and swung her and threw her into a chair After so many suspensions, students who are special ed reach a liimit
It was a lousy one// I guess th- they were trying get something set up for that because she/ now that she has hit her limit/ they have to decide what/ if it's her behaviors ca- disability that's causing it or if it's-	Some IEPs are lousy After reaching a suspension limit, they have to decide if a disability is the cause of a behavior
And I'm not quite/ I don't know if it's because/ I really think it's because of her past history and wanting to get n-- I don't know/ because it/ it shocked me/ too/ that she got a five-day suspension the first time- When we have other kids in the building who do things just as badly and do them on a routine basis and have never been suspended// So/ uh/ I/ because I even tried to talk him out of the	It is sometimes unfair to suspend a student before getting to know their triggers It is unfair that some students get suspended while others do not for the same behaviors

Stanza	Gist Proposition
suspension// He really didn't do anything// I just said that I didn't think it was fair for either o-/ because one/ she was new in here// I didn't know her clicks/ I didn't know her triggers/ she didn't know me and what my expectations were enough- To learn the expectations and it caused her to wig out// So she/ I don't know/ because I told him I didn't feel it was fair for her to have a five-day suspension that early without us really being in/ aware of triggers and knowing/ and I really felt she deserved another chance to get/ uh/ but/ but they kept her at the five day//	
Family life/ um/ family violence/ um/ trauma// A lot of these kids have had/ a lot of these kids don't/ don't have the stability at home// They don't have parents that are making school important// I have s- some that I don't think get proper nutrition//	Kids don't have stability at home or parents that make school important Some kids aren't getting proper nutrition
Not fed well/ yeah// Uh/ see/ I don't know much/ enough about that one to/ I'm trying to think// A lot/ a lot of mine/ I know this one's had trauma// This one had trauma// A lot of them have had trauma in their past with not being with their biological parents/ um/ abuse and neglect by their biological parents and now th- they're living with other people//	Some kids are not fed well A lot of kids have had trauma in their past Not being with biological parents is traumatic Abuse and neglect from biological parents and now living with other people is traumatic for kids
So many of them are/ may of my ones with severe/ the most severe behavior/ have had something like that happen in their/ in their family// Yeah/ I'm thinking of/ thinking of the ones this year// And some/ it's just a chemical// Without the right medication-	Many students with the most severe behavior have experienced trauma
Imagine a child going through similar traumas/ or worse/ and then having to come to school and focus and do things/ and their mind's not there//	Children who experience trauma can't focus because their mind's not there
To help the child in the way they need to be helped because there's too much on our shoulders of what we're going to lose if we don't- produce what we're supposed to be producing//	Teachers are unable to support students to the degree they needs to be supported because they're supposed to be producing
So/ I had kids in the room last year that took this very seriously and I think it affected a- at least three of them emotionally because it's not stuff they're used to hearing and seeing/ and they had special needs	Some kids are impacted by other students' behaviors very seriously.

Stanza	Gist Proposition
themselves- And to where there were days where they were in tears with the behavior/ and there was just nothing I could do// Like I/ I could get the kid out for a few minutes/ but they always brought him back//	Some students who have special needs are impacted by other students who have special needs for behavior Teachers feel there is nothing they can do for kids who are impacted by kids with behaviors
And he would/ you know/ it was like/ uh/ walking on eggshells around a certain kid/ you know/ th- those kids that disrupted and did the violent things all day long and they just kept being allowed to come back// And seeing them/ the ones I had last year/ because out of all years/ other than the individual children/ it was one of the best classes behavior wise and innocence wise-	Violent kids may be pulled out of the classroom, but are allowed to come back soon after
You know/ a lot of the kids in this room this year/ they're not shocked when they hear the profanity coming out of kid's mouths// It's like they've/ they're used to it//	Some kids are used to profanity
But there were kids I had last year that when that stuff started and stuff started flying/ and/ and words were flying and the types of words/ you could see the fear in them/ in some of the kids I had last year-	Some kids are fearful when stuff starts and stuff starts flying
So/ just the fact that I've made him follow rules and I've not broken down and let him get to me too much// I've had times when I've went off/ you know/ I/ I lost my cool with him for a while/ but now I just ignore him and/ or let him walk out/ and/ and he's doing a lot better now/ so he doesn't have those walk-out tantrums like last year//	Teachers feel empowered when they don't break down or let kids get to them too much Ignoring is better than losing your cool Letting a kid walk out is better than them having a tantrum and walking out
T3	
We've had a lot going on with violence with these kids right now// It's rough// And how do you, how do you expect them to continue with school when life is a mess-... at home? So that was a tough day//	Kids experience violence at home
I guess it's the unpredictability of what's going to happen with them// Maybe it's the not knowing what happened at home before they come in// And them not knowing how to handle the right way what happened at home before they came in, if that makes any sense?	The unpredictability of some students makes them hard Not knowing what happened at home the night before and them not knowing how to handle whatever happened is hard

Stanza	Gist Proposition
You notice like when you're in here that sometimes [student] is right on target// And then other times, the smallest thing// I got sometimes/ I can't even tell you what the small thing was// And he just goes// And he just loses it over the smallest little thing// That's hard// Because I sit there thinking/ "Did I do something that set him off? Did-" So that's an unpredictable piece that you don't know//	A small thing might make a student go and lose it Teachers might think they did something wrong to set a student off Not knowing if you set a student off is what is unpredictable
And it's hard, because like you'll notice that on like say Monday/ this worked// But then Tuesday, that doesn't work//	Some days something will work, and then next day it won't
So you're constantly having to figure out what works for him// And you definitely have to handle him differently than you handle// I think that's the hardest part being a teacher/ is you have to figure out how do you handle that kid/ each kid//	Some kids need to be handled differently You have to figure out what works for some kids
Because they all need something different//	All kids need something different
It's not a/ everybody's treated the exact same way//	Not everyone should be treated the same way
He finally started verbalizing that, "I'm doing this/ 'cause I want you to send me home"// So, um, now Tuesday, he's sick, doesn't wanna go home// And he's begging her to let him come to class//	Some kids do things so that they will be sent home
But I also know that uh/ she and I/ 'cause I'm not gonna lie to you/ at the beginning of the year/ there were days after he would go home that I would sit in here and wanting to bawl thinking/ "I can't do this// He's too much"// And she had those exact same days last year/ because she would come in and talk to me at the end of the day// And she would be lik/ she was to the point of saying/"I'm gonna ... I, I'm gonna walk away"//	Teachers feel they can't do this or want to walk away because of some kids' behavior
And um/ I would have to talk her off the ledge (laughs)// So then when I got him, not gonna fib/ When I knew I was having him all summer/ that was a nightmare for me// Because I had seen him since 1st grade in action//	Seeing kids in action before they're in a teacher's class makes the teacher nervous
And he's determined I'm not gonna win i// But I mean, a few weeks ago it was to the point where I don't know what was going/ I do know at home/ um/they were displaced in a home// So that could've been	

Stanza	Gist Proposition
part of the escalation that was going on then// That he had gotten to the point some days where he was over flipping the lights on and off while I'm trying to teach// He's pushing the emergency button/ And I mean/ just ... And/ and these other kids were just sitting here, just staying on the/ You know/ I'm not gonna lie to you// My, I was in my head / {LG}/ I am getting like right here// thinking he's affecting 18 kids now// And I'm really good at ignoring// But some of those days I didn't think I was gonna make it through//	Ignoring can be hard for teachers because one kid's behavior can affect the rest of the class
But it was a total switch//And he literally would go from/"I hate you// don't wanna be in here with you// I wanna go home// Take me out/send me home/send me home"/ He'd come back after that medicine/ and he'd give me a hug and he'd say/ "What do you want me to do now?"	Medicine can switch a kid's behavior
And/ and they're really good too about if he comes in rough like that/ they keep him down there in the office just to give him time to get himself under control/ when I think it's for him and it's for the other kids//	When a kid comes in rough, the administration keeps him in the office to give him time to get under control
I see where some people think it's babying//And I'm not gonna lie/there's been days that I get really frustrated and I think/"Oh my gosh//Why do they let him get away with all of this?" But then I think/"What do I want him to do?" I mean/ I don't want him put out//	A teacher may get angry, but don't want students put out
That's not gonna help him any way. Um, I think he gets consequences. I do think. But I think it's once again, it's that thing of some people ... It used to be hard for me too, that you thought, "A kid should have to do this, this, this, and this just like every other kid has to do this, this, this, and this." But I think there has to be difference for different situations.	There has to be differences for different situations
Yes/ as frustrating it is that he's flipping the lights on and off/ and he's pushing the emergency button/ that's not something that justifies that he should have to go home/ or/ be suspended, or in school suspension/ or / I guess I look at it as long as it's not hurting other children physically//	Students should not have to go home as long as it's not hurting other children physically

Stanza	Gist Proposition
Because I know the one day that he did lose his cool/ and he actually started shoving chairs/ and [inaudible 00:24:26]// And I had the other kids get into the hallway// He was suspended for that// So they do//	When a student loses their cool and starts shoving chairs, the other kids have to go to the hallway
Um/in my opinion/he's got a lot of emotional EH type behaviors//I don't think it would be good for him to be in a classroom like that//I think it's better for him to see/	Even with EH behaviors, a classroom like that is not good for students
Um/I don't know// I [inaudible 00:27:47] worried about EH classrooms breeding more emotional behaviors//	EH classrooms have more emotional behaviors
I think we do a better job of putting kids on the behavior claims//	Teachers do a better job of putting kids on behavior plans so they are not referred to EH
'Cause like I said/ I don't know that EH is the best// It just scares me that they just learn more and more behaviors from/I think there are kids that are extreme cases probably that need those//	EH is where kids that are extreme cases are Kids learn more and more behaviors in EH rooms
That sometimes I'll joke and say/"We have too many disorders"/	There are too many disorders
And sometimes I joke and just tell my husband/"I think we need to just label one called the B-R-A-T disorder"//	Some kids are brats
That's two adults that just he can't walk through the door without/ them automatically projecting he's not gonna behave// he/he can perceive that//And he's ready to get himself in a better spot//	Some adults automatically project that kids are not going to behave Kids avoid adults that assume they will not behave
Or if they're throwing a pencil/ or I just/ I tell the kids all the time/ "It's on you. I'm not calling your parents//They're, your parents have a job// This is your job//You need to learn how to handle your job// Your parents can't save you your whole life"// So I seldom ever call parents//	Kids behavior is their own responsibility because school is their job, and their parents have their own jobs

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

- Ph.D. Urban Education Studies, Indiana University-Purdue University, 2021
- M.Ed. School Counseling, University of Cincinnati, 2011
- B.S. Special Education, Miami University, 2005

Research and Training Experience

Doctoral Research Assistant (2015-2020)

- U.S. Department of Education Region III Technical Assistance Center
Great Lakes Equity Center/ Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center
- Indiana University School of Education-Indianapolis (IUPUI) Indianapolis, IN
- Executive Director and P. I.: Dr. Kathleen King Thorius, Director of Operations: Dr. Seena Skelton

Co-Principal Investigator (2017-2019)

- Test Anxiety: Participation and Exclusion Beyond the Institution
- Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kenzie Latham-Mintus

Co-Principal Investigator (2018-2019)

- Teacher Experiences of Choice Schools
- Faculty Advisors: Dr. James Joseph Scheurich, Dr. Alycia Elfreich

Professional Experience

- Visiting Assistant Faculty, 2018-2021
- Indiana University School of Education- Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Undergraduate Courses Taught

- Special Education Methods, Spring/Fall 2018-2021 Families, School, and Society, 2020

Conference Proceedings (Refereed, National, and International)

- Nguyen, D.H.K., Puckett, T., Silverman, E.H., & **Coomer, M.N.** (2020, Oct. 28-Nov. 1). Revolutionizing our rights for liberation: Examining and critiquing today's hot legal topics [Symposium]. American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX (Conference Canceled)
- **Coomer, M.N.** (2020, Oct. 28 – Nov. 1) Subverting trauma discourse. Moments of authenticity and care in an urban elementary school. [Individual Paper]. AESA Annual Conference San Antonio, TX (Conference Canceled)

- **Coomer, M. N.** (2020, Apr 17 - 21) Neither Here nor There: A Neo-Institutional Interrogation of the Duality of the Individualized Education Plan as Tool for Inclusion and Exclusion [Paper Session]. AERA Annual Meeting San Francisco, CA <http://tinyurl.com/vtyz96g> (Conference Canceled)
- Elfreich, A. M., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2020, Apr 17 - 21) The Impact of School Choice and Teacher Decision Making: Accountability and the Reification of Whiteness [Roundtable Session]. AERA Annual Meeting San Francisco, CA <http://tinyurl.com/t2of2ht> (Conference Canceled)
- Thorius, K. K., **Coomer, M. N.**, & Sanborn, E. (2020, Apr 17 - 21) A Critical Analysis of the Racialized Stereotypes Within the Language of Social Emotional Learning [Roundtable Session]. AERA Annual Meeting San Francisco, CA <http://tinyurl.com/wqvewye> (Conference Canceled)
- **Coomer, M.N.**, Clayton, E., & Wright, R. (2020). The intersection of exclusion: Race and disability in urban schooling contexts. Society for Disability Studies Annual.
- Elfreich, A., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). Teacher identity, curriculum, and neoliberal education reform in Indianapolis. Presented at the Conference on Curriculum, Theory, and Classroom Practice, Dayton, OH.
- **Coomer, M. N.**, & Mintus, K. L. (2019). Test anxiety: Participation and exclusion beyond the institution. Presented at the American Sociological Association, New York, NY.
- Elfreich, A., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). Teacher experiences of school choice. Presented at the Critical Race Studies in Education Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA.
- Scheurich, J. J., Elfrieich, A., Williams, N., Cosby, G., Silverman, E., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). Spotlight: Neoliberalism fireside chat: An open invitation to engage in discussion about global forms of neoliberalism. Presented at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champagne-Urbana, IL.
- Silverman, E., & **Coomer, M. N.**, (2019). Approximating “normal”: A critical examination of racial privilege and mental disability. Presented at the American Educational Research Association. Toronto, Canada.
- Scheurich, J. J., Eflreich, A., Williams, N., Cosby, G., Silverman, E., Scott, C., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). The early history of neoliberal education “reform” in Indianapolis. Presented at the American Educational

Research Association. Toronto, Canada.

- **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). Humanizing essence and existence: Emotion, behavior, and disordering in special education research. Presented at the American Education Studies Association, Baltimore, MD.
- **Coomer, M. N.,** Jackson, R., Moore, T. (2018). Eliminating Curricular Bias to Advance Equitable Democratic Participation in Social Studies Classrooms. Presented at the Social Science in Education Consortium. Florence, Italy.

Refereed Journal Publications

- Fitch, F., Hulgín, K., & **Coomer, M.N.** (Accepted). How ‘special needs’ vouchers silence and deny the right to inclusive education (LRE): Segregation by choice or fraudulent concealment?
- **Coomer, M.N.,** Beneke, M.R., & Mueller, C.O. (in press). D/discourses of Childhood Mental Health and Disability: From Individual Pathology to Relational Wellness. In M. O’Reilly and N. Lester (Eds.) *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Critical Perspectives on Mental Health*.
- **Coomer, M.N., &** Stinson, C. (Accepted). Invisibilizing Race and Gender in Special Education. In C. Mayo (Ed.) *Oxford Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality in Education*.
- Hulgín, K., Fitch, F., & **Coomer, M.N.** (2020). Optimizing a critical juncture: Trauma, neoliberal education and children’s agency. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. 10.1080/15505170.2020.1729903
- **Coomer, M. N.** (2019). Deconstructing difference and inclusion in educational research: Reflections on the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education Special Edition on Difference. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 32(2).
- Graham, J., & **Coomer, M. N.** (2018). When schooling hurts: Professional school counselors as mitigates for school- based trauma. *Journal of Global Engagement and Transformation*, 2(1).
<https://everypiecematters.com/jget/volume02- issue01/when-schooling-hurts-professional-school- counselors-as-mitigates-of-school-based-trauma.html>

Refereed Book Chapters

- **Coomer, M.N.** (in press). Erased and renamed: Re- racialization and the white commodification of Color. In C. Hayes, J. Manlove, & E. Silverman (Eds.) *Critical storytelling: Dismantling white supremacy one doctoral student at a time*.

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