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Abstract

There is an established importance of classroom community, particularly for inclusive education (Kunc, 1992; Osterman, 2000; Sapon-Shevin, 2010). There is also a breadth of research around students who are most vulnerable to exclusion and othering in public schools and in classroom settings. Demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic status, native language, and disability status influence and impact who is seen as exhibiting challenging behavior and how specific behavior is responded to. (Connor et al., 2016; Shapiro, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018) Schools are microcosms of the larger society and during the time in which this research took place, there was more police brutality against Black Americans, the inequities connected to COVID-19 have been highlighted further and brought to the forefront of people's lived experiences, and the 2020 presidential election has exposed the deep philosophical divide across (primarily White) America, making it even more imperative to look at how classroom community and challenging behavior are taken up by educators. This study is a critical qualitative inquiry aimed at better understanding how educators conceptualize and operationalize classroom community and challenging behavior including responses to said behavior, the connections they see between the two concepts, and how race and disability impact who is seen as being part of the community and as exhibiting challenging behavior.

Classroom community and how behaviors perceived as challenging are responded to are both complex phenomena within a much larger institutional and structural context that also impact and interact with one another. As I worked to research the ways in which responses to challenging behavior and classroom community interact with and impact one another in classroom spaces for students, a Constructivist Grounded Theory for critical qualitative research approach was essential. To aid a critical analysis of multiple interviews from 15 current educators, I employed a DisCrit theoretical lens.

The purpose of this study was to better understand how practicing educators conceptualize classroom community and challenging behavior, how educators are supported in supporting students, and how diversity is attended to across these conversations. What quickly emerged is that schools are microcosms of our society at large and that conceptualizations of classroom community and challenging behavior were riddled with racism, ableism, and a lack of consideration of identity and diversity. Among these educator's experiences, there was also a lack of systemic and structural emphasis and support for students with disabilities and students of color. Furthermore, it became clear across participants that work, productivity and contributing were essential to being seen as a

member of the community and as being someone who exhibits “appropriate” behavior. Work was used as a gatekeeper of sorts to uphold white hegemonic notions of classroom community and eliminate students from teacher’s responsibility and radars. This study starts a needed conversation around educator’s conceptualizations of students, in particular student behavior and how adult’s responses to challenging behavior are not currently seen as impacting student membership of the classroom community.

"You Always Have that One:" A Critical Analysis of the
Conceptualizations of Educators Around Classroom Community and
Challenging Behavior

by

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DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education.

Syracuse University

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

“For me context is the key- from that comes the understanding of everything” Kenneth Noland (1988; as cited in Gibbs, 2010, p. 1)

All scholarly work takes place within a specific context and as part of a historical lineage that deeply impacts how it has come into existence, how it is made sense of, and what contributions it can make. It would be impossible to complete this particular research project without situating it within the current context of a global pandemic, COVID-19, and amidst repeated acts of violence against people of color, especially Black Americans, across the United States. Brought to the forefront of our collective conscience through both of these national experiences are centuries of racism, ableism, structural inequity, and real clear evidence of how privilege and oppression are at play within our society. The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted the ways in which certain people and bodies are more disposable than others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our American health system has denied ventilators to Americans with disabilities, has taken medication away from immune-compromised Americans to be used to treat COVID-19, has denied cancer treatment to patients to prioritize those with COVID-19, has allowed people of color, especially Black Americans, to die from COVID-19 at rates far higher than those of

White Americans, has provided inadequate protections to those in custody of ICE, and Americans have engaged in protests around their rights to not wear masks and to end social distancing procedures, which puts immune-compromised Americans around them at far greater risk. (Devereaux, 2020; Godoy & Wood, 2020; Ongera, 2020) Simultaneously, multiple Black Americans, including Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, and George Floyd, were murdered by White Americans and their deaths have highlighted institutionalized racism within our country. While the Black Lives Matter movement started in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin and has been bringing attention to the far too numerous deaths of Black Americans since, protests became particularly prominent after the murder of George Floyd from restraint in the hands of White police officers in Minneapolis, MN.

For this research, this context is particularly important to note as the larger societal context in which the concepts of community and “behavior,” which are the focus of this work, are at play on a much larger scope. Black Americans, and other marginalized Americans, have experienced long histories of being viewed through deficit-based and criminalized ways at the societal level. In this current moment in time, protests are occurring as the “behavior” Americans are exhibiting as people who do not feel like accepted and valued members of our

national community. Schools are microcosms of our larger society and are a place where young children learn about societal norms, how to engage with others, behavioral expectations for our archaic educational system, and learn the implicit and explicit biases of the adults around them, all of which they carry with them as they exit out of the k-12 public education system. These national moments highlight racism, ableism, and the ways in which some are accepted as valued members of our national society and others are not; they shine a light on the importance of continuing to learn more about how feelings of community membership and “behavior” are connected within our public schools.

Beyond situating this study within the current societal climate and context, it is important to explain how this study came about. I offer below two vignettes that highlight my interest in and questioning of what is read in schools as challenging behavior, responses to that behavior, and impacts of those responses to the classroom community.

As a former inclusive special educator, I had the opportunity to collaborate full day with a general education co-teacher to educate students within our district who were considered to have the most complex support needs. During my best co-teaching experience, where we were truly “co” in all aspects of planning, developing, teaching, and

all other aspects of our classroom. We felt we were able to create a space where all students were truly included, instruction was differentiated, and there was a strong sense of community. That being said, there were also certainly times in which students in our classroom would demonstrate challenging behavior. The school's protocol for incidences of heightened challenging behavior was to call the school-based emergency response team. This response team was made up of in-building professionals who were trained in de-escalation techniques, as well as physical interventions, that was created to support students and teachers when a teacher deemed extra support was needed in supporting a student exhibiting challenging behavior. At times, this response team would decide that physical intervention was required for the safety and well-being of the child involved. The decision to physically intervene is certainly debatable from a variety of lenses and highly problematic, but within our school building, the fact is that it occurred. In moments where physical intervention was used on a student, I thought deeply about the child that it was occurring to- the trauma, the fright, all of the emotions going on amongst their body and soul, and how we could create the space and supports they needed to be able to figure out what was wrong and how we could better support students. However, I rarely thought of the other students in the class, who left the room with my general education

partner in instances of student crisis, as I was always the one to stay and support the student in crisis in the classroom. That was, until 6 months or so after our most recent class of 6th graders transitioned to the middle school and I ran into one of our general education student's mother. I asked how this former student was doing and her mother replied, "She's still scared of you, you know." I was shocked and mortified. When I asked her if she could tell me more about what she meant, she told me that this student felt as though I allowed the "SWAT Team" to come in and harm other students in the class, which then made her wonder what she or other peers would have to do to receive the same treatment. Long story short, the fact that the ways in which challenging behavior was responded to impact the ways in which this child, and perhaps other students, could feel safe within our classroom, a space where we worked hard daily to foster a sense of community and safety. I had not been thinking about this until this parent offered me this sort of feedback.

In another year of our 4th grade co-taught classroom, about halfway into the school year we had a student who was identified as having a disability added to our class roster. This particular student, who I will call Avery, was a student who had, in previous years, been enrolled in the co-taught classrooms at our school but had started off the school year in another building as a way to transition to a "less

*restrictive environment” with a smaller amount of special education support. When colleagues heard that Avery was going to be returning to our building and entering our classroom, we started to hear all sorts of stories about how challenging his behavior was and how he refused to do any work. Multiple people even called him a “pain in the a**.” As Avery entered our classroom, there were instances of a wide variety of “behaviors,” including not engaging in assignments, yelling during instruction, throwing materials, and swinging his arms at adults within the classroom, but each time this happened our classroom team responded with calmness and worked to figure out what he needed. He was never asked to leave the classroom and never received a negative consequence. Our students continued to invite him to join them in both collaborative school activities and recreational time. Within a few weeks, we had a boy who smiled across his school day, developed friendships with peers, and became increasingly engaged with activities in the classroom. What we noticed, as a team, was that the more Avery felt as though he belonged and was a true member of our classroom community, we saw less and less of all of the things that were labeled as challenging behavior when he joined us.*

While these are just two small memories over years of being an inclusive special educator, they are two of many that have stuck with me and continually brought me back to the notions of classroom

community and challenging behavior across my doctoral work. As an undergraduate and graduate (M.S) student, the idea of fostering a strong classroom community was continually reinforced in my teaching philosophy and repertoire, as was the need to view all behavior as communication and the employment of humanistic behavior supports, but I never considered how the two might be connected. Ever since the conversation with the mother about how her child was afraid of me, I have thought over and over again about the ways in which behavior practices employed by our school impacted the feelings of safety and belonging for a student who was not even on our collective radar. Her child, a strong student and a hard worker, never came up during discussions about students of concern, yet our approaches to behavior impacted her sense of safety and well-being. Avery was also a student who highlighted the power of belonging within a classroom community. The feelings of connection and of being valued slowly changed how he engaged in our classroom space and how others engaged with him.

The Problem

“There is a growing recognition of the importance of developing respect for human dignity and for teaching students to be active participants--both in their education and in the community--and for beginning this important work at a young age. Creating

classroom communities where students feel accepted, and a sense of belonging is not just a “feel good” curriculum. There are clear correlations between students’ sense of belonging and their academic and social achievement” (Sapon-Shevin, 2010, p. 5).

Classroom community is an essential component of inclusion (Kunc, 1992; TASH, n.d.). To truly be inclusive, classroom community must be built and enacted in daily interactions. Keeping this in mind, while there is an expansive body of literature about positive, humanistic behavioral supports and management strategies that could be utilized within inclusive classroom communities, the reality is that challenging behavior is oftentimes read and responded to very differently within public schools. Zero tolerance policies, behavior charts, and Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) are all current systematic structures and practices that may make sense on some level, but in implementation are often a detriment to supporting classroom community and inclusion. Sapon-Shevin (2003) wrote, “When one student is not a full participant in his or her school community, then we are all at risk” (p. 28).

There is also a breadth of research around students who are most vulnerable to exclusion and othering in public schools and in classroom settings. Demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic

status, native language, and disability status influence and impact who is seen as exhibiting challenging behavior and how specific behavior is responded to. Moreover, responses to behavior affects the classroom community, not just for the child experiencing that response, but for all other members of that space as well. Students with disabilities account for 75% of the cases of restraint and seclusion in US public schools each year (Shapiro, 2014) and are systematically the most at risk for being placed in alternative settings other than the general education classroom, which is compounded by the problem of over-representation of students of color in special education. The over-representation of students of color in special education represents an area in which complex intersections of race, class, and ability translate into marginalization and exclusion. African American students are also most at risk for disability labels such as emotional disturbance (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; Connor, et al., 2016), a label that is also associated as being at most risk for practices such as restraint and seclusion (Shapiro, 2014).

Classroom community is an important component of a student's educational and overall trajectory (Osterman, 2000; Sapon-Shevin, 2010). Behavioral supports, behavior management, and responses to challenging behavior all impact who is seen as being a part, or not, of the classroom community (Goodman, 2017), an issue further

complicated by oppression experienced by multiply marginalized students. This study aims to understand how educators conceptualize and operationalize classroom community and challenging behavior, including responses to said behavior, the connections they see between the two concepts, and how race and disability impact who is seen as being part of the community and as exhibiting challenging behavior.

Positionality

I approach this work as someone who identifies as a critical special educator and an inclusive educator. A critical lens requires that we look at a phenomenon of study in relation to social justice, including systems of power and privilege, and begin to unpack the different constructs at play (Charmaz, 2020; Connor, 2013). While working as an inclusive elementary special educator in a district that primarily served White students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and that served the students who were considered to have the most complex support needs, I quickly began to notice patterns in the students who were placed in our inclusive classrooms. Our school was the district-designated inclusion site, so students with disabilities were often bussed outside of their home schools to us if they were placed in an inclusive classroom setting. Almost every student of color in our building was in our building as a result of their

special education label and placement, removed from their home school and bussed to us. Most often students coming to us from other schools were also from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As I began to take note of these patterns, it made me question the larger structure within which I was a player, and how it impacted the educational placements, community membership, and treatment of certain students. One could argue that these placements were not a concern because they were placed in our building for full-day co-taught instruction, but most students in our classroom, particularly students of color, were still removed from their home school placement to receive this program and it highlighted who was framed as not belonging in their home school and as needing the highest level of special education support offered within our district. Race, socioeconomic status and disability seemed deeply intertwined in who was not only removed from their home schools, but who was seen as exhibiting challenging behavior, how that behavior was responded to, and who was and was not seen as a community member. My experiences as a full day co-teacher raised many questions for me about how classroom community and challenging behavior, specifically our systemic responses to them, impact all students within classroom spaces.

I approach this work as a white woman with much privilege, which must be named, acknowledged, and interrogated, but I also bring to this work specific experiences within the system of special education that have helped shape my critical lens and impact how I conceptualize the research, how I interact with participants, how I frame questions, and how I make sense of responses. In particular, this positioning makes me particularly concerned about the structural elements that educators highlight within this work, and so there is an essential need to step back and ask clarifying questions of participants to make sure I truly understand what they are sharing and not making meaning, from my own lens, that is not there, and to also consider my own place within these larger structures of privilege and oppression. I approach this research as an insider within education deeply committed to changing paradigms for students within our public schools and passionate about teachers and working to improve support for them as they work to support their students. Throughout the research process, my own personal identity as a white, female educator has been a central focus, especially within my memoing process. Through my memos, I was able to interrogate my own positioning in connection to the topics of discussion, the participants I was engaged with, and what was being shared within interview

conversations, including what I was able to see and not see within the moment.

Research Questions and Road Map

1. How do teachers conceptualize “classroom community” and “challenging behavior?” What connections, if any, do they make between the two?
2. What supports and barriers do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?
3. In what ways do teachers address and/or omit race and disability in their discussions around classroom community and behavior?

In the remaining chapters I detail the study formed around these three research questions. In Chapter 2, I situate this study and how I approached it within the existing literature. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods I used as located within the critical qualitative method umbrella. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are data chapters in which I detail my findings of this study. I focus on the first two research questions in Chapter 4 and describe participants’ descriptions and definitions of classroom community and challenging behavior. In Chapter 5, I describe how participants talked about the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior, still focusing on the

first two research questions. Chapter 6 is dedicated to detailing disability, race and support within participants' discussions, centering research question number 3. I conclude with Chapter 7 and a discussion of my findings.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The aim of this research was to better understand how educators conceptualize and operationalize classroom community and challenging behavior, including responses to said behavior, the connections they see between the two concepts, and how race and disability impact who is seen as being part of the community and as exhibiting challenging behavior. The interwoven intricacies of the research questions necessitate a broad look at the literature that covers a variety of ideas and theories to organize this study. This chapter starts with a discussion of challenging behavior and a wide range of responses to challenging behavior. Following, it includes a discussion of classroom community, including what it is and why it is important, and then moves into a discussion of the dissonance between many of the responses to challenging behavior and supporting and building classroom community. After this, I establish the lens through which I approach this work as an inclusive educator who centers a Disability Studies in Education (DSE) framework. Finally, I describe DisCrit as a theory, explain why it was useful in exploring my research questions, how it has been operationalized in other research, and how it was used in this study.

Challenging Behavior: Supports and Responses in School

In this section, I begin by defining challenging behavior as it is used in this study and then detail two different broad approaches to challenging behavior in schools. I begin with a discussion of positive and humanistic behavior supports (Causton, Tracy-Bronson, & MacLeod, 2015) and end with a discussion encompassing more traditional responses to challenging behavior. While it is necessary to situate this study within existing knowledge of a research around challenging behavior, it would be impossible to detail all of the ways in which behavior is supported and challenging behavior is responded to in schools. I chose behavior responses that would range from classroom and individual teacher level to school and/or district-wide level, from undocumented and discreet responses to documented and physical interventions in hopes of capturing a representative context for this study.

Positive and Humanistic Behavior Supports Defined

As schools across the U.S. become increasingly inclusive of diverse students, a breadth of literature has emerged about the importance of classroom community and how to best support a wider range of students within the classroom community. In the literature around inclusive education, classroom and behavior management are typically discussed alongside positive behavioral supports and

humanistic behavioral supports as best practice. According to Safe & Civil Schools (2018), a positive behavior support approach to behavior ...incorporates proactive, positive (non-punitive), and instructional strategies exercised over time with consistency. These strategies involve establishing settings, structures, and systems to facilitate positive behavior change. The emphasis is on, "How can we change the system, setting, or structure to help Johnny stop talking out in class and learn to be academically and socially successful?" rather than, "What can I do to Johnny to make him stop talking out in class" (para. 3)

Causton, Tracy-Bronson & MacLeod (2015) explain, humanistic behavioral supports aim to see the whole student while proactively creating and maintaining an environment that meets individual student need. We see students as experts on themselves and so we should utilize their preferences whenever possible. We respond to behavior as communication of needs or desires and act from a place of compassion. Upon enactment, these values foster long-term social development and a more conducive learning environment for all students. (p. 73)

While different scholars have suggested various methods, the following suggestions outlined fall under positive and humanistic

behavior supports in terms of best practice for classroom and behavior management in inclusive classroom communities.

Best Practices for Classroom and Behavior Management

Various authors have suggested best practices that fall under what Causton, Tracy-Bronson and MacLeod (2015) have described as positive and humanistic behavioral supports. Wiebe-Berry (2006) highlighted multiple best practices for teachers to utilize in inclusive classrooms that are both positive and proactive. One key finding from Wiebe-Berry's study was that teachers could use the learning environment within the classroom to create and encourage authentic participation from all members of the classroom community. Jorgenson (2018) and Danforth (2014) also stress relationships and membership in the classroom community as behavior supports. Wiebe-Berry (2006) explains that increased participation across classroom activities and learning increased the sense of community for all students and allowed students to see each member as a full member of that community. Creating a respectful and safe environment for students is another behavior support many authors mention (Danforth, 2014; Jorgenson, 2018; Weibe-Berry, 2006). Danforth (2014) stated, "The two goals of classroom management and behavior problem solving are to support all students as citizens, as valued community members, while creating a respectful and peaceful classroom climate conducive to learning" (p.

133). Another humanistic and positive behavior support that is recommended by researchers is explicit teaching of social and emotional skills (Danforth, 2014; Weibe-Berry, 2006). Weibe-Berry argue that providing direct instruction and preparing students for what is expected in social interactions sets up students for success (2006).

When moving to student specific humanistic behavioral supports, Causton et al. (2015) recommend that school professionals center strengths and preferences when designing instructional tasks. They also suggest that teachers determine the communicative intent of all behavior and then meet the student's needs, rethink paraprofessional support and how such support can be faded back and replaced by other supports and keep any disciplinary feedback private to maintain a student's dignity within the classroom (pp. 77-79). Similarly, Jorgenson (2018) suggests that it is crucial to presume all students' value and competence and provide students with a means to communicate all of the time. Discovering communicative intent and then supporting more appropriate and timely means of communication go hand in hand when offering behavior supports to students.

Traditional School Views of and Responses to Challenging Behavior

In this section, I move from detailing positive and humanistic behavior supports to more traditional responses to challenging

behavior. Before exploring a range of traditional responses to challenging behavior, it is important here to define “challenging behavior”. Emerson (2001) defines challenging behavior as

A term initially promoted in North America by The Association for People with Severe Handicaps, has come to replace a number of related terms including abnormal, aberrant, disordered, disturbed, dysfunctional, maladaptive and problem behaviors.

These terms have previously been used to describe a broad class of unusual behaviors shown by people with severe intellectual disabilities. They include aggression, destructiveness, self-injury, stereotyped mannerisms and a range of other behaviors which may be either harmful to the individual (e.g. eating inedible objects), challenging for carers and care staff. (p.3, 2001)

Emerson (2001) argues that by choosing to use the word challenging, he hopes to broaden the focus of a behavior outside of the person and into the social and interpersonal context. Challenging behavior will be used here as it is a common term used in educational settings and literature as term.

Traditional Responses to Challenging Behavior

While there is an expansive body of literature about positive, humanistic behavioral supports and management strategies that could be utilized within inclusive classrooms to support learners within a

classroom community (Causton, Tracy-Bronson, & MacLeod, 2015; Danforth, 2014; Jorgensen, 2018; Weibe-Berry, 2006), the reality is that challenging behavior is often times read and responded to very differently within public schools. There is a continuum of traditional behavior supports for students that ranges from seemingly harmless and hidden shaming practices to restraint and seclusion.

In classrooms across the country, many students experience shaming as a response to challenging or undesired behavior or actions. In an examination of shaming practices and their effects, Goodman (2017) explained, "...for shaming to occur, people must be observed disapprovingly by others whose values they share, and they must believe that they deserve the criticism" (p. 27). Goodman explains that public data walls, such as academic progress or disciplinary infractions charts, public apologies, and physical isolation, are all examples of everyday shaming that occurs in schools throughout the United States (2017). When examining the effects of shaming on students, Goodman (2017) explains that almost all of the time shaming does not, in fact, do any good, but rather humiliates a child, effectively harming their self-worth.

Another traditional response to behavior in US schools is zero tolerance policies. Since the 1990s, schools across the United States have instituted "zero tolerance" policies in an effort to reduce violent

and dangerous behavior. As described by Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld (2011),

A zero-tolerance policy assigns explicit, predetermined punishments to specific violations of school rules, regardless of the situation or context of the behavior. In many cases, punishment for a violation under the policy is severe, such as suspension or expulsion from school. In theory, zero tolerance deters students from violent or illegal behavior because the punishment for such a violation is harsh and certain” (p. 1).

As Casella (2003) explains, the thinking behind zero tolerance policies is that making students aware of the exact consequences that would accompany certain behavior will make them less likely to engage in that behavior.

Although zero tolerance policies and systematic responses to behavior are common in U.S. schools, there are many negative effects of zero tolerance policies. Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld (2011) identified the following negative effects of zero tolerance policies. First, zero tolerance policies are often not effective in reducing the amount of challenging behavior occurring in schools. Second, bullying is still very prevalent in schools despite zero tolerance policies. Third, the punishments associated with zero tolerance (such as suspension and expulsion) are associated with negative outcomes, such as increased

dropout rates and lower academic achievement. Fourth, the implementation of zero tolerance policies varies greatly and is subject to teacher and administrative judgement. Fifth, students of color, students with disabilities, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience higher rates of suspensions and expulsions under these policies. Sixth, students across the country miss many school days for nonviolent offenses (pp. 2-3). Thus, the consequences of zero tolerance policies "...further reinforce negative behavior by denying students opportunities for positive socialization in schools and nurture a distrust of adults..." (Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld, 2011, p. 2). Because of the many problems associated with zero tolerance policies, Casella (2003), instead, recommends that schools focus on violence prevention initiatives and school discipline initiatives (pp. 885-889). Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld (2011) recommend alternatives to zero tolerance policies as well, including that schools target behavioral supports for at-risk students and that schools focus on character education and social-emotional learning programs.

Other traditional responses to challenging behavior include Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans. In terms of larger system-wide responses to behavior for students receiving special education services and supports, Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) are used

within school systems to try to think about what specific challenging behavior is communicating and then how to respond to the behavior through the BIP. Acker et al. (2005) set out to examine the FBA/BIP process and evaluate how successfully it was being implemented. Working with school personnel in the state of Wisconsin over a three-year period, participants received extensive professional development on positive behavioral support. The program consisted of a single day general training seminar about conducting FBAs and developing positive BIPs. A two-day seminar followed that focused in more specifically on identifying the function of the behavior from the data collection process, and having the function identified then guide the development of the BIP. After attending these seminars, schools were then encouraged to send their FBA/BIPs to the research team and they were evaluated using a rating scale (Acker et al., 2005, pg. 38-39). Using the rating scale process, the research team evaluated the following:

- (a) the make-up and training of the members of the IEP team responsible for FBA/BIP development; (b) the identification of the target behavior(s); (c) the identification of the hypothesized function(s); (d) data collection procedures; (e) examination of context variables that impact the behavior; (f) verification of the hypothesized function; (g) connection of the Behavior

Intervention Plan (BIP) to the FBA; (h) use of positive behavioral supports; and, (i) monitoring of implementation and effectiveness of the BIP (Acker et al, 2005, pg. 39-40).

The results from this research highlight many problems within the FBA/BIP process. The FBA/BIP process should be a team problem-solving process, in which multiple people observe the student behavior to collectively make sense of it and its possible functions together. The team then formulates a Behavior Intervention Plan (with necessary supports). Together the team aims to try to decrease challenging behavior and increase prosocial behavior. Acker et al. found that, overall, there was a lack of consistency on who made up the FBA/BIP team: only 40% included all of the people required for a legal IEP team; 58% did not invite or include a parent; 57% did not indicate participation by a general education teacher; and 8% were developed by a single person (2005, pp. 40-43). When schools are responding to challenging behavior within schools, it seems essential to have a large team of people come together to develop the support plan if they in fact want it to be successful.

Another key component, as previously discussed, of the FBA/BIP process and a principle laid out by the U.S. Department of Education was to identify the reason behind, or function, of the challenging behavior. Acker et al's research found that of the FBA/BIPs they

evaluated, they first highlighted many problems with teams defining the challenging behavior actually being targeted (2005, pg. 44). Furthermore, once a target behavior was identified and data was collected for the purpose of developing a functional hypothesis, only a quarter of the FBAs examined actually identified what function the team believed that behavior was serving (Acker et al., 2005, 44). When they examined the BIPs, they found that only 35% actually developed a plan that included alternate behaviors that would still meet the functional purpose of the challenging behavior (Acker et al., 2005, 48). While there were many other specific areas that Acker et al examined within the FBA/BIP process, overall, they found that school personnel needed additional training about the FBA/BIP process and effective functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). While FBAs and BIPs have been mandated since 1997, Acker et. al. concluded that staff is still not being properly trained, teams are not being formed, and effective FBAs/BIPs are not being created to respond to challenging behavior in schools.

Finally, restraint and seclusion are traditional responses to behavior. When challenging behavior continues to escalate, schools sometimes resort to restraint and/or seclusion for the student exhibiting the behavior. Restraints take the form of holding students from behind, holding them on the ground, or even using physical

mechanical restraints, like a belt or other device to restrain body parts. Seclusion is used to place the student in an isolated setting or in a room separate from all other students (Vogell, 2014) In both cases, adults (e.g. school staff, teachers, administrators) make the decision that the use of restraint and/or seclusion are required for safety, either for the student involved or other students, and move forward with the course of response without any input from the child who will be experiencing and receiving it. While those descriptions do not sound overly frightening, the lived experience of students experiencing them often are. Carson Luke, a boy from Chesapeake, Virginia, is a student who receives special education supports and services under the label of autism. When Carson was 10 years old, his hand was slammed while school staff members were trying to move him into a seclusion room, crushing the skin and bone of his hand. On this particular day, Carson became upset when school personnel suggested that he might have to go to this seclusion room, euphemistically called the “quiet area” by school employees. The behavior that “warranted” Carson’s movement to the seclusion room was an incident in which he threw his shoes at a teacher, and then scratched her. When the incident was looked in to, school officials did not include the information that it was in fact the threat of having to go to the “quiet area” in the first place

that had caused Carson to become so upset, resulting in the escalation of his behavior (Vogell, 2014, paragraphs 1-4).

While it could be easy to think that Carson's experience with restraint and/or seclusion is unique, these methods of behavior management are used with far more frequency than one would expect in schools across the United States. In a joint effort between National Public Radio (NPS) and ProPublica, the 2011-2012 school year data from the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection database found that, across the United States, restraint and seclusion were used in schools at least 267,000 times over the course of that single school year (Shapiro, 2014, paragraph 1). When they looked at both restraint and seclusion separately, they found that students experienced restraint at least 163,000 times over the course of that school year and mechanical restraints were used at least 7,600 times. Students across the United States were also placed in seclusion rooms 104,000 times during the 2011-2012 school year (Shapiro, 2014, paragraph 4). While these numbers are exceptionally alarming, it is important to note that 2011-2012 was the very first-time school districts were ever required to report their use of restraint and seclusion, and it is believed by those collecting the data that the usage of these methods is actually quite higher, as many schools did not report a single use over the course of the school year. Thus, it is

expected that many districts, in the first year of the requirement, did not actually report all incidents of restraint and seclusion (Shapiro, 2014, paragraph 5). Furthermore, the Government Accountability found, in 2009, that at least 20 children across the U.S. have died as a result of restraint or seclusion over the course of the previous two decades (Vogell, 2014, paragraph 11). I'd argue that even one student experiencing restraint or seclusion is one too many. Unfortunately, this data and incidents going under-reported show that they are a far too common reality for children within our schools.

Although no child should ever be held against their will, either physically or within an isolated space, this problem becomes even more concerning when it is evident that specific groups or types of students are actually being restrained or secluded within schools with much greater frequency. During the 2011-2012 school year, students experiencing restraint and/or exclusions are much more likely to be students with disabilities, most commonly those receiving special education services through IDEA labels of autism and emotional disturbance (Shapiro, 2014, paragraph 3). In fact, the 2011-2012 data showed that in 75% of the cases, it was a student with a disability who was restrained or secluded (Shapiro, 2014, paragraph 4). The New York Post, in their piece "Queens School Locks Disabled Kids in Isolation Room: Teacher," presented readers with the survey results of

parents, students, and school professionals across New York state, collected by Disabled Rights New York. These surveys showed that 34 percent of respondents reported the use of restraint more than 10 times in a school year on students with disabilities. One would likely assume that it would be older students (since restraint and seclusion are often used in the name of “safety”) who would be restrained in schools, but results showed that 74 percent of those who reported restraint more than 10 times in a school year were children under the age of 13, and of those 35 percent were between the ages of 6 and 9. Results further highlighted the fact that, of students who were restrained 20 times or more within a school year, 73 percent were also secluded (Edelman, 2015, paragraph 14). In looking across these data sets, it becomes very clear that it is disproportionately students with disability labels who are experiencing restraint and seclusion within U.S. schools. Beyond the disproportionality of students with disabilities receiving restraint and/or seclusion, there is also a disproportionality of students with disabilities of color being restrained or secluded. According to the U.S. Department of Education, of 6.7 million students served under IDEA, Black students make-up 18 percent, but of all students with disabilities being restrained or secluded, Black students make up 34 percent of students being mechanically restrained. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, pg. 11) That is almost double that of

the larger percentage make-up of students with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education outlined 15 principles for states, school districts, parents, school staff and others to consider when working on their policies about restraint and seclusion. While this report outlined many important considerations for when restraint and seclusion are used in schools, Principle 5 is of particular importance and states, "Any behavioral intervention must be consistent with the child's rights to be treated with dignity and to be free from abuse" (U.S Department of Education, 2012, pg. 12).

Classroom Community and Responses to Behavior: A Dissonance in US Schools

As outlined by Sapon-Shevin, security, open communication, mutual liking, shared goals or objectives, and connectedness and trust are all essential components of classroom and school community. When a student feels a true sense of belonging and membership as a full member of a classroom community, there are many benefits, as previously outlined. Classroom community is a central component of inclusive education. According to Soodak (2003),

One revealing indicator of a school's commitment to inclusion is whether there are conditions placed on a child's participation in general education classes. Classroom community is undermined when membership is made conditional on the student's

behavioral or academic readiness (Soodak & Erwin, 2000). When students are required to earn their way into a class or school, teachers and students are given the message that the child is not a full and rightful member of the class..." (p. 328).

Although many researchers and scholars have outlined positive, humanistic responses to behavior that maintain students' dignity and membership within the classroom community, schools often rely on very different methods when challenging behaviors occur.

For example, out of the different behavior responses outlined in this paper, shaming would seem the most benign and least likely to negatively impact one's membership within a classroom community. However, when one looks a bit deeper it is clear that it does. Methods like public behavioral charts, forced public apologies, and physically separating students from their peers impact all five components of classroom community as outlined by Sapon-Shevin (2010). As previously detailed above, Goodman (2017) explains that shaming (as would occur with the use of behavior charts and other behavior responses) requires that there be disapproval by others and a belief that a student deserves criticism. This is in direct conflict with the safety and security that allows for risk taking that Sapon-Shevin (2010) explains is necessary to create a classroom community. A student's feeling of both security/connectedness and trust can be

deeply impacted when they are forced to be publicly vulnerable and peers and other adults can see and make judgements about them based on their “infractions.” Furthermore, the system of shaming places the adult in power (Goodman, 2017), making decisions about the actions of a student, which also impacts open communication, another essential component in building a classroom community (Sapon-Shevin, 2010). When the missteps of students are made public in classroom spaces, social relationships can be severely impacted. Classmates may not, for instance, want to be friends with the “bad” student and they may also not want to collaborate or partner with students who are continually being shamed by their teacher. There is a direct impact between shaming as Goodman (2017) explains it and the essential components of a classroom community that Sapon-Shevin (2010) outlines.

On the other end of the traditional behavior response continuum, restraint and seclusion as responses to challenging behavior deeply impact membership within a classroom community. There is a similar direct impact on the ability to create a classroom community when restraint or seclusion practices occur as when shaming practices occur. Each of the five components of classroom community (Sapon-Shevin, 2010) are at risk when any restraint or seclusion practice is used in a classroom space. Feelings of safety and security are deeply impacted

whenever adults choose to restrain or seclude students, as I detail in my vignette in Chapter 1. Open communication, at the point of restraint and seclusion, has been traded in for physical intervention or removal and opportunities for mutual liking and collaboration are non-existent during times of restraint and seclusion as well as likely impacted long-term. Most importantly, feelings of connection and trust are damaged when restraint and seclusion are used: trust in the adults in the room, trust that a student has choice and autonomy, trust in one's safety, and connection to that space, where a likely traumatic and embarrassing event has just occurred.

Important to note alongside how behaviors are often responded to is the ways in which educators have agency in how they view students and the ways they engage in the classroom setting. Collins (2011), through her research within a 5th grade classroom, highlights the ways in which educators are able to "position" students in different ways in a classroom space. In this study, the adults within one classroom space together created a narrative of one student as a "bad boy," which then became the justification for his exclusion from the classroom community. This study names the ways in which our views of student actions and behavior are highly subjective and, as such, adult biases can have real, lived consequences for students who are seen as engaging negatively and then routinely treated as such, as

well as the ways in which implicit bias related to race, disability, and other identity characteristic can clearly play into who is positioned to the margins of a classroom community.

In order to further examine the connections between responses to challenging behavior and classroom community, it is crucial to look at who gets what responses to behavior, who is seen as exhibiting challenging behavior, how privilege and oppression as well as marginalized identities play into who is seen as a classroom community member, and what all of these intersections mean to unpacking this connection. Next, I explore literature that guide my work and shape the lens through which I approached this study.

Inclusive Education

I come to this work as someone steeped within the inclusive education context and philosophy, so it is necessary to define and set the context for this research. Artiles, Dorn, & Bal (2016) explain that inclusive education is concerned with the transformation of school cultures to: (a) increase access (or presence) of all students (not only marginalized or vulnerable groups); (b) enhance school personnel's and students' acceptance of all students; (c) maximize student participation in various domains of activity; and (d) increase the achievement of all students. While inclusion is often believed to mean that students with disabilities should simply have access to general

education classroom or community spaces, inclusion is far more expansive. A more expansive notion of inclusion requires undermining historical systems of privilege within educational systems to meet the needs of the widest range of diverse learners. Furthermore, inclusion (inclusive education), if applied more broadly across school, home, and community spaces, challenges us to examine and consider whether all students have access to and a presence in classroom or community spaces; challenges school personnel or other professionals to truly accept and understand all students as unique individuals; challenges us to consider whether students' participation is maximized and authentic across various settings; and, whether the inclusive opportunities provided increase the achievement of all.

Essential to inclusive schooling is the idea that all students, regardless of disability label or other elements of their identities, remain in the general education classroom for all instruction. With the push for inclusion in schools across the U.S., this means that increasingly there are students remaining in the classroom who qualify for and receive special education services and supports under a wide variety of disability categories. According to the 39th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017, as of 2015, 67,020,481 students ages 6 through 21 received special education services and supports under IDEA (U.S.

Department of Education, 2018, p. 36). Within federal data collection, the data label most closely aligned with an inclusive education model is collected as “inside the regular class 80% or more of the day.” As of Fall 2015, across all students receiving special education supports and services under IDEA, 62.7 percent of students received their instruction in the (general education) classroom 80 percent or more of the day (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 49). There is a wide range of access to inclusive settings based on disability categories: from only 16.5 percent of students receiving services under the intellectual disability category to 86.6 percent of students receiving services under the speech or language impairment category. The push for inclusion, nonetheless, means that a much more diverse body of students with disabilities are receiving instruction within (general education) classrooms. For example, as of Fall 2015, 47.1 percent of students receiving services under the emotional disturbance label and 39.6 percent of students receiving services under the label of autism were in the classroom 80 percent or more of the day (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 52). As the make-up of (general education) classrooms change, so do the academic, social, sensory, emotional, and other needs of the students within those communities.

Disability Studies in Education

A relatively new field of study, with its earliest writings emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, disability studies (D.S.) became more cohesive and recognizable in the 1990s (Davis, 2013). Acknowledging that disability studies is an inherently “messy, interdisciplinary field,” Ferguson and Nusbaum (2012) suggest that in DS-related research, the study of disability must be: social, foundational, interdisciplinary, participatory, and values-based (pp. 72-75). The study of disability must also be situated within larger social contexts and seen as foundational to understanding conceptions of other differences. They argue that disability-related work must take place outside the narrow range of disciplines, like special education and/or rehabilitation, and must include those with disabilities in authentic ways. Finally, they contend that there must be an ethical component to D.S. (Ferguson and Nusbaum, 2012, pp. 72-75).

Influencing a range of disciplines, DS scholarship has also been taken up in educational contexts. Officially formed in 1999, the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) special interest group of the American Educational Research Association (Baglieri et al, 2011) describes the mission of the group to be to “...promote the understanding of disability from a social model perspective drawing on social, cultural, historical, discursive, philosophical, literary, aesthetic, artistic, and other traditions to challenge medical, scientific, and

psychological models of disability as they relate to education”

(American Educational Research Association, 2019, para. 1). Disability Studies in Education scholars represent diverse fields and theoretical perspectives that include social constructivist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, interpretivist, legal, and critical theory (Baglieri et al, 2011, p. 270), typically engaging in the examination of the intersections of disability and issues around education. According to Ware (2009)

...the articulation of disability studies in education assumes, first, solidarity across academic disciplines; second, recovery of the discordant voices of critical special educators; and third self-critique among general and special educators to generate an “explicit and sustained analysis” of the educational treatment of disabled people. In the absence of such critical analysis educators will continue to deny the intrusive paternalism of the existing system, disbelieve that the system reinforces stereotypes of dependence and inferiority, dismiss the logic of the social- construction of disability, and dispute their own complicity in pathologizing disability (p. 108).

Disability Studies in Education moves away from traditional, medicalized views of disability and traditional special education, where disability difference is seen from a deficit-based lens and where the

aim of education is to remediate the effects of disability. Instead, DSE focuses on disability as difference and re-centers the margins to bring in the voices of those who identify as disabled to envision a more just and meaningful approach to education. Inclusion, as is explained above, is about more than students with disabilities gaining access to general education and is concerned with undermining historical systems of privilege within educational systems to meet the needs of the widest range of diverse learners. These concepts shape the lens through which this study is approached, and the existing literature is understood in relation to this study.

Classroom Community

Classroom community is a term that is often referred to when discussing elementary (and beyond) classrooms. Quite simply, "Classroom community is defined as the degree to which students feel like they are members of their classroom" (Ciani et al, 2010, p. 89). According to Sapon-Shevin (2010)

There is a growing recognition of the importance of developing respect for human dignity, for teaching students to be active participants- both in their education and in the community- and for beginning this important work at a young age. Creating classroom communities where students feel accepted and feel like they belong is not just feel good curriculum. Rather, there

are clear correlations between students' sense of belonging and their academic and social achievement (p. 5).

Numerous scholars have documented and described the importance of classroom community for individual students and their success (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins, 2005).

While the definition of classroom community is pretty straightforward, what is needed to support classroom community and what a true classroom community means for students is a little more varied. There are several different elements that scholars present as necessary to supporting a classroom community (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Harriot & Martin, 2004; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; & Watkins & Ebrary, 2005). The first of these elements is a set of group goals, both small and whole group learning goals (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Harriott & Martin, 2004; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins & Ebrary, 2005). Sapon-Shevin explains that an essential component of a true classroom community is shared goals or objectives, or a space in which students work together towards specific goals or objectives. Within classrooms with a true sense of community, students do not feel in competition with one another, but instead work to support one another and work together (2010). Another common element in research around classroom community is

active student participation, leadership and ownership in the classroom (Gaete et al, 2016; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins & Ebrary, 2005). Watkins (2005) explains the importance of students being crew members, not passengers, and helping each other learn. Watkins and Harriott (2005) and Martin (2004) also emphasize the need to embrace and support diverse contributions in a classroom community. Another widely mentioned element of a classroom community is student's sense of membership (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete, 2016; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010). Osterman (2000) describes a sense of community as a sense of belonging.

DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education

This study draws on a DisCrit theoretical framework, which will be defined, explained, and justified in this section of the chapter. Emerging from a recognition of theoretical shortcoming to account for both race and disability simultaneously, DisCrit seeks to consider the ways in which disability and race are both socially constructed and interwoven and interdependent (Annamma, Conner & Ferri, 2013). In terms of subjective categories of disability, where the very measures of whether someone qualifies or not are left to individual and clinical perspectives, students of color are at a greater risk of being labeled. For example, Black students are three times as likely as their white peers to be labeled as having an Intellectual Disability, and students

who are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander are about two and a half times as likely as their white peers to be labeled under this category. Furthermore, Black students are twice as likely to be labeled as having an Emotional Disturbance than their white peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 49). If these categories were objective or based on neutral criteria, discrepancies such as these would not exist. Furthermore, the category under which a child qualifies for special education services and supports matters in terms of access to general education. Whereas overall, across all disability labels, 63% of students with disabilities have access to general education for 80% of the day or more, the measure closest to inclusion, the categories in which students of color are especially at risk of being over identified do not have this same level of access to general education curriculum and peers. For example, of the students who receive special education services and supports through IDEA under the category of Emotional Disturbance, only 47.2% have access to the 80% or more mark of general education time. Beyond that, 18% of students are in general education for 40% of the day or less and 17% of students are placed in other environments, outside of the general education setting. When you put those two factors together, 35% of students who are identified under the Emotional Disturbance category experience high levels of exclusion. Of students labeled with

Intellectual Disability, another IDEA category under which students of color are more at risk of being labeled, only 17% access general education for 80% or more of the school day. Yet, 49.4% of students receiving special education services and supports spend 40% or less in general education and another 7.3% are educated in other environments. In combination, well over 50% of students who are serviced under the label of Intellectual Disability experience high levels of exclusion in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 55). These same categories (emotional disturbance and intellectual disability) also represent IDEA categories that are over-represented by students of color (US Department of Education, 2018). In other words, students of color are over-represented in the IDEA categories that represent less access to general education. Similarly, it has also been noted that of students who qualify under the same IDEA label, White students and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be given inclusive learning opportunities (White et al, 2019).

The entire system of education in the U.S. is built upon ideas of binaries: normal/abnormal, abled/disabled, deserving of access to rigorous grade level content/not deserving of that same access. Race, disability, and many other factors related student identity and

background are at play amongst all of those various binaries, privileging some while marginalizing others. DisCrit recognizes that ...racism and ableism are normalizing processes that are interconnected and collusive. In other words, racism and ableism often work in ways that are unspoken, yet racism validates and reinforces ableism, and ableism validates and reinforces racism (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013, p. 6).

DisCrit recognizes that racism and ableism are at the very core of everything connected to education: curriculum, school and classroom layout and procedures, responses to “behavior,” how children, families and the community are spoken about, and the list could go on. They are inherently deeply rooted within the institutional and systemic structures across the U.S. education context. DisCrit, as a theoretical tool asks us to rethink and problematize binaries at play within our schools, across contexts, and to question notions of normalcy. In order to do so, the very notions of norm must be revisited, because something can only be outside of “norm” if another way of being or engaging is unquestioned as norm (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013).

DisCrit Tenets and their Application to Work Around Classroom Community and Behavior.

DisCrit offers seven tenets, which are meant to serve as a way to operationalize DisCrit in research and highlight the types of questions a DisCrit approach will best serve. In this section, I will elaborate on the meaning of each tenet and will then consider how it can best help better understand all of the structures at play when considering both classroom community and behavior in schools.

- (1) DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.

The first tenet challenges researchers to think about "...the interdependent ways that racism and ableism shape notions of normalcy" (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, p. 19). This tenet of DisCrit recognizes the ways in which racism and ableism work together to put children of color at greater risk of being labeled with a disability and being relegated to separate and unequal educational spaces. This tenet of DisCrit also emphasizes the recognition that white, able-bodied norms are not necessarily universal. Individuals may not want to work towards achieving behavioral goals or objectives that reflect normative assumptions or ways of being (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, pp. 19-20).

- (2) DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.

No human can be defined, identified, or understood by one single element of their being. As Clare (2010) describes,

Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race... everything finally piling into a single human body. To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body, means writing about this entire maze (p. 497).

Recognizing this, DisCrit requires that the multidimensional identities of every student are seen and are also valued. In other words, one cannot consider just certain elements of someone's identity, without considering how one aspect of identity interacts with other aspects of the self within a particular social context.

Furthermore, DisCrit considers the ways in which normalcy is assigned (or not) to certain elements of identity and recognizes how normative beliefs have allowed certain individuals to be viewed as deviant or deficient. Various components of identity also impact how an individual experiences stigma and segregation. Moreover, certain identities might come together to make someone be perceived as more deviant and in

greater need of being segregated into alternate spaces than others (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). In schools, disabilities are often treated as a kind of master status—erasing other aspects of the student’s identity. Moreover, approaches to behavior often fail to regard how whiteness and middle-class background are embedded in assumptions about appropriate behavior.

- (3) DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.

While it is possible to recognize that certain phenomena are socially constructed and are not, in fact, biologically determined, it is possible to fall into the trap of ignoring and erasing the real, material, and felt implications of social constructions on individual lived experience. Furthermore, while race as a social construction is more readily acknowledged by critical theorists, DisCrit also recognizes the ways in which disability is also constructed. When disability is seen as purely biological, this leaves segregation based on disability, perceptions of ability, and the need for separate space and curriculum unquestioned. In a DisCrit framework, disability and race as biologically rooted is renounced (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, pp. 20-21).

- (4) DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.

Essential to DisCrit is the centering of marginalized voices and experiences. In particular, DisCrit attends to the ways in which students respond to the injustices that occur to them within our educational systems and recognize the ways in which students are strategic in their responses. At a very basic level, DisCrit assumes that students are constantly strategic in their decision-making and actions, as opposed to passive recipients of what is occurring around them. Furthermore, there is a long lineage of white, able-bodied, and otherwise privileged people claiming to “give voice” to the voices of marginalized folks through research and other work. DisCrit acknowledges that minoritized individuals have always had a voice and seeks to center counter-narratives against traditional notions of knowing and thinking (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, pp. 21-22).

- (5) DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.

Historically, dis/ability has been used to justify racism. Eugenics, craniology, phrenology and others were used to prove people of color “had less capacity for intelligence” (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, p. 22), thus justifying white supremacy (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma,

2016). DisCrit also recognizes and attends to the legal policies that have worked to racialize dis/ability, such as Black codes which criminalized people of color who refused to work under oppressive, dangerous, and exploitative labor conditions post slavery. These laws set the precedent that people of color who refused to work did so because of dis/ability or mental illness, rather than because of unfair and dangerous work conditions. Another example of laws racializing dis/ability are special education practices that lead to “overrepresentation.” Overrepresentation describes the phenomenon in which people of color are identified as having certain disability labels, particularly those that lead to more segregated settings than their white counterparts, at higher rates than would be expected when compared to the natural proportions of the school. Under this tenet, Connor, Ferri and Annamma (2016) also explain that both race and dis/ability figure into who is deemed the ideal citizen and, therefore, worthy of belonging (p. 24).

- (6) DisCrit recognizes whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens.

Because whiteness and ability serve as forms of property and cultural capital, “DisCrit holds that the political interests of oppressed

groups have often been gained only through interest convergence” (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, p. 25). In essence, only when interests align with those of groups who have the privilege of being the accepted norm, can gains be made in the interest of oppressed groups. In order for the interests of marginalized groups to be considered, there has to be larger buy in and benefit for those who experience privilege. Beyond this, as discussed earlier in the paper, DisCrit highlights the ways in which certain labels, such as a specific disability category placed on a child of color, can lead to highly different lived experiences, such as a more segregated learning experience, with long term effects` (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, pp. 24-25).

- (7) DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.

The final tenet of DisCrit not only supports activity but recognizes and encourages activism and resistance to occur in a variety of forms, including forms that may not traditionally be recognized as such. DisCrit does not align with specific prescribed notions of what activism and resistance are, knowing that traditional modes of each, such as protesting or sit-ins, are often safe, physically and/or emotionally, for certain populations of folks and not others. (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, pp. 25-26).

How Have Other Scholars Used DisCrit?

DisCrit Look at Challenging Behavior and Classroom

Community. Scholars have utilized DisCrit in studies looking at school policies around disability (Migliarini, 2018b; Tabron & Ramlackhan, 2019), teacher and leadership practices (DeMatthews, 2020; Migliarini, 2018a), at teacher preparation practices (Schwartzman, 2019) and in classroom community and relationships (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). As is necessary when coming from a DisCrit lens, all of the aforementioned authors specifically attend to the intersection of race and disability and argue the importance of looking critically at their collusive effects. Schwartzman (2019) states “DisCrit deliberately utilizes dis/ability to expand notions of student achievement, making it a useful theoretical tool in conversations around multicultural education” (p. 51). While Schwartzman utilizes DisCrit to highlight the need to bring in a discussion of disability into the diversity training and, thus, attend to the intersection, other authors use DisCrit to argue for the need to include race in discussions of disability. Tabron and Ramlackhan used DisCrit to discuss how dis/ability has been racialized in schooling contexts via policy creation and implementation in Texas (2019, p. 188), while Migliarini used it to look at special education policies in Italy (2018b). DeMatthews (2020) uses DisCrit not only to critique but to expand existing conceptions of

leadership practice, with the goal being to figure out how to systematically and simultaneously address racism and ableism. Annamma and Morrison (2018a), as well as Annamma and Handy (2019), use DisCrit to theorize around relationships in the classroom. Annamma and Morrison (2018a) frame their work in DisCrit to conceptualize DisCrit Classroom Ecology. The authors define ecology as “the interconnections of living systems including ‘the interactions among... and the interactions between organisms’” (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a, p. 70) and state that a DisCrit Classroom Ecology, while situated within larger social structures, also offers a lens to look at all different levels of interactions. The authors in this study emphasize the importance of tracing the lineage of thought, experience and theory when thinking through a new way of thinking about educational ecologies to counter the current ecologies that the authors argue are dysfunctional (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b). Annamma and Handy (2019) use DisCrit to “conceptualize relationships built in the classroom as a necessary part of critical curriculum studies” (p. 442). The authors point out the issues with classroom and behavior management being a top-down control or eradication of student behavior and argue that a DisCrit orientation is needed to transform these practices (Annamma & Handy, 2019). In this study, Annamma and Handy most often mention the relationships

a teacher has with their students, rather than students have with each other (2019).

Connor, Cavendish, Gonzalez, and Jean-Pierre (2019) take a slightly different approach to using DisCrit than the other studies mentioned here by specifically using the seven tenets of DisCrit as a structure to critique special education's response to overrepresentation (p. 732). The authors take each tenet of DisCrit and discuss how each one can be used to think about and understand statistics, studies and conversations around overrepresentation in special education. While all of the authors mentioned here use DisCrit in their research, they each use the theoretical lens differently.

While scholars have utilized DisCrit to look at relationships and community within the classroom (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a; Annamma & Handy, 2019) and to look at school policies and practices around disability (Migliarini, 2018b; Tabron & Ramlackhan, 2019), there is a need to examine the relationship between policies and practices that uniquely affect marginalized students and the classroom community at large, specifically coming from a DisCrit lens.

Methodologies of DisCrit Studies in This Area. Beyond situating this study topically within existing literature, it is useful in this case to also situate it methodologically. While there is a need to address the interconnections between classroom community and

challenging behavior, there is also a need to look at it in specific ways as I will detail next. In this section I focus on the methods used within studies employing DisCrit in the areas of challenging behavior and classroom community (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Annamma & Morrison, 2018a; Migliarini, 2018a; Migliarini, 2018b; Schwitchman, 2019; Tabron & Ramlackhan, 2019) as it sets the stage for my study within this content area.

Both Migliarini (2018b) and Tabron and Ramlackhan (2019) use DisCrit to look at school policies regarding students with disabilities. Tabron and Ramlackhan utilize critical policy analysis and critical quantitative methods, specifically logistic regression models, to look at current policies and how they impact “African American youth with disabilities” (2019, p. 181). This is the only study I found using DisCrit in the area of challenging behavior and classroom community that employed quantitative methods. Migliarini (2018b) takes a very different approach than Tabron and Ramlackhan (2019) to analyzing policy in her use of constructivist grounded theory. Migliarini conducted semi-structured interviews and analyzed the interviews using different coding strategies such as gerunds to code for actions and process, memo writing, and comparison of codes and categories (2018b; p. 443). Migliarini used DisCrit to guide and command her research through early and advanced memo writing, specifically

employing the different tenets of DisCrit as laid out by Annamma et al. (2016).

Schwitsman (2019) and Migliarini (2018a) both use DisCrit to look at practices, both in teacher preparation and educational leadership. Schwitsman (2019) describes their process as qualitative analysis via poetry and categorizations of course assignments. This scholar looks at a preservice teaching preparation course, particularly through student work to offer a DisCrit analysis of how preservice teachers engage with curriculum and materials meant to address diversity and difference (Schwitsman, 2019). Migliarini (2018a) used case study and employed critical discourse analysis to a set of semi-structured interviews in looking at educational policy discourse through a DisCrit framework. Again here, Migliarini relies on semi-structured interviews to take a DisCrit informed look at educational practices and policies (2018a, 2018b).

Annamma and Morrison (2018) and Annamma and Handy (2019) both address relationships in the classroom using a DisCrit framework. Annamma and Morrison (2018) use a critical conceptual analysis to theorize a DisCrit Classroom Ecology by tracing the lineage of Critical Race Theory and DisCrit, and then exploring pedagogy, curriculum and solidarity as constructs of DisCrit Classroom Ecology.

Annamma and Handy (2019) theorize around what it could mean if critical classroom relationships were centered through DisCrit.

While Migliarini (2018a, 2018b) uses DisCrit in studies employing semi-structured interviews, many of the other studies focus on policies (Tabron & Ramlackhan, 2019), student work (Schwitchman, 2019) and other written work and data to theorize and analyze using a DisCrit framework. While Annamma and Morrison (2018) and Annamma and Handy (2019) both focus on relationships in the classroom, and Annamma and Handy (2019) theorize around both relationships and how behavior is handled in the classroom, both studies focus on analyzing and theorizing around written work and data. There is still a need to address the intersections of classroom community and challenging behavior using methods that include the perspectives of individuals currently experiencing these phenomena.

Migliarini (2018b) models the use of DisCrit in a constructivist grounded theory study in exploring school policies. Although Migliarini does not look at the same phenomena as I focus on in my study, I drew on her use of DisCrit within CGT, particularly through the reliance on DisCrit within memoing. In using CGT to explore the interconnections between classroom community and challenging behavior, not only do I address a gap in the literature in regard to content, but also methodologically. Drawing on DisCrit, and these

examples of how it has been used in other studies, I will now discuss how it will be used in this study.

How Is DisCrit Used In This Study?

Classroom community and how behaviors perceived as challenging are responded to are both complex phenomena within a much larger institutional and structural context that also impact and interact with one another. As I worked to research the ways in which responses to challenging behavior and classroom community interact with and impact one another in classroom spaces for students identified for receiving special education supports and services and for students who are not identified, an approach grounded in DisCrit was be essential. Other scholars using DisCrit argue for use based on the “long history of racism and ableism within the U.S. [that] shapes policies, practices, and preparation in public education” (DeMatthews, 2020) and on the idea that “racism and ableism work in tandem to position specific bodies and minds as out of place” (Annamma & Handy, 2019) in places such as classrooms, and in creating phenomena such as the overrepresentation of students of color in special education, specifically in certain disability labels being more highly relegated to segregated placements (Conner et al, 2019). Annamma and Handy (2019) specifically look at classroom behavior management and argue for the need to attend to the ways maintaining

order and managing classrooms are “rooted in normative understandings of behavior that are intrinsically ableist” and racist (p. 445). Annamma and Morrison (2018a) make a claim for how the different tenets of DisCrit are important when thinking of classrooms through an ecology lens and in dissecting all levels of interconnectedness and relationships within the classroom.

DisCrit is a useful tool in looking at control and management of behavior in the classroom (Annamma & Handy, 2019), and in looking at relationships within a classroom setting (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Annamma & Morrison, 2018b). The different tenets of DisCrit offered an important lens when dissecting these interacting phenomena. When thinking about classroom community, approximately 80% of the K-12 teaching force is white and roughly 77% is female (Loewus, 2017).

Whether named or not, systems of power, privilege, marginalization, and bias are all at play within U.S. public school classrooms. Implicit bias affects each educator in different ways, and beyond that, simple differences and preferences in things like personality and interests impact the ways in which teachers interact with different students within their classroom. Furthermore, how students are viewed by one another are impacted by the same phenomena of implicit bias, preferences, and family values. The first tenet challenges those utilizing a DisCrit approach to think about “...the interdependent ways

that racism and ableism shape notions of normalcy” (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, p. 19). With the vast majority of teachers, those who are in power in classrooms, being white, this first tenet will support the unpacking of the co-mingled invisible racism and ableism at play.

Tenet six of DisCrit “recognizes Whiteness and Ability as ‘property’” (Connor et al., 2016, p. 24). Connor et al. explain that for years, groups of individuals have been positioned as disabled in some way in order to justify their exclusion from rights (2016, p. 24) To expand, disability is seen as justification for exclusion and, thus, used to justify exclusion of other groups of people, such as people of color. As I talked with educators and went through my analyses phases I heavily relied on this tenet of DisCrit.

The notion of classroom community is complex, because it is further impacted by grade level, school building level, district level, and state/federal law level practices and policies that control curricular content, curricular delivery, classroom management practices, and educational intervention services, among others. How students are constructed as members, or not, of a classroom community is far more complex than an observation as to whether or not it seems, from the perspective of the researcher, as though they are. The fifth tenet of DisCrit calls for the recognition of the legal and historical lineage of racism and ableism and how historically dis/ability has been used to

justify racism. This all impacts who gets constructed as a member, or not, of a classroom community.

Demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic status, native language, and disability status influence and impact who is seen as exhibiting challenging behavior, what is considered challenging behavior, how a specific behavior is responded to. Each of these then affects the classroom community, not just for the child experiencing that response, but for all other members of that space as well.

Furthermore, responses to behavior viewed as challenging are guided by building and district level policy, teacher choice, and administrative decision-making. For example, in schools across the nation it is still legal to utilize restraint and seclusion as responses to behavior and as interventions based on the criteria set by law and policy. The second tenet states that DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). This tenet will be crucial to challenge singular notions of identity in this study. It will also be important to focus again on the interdependent ways racism and ableism shape what is seen as normal (Connor et al, 2016, p. 19), and the legal and historical lineage of the interwovenness of racism and ableism. DisCrit's emphasis on recognizing race and ability as social constructions, while also

recognizing the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, will be crucial to this study. One example is how either of these labels directly impact students in responses to behavior within the classroom. Utilizing DisCrit as the theoretical lens for this study, specifically looking to the tenets as a guide, will support beginning to unearth how certain responses to the behavior of any member of a classroom can impact feelings of safety and belonging for other members of the community, and tie those feelings to the larger structural practices that create them.

In this chapter I situate this study amongst the existing literature as well as establish the lens through which I approach this work as an inclusive educator centered in a Disability Studies in Education framework. I also establish DisCrit as my theoretical lens for this research. In Chapter 3 I will describe the methods I employed throughout this study.

Chapter 3: Methods

“In its various forms, critical inquiry addresses power, inequality, and injustice... I see critical inquiry as embedded in a transformative paradigm that seeks to expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality, and injustice” (Charmaz, 2017)

In this chapter I outline and discuss the critical qualitative research methods I used to explore how educators conceptualize and operationalize classroom community and challenging behavior, including responses to said behavior and the connections they perceived between the two through a DisCrit theoretical framework. To do this I interviewed 15 educators, all graduates from the same inclusive education program and university. I conducted multiple rounds of interviews to begin to understand how these educators understand classroom community, challenging behavior, and the connections between the two.

Chapter 3 is comprised of three sections. The first section contextualizing this study under the critical qualitative research methods umbrella, including a brief discussion on how critical qualitative methods have been used in other studies. The second section describes Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) as method and how it has been used by other scholars. The last section operationalizes

CGT for this particular study and outlines the specific methods that will be employed here.

Critical Qualitative Research Methods

Charmaz (2017) writes,

...Anglo-North American worldviews, particularly those based on individualism, pervade much of qualitative inquiry and foster adopting a *taken-for-granted* methodological individualism.

Subsequently, many researchers import preconceptions about individualism into their methodologies. They focus on individuals and emphasize the individual level of analysis without excavating the structural contexts, power arrangements, and collective ideologies on which the specific analysis rests. (pp. 34-35)

According to the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2018), as of fall 2016, of the 1.5 million faculty members in postsecondary institutions across the US, 41% were white males and another 35% were white females. This means that 76% of all faculty members across the United States are white, and that is at a time where faculty is more diverse than it has been in the past. In other words, the academy is saturated in Whiteness, including across the realms of theory and research methods, without ever being named. Koro-Ljungberg and Cannella (2017) remind us that critical qualitative researchers, "...address the complexities of oppression and

privilege, and acknowledge mainstream research as implicated in the reproduction of oppression" (p. 327). There is a growing field of scholars engaging in critical qualitative research methods to begin the excavation process within research to bring the structural contexts, power arrangements and collective ideologies to the forefront. At its core, critical qualitative inquiry is about engaging in inquiry "...that addresses inequities in the economy, education, employment, environment, health, housing, food, and water, inquiry that embraces the global cry for peace and justice" (Denzin, 2017, p. 8). Charmaz (2017) explains, "In its various forms, critical inquiry addresses power, inequality, and injustice... I see critical inquiry as embedded in a transformative paradigm that seeks to expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality, and injustice" (p. 35). As opposed to traditional qualitative research, in which the researcher records everything as objectively as possible and then uses theory and their own professional judgement to analyze the data and "make sense" of what it is telling them, critical qualitative methods look beyond the face value of what is seen, where social constructions and accepted norms are not named, to consider historical lineages and current contexts of injustice, privilege, power, marginalization, and inequities.

One of the essential elements of engaging in critical qualitative research methods is the researcher making an "explicit value position

that defines the meaning of the research question in advance of conducting the study” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35). The researcher goes into the research knowing and naming the specific cause, structure, or phenomenon that they want to learn more about, in connection to issues of social justice, emancipation, and transformation. Central to critical qualitative research methods is the continual openness to an emergent process across the inquiry process as well. Charmaz (2017) explains,

What stands as critical qualitative inquiry can develop long after researchers begin to pursue their initial research questions. An innocuous research question may produce findings that arouse doubt and spur critical analysis and subsequently contribute to furthering human rights. In addition, such questions may spark examining taken-for-granted methodological individualism in our methods. By subjecting our data, our practices, and ourselves to rigorous scrutiny throughout inquiry, researchers’ critical stance can emerge and change how we see our research participants, our research goals, and ourselves. (p. 35)

The critical component of critical qualitative research methods is the element that weaves across every aspect of the research, leaving the inquiry process and findings to continually be challenged and reconsidered, keeping in mind the original goal of inquiry, but not

remaining stuck to it. Denzin (2017) argues that critical qualitative inquiry can contribute to social justice. He argues that critical qualitative research methods can help identify new and different definitions of a problem and/or situation, can help locate, name and evaluate the assumptions held in privileged groups from the perspectives of those actually living, receiving, or experiencing within whatever is being studied, structural problems can be identified so that points of change and rectification can also be identified, and new points of view can be considered and judgements of the value, effectiveness, etc. of something can be determined by those experiencing it (p. 12). The perspectives of marginalized people are valued, believed, and centered, and larger structural elements of their experience are named and considered throughout the research. Critical qualitative research methods allow and require the researcher to move beyond the surface to think more about the larger structures and institutions, based on social constructions and norms, that are at play within any context being considered. No longer are things like Whiteness, ability, or heteronormativity left unnamed. Critical qualitative research aims to bring the structural contexts, power arrangements and collective ideologies to the forefront. This allows for new and deeper questioning and a continual shifting in our collective understanding of all that is at play within our world.

Critical Qualitative Research In Action

Critical qualitative research methods are becoming more prominent (Ashby, 2011; Cannella & Wolf, 2014; Collins, 2003; Hsiung, 2015; Mirra et al, 2013; Paredes Scribner & Fernandez, 2017; Perez & Cannella, 2013). Within my selection of critical qualitative research that has been conducted, there are some trends and unique elements of how and why they are employed. The first important trend to note is that all critical qualitative research studies considered within this section focus the research around historically marginalized groups. Ashby (2011) centered their research around students with disabilities who do not use verbal speech as their mode of communication. Mirra et al. (2013), Perez and Cannella (2013) and Paredes Scribner and Fernandez (2017) all utilized critical qualitative research methods in order to consider and learn more from the experiences of people of color. Hsiung, recognizing the Anglo-American core present within research in the Chinese context, considers what critical qualitative methods can do to decenter traditional methodologies. Furthermore, in many cases, research occurred *with* as opposed to *on*.

Looking more closely, Mirra et al (2013) engaged in a youth participatory action research (YPAR) study with students who identified as Latino/a and/or African American in the context of neighborhoods in Los Angeles "that suffer disproportionately from concentrated poverty,

systemic racism, and struggling schools but also draw strength from deep historical traditions of protest and resistance” (p. 4). Approaching research from a critical qualitative approach, these researchers worked to honor and hear the voices of multiply marginalized youth in an effort to “represent the interests of those who have been most disaffected by the existing power relations and their impact on the production of knowledge within a particular discipline” (Mirra et al., 2013, p. 4). Within this study, the traditional power dynamics were also flipped, as students had to opportunity to interview and present to the adults, as opposed to being the ones who were questioned and studied.

A traditional goal of qualitative research is to “give voice” to marginalized and unheard voices. Ashby (2011) engaged in critical qualitative research methods and, in doing so, was able to problematize the very notion of “giving voice.” Ashby (2011) recognizes the fact that “voice” in and of itself is an ableist notion, since there are plenty of human beings who are able to share perspective without ever utilizing voice. This work also works against traditional systems of power and privilege that marginalize students for whom competence is not presumed. Troubling the idea of a previously nonexistent “voice,” Ashby names the ways in which certain voice is listened to or denied. This highlights the ways in which

traditional research serves as a gatekeeper to which voices can and should be heard.

Paredes Scribner and Fernandez (2017) also employed critical qualitative research methods within their study with Latinx parents. According to Paredes et.al., the critical qualitative research methods allowed them to co-create knowledge with their research participants. Through a multi-layered data analysis, they were able to analyze the nuances of parent organizing within both a national and local context of anti-immigration sentiment and policies to identify the underlying tensions across varying constructions of parent engagement as constructed by the school and parent advocacy organization (Paredes Scribner & Fernandez, 2017, p. 904).

When critical qualitative research methods are utilized within research, structural components are unearthed and examined, moving beyond what can be seen at face value. What is said and seen is considered just as much as what is not said or seen, recognizing the power within omissions. Critical qualitative inquiry forces things like Whiteness and notions of ability to be named and no longer taken as norm, in order to recenter historically marginalized voices in ways that highlight structural contexts, power arrangements, and collective ideologies. It allows for a much deeper level of questioning and

engagement to alter what was previously considered a collective understanding.

Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry

A particular iteration of critical qualitative research, for this study I will be employing Constructivist grounded theory (CGT), which is rooted within critical qualitative inquiry but offers a particular “method for critical inquiry” (Charmaz 2017b, p. 38). Charmaz explains that CGT broadens the foundations and practices of critical inquiry through its emergent nature (2017). CGT is “inductive, indeterminate and open-ended.... it begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues.” (Charmaz, 2017b, p. 35) CGT draws on critical inquiry from a social-justice lens. It places importance on recognition of the larger structural contexts, power arrangements and collective ideologies that are at play in any given situation and aim towards abstract understanding rather than explanation or prediction. CGT draws on grounded theory in that its findings are grounded in the data and it emphasizes the analysis of data. It also is constructivist in that it recognizes that truth is constructed, and it emphasizes the multiple perspectives constructing any specific “data” or analysis of data (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006; Charmaz 2020). In short, CGT draws on critical inquiry, grounded theory and constructivism to shape research that has a

critical social-justice lens, is grounded in the data and actively works to let the data lead the research. CGT recognizes that knowledge is constructed and that the researcher themselves are a major player in that construction.

A crucial piece of constructivist grounded theory is methodological self-consciousness, which requires researchers to examine ourselves in the research process, including the meanings we make and the actions we take each step along the way” (Charmaz 2017b, p. 36). Reflexivity is a tool utilized by researchers using CGT in order to develop and maintain methodological self-consciousness. Reflexivity is an attitude of attending to the researcher’s role in the context of knowledge construction (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Reflexivity, as is described, is an attitude, so not a specific act at a specific point in the research process, but an attitude that should infuse all points of the research process. Reflexivity, according to Charmaz (2017b) is a tool to developing methodological self-consciousness.

Charmaz (2020) outlines a series of methodological moves in CGT (or steps/actions that make up the CGT method for research). The first of these moves, as Charmaz describes them, is paying attention to language (2020). She writes that, “Paying attention to language helps researchers to position the data in their cultural

context, and hence enrich the resulting analysis” (Charmaz, 2020, p. 170). Charmaz explains that in paying attention to language, researchers must pay attention not only to the participant’s language, but their own as well. Another move that Charmaz mentions is dissecting discourses, both macro and micro, which can become a key resource for CGT researchers as it can highlight both dominant and hidden narratives (2020). Coding is central to constructivist grounded theory, as this method involves grounding theory in the data and relies on constructing knowledge. Coding is an essential part of that constructing of knowledge. Theoretical sampling is another move that Charmaz (2020) outlines, which comes from grounded theory, and describes the gathering of data to build an emergent theoretical category. The pulling of data from all different sources helps the researcher link the subjective and the social, or situate the personal within the social and political structures at play. The last major move that Charmaz outlines is constructing concepts (2020). The aim of grounded theory, and also constructivist grounded theory, is theory construction through conceptualizing and theorizing around problems in the empirical world. CGT focuses on constructing concepts “that illuminate social-justice issues in the public sphere” (Charmaz, 2020, p. 173).

Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry in Action

Constructivist grounded theory for critical inquiry is a specific method, as described above, that is most often used connected to social-justice research. Charmaz (2020) reviewed over 40 different studies employing CGT to come up with the list of methodological moves, as is described above. The studies that Charmaz (2020) looked at covered topics such as violence and oppression, war and genocide, school bullying, gang intervention, the justice system, inequality in health, access to higher education, intergenerational solidarity and the state, nation-building, national identity, sustainability, and climate change (pp. 165-166). Thornberg (2015) used CGT for critical inquiry to “investigate the collective action of bullying and its stigma processes and influences on identities” (p. 310). Thornberg explained that interactionism shaped his study in that identity is a social process that is constructed and reconstructed in interpersonal interactions. He noted that a constructivist grounded theory approach offered an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the group processes of bullying (2015, p. 311). The author sees bullying as a collective action and its influences on identities numerous and drew upon CGT for critical inquiry, specifically its focus on a constructivist position to not only focus on the social construction of bullying and identity but the author’s role in the process of attempting to understand it. Thornberg (2018) looks at bullying as a collective action, highlighting

CGT's usefulness in looking at phenomena as collective and from multiple and shared perspectives. That is particularly important in exploring classroom community and responses to challenging behavior, which highlights the usefulness of this methodology for this study.

Elaine Keane (2012) also used CGT for critical inquiry as is described by Charmaz (2005, 2006, 2007) for her dissertation studying the widening participation in Irish higher education. Keane's study is particularly useful in that she discusses the heavy reliance on back-and-forth conversations with participants rather than observations, which was the focus of Thornberg (2018). My study relied on participant conversations given restrictions due to COVID-19 and time constraints of participants, who were already overloaded with screen-time requirements due to virtual teaching.

Discussion: Critical Qualitative Research Methods, Classroom Community, and Behavior

Classroom community and how behaviors perceived as challenging are responded to are both complex phenomena within a much larger institutional and structural context that also impact and interact with one another. As I worked to research the ways in which responses to challenging behavior and classroom community interact with and impact one another in classroom spaces for students identified for

receiving special education supports and services and for student not identified, a constructivist grounded theory for critical qualitative research approach was essential. The research questions I used to guide my study were the following:

1. How do teachers conceptualize “classroom community” and “challenging behavior?” What connections, if any, do they make between the two?
2. What supports and barriers do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?
3. In what ways do teachers address and/or omit race and disability in their discussions around classroom community and behavior?

When thinking about classroom community, it is known that about 80% of the k-12 teaching force is white, and even more specifically, predominantly female (about 77%) (Loewus, 2017). Whether named or not, systems of power, privilege, marginalization, and bias are all at play within U.S. public school classrooms. Implicit bias is at play for each educator in different ways, and beyond that, simple differences and preferences in things like personality and interests impact the ways in which teachers interact with different students within their classroom. Furthermore, how students are viewed by one another are

impacted by the same phenomena of implicit bias, preferences, and family values. Critical qualitative inquiry offered a model to look at phenomena in relation to social-justice, systems of power and privilege, and begin to unpack the different constructs at play. Constructivist grounded theory offered the ability to begin to acknowledge and account for the fact that I, and the majority of the k-12 teaching force, am white through centering positionality, and the identities of those involved in the construction of knowledge within this study. As Thornburg (2015) and Keane (2012) do in their employing of CGT for critical inquiry, I was explicit in my lens through the use of memos and similar tools to document and critically analyze my position in relation to the data and the construction of data and subsequent knowledge. Memoing allowed me to interrogate my own language, alongside my participants, as Charmaz (2020) points out is important in CGT methodology, as well as supported attention to my own power and privileges.

The notion of classroom community is complex, because it is further impacted by grade level, school building level, district level, and state/federal law level practices and policies that control curricular content, curricular delivery, classroom management practices, and educational intervention services, among others. How students are constructed as members, or not, of a classroom community is far more

complex than an observation as to whether or not it seems, from the perspective of the researcher, as though they are. For all of these reasons and more, critical qualitative research methods were essential for better considering questions about belonging and membership. Grounded theory allowed for all of the complexities to be acknowledged, to shape and re-shape the data and the study, and to attend to all of the innerworkings of classroom community, responses to challenging behavior, and how the two interact.

CGT supports a broad multi-dimensional look at phenomena, leaving room for and even calling for attention of larger systematic structures and powers at play (Charmaz, 2017b). In memoing, I documented my own experiences, my reactions to my participants and my thoughts before and after interviews, which allowed me to interrogate my own language in my analysis of memos and attend to the larger system in which both I and my participants are working in.

Demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic status, native language, and disability status influence and impact who is and is not seen as exhibiting challenging behavior, how a specific behavior is responded to, and how that effects the classroom community, not just for the child experiencing that response, but for all other members of that space as well. Furthermore, responses to behavior viewed as challenging are guided by building and district level policy, teacher

choice, and administrator choice. For example, in schools across the nation it is still legal to utilize restraint and seclusion in response to challenging behavior. These interventions are included in criteria set by law and policy. On a more innocuous level, on management systems like Classroom Dojo or a red, yellow and green light system, a teacher can make decisions about who has positive versus negative behavior based on their own interpretation of what is occurring within the classroom. None of these practices are objective. Critical qualitative research methods push us to consider the ways in which different preferences, ways of being, personalities, and policies all come crashing together to privilege some and marginalize others. Constructivist grounded theory makes room for and demands attention to the demographics, the positionalities of the individuals at play in any given interaction and in the data itself. Beyond whom is seen as a behavior problem, or not, a critical qualitative research method can also help us, collectively, begin to unearth how certain responses to the behavior of any member of a classroom can impact feelings of safety and belonging for other members of the community, and tie those feelings to the larger structural practices that create them.

DisCrit Informed Methodology: How DisCrit will be operationalized in this study

While constructivist grounded theory makes room for and demands attention to demographics, positionality, and similar complexities at play in any given situation, it alone was not sufficient for this study. Classroom community and how behaviors perceived as challenging are responded to are both complex phenomena within a much larger institutional and structural context that also impact and interact with one another. As I worked to research the ways in which responses to challenging behavior and classroom community interact with and impact one another in classroom spaces for students identified for receiving special education supports and services and for students not identified, an approach grounded in DisCrit was essential. Other scholars justify using DisCrit in their studies based on the “long history of racism and ableism within the U.S. [that] shapes policies, practices, and preparation in public education” (DeMatthews, 2020) and on the idea that “racism and ableism work in tandem to position specific bodies and minds as out of place” (Annamma & Handy, 2019, p. 445) in places such as classrooms. Others state phenomena such as the overrepresentation of students of color in special education, specifically in certain disability labels and segregated placements (Conner et al, 2019) as a rationale for using DisCrit. Annamma and Handy (2019) specifically look at classroom behavior management and argue for the need to attend to the ways maintaining order and

managing classrooms are “rooted in normative understandings of behavior that are intrinsically ableist” (p. 445). Annamma and Morrison (2018) make a claim for how the different tenets of DisCrit are important when thinking of classrooms as an ecology and for dissecting all levels of interconnectedness and relationships within the classroom.

It has been established that DisCrit is a useful tool in looking at control and management of behavior in the classroom (Annamma & Handy, 2019), and in looking at relationships within a classroom setting (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The different tenets of DisCrit offered an important lens for untangling these interacting phenomena in my study. As Migliarini (2018b) modeled, I primarily employed DisCrit in my memoing and relied heavily on the different tenets, especially tenets one and six.

One way I employed DisCrit was relying on the different tenets to make methodological decisions throughout this study. For example, for the purpose of addressing whiteness and the privilege and power at play, this study was set up to be representative of the current teaching workforce. 80% of the U.S. k-12 teaching force is white and 77% female (Loewus, 2017), and my study was set up to mimic those proportions. Whether named or not, systems of power, privilege, marginalization, and bias are all at play within U.S. public school

classrooms. Implicit bias is at play for each educator in different ways, and beyond that, simple differences and preferences in things like personality and interests impact the ways in which teachers interact with different students within their classroom. As Collins (2011) explains, educators are able to “position” students in different ways in a classroom space. As Collins details, educator’s narratives and positioning of students lead to justifications for either exclusion or inclusion in the classroom community (2011). The first tenet challenges those utilizing a DisCrit approach to think about “...the interdependent ways that racism and ableism shape notions of normalcy” (Connor et al., 2016, p. 19). With the vast majority of teachers being white, this first tenet will support the unpacking of the co-mingled invisible racism and ableism at play in this study.

Another way I operationalized DisCrit within this study is within my memoing as a way to deepen and guide my own understanding of what participants were discussing and what was happening within the data. Migliarini (2018b) laid the groundwork for using DisCrit within a CGT study through the process of memoing. I followed this model, taking the different tenets of DisCrit to break down the data within my memoing. For example, the notion of classroom community is complex, because it is further impacted by grade level, school building level, district level, and state/federal law level practices and policies

that control curricular content, curricular delivery, classroom management practices, and educational intervention services, among others. How students are constructed as members, or not, of a classroom community is complex. The fifth tenet of DisCrit calls for the recognition of the legal and historical lineage of racism and ableism and how, historically, dis/ability has been used to justify racism. This all impacts who gets constructed as a member of a classroom community, or not. This fifth tenet draws attention to the historical lineage at play in the school system and contexts within participants of this study are steeped.

Another example of how I used DisCrit throughout my memos, which ultimately not only added to my data but informed significance as I was coding, determining focus codes, and organizing the focus codes by theme, can be illustrated in my work to unpack discussions around challenging behavior. Demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic status, native language, and disability status influence and impact who is seen as exhibiting challenging behavior, who is seen as not exhibiting challenging behavior, how a specific behavior is responded to, and how that effects the classroom community, not just for the child experiencing that response, but for all other members of that space as well. Furthermore, responses to behavior viewed as challenging are guided by building and district level policy, teacher

choice, and administrator choice. For example, in schools across the nation it is still legal to utilize restraint and seclusion as behavior responses and interventions based on the criteria set by law and policy. Several tenets of DisCrit were important in unpacking all of the factors at play.

The second tenet states that DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on (Annamma, et al., 2013). It was crucial to challenge singular notions of identity in this study. Because of the data on disproportionality of students of color in disciplinary actions, it was important to focus again on the interdependent ways racism and ableism shape what is seen as normal (Connor et al, 2016, p. 19), as well as the legal and historical lineage of the interwovenness of racism and ableism. I relied on DisCrit's emphasis on recognizing race and ability as social constructions while also recognizing the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled. One example is how either of these labels directly impact students' responses to behavior within the classroom. Utilizing DisCrit as the theoretical lens for this study, specifically looking to the tenets as a guide, supported in beginning to unearth how certain responses to the behavior of any member of a classroom can impact feelings of safety and belonging for other

members of the community, and tying those feelings to the larger structural practices that create them and that they, in turn, recreate.

Finally, I used DisCrit to inform not only my coding but my constant comparison process, adding to the trustworthiness of the study. As I will describe in the later data chapters, throughout the study I took careful steps in understanding participants and tracing back, as well as member checking, the different narratives that were shared throughout first and second-round interviews. Often times, participants would not include identities beyond gender or disability in speaking about students who exhibit challenging behavior or struggle with classroom community. DisCrit informed my member-checking follow-up questions, such as asking for more details on identity, including specific questions about race. DisCrit also informed my process as I worked to connect the narratives. Participants often talked about the same students throughout different questions within their interviews, but it wasn't clear until second-round clarifications and tracing of descriptions that I would figure out it was the same student. DisCrit helped inform how I understood these narratives once they were put together and supported in unpacking the different ways that race was talked about but not named, the ways race and disability intersected within discussions of students, and the underlying larger

systemic paradigms that were impacting these educators' understandings of students.

Procedures

Participant selection and criteria

This study was designed for up to 15 participants and aimed to be wide in scope in terms of participant teaching experience. Participant selection was done in ways that both captured the typical demographic of the teaching force in the United States, and to work to unpack the co-mingled invisible racism and ableism at play within the context and topic of this study. Participants were all graduates of the same university; one centers a social-justice oriented inclusive education pedagogy. I utilized a snowball sampling method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) for recruitment. I began by reaching out using the recruitment email to 20 personal contacts. From there I relied on those individuals reaching out and/or suggesting others. Shortly after initial emails went out, I had over my 15-participant maximum. I continued recruitment until I had enough teachers of color to recreate the make-up of the larger teaching workforce, and then chose white participants based on a first-come-first-serve basis. Once I had chosen perspective participants, I sent out oral consent information and scheduled initial interviews.

The following criteria led my selection:

- (1) Participants must be 18 years or older
- (2) Participants must be practicing teachers
- (3) Each practicing teacher must currently be a certified teacher and currently teaching in K-12 public schools in the United States
- (4) Each practicing teacher must have graduated from a teacher preparation program that centered an inclusive teaching pedagogy and approach
- (5) Participants must be willing to engage in conversations about challenging behavior in school

Participants

This study is centered around the voices of 15 educators who represent a wide range of experiences. In the table included here information about the number of years of experience, whether the participant was a white teacher or a teacher of color, teaching role, and the community type of their district are shared. I aimed to get a sample that mirrored the current teaching force, in terms of racial diversity, gender, district type (urban, suburban, and rural), and years of teaching experience. There were more individuals interested in the study than I had approval for, so I had to turn people away. I kept recruiting until I had a comparable sample, centering gender and racial diversity in my decisions. I had more white females than I had room

for, so I eliminated based on the order they reached out to me. The participants in this study range from educators in their very beginnings of their career to folks who have been teaching for over a decade. While participants are primarily located in the Northeast region of the United States, there are participants teaching in the Midwest and Southeast included as well. Participant experiences are also widely varied across rural, urban, and suburban communities, as well as folks who have served as a general educator, a special educator, or both. Participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. For those who either didn't have a preference or didn't get back, I looked up flower names and went through the list from the top assigning pseudonyms. It is important to note that pseudonym selection did not necessarily align with participants' gender identity.

Participant	Year Teaching	Teacher Type	White Teacher/Teacher of Color	District Type
Daisy	6	Currently: GEN Formerly: SPE	White Teacher	Rural

Petunia	2	SPE	White Teacher	Suburban/Rural
Irish	11	GEN Formerly: SPE	White Teacher	Currently: Suburban Formerly: Urban
Carson	1	SPE	White Teacher	Urban
Kai	1	GEN	Teacher of Color	Urban
Eli	3	GEN	Teacher of Color	Urban
Tulip	13	SPE	White Teacher	Urban
Magnolia	10	SPE	White Teacher	Suburban
Azalea	13	GEN	White Teacher	Urban
Jane	6	SPE	White Teacher	Suburban
Nicole	13	SPE	White Teacher	Suburban

Heather	6	SPE	White Teacher	Urban
Georgina	10	GEN	Teacher of Color	Urban
Kaitlyn	7	SPE- 4 years GEN- 3 years	White Teacher	Suburban
Stephanie	13	SPE	White Teacher	Suburban/Rural

It is important to note that some key information tied to specific participants have purposefully been excluded from the above table. Since many participants were very concerned about being identifiable, information about gender is not included as connected to individual participants. Race has also been only delineated between white teachers and teachers of color. With such little diversity among students from this program, pairing the year they graduated with gender alone could easily make the participant identifiable, as is the same with any details when it comes to race amongst teachers of color. Across the participants in this study, there were 13 participants who identify as female and 2 who identify as male. Of the participants, 12 identify as White, 2 identify as Asian, and 1 identifies as Black. I

was an instructor of record at this same university, and of the 15 participants, I had two as former students.

Throughout initial and again in second-round interviews, participants expressed concern in being identified, asking questions about potential for being fired for participating in this study, and making sure anonymity could be prioritized. These 15 educators were vulnerable and open throughout this process and while it does impact the ways in which I am able to identify quotes, share analysis with readers, and make known my process in coming to understanding within the data, it was important to honor their concerns and vulnerability.

Consent Process

Participants were sent the consent form via email before their first interview. Before first round interviews started, the participants and I went through the consent interview orally. Participants were given the risks and benefits of participation, asked if they allowed their interview to be recorded and were asked if they agree to participate verbally. After consent interviews were completed, I went on with the first-round interviews. All participants who went through the consent process agreed to participate.

Data Collection

I utilized a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as my methodology of critical inquiry. As Charmaz states CGT is “inductive, indeterminate and open-ended.... it begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues.” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35) This study was designed to be emergent in nature, so that each step was grounded in the step before. The data steered the direction of the study; however, I did start with an initial one-hour interview. The table below illustrates the steps I took throughout my study, paying particular attention to the data collection and analysis phases of this study.

Snowball sampling for participant recruitment
First round, one-hour interviews conducted on Zoom
Memoing after each interview and throughout this time
Transcriptions of first round interviews
Memoing throughout transcription time
Line-by-line coding, and constant comparison with recordings
Memoing and transcription reviews
Focus coding using memo derived significance, centering DisCrit
Constant comparison and memoing
Thematic organization based on research questions and focus codes
2 nd Round interview protocol

Memoing
2 nd Round Interviews with memoing after
Transcripts for 2 nd Round Interviews
Line-by-line coding using constant comparison with recordings and data
Additional focus coding and constant comparison with all data
Memoing
Final analysis using memo-derived significance, literature centered descriptions and discussions

I started with predetermined first round interviews. However, from there the steps were grounded in the data. Based on the first round of interviewing, I determined a second round of interviews was needed. Not all participants were able to complete the second interview, however. Some participants from the start expressed difficulty in scheduling and requested only one interview, and others just didn't respond to the request for second interviews. I conducted 15 first round interviews and 9 second round interviews. Participants were asked to participate in an initial semi-structured interview, done in a virtual format, in the Fall of 2020. Virtual interviews were required for this study to ensure safety of the participants as well as the researcher. Data collection fell during a time when much of the

country was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so while not my first choice, virtual participation was required. All interviews were done on Zoom and several participants opted to not have their video on, stating Zoom fatigue. These interviews took place largely after school hours, and some even after the teachers had gotten their kids to bed. Participants expressed the importance of the study and willingness to make the interviews fit in their busy schedules. Initial interviews consisted of getting background information about participants' teaching experience and identities, as well as discussions about classroom community, challenging behavior, responses to challenging behavior and the relationship among these concepts. Interviews were all transcribed by myself, using the zoom transcript as a base and editing/adding as I listened to and transcribed the recordings.

Charmaz (2005, 2006, 2007) emphasizes reflexivity of the researcher in using CGT as method. As researchers utilizing CGT have in the past (Keane, 2012; Thornberg, 2015; Thornberg, 2018), memos were relied on heavily in this study during all data collection and analysis phases. I took memos directly after each interview, as well as throughout the data collection phase as I would think of things. My memos were audio recordings on my cellphone taken either in my home office or as I walked my dogs after interviews to think as I

walked. After recording, I transcribed all of my memos to then become a part of the data set and coded along with the interviews.

Initial interviews were coded following Thornberg (2018), and Keane's (2012) use of critical qualitative coding within their use of CGT.

Thornberg (2018) and Keane (2012) both describe their coding process as critical qualitative coding and emphasize their use of focus coding, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling. Thornberg (2018) explains that focus coding is taking the most frequent and/or significant codes in initial coding to make focused codes, thus organizing the data and the codes. Focus coding was utilized to help organize initial coding of the data. Significance of codes was determined using a DisCrit theoretical lens, particularly drawing on the tenets of DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013), use of previous DisCrit research, and memo-derived significance of existing literature on classroom community and challenging behavior. Keane (2012) used a similar method in coding, explaining that they utilized informed ground theory (Thornberg, 2012) where the researcher takes advantage of pre-existing theories and research findings in a flexible way. This differs from the emphasis on not coming into research with much experience in the research and literature on the same topic in other ground theory work. Keane (2012) used memos as the place to put his existing knowledge of similar research and background knowledge on

the topic being studied, which then shaped coding and focus as memos were a part of the data and thus informed initial categorization of the data. I used a similar structure as I drew on memos which were DisCrit informed. Drawing on background knowledge, initial coding attended to definitions of challenging behavior, descriptions of who teachers described as being members of a classroom community, how notions of race and/or ability were and were not discussed across conversations, who teachers described as demonstrating challenging behavior and other discourse used to describe those students. Theoretical sampling was used in this study, as was in both Keane (2012) and Thornberg (2018). Thornberg explains that “theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and then decides what data to collect and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (2018, p. 148). The codes generated in initial coding informed the second-round interviews.

Initial codes were organized under 5 main themes including classroom community, challenging behavior, connections between classroom community and challenging behavior, teacher’s perceptions of students, and social emotional learning (SEL). Under each theme, I identified a series of codes. For example, under classroom community, some of the codes included love, expectations, relationship, classroom

space, feelings of safety and belonging, etc. Once all interviews were themed and coded, I used the themes and codes to identify where clarification or expansion was needed. Initial codes lead me to adding questions about prosocial behavior, SEL and refusal and/or defiance as challenging behavior to second round interviews. I interviewed 9 participants a second time. The other 6 participants were not able to schedule 2nd round interviews due to their busy schedules. Memos were recorded and transcribed again after each interviews and data was again coded using focused codes developed in the initial interviews. Coding of the second-round interviews added a theme of work, work as prosocial behavior and as community membership, and the theme of lack of structural and systematic support for teachers. These themes became the basis for the data chapters to come.

Ethics

The risks associated with this study were minimal, however there was the risk of potential confidentiality breaches if someone were to overhear the interview. I minimized these risks by reminding participants to choose a safe and secure location where they will be comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. I informed participants through their consent process, as well as throughout the study, that they may withdraw at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions they are not comfortable answering without penalty.

Pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information are used to protect privacy. All audio recordings, transcripts and documents were and are stored on a password-protected laptop. I hope that participants experienced some benefit from participating in this study other than offering insight into how teachers think about and enact classroom community and behavior management/ responses to challenging behavior in their classrooms. Given the context within this study takes place, there is value to having space to think about community, supporting and building community, how certain bodies are read and responded to, responses to behavior, and the role we play in these interactions.

Trustworthiness

As a research, I made a series of decisions in designing and carrying out my research to ensure what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as worthy of paying attention to, or trustworthy. Charmaz (2016) describes the value and importance in transcription, particularly in building trustworthiness. Charmaz (2016) emphasizes not only having the transcriptions but emphasizes listening to the recordings which allow for a deeper level of understanding and a context that is lost in translation to paper. Throughout my data collection and analysis, I was sure to revisit not only the transcriptions, but also the recordings of my interviews, memoing as I revisited to

capture context, feeling, and details lost in translation to paper. I also made the decision to do all my own transcribing, as it offered both confidentiality and another opportunity to be immersed in the data.

Second round interviews were used as an opportunity for member checking. For example, based on my line-by-line and focus coding, as well as memoing, during first round interviews, I made a list of concepts, definitions, and areas in need for expansion, confirmation, and or clarification and asked questions that allowed participants to engage with me around those areas. Throughout data analysis, I took great efforts to systematically follow the lineage of participant offered information and data in order to connect the different narratives and offer follow-up questions for clarity and accuracy. Member-checking allowed for more accurate analysis and deeper understanding of participant shared knowledge and experiences.

Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) describe the importance of being transparent with data and analysis in an effort to add to the trustworthiness of a study. Throughout the documentation and write-up of this study, I worked to offer not only a breadth and depth of data, but also to offer direct quotes to readers to better share the data with readers. Another decision around data that I made with trustworthiness in mind, was to not overly clean up quotes when including them in the write-up. Rather than make quotes more read-

able, I chose to leave in all of the ums, repeated words, etc. as I feel it is important to not take liberties in sharing words and statements directly from participants.

Chapter 4: “I think it Depends:” Educators’ Descriptions of Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior

In Chapter 4 I address the first and second research questions:

- How do teachers conceptualize “classroom community” and “challenging behavior?” What connections, if any, do they make between the two?
- What supports and barriers do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?

Across interviews, participants engaged in discussions around what classroom community and challenging behavior mean to them based on their experiences within teaching and learning. Before looking more deeply at themes that emerged related to classroom community and challenging behavior, it is essential to first understand how the teacher participants included within these interviews defined and made sense of these concepts.

This chapter is divided into two major themes, with sub themes within each. The first theme covers how teachers conceptualized and built classroom community. Within this section, I will begin by considering how teachers defined a classroom community, as well as some of the steps that they took in their efforts to build a classroom community. Furthermore, I will unpack who teachers see and position

as being at the margins of a classroom community. The second theme is how these teachers defined challenging behavior. In this section I will consider the wide breadth of what is named as challenging behavior within schools and look at who teachers named as exhibiting challenging behavior.

Classroom Community

In exploring the first research question, it was important to understand how participants thought about classroom community. To get a more nuanced look at how the practicing teachers defined classroom community, I asked them to describe a time where they felt there was a strong sense of community, what they noticed, and how they knew it was a strong classroom community. Participants were also asked to describe what they do in order to build and support a classroom community and what examples they had of students who struggled to become part of the classroom community. In this next section, I first discuss common characteristics or descriptions of strong classroom communities within the first-round interviews.

Practicing Teachers Conceptualizations of Classroom Community

Asking participants to describe a strong classroom community yielded several common characteristics including student participation/collaboration, students showing care for each other and

for the teacher, students feeling like they belong, and classroom set up and the physical space.

Participation/Collaboration. Participants most often discussed a strong sense of classroom community through student collaboration and participation. The practicing teachers' described students working together, collaborating and participating in the full groups. Among these descriptions there were common overtones of safety, comfort, recognition of strengths and willingness to ask for and offer support. In many of the participants' answers, these overtones were almost taken for granted, as if it is assumed that safety and respect must be a precursor to community, but in each the center of the response was in collaboration and participation in the learning processes.

Magnolia explained:

I just know that it's a good classroom community when the kids all participate, they feel comfortable with each other. They're like, hey, I want to help this person do this problem. They feel comfortable being like hey, I don't understand what you're talking about. Can you re-explain it. Like, we're all learning.

Magnolia described a good classroom community as one in which the students felt comfortable with each other to the degree that they felt they could not only help each other but ask for help themselves.

Kai and Tulip described full-group participation and collaboration as being signs of a particularly strong classroom community:

Kai: And so, the entire class, they went on full detective mode.

Where did you leave it? Let's look around the room. They were talking amongst each other, sharing ideas, they were having fun with it. But they were also really trying to look for glasses and we did it and afterwards, the lesson and all the lessons.

Afterwards, they were just really fun and exciting and engaging and classroom community here was really important because these students were able to talk amongst one another, share ideas with each other.

Tulip: I think anytime a classroom community presence can be strong is when you present the students with a question they don't know the answer to, and they collectively work together without judgment, fear, shame

Both Kai and Tulip talked about how students engaged as a group in a presented task. They each emphasized that working collectively showed signs of a classroom community because it signaled the students felt safe and also felt engaged.

Students Showing Care for Each Other and the Teacher.

When participants described strong classroom communities, they detailed the importance of students caring for one another and

showing they cared for the teacher. This was described in a variety of ways including welcoming a student into the classroom and into the community, protecting a student with autism, and fighting another student to stand up for the teacher. It is important to note the examples that participating teachers chose to illustrate the care their students showed for both their classmates and their teacher.

Participants felt the best illustration for care was students caring for students with disabilities, students who had trouble fitting in elsewhere, and physical acts of violence.

In describing a situation in which a student who had been struggling in another class was being moved to their class, Petunia explained,

Our students, the day before, we told them that we're going to have a new friend tomorrow. We expect you to be really kind to them. They're going to be joining our classroom. The next morning two of our students had made cards for him. Another one requested a post it note to put on his desk to say welcome. Then that morning in the morning meeting before we could like we had done like calendar one of the kids raised their hand and said, can we play a game, so he can get to know all of us. So that was just like, my co teacher and I looked at each other like kind of like almost crying. We were so proud. It showed that our

students cared, and we had done something right in terms of having [out students] be caring people and wanting to welcome this new person to our classroom”

Irish: “So this one child found out another student was physically threatening me and had attempted to cause me an injury. That child felt such a deep connection to me that he actually attacked the kid that was trying to hurt me on the school bus and threatened him that if he ever touched his favorite teacher that would be the last thing he did. I’m not condoning the violence or the aggression, but to see that in all the chaos that was this kid’s life that I was that one person for him. He was willing to get himself in trouble to keep me safe.”

Kaitlyn: “The one student that stands out in my mind, he was a student with autism and you just had like quirky things about him, but he was so lovable. The kids just gravitated towards him. They protected him and they cared for him. So I kind of came into that, but then like I feel like together. We did a good job of continuing that classroom community.”

The participants described student’s caring for others in very limited and problematic ways. As Shapiro (1994) explained over 25 years ago, “the new thinking by disabled people that there is no pity or tragedy in disability.” The ways in which participants described

students treating their peers with disabilities lent itself towards a pity framework. The educators described caring for students with disabilities and students who struggled other places as the ultimate example of care, in ways that hinted towards it was harder to care for students with autism or students who struggled to fit in in other spaces than it was to care for any other student. Compassion for others struggling is included in many different definitions of pity, which is exactly how the participants described the ultimate act of care and, thus, the ultimate sign of a strong classroom community.

Irish's response needs further unpacking. This educator detailed an instance where one of their students attacked another student and Irish saw it as a sign of strong classroom community. Acts of violence against peers were given as an example of a strong classroom community when in a response to a threat against the teacher. This calls into question the value of safety that Sapon-Shevin (2010) outlines as central to classroom community. It seems unlikely that safety would be present for students in a space in which acts of violence, while "not condoned," were seen as an example of a strong sense of community. This example also begs the question of what classroom community means to this educator. It seems as though this educator centered themselves in their definitions of classroom community. Here, students protecting the teacher, regardless of

method, seemed more important than students treating their peers in way that promotes safety and belonging.

Feelings of Belonging and Safety. While there were feelings of safety and belonging embedded in responses centering around participation and collaboration, some participants also emphasized these as stand-alone characteristics of strong classroom communities. Students feeling safe and feeling a part of the community, whether explicitly stated or embedded in another response, was an interwoven theme in the participant's discussions around classroom community. Carson clearly summed up what many educators discussed in explaining a strong classroom community when they said "And the kids always really looked forward to it, which was cool. And I think for most of them, and for me too, we always felt very safe, and I think everyone felt like they belonged in her classroom." Multiple participants explained that being eager to participate was a sign of students feeling safe and a sense of belonging.

Other educators described student's opening up about concerns, like Magnolia, who talked about the classroom community they built with their fifth and sixth graders. Magnolia said "I knew they were in a good classroom community because they would like tell me when they were concerned about something going on in their lives. They will come talk to me." This educator described students feeling safe and

comfortable enough to share with them if something was going wrong as being an indicator of a strong classroom community.

Nicole and Kaitlyn both emphasized recognizing and embracing difference and diversity as important to feelings of belonging. Nicole explained,

Everybody's different. But beyond that, everything we produce is different, everything we feel is different and we believe is different. All of that is good and encouraged and makes us all special and to just sort of embrace that in a community... and want to be a part of it because they feel important.

Similarly, Kaitlyn shared,

So, I feel like when kids recognize what other kids need and understand why some kids need certain things and how some kids react differently, I think it shows that they that there's a strong community and that they're valuing each other.

Each of these participants talked about valuing and respecting diversity as a sign of a good classroom community. This is important to point out here, as in the following chapters I will detail how participants descriptions of challenging behavior and who struggles with classroom community membership contradict this emphasis and valuing of diversity.

Others emphasized how the students interacted, looked at and felt with one another. Heather, in particular, talked about how they were looking back at last year's photos, and how you could just see the classroom community that they had in the ways students looked in the photos.

Heather: And when I look back at the pictures you see the kids holding hands or you see the kids with their arms around each other and the smiles on their faces and they're, you know.

Although that they're not candid shots. I feel like the hand holding and the arms around each other was like a candid moment. You know, I didn't ask anybody to do that. You could just see the joy and like the classroom family we created in these pictures.

As participants described a strong sense of classroom community, feelings of safety and belonging came up over and over. While some participants talked about valuing of diversity, others talked about creating a family-like group that students felt a part of. Next, I will look at another common thread in educator's descriptions of strong classroom community.

Classroom Set Up. Practicing teachers emphasized the importance of the physical space of the classroom when identifying a strong classroom community. Student names and work posted on the

walls, student identified rules on the walls, tables versus single file desk rows, as well as table clusters were all used as descriptors of strong classroom community. Georgina explained, "As far as like setting up that community. In the past, the groupings in the classroom like having the desks grouped I think is huge." Tulip talked about having the room set up in a way that encouraged working together but also talked about student names being visible and up on the walls.

Tulip: I mean, a lot of them when you come in you would see their names on the door. You would think like okay, this looks like a place where the kids will get together

Similarly, to Tulip, Stephanie described what was up on the walls of the classroom including the importance of having expectations posted, or what they called a constitution as a sign of a strong classroom community. Developing shared expectations was a theme that emerged when teachers spoke to things they did to build and support classroom community, and Stephanie mentioned the importance of having those displayed in the classroom.

So, I think like just even looking at the walls and just the environment. Having expectations posted and setting that up from the beginning. Having some sort of a constitution that you refer back to like through the year.

The physical space was repeatedly talked about when educators described strong classroom communities. Participants also mentioned on many occasions how different classroom set ups were for them at the time of the interviews because of the pandemic. There seemed to be a heightened awareness of the physical space given the restrictions in place for safety during the pandemic, and the general consensus that not sharing space is a barrier to building community. In the next section I switch gears to detail how educators talked about building and supporting classroom community.

How Practicing Teachers Build and Support Classroom Community

After I asked participants to describe a strong classroom community, I asked what they did to build and support community in their own classrooms. Overall, the practicing teachers talked about how they treated and felt about their students and/or specific activities or practices they incorporated into their classrooms. Participants emphasized the importance of being positive, loving the students and showing them that they were loved and respecting students and showing them respect. Specific practices that participants stated being important for building and supporting classroom community included morning meeting or similar daily chances to check in as a group, classroom community builders and restorative circle.

As Irish explained, the practicing teachers emphasized the impact loving their students and showing/telling them that had when building classroom community.

So I make it a point to tell my kids that I love them every single day because you don't know if they're hearing it at home, whether it be because they're coming from a broken home situation or maybe parents are just too busy to remember the small things. I continuously tell my kids that I love them.

Whether it's a note, or every day at the end of the day we and our school day, I say, I love you guys. Have a safe night like. See you in the morning. I'm big on giving hugs and those types of social interactions with kids because I think they just need to know that like I don't look at them just as a student that I genuinely love them.

Many participants mentioned loving their students, and the importance of having that love of students, not only for classroom community but also challenging behavior. Respecting students and showing them you respect them was also a recurring theme throughout discussions of building and supporting classroom community. Irish emphasized the importance of mutual respect to build a reciprocal relationship with students. Jane also discussed at length the importance of respecting students when working on building

classroom community and specifically talked about respecting students through showing up for them long term.

She was one where I specifically focused on showing her that I respected her because she's a student that before school even started people saw her on my roster and were like, oh my god, this girl is going to kill you, blah, blah....And the first couple months were terrible. I mean, they were definitely rough, but I think spending time in building the whole classroom community, focusing on those specific kids that I knew were coming to me with like very challenging backgrounds and home lives. It definitely was worth my while because the rest of the year was so much better. Spending that time making sure that they knew I have their back, and I knew that they weren't a bad person.

(Jane)

Jane described a particular student who came into their classroom being followed by teacher talk of all of her challenging behavior and attributes, but that their experience was different than those teachers who described this student at the beginning of the year. Jane explained that it was important in this case that they earn this student's trust and show them love.

Petunia talked about the importance of teacher attitude in building classroom community, specifically about having a positive attitude.

The first is you have to be positive. You know, it's super cliché, but kids do what you do, not what you say. And so, if you're always only wishing it was Friday then the kids are going to be unhappy and are not going to want to come to school. So, I think that's the first thing because kids are smarter, especially emotionally and socially, then we sometimes give them credit for in terms of understanding what adults are feeling or thinking.

Educators discussed the importance of managing their own emotions and remaining positive. Petunia also explained that students can read teachers much better than they are often thought to and it is not enough to fake it. Teachers must really manage their attitudes and find ways to enjoy their work. Beyond teacher emotions, thoughts, and actions towards students, practicing teachers cited several specific practices they utilized to build community in their classrooms. These practices and activities included things like morning meeting or other similar daily check-ins. Several participants specifically mentioned morning meeting, while others talked about using daily community builders.

Petunia: But morning meeting. I just think is really important.

And you know, it's a chance for everyone to get on the same page, you know, kids come in from very different homes situations and a lot of that carries into school and we can't expect them not to carry it into school, but kind of morning meeting gives them a chance to reset to get ready for the day.

Georgina: Every day after the morning announcements we do a community builder. We played hangman today. It was really fun. So that has been my way to build a positive classroom culture.

Morning meeting or daily community builders were talked about often throughout both the first and second interviews, not just within discussions of how teachers build classroom community, but also how the district or school supports teachers and students when it comes to systems in place to deal with challenging behavior.

Beyond daily community builders, one participant stressed the importance of offering a structured and supportive environment to deal with any issues that occurred amongst the students as a way to support a positive classroom community. Kaitlyn was the only teacher to talk about how to handle issues as a community, but stated

I think we do what we call restorative circle. So, we try to get them all down and we name it. We're having a really hard day today and we want to know what it is that's going on. And

sometimes it's like a group mutual feeling of that lesson which is bad, and I didn't like it or something happened at recess and it was never addressed and now living with that for two hours. For anyone that's a long time to be frustrated. So, it's just like how to name what is frustrating you and hoping that tomorrow we work on these things.

Overall, teachers discussed having daily community builders and class activities, managing emotions and staying positive, and loving their students as ways that they built classroom community. Within my memos, I noted that participant's discussions of what they did to build classroom community seemed to be lacking depth and actionable steps they took. I kept coming back to what Dr. Bettina Love says about loving students throughout my memos.

I have taught so many future educators and worked with hundreds of in-service teachers who profess to love all kids and have good intentions to be fair and just in their classrooms, yet they write, say and partake in racist actions (Love, 2019, p. 51)

I have seen Dr. Love speak on several occasions, and just as she writes, she talks about how you can't love black kids unless you know black kids. There has to be an effort made to know, understand, respect and value black culture. In the next two data chapters, I detail in depth how teacher's described students in ways that further

highlight Dr. Love's statement. Next, I will discuss who participants described as struggling with classroom community membership. This all ties into the first research question and focuses on discussion around classroom community.

Teacher Identified Trends in Students Who Struggle with Classroom Community Membership

In order to begin to understand teachers' conceptions of students who struggle with classroom community membership, I asked participants to describe a time where a student struggled with classroom community membership, as well as any trends they noticed in who generally struggles with classroom community membership. Practicing teachers identified students with disabilities and students with "more complex families" (Jane) and/or hard home lives. Of the participants who mentioned students with disabilities, several mentioned students with autism, students with other specific disabilities, and then many mentioned just students with disabilities generally, such as Petunia who stated "Well, there are definitely more often students with disabilities. I mean, um the first thing that pops into my head, especially, you know, students with some social difficulties or, or processing skills, verbal skills, things like that." Many participants talked about students with specific disability labels or

generally listed specific disability labels as being markers for students who most often struggle with classroom community membership.

Magnolia has worked in multiple different settings as a special education teacher and explained,

So, when I was teaching in a behavior classroom, I had this little friend who really challenged my teaching abilities and who I was as a person. He had a severe re-attachment disorder. So, he was really great at stirring the entire pot in my classroom and setting off kids on purpose so that they would destroy the room. He either likes to avoid his work, or just enjoyed watching the chaos.

Magnolia mentioned re-attachment disorder when describing a student they had a hard time bringing into the classroom community. They were not the only educator to talk about how students “stir the pot” or “set off other students.” I address this more in depth in chapter 5 when I detail the ways in which educators spoke about challenging behavior and classroom community being connected. In terms of the participant’s talking about students with disabilities as struggling with classroom community membership, Autism was another label that kept coming up when practicing teachers were asked which students, they most often had trouble bringing into the classroom community. Kai cited two different disability labels.

Um, just speaking with her fourth-grade teacher and her parents, they let us know that she was on the autism spectrum. And she also was classified with an emotional disturbance on her IEP. Her fourth-grade teachers also said that she excluded herself. You know when you have really high expectations of yourself, but you're not meeting them. That's exactly what she felt, she felt she was never meeting the expectations of she set for herself. She automatically assumed that the classmates were assuming negative things about her, which is why she never tried to engage. (Kai)

Kai was one of many to mention autism as a common thread amongst students who struggle with classroom community membership. Autism was the most mentioned disability label within educator's answers to this question. Students with disabilities were one of two main descriptors of students that participants talked about as having a hard time to bring into the classroom community. The other common descriptor was of students' home lives.

Participants also spoke about students' home lives when identifying who struggles with classroom community membership. Here it is important to point out that what teachers define and explain as hard home lives are very subjective and also may point towards biases that participants hold. The thread of discussions around

students' home lives became a part of a larger theme within the data that becomes central to Chapter 6. I analyze these descriptions and biases in-depth in Chapter 6, while here I focus on documenting how participants described the home lives of student's they determined struggled with classroom community membership.

Heather: A lot of the times it's like the kid staying in a shelter who moves around a lot. Or kids who are living with a foster family. I feel like adults keep failing them. So, when the adults at home keep failing them, they kind of look at us and assume the teacher is going to fail them also. They can't trust you because they feel they might be taken away and move to another school. So, they just don't trust. They don't trust us, because the adults that they've been living with don't give them the love and the support that they need.

Heather described students who have unstable living and sleeping arrangements, as well as those who are in the foster system, as having trust issues, which then made it hard to bring them into the classroom community. While Heather explained instability in living leading to mistrust in adults which impacted classroom community membership, Jane explained instability in living arrangements either leading to anger or to being easily drawn into the classroom community out of a need for safety and belonging.

I definitely think students that come from more complex families are usually more challenging. It's kind of twofold. They're either super easy to bring in because they're, like, they need that, or they are super hard. I'm thinking of one student I had, she was homeless, and she was another one that kind of went bebopping around to all these different friends, families, I mean she was all over the place. She was raising her two younger brothers in fifth grade, and she was one that just like full on koala bear latched on to any teacher, any adult, any student. She just wanted it so badly. So, for her it was because she didn't have it. She wanted it so badly. She was the happiest girl. On the flip side, there's the students that come with so much anger about what they've been through. A lot of times it's because like they haven't process like You know, that's just kind of there, but they, they don't they don't want to open up about it. And so they're just super angry about it. (Jane)

Disability labels and "hard home lives" were identified by educators in this study as markers for students who typically struggle with classroom community membership. Descriptions of "hard home lives" included homelessness, gang involvement, foster care, and mistrust of adults. I will mention here, and detail further in next two

chapters, the absence of discussions of race. Next, I move from classroom community to a discussion of challenging behavior.

Challenging Behavior

A central foundation of this research was understanding the ways in which participants conceptualized challenging behavior. I quickly found that how challenging behavior was defined varied greatly. One interesting dichotomy that emerged was that many participants described challenging students based on labels and/or their perceptions about the student's "home life," whereas when disability and/or specific "home life" conditions were not seen as a factor for the particular child, they then described challenging behavior. Conceptualizations of challenging behavior included outside factors, behavior that could be labeled as physical, and many behaviors that could not be categorized in that same way. Within this section, I will first consider the ways in which some participants described a challenging student when asked about challenging behavior, and then will move into conversations about challenging behavior. The major categories of challenging behavior that recurred across conversations included: physical behaviors, defiance, work refusal, sleeping, destruction of property, and disruptive behavior. To begin, I recount the ways in which educators separated challenging

behavior they saw as being a result from outside factors, from the rest of their discussions of challenging behavior.

Outside factors causing behavior

For some of the participants within this research, when asked about challenging behavior they began describing specific children that they felt were representative of challenging behavior. Within each of these discussions, there was a sense that the challenging behavior was a part of the child because of specific factors, namely either a description some way connected to perceptions of disability/mental health differences or were a result of the child's home context. When I asked Tulip about the most challenging behavior they had experienced within the classroom, they explained

When you have children that have crazy home lives, they bring that into the classroom and then that becomes another challenging issue. Because then when you try to talk to the child to see what is going on at home that might be driving this behavior, you might open another can of worms.

After using the phrase, "you might open another can of worms," this participant went on and shared that the child having a "crazy home life" was a challenging issue directly connected to behavior. Furthermore, they described that when they asked the guardians about this child's challenging behavior, it caused challenging behavior

on the part of the child's guardians because they were upset that this teacher asked questions about what went on in their home. There was no further discussion of what "crazy home life" actually meant in this case, but there was clear blame on the part of the parents for not only the child's behavior, but also the response to this educator's questioning. Tulip described multiple instances of parents believing that Tulip's actions were inappropriate and accusatory.

A few other participants made connections to disability and/or mental health differences when I asked about challenging behavior. For example,

We have kids that get so angry and so upset and they don't know how to handle their emotions. So even those over emotional kids, the kids that don't know how to self-regulate or don't have like the coping skills that they need. So they can, be challenging also. (Heather)

This teacher described children being overly emotional as the route of challenging behavior. They saw a lack of "coping skills" or the ability to self-regulate, as being directly linked to the "over emotional" ways certain children engaged within the classroom. Similarly naming disability as challenging behavior, Kai described

So, for example, if I'm teaching a whole group lesson and there are distractions, or something pulls attention away from what is

supposed to be happening or if, um, someone is getting hurt or if someone has like physical or emotional disturbance challenges... I think those are what I consider challenging behavior.

Instead of simply naming different challenging behaviors that they have experienced across their years of teaching, this educator specifically named students with physical or emotional challenges as students with challenging behavior, and as students who in fact pulled the attention of the educator away from other students in the class. Another participant, Georgina, engaged in a discussion about some behavior being allowed and learned, while some behavior was outside of a child's control. This participant described the difference as

To me it's a difference whether it's a learned challenging behavior or when you have some kind of chemical going on that you can't control. So, I think that they're two different things of challenging behavior, but it's different kinds. I think that some is learned and can be controlled, and some isn't. Mm hmm.

While this participant was the one who clearly named the difference, across each of these conversations about challenging behavior these participants explained challenging behavior instead as certain elements inherent to the child, that was more or less out of the child's control and did not approach the question by discussing various

instances of just challenging behavior. Next, I will look at specific behaviors that recurred within conversations around challenging behavior.

Specific Behaviors Identified as Challenging

Physical behaviors. As a former inclusive special educator who sometimes supported students through behavior that I considered challenging, I was expecting educators to primarily discuss various actions that could fall under an overarching theme of physical. Based on my own experiences and how I often hear physical behavior discussed in schools, this category to me typically involves physical movements directed at the environment or people nearby the student, such as hitting, kicking, spitting, throwing objects, pushing, or other similar actions. While not as central to the conversations as I was expecting, some of the participants did discuss physical actions when talking about what challenging behavior means to them.

When I asked about the most challenging behaviors they had experienced as an educator, Carson explained, "Yeah, um, I definitely think of, like, throwing either, like, chairs or paper or being, like, more physical with other peers or with, like, teachers. Um, I think of spitting as one that I've noticed more recently than in the past. Those are probably be like the top tier, I think." Daisy also defined challenging behavior as, "Physical harm towards staff and other students. Anything

that was physically aggressive, any sort of just hitting, punching, spitting, fighting (pause). Yeah.”

While Heather included spitting in a longer explanation about challenging physical behaviors, another participant felt that spitting was the most challenging behavior that they had experienced in the classroom. Heather shared

I had a child who had a lot of anger and didn't really know how to cope. And he was a projectile spitter. He was spitting on the other kids and around the room. So, he would throw things and he would kick things and he would rip things, but the spitting was over the top, it was really over the top.

Heather was describing a student in kindergarten and explained that if all of the students were sitting on the rug, many could get spit on at once. What is also important to note here is this educator’s mention that this particular student didn’t know how to cope. Whereas Heather explained that the student didn’t know how to cope, so resorted to challenging behavior, Kaitlyn explained that they themselves struggled to cope in the moment with challenging behaviors.

Kaitlyn: I would say when kids get violent or get really angry and physical. I feel like I freeze up and I haven't had proper training. You talked about having to remove the kid or remove a

class. So, like in [one school I taught in], there were times where some kids would destroy the classroom. So, at that point, it's not safe. I know teachers had to move their entire class. I feel like it's hardest to respond when you don't know what they're going to do.

Kaitlyn worked multiple settings throughout their career. They described here experiences in a segregated school for students with disabilities. This educator also mentioned freezing up during challenging behavior due to a lack of training and knowledge in how to support students with challenging behavior. Something that came out of the data was a general lack of training and support for teachers supporting students with challenging behavior. I will look at lack of support further in Chapter 6. Next, I discuss teacher's descriptions of defiance as challenging behavior.

Defiance. Across initial interviews, multiple participants described challenging behavior as including defiance. Nicole explained, Everybody said, "Oh, he's so defiant." He just never does anything you tell him to. He'll do opposite of what you're telling him to. When he came to my classroom, I just felt like I really needed to get to the bottom of why this behavior; why was he unhappy? It did happen in my classroom for months. He would refuse to come to the rug, refuse to go anywhere. When you

went to go talk to him, he would, he'd be sitting in this chair and he would kick you, you know, underneath the table and pushed his chair out away from you, me, refuse to talk. Just... just things like that.

In this particular scenario, the student entered the classroom with the reputation of being a defiant child, who was thought to do things in different ways in order to upset teachers. The student was then seen as continuing to demonstrate defiance as challenging behavior through; not moving to the rug when asked, not following classroom norms around chair use, and for refusing to talk. For this particular educator, defiance became a student not doing what was asked of them: not moving to the rug, not talking when the teacher wanted to have a discussion, not sitting in a chair with all four legs on the ground, and not following requests to keep feet off of the teacher. Georgina, when asked about what challenging behavior is, replied

My most challenging is just the defiance and walking in and walking out of class or, like, profane language, it really bothers my spirit. For me it was really the cursing and walking out of class that has been hardest for me.

For this particular educator, defiance included students joining class after it had started, exiting the classroom without expressed permission or a hall pass, or using curse words in a classroom space

where it had been expressed to students as unacceptable. According to this teacher, school and classroom rules and expectations were clear and each of these behaviors constituted a defiant disregard for those rules and expectations.

And then I feel like defiance can also be thrown in there. We had a lot of kids who just didn't want to work together. They were like "Oh, I'm not working with them" or "I'm not working with this person." And that was something that was pretty hard...I think it can be challenging, especially as they kind of get older and there's like cliques and groups and the "I'm not going to work with you" and "I'm not going to work with you." So just managing that. (Carson)

Defiance in this case was conceptualized as students who would not follow directions to work with specific peers. In this particular context, collaborative learning time was used frequently in the classroom and was emphasized as an important component of classroom community. As such, students who wanted to work or not work with specific peers created a dissonance that the educator considered to rise to the occasion of challenging behavior.

Across multiple participant discussions about defiance as challenging behavior, it is clear that, while it emerges as a theme, what exactly constitutes defiant behavior varies by educator and

classroom context. In just these few instances, defiance was all linked to not doing what was asked by the educator, but what that looked like was markedly different within each of their descriptions, which highlights the ways in which one common term is open to subjective interpretation by individual teachers, administrators, and larger structures. So far, I have discussed physical behaviors and defiance as participant identified challenging behaviors. Next, I discuss work refusal as challenging behavior.

Work refusal. As educators spoke about classroom and community across initial and second interviews, students refusing to do their “work” was another theme that emerged in regard to behavior that is challenging within a classroom. For example,

Jane: It was, it was probably about that one student my first year. She would just refuse. She would first make a huge scene in the room, you know.... She would just sit there and be like, “No, I’m not doing that.” She didn’t want to do an assignment. “I’m not doing that.” And, like, for her grades, didn’t matter. It was more challenging because she was going to do what she wanted to do and it didn’t matter. Other people were, you know, not going to stop her. It was just, she was going to do it and it didn’t really matter what other people thought.

Jane described a student who would refuse to do whatever it was that she was asked to do, but also explained that it seemed as though this student did not care about grades. Petunia also talked about refusal as challenging behavior and explained, "And then lastly, you know, things that were, you know, yes, you know, challenging behavior, he'd be the kid and puts his head down and refuses to do anything." Across participants who spoke about "work refusal," the students' unwillingness to not complete tasks given to them by the teacher were framed as exhibiting challenging behavior. This notion will become a recurring theme explored in much greater depth across upcoming discussions.

Work refusal as challenging behavior came up over and over again during participants first and second interviews. This became a commonality between challenging behavior and classroom community and so is addressed in the next two chapters more in-depth. Next, I add sleeping to the list of identified challenging behaviors.

Sleeping. Another behavior that was discussed by one of the participants, Stephanie, was the notion of sleeping as the most challenging behavior that they had experienced as an educator. This participant explained:

I've had kids that sleep all day. I mean, that's tough because they're smart and you want them to be there, but they're

sleeping. And I think the kid that you just can't get there because of their outside circumstances, that kills your heart. I think that's the toughest part, those students that you just really try and really want it for, and you can't save them. I think is the hardest.

For this particular educator, this student sleeping across the school day came up multiple times amidst our conversations. Sleeping was framed as challenging behavior in this particular instance because the educator expressed that they did not know what to do with it (i.e. how to make this child stop sleeping in school) and that it was something that they saw as impeding this child's engagement within school.

Destruction of property. For some participants interviewed for this study, behavior that involved acts perceived to destroy property were named as challenging behavior. Petunia, while considering whether throwing crayons would be unsafe challenging behavior or not, explained, "I might start to consider it unsafe because it does have the potential to cause property damage, personal damage, etc. I still wouldn't classify it unsafe unless there was a piece of technology, your personal property, or person in the line of fire." For this educator, it was clear across our conversations that they saw

protecting technology and other school property as being an essential component of their job as a special educator.

Daisy described a variety of other challenging behaviors, including physical behaviors, the use of profane language, and the throwing of objects, but also specifically addressed this idea of a student damaging items as challenging when they said

I was getting my hair ripped out, spit on, called the C word, hit, kicked. I wasn't allowed to do anything. You can't restrain, you can't use the training that they give you. You have to just sit back and watch. They are throwing scissors around the room. They're destroying your entire classroom. You can't see any square footage of your classroom because there's Legos and everything you've ever bought with your own money lying around the floor and you can't do anything about it. My school psychologist got a concussion because a little girl took a chair and whipped it at her head. To me that's challenging.

Within this conversation, this educator stressed the ways in which they attempted to make their classroom space warm and welcoming to students with the various items and decorations they brought into the space, and that it was upsetting when students did not respect the space and the things that they had purchased. In this particular case as well, this educator talked of students struggling with

being placed in a segregated school, feeling like outcasts and like they had been given up on.

Disruptive behavior. Across conversations about what constitutes challenging behavior and the most challenging behavior that participants had experienced across their teaching careers, the notion of generally disruptive behavior recurred within the interviews. For Petunia, disruptive behaviors included students making a variety of sounds. They explained

I mean, just like any teacher, you know, when you say that, one student pops into my brain immediately. He would slam the door repeatedly, or he would make burping noises over and over and you're trying to teach and he was out yelling swear words in the hallway.

This educator described slamming of doors, burping and yelling all as disruptive behaviors when they happen during instruction. Echoing the idea of noise as disruptive, and challenging, behavior, Tulip described one particular student that they had on their caseload. This particular moment occurred when they had taken the student to another space in order to following testing accommodations.

I was always taking kids separately to test them because most of them all had a testing accommodation. They had to be in a separate room, but we would just take them all to one room

and separate them out. I remember one child was like constantly making noise. And he was just being very disruptive. I think that is another challenging behavior because I think sometimes the kids don't necessarily realize what they're doing and realize that they're being disruptive, but even the littlest thing could irritate somebody else.

As this participant talked about students making noises as disruptive behavior, they explicitly named, unlike Petunia, that the major problem with the sounds is that they could irritate someone else in the room. Within this discussion, there was acknowledgement that the student might not even be cognizant of the fact that they are making sounds, but there was not a consideration that the sounds might in some way, shape or form be useful to the student while working to complete their test.

Within their discussions, Kai and Stephanie summed up the overarching theme of disruptive behavior. Kai explained, "Challenging behavior broadly in my definition is just anything that disrupts what is happening in the classroom. So, for example, if I'm teaching a whole group lesson and there are distractions." Stephanie also stated, "I think anything that like opposes a norm, like anything that gives difficulty to what you're trying to accomplish or do with them." While Kai addresses distractions, it is unclear if they were talking about

distractions for students or for the adults in the room. Stephanie, on the other hand, explicitly named the fact that behavior was disruptive when it impacted what the educator was trying to do or accomplish in the classroom. While some participants clearly focused on students distracting one another, this participant clearly names that students distracting them makes something challenging behavior.

Differences in Special Education and General Education

Settings

A few of the participants explained that they had experience within both general education and self-contained segregated classroom spaces. Some of the educators had been employed in both general and special educator roles, whereas others are special educators who spent hours both in general education and in separate spaces specifically for students who receive special education supports and services. As conversations continued, it became interesting the ways in which some of the participants talked about criteria for challenging behavior being context specific. In other words, some participants talked about how something that was challenging behavior within general education might not even be noticed within some of the self-contained spaces that they had experienced.

Daisy, who first served as a special educator before taking a job as a general educator, talked about the differences that they saw

between the two different classroom contexts in regards to challenging behavior.

Okay, so I think I might have an advantage. I guess you could call it an advantage or disadvantage, depending on how you look at it, coming from two completely different settings. I have taught in a self-contained and an inclusive setting. So, when I thought of challenging in self-contained, I thought I was getting my hair ripped out, spit on, called the C word, hit, kicked, wasn't allowed to do anything, wasn't, uh, you know, you can't you can't restrain, you can't use your, you know, the training that they give you. You have to just sit back and watch. They are throwing scissors around the room. They're destroying your entire classroom... To me that's challenging. So, when I then taught in a gen-ed classroom setting, I felt kind of like Superwoman. Like if I just dealt with all this, I can do anything. So now if I think about the classroom that I'm in and I think of challenging, I think maybe work refusal or, you know, a student with their head down or student who's making noises and impacting the learning of others and you're not sure what to do because it is affecting the other kids and you don't want to take them out of the classroom, and you don't want to take the other students out of classroom.

For this participant, there is a marked difference in the behaviors that they describe across the two classroom contexts. The self-contained special education described here was in a separate building, in a classroom that this participant stated was in the basement of the building. This educator has clearly drawn a line that separates these teaching experiences as two very different contexts, and what they would consider to be challenging behavior was differentiated based on the different settings. Kaitlyn discussed differences in challenging behavior in similar ways:

I think it depends. I have a different perspective, working in these two places. Challenging behavior in [the city school] is not the same as challenging behavior in my school this year. Actually, I was talking about this with another friend who worked in the [city] for a few years before she went to my school. We had some similar situations where she thought "My class last year was a really tough class," but she's like, "it's not cross-compared to that." It's just not the same type of challenges. This year I actually have a student who has some trauma in their home life, with abuse and other struggles. I know that he's been a kid who does get physical and punch kids on the bus...So there's kids like that, that carry those types of challenging behaviors, where they get really angry and then

they get physical. And then you have other kids, like G would be more of an example of just, like Oppositional Defiant, refuses to do things, does annoying things disrupt the class, makes noises like...So then you have, yeah. So then that's like another factor is like kids that just do things to disrupt I guess things to disrupt the class, like 2 different scales.

This educator had taught within multiple community and school contexts and saw clear differences in what behavior would be considered challenging within each. Kaitlyn also saw the differences as noticeable enough that they were worth discussing with educator friend(s). Jane, who has taught both in a Title One school and a school specifically for students with disabilities, also talked about the differences in behavior between the two contexts.

So, it's interesting because I had that Title One experience. Um, my thought process of challenging behavior has definitely changed. So, I think it's, it's definitely different. In my current school challenging behavior would be something like constantly calling, impulsivity, things like that, but I also know that that is part of their ADHD. Whereas when I was in Title One challenging behavior was getting cursed at, things being thrown, being threatened, all those things. I think it kind of depends on the scenario. Like right now I wouldn't say have like any challenging

behavior. But a lot of my coworkers think there's a lot of challenging behavior in our school.

It is essential to note in this in this example that this participant made it clear that their self-contained school was a site of far less challenging behavior than the Title One school that served a primarily Latinx student population. This participant also expressed clear viewpoints about the differences across the two contexts but centered the Title One conversation about behavior that they had, in fact, never actually experienced from students and had, instead, heard about through word of mouth. I unpack this further in the sixth chapter, but there was a clear separation between challenging behavior that happened within the gen-ed setting and challenging behavior that happened within segregated settings. There was also a clear separation between challenging behavior that educators explained as a result of outside factors such as disability labels, mental health, and/or home circumstances. There was also a difference between Title One schools and private schools, in more than just Jane's descriptions of challenging behavior.

Exhibitors of Challenging Behavior

After participants discussed what behaviors qualify as challenging, I asked if they have ever noticed any trends in who most often is viewed as exhibiting challenging behavior within the

classroom. Consistently, participants named boys, students with disabilities, and students of color as who most often exhibits challenging behavior within the classroom.

When asked about trends in who exhibits challenging behavior, Eli explained

More often than not, they are students with disabilities or students in the process of being in an IEP process. And then every now and then, they're just a kid without disabilities who just had a tough day. But the general trend is those who perform under below grade level and typically have some kind of labeled disability on their IEP

This particular participant first talked about students who were below academically as being the students who most often exhibit challenging behavior. When asked to explain further who that might include, this educator specifically named students with disabilities or students in the process of being considered for special education supports and services as being the students who exhibit challenging behavior.

When asked the same questions about trends in who exhibits challenging behavior, Petunia responded

Um, I mean, this one's, you know, probably the one of the answers you get the most often, but definitely more males on,

especially those disruptive behaviors... That's another thing my school does that is very open. You can see the statistics of who gets disciplined. It is obviously, higher in males, higher students disabilities, higher students with diagnosed ADHD or a ED or sensory processing disorder.

This educator named both gender, in terms of males as being the students who are most often seen as demonstrating challenging behaviors, and then further explained that students with disabilities, and in particular students with specific disability labels, also fit into this category both at the micro classroom level and at their larger, macro, building level. For another participant, Nicole, when asked if they have seen any trends in who is seen as demonstrating challenging behaviors, responded

Um, well, oh, I've never noticed it until you just said something. But if I'm thinking about it. I will say two things. One, I feel like they're often students with disabilities that have like labeled disabilities, with an IEP and I never thought of it that way. And also, when two of the three cases I mentioned, they were students in my classroom, who in terms of demographics, were different than the majority of the rest of the room. And I didn't think of that until you just mentioned it.

I know that upsets me because I wonder if that had a piece of it.

When Nicole was asked what they meant by students who were different from the majority, they replied, "Yeah, in terms of I would say race and SES. Yeah." Until asked, this educator, who had such student centered and student empowering ways of talking about their classroom, had never noticed this trend that the students who were seen as exhibitors of challenging behavior also fell along the lines of marginalized racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants also described race as a trend across students who exhibit challenging behavior. A couple poignant examples came from Tulip and Jane.

Tulip: Oh, I mean, I hate to say it, I don't want to sound racist, but I feel like a lot of them have been of color. I don't know if that's just a coincidence. I had those two brothers; it was really interesting. The fact that they're both in self-contained special ed, you know? I think a lot of it had to do with their environment. I'm not sure if the mom like, did any alcohol or drugs during pregnancy, which could have also affected it because it might have, least for them.

Tulip first stated that students of color more often were those who exhibited challenging behavior, and then went on to describe

these students of color parents and home environment in problematic ways. There was also no acknowledgement that racism and ableism work to uphold notions of normalcy (Annamma et al., 2013) Jane also described students who exhibit challenging behavior in similar and equally problematic ways.

Um, when I was in Title One for the most part it was kids that came with, like, pretty heavy baggage, homelessness, broken homes, you know, bebopping all over the place... We had a BD room, which was the behavior disabilities classroom. Okay, so most of the elementary schools had at least one, the middle school had one and pretty much every kid in that room had some sort of pretty intense background in terms of, like, either gang violence, like moms and dads. And again, or like some, like, just like Mom and Dad are split, like, they're all over the place. Going from home to home, like, just really intense stuff going on. It was always boys. (Jane)

When asked if the male students in the classroom reflected the school's primarily Latinx population, Jane responded, "No the BD room was predominantly black actually. Interesting. Yeah, now that I'm thinking about it, yeah. And most of the students that had, um, the parents were affiliated with the gang. It was our black students." Both of these examples show the direct ways in which participants named

race when discussion trends in students who most often were seen as the students exhibiting challenging behavior.

Discussion

In conversations with educators across these interviews, they were all very willing and eager to talk about classroom community and challenging behavior and noted that each are important things to think about related to education. Participants echoed the literature around the importance of classroom community (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins & Ebrary, 2005). Participants also outlined many of the same elements as researchers when it comes to what is necessary to build classroom community including shared goals, student ownership, supporting diverse contributions and a sense of belonging (Gaete et al, 2016; Harriott & Martin, 2004; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins & Ebrary, 2005). It was clear across these conversations that each person interviewed takes specific steps in an effort to create a strong classroom community, and see community as essential to teaching and learning. It is important to note that, while these educators were all thoughtful in their discussions about both classroom community and challenging behavior, even amidst their best attempts to put inclusive pedagogy into action in their work, the trends in the outliers of classroom community and the most common exhibitors of

challenging behavior show that the trends outlined within the literature were very much alive and well within these teachers' experiences.

Students with labels of disability and/or students perceived to have some sort of a disability were specifically named, both as students who were harder to incorporate into classroom communities and as students who most often exhibited challenging behavior. There is a well-documented and long history of exclusion of people with disabilities, both in and out of public schools, including even the most recent Report to Congress as is detailed in Chapter 2 (United States Department of Education, 2018). This exclusion is apparent in participants' discussions around who they struggle to bring into the classroom community. In the most recent Civil Rights Data Collection by the U.S. Department of Education, it is documented that the majority of students receiving punishments related to behavior, such as restraint and seclusion, are students with disability labels of autism and/or emotional disturbance (United States Department of Education, 2018). These are the exact disability labels that the practicing teachers named in discussing students who exhibit challenging behavior and who struggle with classroom community membership.

When discussing classroom community and challenging behavior, race and students' home lives were recurring themes, specifically when describing students who fell on the margins of the

classroom community and students who exhibited challenging behavior. It is important to note the ways in which the participants described students were alarming and prompted a deeper analysis and discussion of the ways in which teachers did and didn't attend to diversity and the ways in which diversity was described. As Collins (2013) explains, these educators position students and at the same time putting the blame of the positioning on student's home lives and disability labels. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. In the next chapter I explore the connections that the practicing teachers made between classroom community and challenging behavior. As I coded the data, particularly my memos, I became aware of a coding of race or silencing of race within discussions of outliers of classroom community and exhibitors of challenging behavior. White participants in particular used descriptions, such as "hard home lives," as codes for race, in ways that will be further unpacked in the coming chapters.

Chapter 5: "...if you're compliant...then you get the reward:" Connections Between Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior

As I analyzed the data related to the relationship between classroom community and challenging behavior within the educator's interviews, I realized that it was much more complex and covert than I ever expected. The quote used for the title of this chapter, "if you're compliant... then you get the reward" is part of a larger discussion by Carson who explained that behavior and community membership often boil down to compliance, even though it is not what education and teaching should be about. Carson highlighted the complicated nature of the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior that was apparent throughout the interviews. This chapter will expand what participants shared in Chapter 4 to explore the ways in which participants see classroom community and challenging behavior as being linked, how they have seen adults impact student behavior and/or classroom community membership, and how they view work as an essential part of both behavior and classroom community membership.

Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior: Participant Identified Connections

The first part of this chapter focuses on how participants discussed connections between classroom community and challenging behavior. Many of the participants shared they think about this connection often. Within this section, I will consider the following themes from participant interviews: the ways in which classroom community impacts student behavior and the ways in which participants see challenging behavior as a threat to the classroom community. I will end the chapter with a discussion and deeper analysis of these two themes.

Classroom Community Impacting Challenging Behavior

Across the majority of interviews, participants spoke about the ways that classroom community membership had an impact on challenging behavior exhibited by students within the space. The participants described the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior in two ways. Some participants discussed the ways in which challenging behavior occurred because of a lack of classroom community, whereas, other participants talked about the ways in which they see classroom community membership as a way to minimize challenging behavior within their classroom.

Lack of classroom community leading to challenging behavior. When I asked how the educators saw classroom community and challenging behavior as being connected, participants talked about

the ways in which challenging behavior seems to be directly linked to community membership based on their own teaching experience. Specifically, many participants talked about how often times students exhibit challenging behavior when there is a lack of classroom community and/or that particular student does not feel like a part of the classroom community.

When thinking about the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior Magnolia explained, "So, the relationship obviously would be the more you have that relationship and classroom community, the less you'll have the behaviors. The worse the class and community, the worse relationship you have with your students, the worse the behaviors become." Similarly, Kaitlyn responded, "If the kids don't feel respected, they're not going to respect [the adults] back." Another participant explained, "I think if there's no community happening then it's constant warfare, kids just not getting along, bullying and making fun of each other, and there is no chance of the kids working together." (Stephanie). For these participants, the ways in which they saw a clear connection between a lack of classroom community and the behavior demonstrated by some students within the class was explicitly stated. Irish also stated,

And that's when behaviors arise: if a kid doesn't feel respected or valued or loved or feel like there's some sense of

understanding, they're going to pop off and they're right to do so. [It's] like, if you don't like me, fine, I'm not gonna listen to you. Why should I?

For each of these educators there was a clear sense that students who do not feel like community members do not have a reason to behave in the ways being asked of them within the classroom. For Irish, there is an emphasis on respect and love as essential for students to engage in the classroom. Respect and love were central to participant's descriptions on positive classroom communities. Here Irish claims that lack of respect and love not only to affect the classroom community but can influence or increase challenging behavior.

Another participant reported working in a building with a strong sense of community and explained, "I think it encourages kids to come to school, which I never really experienced prior to my current school. My current school, we have a lot of kids who experienced school refusal in their previous public-school experiences" (Jane). Within this conversation, this participant talked about how many of their current students experienced a lack of classroom and school community at their previous schools, including high levels of bullying. This educator sees their students "work refusal" as being the direct result of the lack of community and safety in their previous schools.

Kaitlyn also spoke about the ways in which community membership and challenging behavior are linked. They explained, "So if we think about kids with challenging behavior, I feel like in a class that has a tight knit community, a strong community and a sense of routine and structure, I feel like those kids are going to hopefully exhibit less challenging behaviors because they feel comfortable and welcomed by their peers and their teachers. Whereas if you have less structure and you're not setting up those community building things.... that's where you see the challenging behaviors rise up again because [students] don't feel supported and they don't feel valued. So, I feel the community definitely impacts everything else."

For this participant, it is clear that classroom community is about a lot more than just delivering content. Kaitlyn emphasized how the ways in which teachers do or do not foster a strong sense of community directly impact the way students behave within the space. Eli made connections to their own experiences with feeling like they belong in a community, or not.

I don't know, I think that if you don't feel like you're a part of the community, you do some things out of frustration and anger whether you're a kid or an adult. When you don't feel like you're a part of a friend group and you feel like you're the one person

that no one addresses, you're going to feel some kind of way. I think when you feel like you're a part of the community and you're an important community member you want to be there and you want to call that school and classroom your classroom, but because you display challenging behaviors you probably feel like an outcast. You probably feel like, I'm that kid that I hear in the story book. I'm like, not fully over there. It's our job as educators to identify that, name it and bring them back in. Not just because we have to, but because we want to.

In ways similar and different from other participants, Eli considered how all humans act different when they feel like they do not belong. Eli, like Kaitlyn and Irish, emphasized the students needing to feel like they belong. Unlike other participants however, throughout our conversations, Eli often related student experiences and reactions to adults' reactions in similar circumstances and worked to normalize student feelings and emotions. This educator also acknowledged how adult feelings of being left out are the same one a student on the margins of a community likely feel, and it is the response of anger or frustration that might lend to behavior that is seen as challenging.

Strong classroom community minimizing challenging behavior. Another theme I noticed from the participants' discussions about the links between classroom community and challenging

behavior included the ways in which classroom community membership can serve in minimizing challenging behavior. While very similar to the idea that challenging behavior more often occurs when there is a lack of classroom community, these conversations added a layer of nuance in terms of how participants saw classroom community as a tool for reducing challenging behavior exhibited by students within the class.

For example, when asked about the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior, Jane responded,

Mm hmm. I think that strong classroom community limits the challenging behaviors because when the community's there, a lot of times, you know, inherently, everyone wants to be respectful of everyone in the room, typically, if it's a strong classroom community.

This educator saw a strong classroom community as directly reducing challenging behaviors exhibited by students in the classroom.

Similarly, Kaitlyn explained,

So, if we say kids with challenging behavior, I feel like in a class that has a tight knit community, a sense of routine, and structure and everything, those kids exhibit less of the other challenging behaviors because they feel comfortable and they feel welcomed by their peers and their teachers."

For Kaitlyn, the feeling of a close-knit community, where students have a strong sense of structure and routine, was seen as the reason for a reduction in challenging behavior. From their perspective, having transparency in expectations for students, specifically through structure and routines, make classroom spaces predictable, which makes them feel like a safer space for students.

There definitely is a connection. I believe, for example, it's the beginning of the year, we all agree on standards that we want for ourselves and the people around us, and how we want to be treated. We set the expectations together and we expect the students to expect them of themselves and of each other. We expect we all maintain these expectations and treat everybody with respect. The challenging behavior bit, yeah. Of course. Like, sometimes students will have bad days, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are out to villainize the entire class (Kai).

Many participants discussed the creation of a class constitution or student-made rules, as was discussed in Chapter 4. Kai expanded on the idea of class rules or constitution further and explained that when students work to create the classroom expectations, they also have a drive to meet those behavioral expectations. From this participant's experiences, contrary to a theme that will be explored

further later in this chapter, students having an off day, where their behavior might not look like it typically would, was not indicative of a student hoping to upset the class routines and expectations, but just a student having a hard day. Nevertheless, they still maintain a belief that class derived rules and expectations are a motivator for students that work to decrease challenging behavior.

Nicole could not explain exactly how challenging behavior and classroom community are connected, but explained,

I'm going to say that goes similarly to the idea of being proactive with different ideas in the classroom. I feel like if things are really thoughtful and relevant, kids have agency and see the bigger picture of what they're doing and why I think that they are less likely to exhibit challenging behavior. When a kid feels like they are important in the classroom that their best is good enough, and they just feel successful with their work, I think that what people would consider to be challenging behaviors are just really minimized.

This participant is an educator who works to center student choice and agency within classroom routines and activities and as an essential component of the classroom community. From their perspective, when students understand what they are doing and why, seeing themselves as important members of the classroom space who

have agency in what they do within it, all of those pieces come together to minimize challenging behavior.

According to Irish, relationships are an essential part of supporting students in the classroom, including in supporting them around behavior.

I'm really good at forming relationships with them and when kids feel that I trust them and rely on them to do their part, they take ownership over their actions and their behaviors and their performance increases academically and behaviorally. They work really hard on that intrinsic self-control component in addition to the adaptations that I'm making to help them be successful.

From this perspective, relationships are essential to build intrinsic self-control, or students displaying self-control not for some sort of outside reward or reinforcement, but because they want to. Magnolia also viewed relationships as a way to minimize challenging behavior in the classroom. When describing an inclusive general educator in their school whose classroom they pushed into they explained, "That's the best class community I've ever seen in my entire life. And literally, like, minimal behavior problems ever. She rarely had an issue. She had a great relationship with the kids." Across these discussions, participants were clear that they saw classroom

community and the associated relationships as a way to reduce behaviors deemed challenging from occurring within the classroom.

Challenging behavior as a threat to classroom community.

Part of the role of educators is to manage a classroom space and to work to minimize behavior in the classroom. It was clear across these conversations that challenging behavior was seen as being able to impact that community as a whole and could possibly impact whether or not a child was seen as belonging within the classroom community. Within this section, I will discuss two different sub-themes that emerged: how challenging behavior can serve as a threat both to the community at large and to the membership of the student demonstrating it.

Challenging behavior as a threat to the overall classroom community. One theme that emerged across interviews was the notion of challenging behavior spreading within a classroom, ultimately not only impacting the individual student but the classroom at large. Petunia discussed, on multiple occasions, “And so it was that monkey see, monkey do” to explain a domino effect type of situation related to challenging behavior. When reflecting on the challenges posed by defiance and/or work refusal, Carson explained,

I think sometimes it can definitely be a bit of a ripple effect. If one kid is like, “Oh, I'm not, I'm not doing this. I don't want to

do it.” Then their friend across the room says, “Oh yeah, like that's not worth my time. I don't want to do that.” And I think that can be really damaging as a teacher, because then you can kind of just see your class, you're losing them slowly.

This educator described challenging behavior as a ripple effect in the classroom, where other students would begin to demonstrate challenging behavior after seeing or hearing one of their peers decide to not engage in the ways requested. It is also important to note in this description that the term damaging is used, specifically in terms of the student actions being damaging to the teacher in the classroom, as it is seen as the reason why they have “lost” students, from both engaging in the task assigned and in terms of a general feeling of classroom management.

We had a lot of students with ADHD or, you know, we were an inclusive classroom. We had some students who had struggles and it would kind of set off other students. So, he and another student were running around the classroom throwing chairs at each other and we did have to evacuate the rest of the classroom. (Petunia)

When Petunia thought about a student who at times demonstrated challenging behavior in one of the classrooms they collaborated in, it was the student with a disability label who was seen

as the cause of another student's challenging behavior, which in this case was running around the classroom throwing chairs. Instead of seeing it as two students who both made decisions to engage in a particular way, one student set off another.

While reflecting on challenging behavior in the classroom, Heather took this same idea but named even more explicitly the idea of a student acting with intentionality.

And then I think, too, certain kids have certain behavior because they're trying to trigger other kids, right? Like, they're trying to get the other ones to do what they're doing. So, what do you do with those kids who are so easily manipulated in those situations? Like, rewarding the kids who are doing what they're supposed to be doing, so that they don't spiral and, you know, join in on the others too. (Stephanie)

Echoing more explicitly than some of the other participants, this participant specifically named a feeling that some students were intentionally "triggering" other students in the room, with an end goal of disrupting what was happening within the classroom. Stephanie also explained,

But the distraction for the gen ed kids who aren't used to it, maybe have never been in co-taught classrooms and the dynamic of who they put it into them. Sometimes it's all your

504s, all you ELLs, all your, it bogs down the whole classroom to have all those needs in one room. But I think that the refusal takes away from that and the kids who are trying to learn.

Here, students who may need additional supports, including students with disabilities and students who are learning English, are seen as the students who exhibit the challenging behavior of work refusal, and are seen in general as taking away from the other students in the class. It is also important to point out here that Stephanie made the statement that work refusal from some students takes away from other students who want to learn, meaning that Stephanie thought that students refusing to work did not want to learn, at least in that moment. Kaitlyn explained what many participants talked about regarding behavior management when they said, it is “kind of like the foundation to being able to teach,” and across conversations with participants it was clear that challenging behavior was seen as a threat to the community and learning at large. Keeping students working and “managed” was presented as classroom community support, and challenging behavior was not only seen as a sign of poor classroom management, but also a threat to the classroom community at large.

Challenging behavior as a threat to individual classroom community membership. While there was a clear sense that challenging behavior could have a “ripple effect” and spread within a classroom, ultimately threatening the community as a whole, it also became clear across interviews that challenging behavior could also directly threaten individual student community membership, as perceptions about behavior influence placement decisions and access to general education. Within these conversations, participants almost unanimously agreed that behavior should not limit student access to inclusive education, but as they continued talking it was clear that there were students for whom behavior became the reason that they were out of full-time general education. Many participants expressed that it shouldn’t, but it does when asked whether behavior should impact gen-ed placement for students.

Petunia explained,

No, so I think in terms of placement and classification, that should really be based on academics. The part that gets confusing or gets in a gray area is when those behaviors effect academics. The kids who are destructive and run around the classroom so that they don't complete their work that they are there for, or miss lessons so they aren’t learning, that of course affects placement or classification.

This participant articulated the gray area that exists related to behavior, and, specifically, challenging behavior. They believe that special education placement decisions should be based on academic needs but acknowledged how often times challenging behavior is viewed as impacting an individual student's learning and success in the classroom, which then serves as the basis for them to be served through a more restrictive placement. On a similar note, another participant spoke about the ways in which many students who are viewed as exhibiting challenging behavior are placed in more restrictive settings due to a belief about their behavior.

I feel like you have the kids who end up being in too restrictive of an environment because of their behavior, but they're put in there because the behavior is interfering with the academics, so they're not being seen at their full potential. So, I feel like the inclusion model should allow them to kind of have their academic needs met, but then also their behavioral needs. Um, and, you know, they have their peers as an example. (Heather).

As this participant reflected on what they have experienced and witnessed across their teaching career, they clearly acknowledged both the fact that many children are in a restrictive placement because of challenging behavior and that inclusive educational opportunities

should be a space that works in opposition to these trends, meeting both the academic and behavioral needs of students.

Eli engaged in critical reflections about the ways in which students are placed in restrictive settings because of challenging behavior, and the problematic consequences of those trends.

Oftentimes when those behaviors are exhibited, students may be labeled with a disability or they may be segregated into self-contained rooms or other rooms. That is essentially doing the same thing as taking their right to the general education away from them. So, I definitely don't agree that behavior should be a factor when deciding like LRE or when deciding just inclusive and, in general, there shouldn't be a thought about behavior in that sense. Obviously, you want to think about how you can support their behavioral needs within the classroom, but trying to remove them because of behavior, I think, is really problematic.

This participant named an important duality: first, that students receive more segregated special education supports because those students exhibit behaviors deemed challenging by educators, and second, that this practice was problematic and acts as something that denies students access to general education. For this participant, access to general education was clearly something that all students

should have access to, and so this trend in students losing access because of perceived behavior was deeply troubling.

Summary of teachers links between classroom community and challenging behavior

Across conversations, participants spoke about the connections in both theory and practice that they see between classroom community membership and challenging behavior. The connections largely centered around classroom level impacts rather than individual student's membership being impacted aside from conversations around placement. The practicing teachers identified that there were connections between a student exhibiting challenging behavior and their access to the gen-ed classroom despite the teacher's belief that behavior shouldn't be a deciding factor on placement. Beyond that isolated discussion on the individual level, educators focused on classroom level connections. At the classroom level participants emphasized the impact of classroom community on challenging behavior at large citing that lack of classroom community leads to more challenging behavior while strong classroom community minimizes challenging behavior. At the same time, participants spoke about challenging behavior threatening classroom community in very targeted ways. These conversations centered around one student

being the catalyst for wide-spread behaviors that the educators saw as threatening the classroom community.

Adults Impact on Student Behavior and Community

Membership

When I started this research project, I was particularly interested in how the ways in which adults responded to student behavior impacted classroom community as a whole as well as individual classroom community membership. As the study progressed, it became clear that this was far more complex to unpack than I had originally assumed. In this section I detail the adult impact on student behavior and classroom community membership that participants identified, as well as connections that were not spoken about by participants, but that I discovered in analyzing the data. First, I address the adult impact that participants directly spoke about. Then, I look at what participants did not identify when speaking about adult impact on student behavior and classroom community.

Acknowledging the Adult Impact.

As the practicing teachers and I discussed classroom community and challenging behavior, adult impact on these things came up both prompted and un-prompted. When asked whether or not adults can impact student behavior negatively and if they had an example, each

of the participants agreed that yes, adults can impact a student's behavior in a negative way.

Jane answered

Oh yeah, yeah. Definitely. I mean, I think it happens. Usually, it's like a kid is acting one way and the kid like puts a wall like a defensive wall up and then instead of explaining why the teachers doing something they'll kind of be like, "Well, I'm the I'm the teacher. So, you need to listen." That's like the biggest one. Or like, I'm asking you, like, you need to be doing this. And so then that just makes them, you know, Escalate even higher." This educator was detailing a power struggle in which teachers respond to students questioning or pushing back on things is to name their power and position as the ultimate reason why a student should do something.

Heather talked about a specific student who they explained as having PTSD from the year before and said,

So, although he is a very difficult child, I understand that, but as soon as certain adults would start talking to him, whether it was a para or the art teacher, he just assumed that he was getting in trouble because that's what he was used to.

This particular student had gotten in trouble so frequently, that he just assumed that he was going to get in trouble if he had to talk to specific adults. There were specific adults in this student's school experience that were particularly contentious and even trauma inducing, which understandably impacts behavior.

Another educator talked a lot across the two interviews about what they described as struggles during specials, lunch, and recess.

Um, yeah. So, typically places like the lunchroom or recess, where it's adult monitors that aren't necessarily trained in proper language and how to deal with students. If they're screaming at a child it could be humiliating to them. The kids just feel disrespected, so then act out. (Kaitlyn)

Kaitlyn spoke a good deal about students struggling outside of her classroom and discussed her concerns with adults who have so much interaction with students not getting training around how to speak, interact, and guide students during unstructured times such as lunch and recess. This educator also described students having trouble in specials when expectations varied from their home room. Their discussions centered around adults yelling and screaming at kids, not setting them up with clear and structured expectations, and the kids being the ones that get blamed.

These three quotes are representative of participant discussions about adults negatively impacting student behavior. In line with Jane's description of teachers' power struggles with students, much of the discussion around negative influence on behavior was around responses to students. Descriptors such as "butting heads," "power struggle," and gestures of two fists bumping together were all used in response to the question about adult impact on student behavior. These generally were accompanied with student work refusal and/or defiance. As Jane explained, adults tended to escalate students' challenging behaviors when their response was to get into a power struggle with the student. Heather brought up the idea of adult induced trauma for students, which was a recurring topic throughout discussions around adult impact on behavior. Stephanie detailed how their school is not doing behavior monitoring during COVID, except for one student because "they want a reason to kick him out," and was explaining that this particular student really gets "unfair punishments" and "just doesn't have a chance." Just as Heather described, Stephanie's student had particularly contentious relationships with particular adults. The last quote in this section highlights another point that many educators made. Participants many times mentioned students struggling in settings outside of their classroom, whether that was specials, lunch, recess or another setting. Carson and Kai both

described what they deemed challenging behavior that started in special and recess under different adult supervision, went unsolved, and then escalated once the students were back in their classroom.

No discussion of adult impact on individual classroom community membership.

While the practicing teachers all agreed that adults can negatively impact a student's behavior, there was no mention of how adults can negativity impact how peers see students and a student's overall sense of community. Stephanie told a story about a student who slept all day, which the educator labeled as challenging. They acknowledged that this student slept all day because of not sleeping at home and other home/life stresses and were proud of the fact that they were able to get this student a 1:1 aid to support the student staying awake and alert in class. When asked if they noticed if that student's peer relationships and classroom community membership was impacted, they replied

Um, I think in terms of like friendship, I wouldn't really say that was affected. Um, you know they still hung out with him after school, he still was a very friendly student, you know, they play basketball. They wanted to play with them a recess, things like that. So, I would say in terms of actual friendship. It wasn't impacted. We really try to give students a lot of choice in who

they work with as partners. Often, you know, a couple of students who tend to be the more mature students who make good choices would ask to work with a different partner. The in-classroom things were impacted, but I don't think we really noticed any sort of friendship change.

This particular participant did directly address student peer relationships and community membership. Stephanie said that no, the student's friendships inside and outside the classroom weren't affected. The only affect that this educator noticed was what they explained as isolated incidences of other students not wanting to work with this particular student on partner activities, which they saw as mature. Stephanie was the only one to address the community impact, but they only acknowledged isolated incidences of struggles with peers, emphasizing that overall friendships in and out of the classroom were not impacted.

Another angle to approach the impact of adults on students' behavior is to look at a conversation that occurred in multiple interviews. Several educators talked about students who were removed from class, whether just momentarily, or for a more extended amount of time, such as day long in school or out of school suspension. During these conversations, I asked these educators how the transition back into the classroom worked and how it impacted

both the student coming in and the students who remained in the classroom. There was discussion of how it affected students and the classroom teacher, but not how adult decisions or actions impact students.

Stephanie spoke about transitions back into the classroom as being student-centric. Whether or not the transition back to the classroom was smooth was determined by the student and whether or not they were ready and wanted to change. There was no acknowledgment of adult impact on that transition.

It is important to point out the omissions within the interviews as they are just as telling, if not more, than what was said. While the educators were quick to recognize and describe how adults negatively impact behavior, there were no explicit connections made between adult response to challenging behavior and a student's subsequent classroom community membership.

"Work" as a Connection between Classroom Community and Challenging behavior.

After the first few interviews, I found myself writing in memos that I needed to pay attention to the notion of "work," as it seemed to be emerging as a trend in the data. Work and productivity as things with value was something that I had been thinking about in my own experiences and teaching, and so the first time I heard it I did not

think too much about it, but as the term work continued to appear in interviews, I found myself paying more and more attention to it. Within this next section, I will discuss the ways in which participants discussed “work” as pro-social behavior, as a key component of classroom community, and engage in a larger discussion about “work.”

Work as pro-social behavior.

In the first-round interviews, the focus was on what participants defined as and deemed challenging behavior. In the second-round interviews, the focus shifted for a moment to what the educators were looking for in terms of pro-social behavior in their classrooms. Many of these conversations, as well as other conversations across both rounds of interviews included threads of work.

Kaitlyn described the student behavior they are looking for in their classroom as,

So, in a perfect world, they come in the chat a little bit about human nature, and then they kind of get settled and get going without disruption. And being able to stay focused on their schoolwork. So, I feel like throughout the day, it's mostly like being able to stay focused, being able to participate in the lessons that I'm teaching and, you know, in a perfect world to be excited about the lesson. And like all through. I'm like our classroom expectations so like staying quiet when I'm when I'm

talking and then participating like talking to each other. When it's time for partner work or group work, they do their part.

This educator, when describing positive student behavior centered the students focusing on their schoolwork, doing their part in partner and group work, and staying focused on the lessons. In similar regard, Carson said that they look for students “that are willing to like, do their work and get through it and complete it.”

Irish explained,

And I think one of the things that teachers need to be mindful of is you have to have this really good seesaw balance between drowning kids with love and because they just want to work for you, like you're an adult and you're supposed to be a person of structure and stability in their life, and they just want to know that you value them, not just as a student, but as a child.

Even when explaining the need to love the students, this educator talked about the kids working and centered the reason for the work around the teacher. Irish talked a lot about what students and parents did for her and had a teacher-centric view of student behavior, however the focus here is the work component of this statement.

Another educator explained

As long as everyone was working towards whatever we were learning and they're being respectful of everyone's learning that was going on and respectful of what everyone needed, It was, it's like, whatever (Jane)

Here we see this participant delineating working and learning, whereas others seemed to use them synonymously. I was curious to know what Jane meant by respecting other's learning so asked for additional details.

Jane: Yeah, it's so funny, because when you ask these types of questions. There's always like that certain time that like comes up and you're just like, oh boy. Yes. That was definitely it, um, I think it's just any, anything that's kind of off task and disruptive....Or sometimes they're just distracting themselves, you know, whether it's like you know they're taking out a coloring thing and drawing instead of doing the assignment and stuff like that.

This educator saw respect as students not disrupting the work of others and of themselves. This further shed light on the importance of work as pro-social behavior and, while Jane seems to point out the difference between work and learning, still they center working and allowing others to work when thinking about ideal classroom behavior.

Approaching behavior from the angle of identifying challenging behavior rather than identifying positive classroom behavior, Petunia expressed frustration with student's work refusal and explained why they believe it is challenging behavior.

You know, one time, it's like, okay, whatever. And then when it keeps happening it is like, oh my god, would you just write something. Um, so I think it can be very irritating to us as the teacher as well. And so I think that's where we start labeling it as sometimes challenging behavior because it's one of those behaviors that really irks us as teachers too. Um I mean, I experienced a lot of work refusals just being a special ed teacher. I mean, that's kind of one of the hallmarks of a student with disabilities

For this special education teacher work refusal was seen as challenging behavior because it "really irks us teachers." I point out in this section that throughout the interviews, educators talked about work as desirable and as one of the most important behaviors students exhibit in the classroom. The participants then also detailed how students refusing to work were exhibiting challenging behavior. Work was described as being central to the general education classroom. Petunia explains that work refusal is so challenging because it goes against everything that a classroom is meant to be. This quote

becomes further put into context in the next section, as I detail the ways in which educators used work as community membership.

Work as Community Membership.

Not only was work a recurring theme when discussing positive student behavior, or behavior that teachers were looking for in their classrooms, but it also emerged as a thread throughout discussions of classroom community. Work came up in numerous ways using a myriad of descriptions. Stephanie in particular emphasized work. When I asked as a teacher how they supported classroom community membership for students who exhibit challenging behavior, Stephanie answered,

So, in the past. I always had a Learning Lab attached to me, which was like a skills-based class that went with the content area. So, I was able to like pre teach and reteach content. So that way, at least I could give some supplemental materials. So that kids at least have some background. So, I tried to give them some material that they could go in and have discussion points with. But this in my current setting, they don't have that attached and just a co teacher in the rooms with them. So, I don't really have that opportunity. So, I'll try to like give little hints or point out things on the paper. It's like trying to encourage them to speak during class, unfortunately, again,

there's no collaborative groupings. If there were, I would definitely sit within the groups and try to monitor encourage speaking or give discussion points. I have. I like to use a lot of like websites that give them supplemental materials stuff like that that are fun, songs like things that like are a little bit more on their level that if they watch it, they could get more information. So um, but yeah. In the past, it would be more of like being a part of like their groups, giving them more materials ahead of time so that they had background knowledge and like pre teaching really is what helps them I think more feel like a part of a discussion.

To support student's classroom community membership, Stephanie focused on supporting their participation in small and large group academic discussions. This response was then followed up on in a later statement that reiterated the importance of work for community membership for this educator.

But then he isn't productive and that's when my concern for him to community wise, like, what is he contributing like how he answers these questions like, how does he become a group member. How does he succeed later in life when he's supposed to be a part of community?" (Stephanie)

Work, productivity, and participation in academic discussions were synonymous for Stephanie. From their perspective, to support community membership means to support academic participation. To be a part of the community in and out of school means to be productive. Work is at the center of community for this particular educator.

Work as community membership was a theme that came up over and over throughout the two rounds of interviews. Tulip said

I feel like they're not going to want to like have that person in the community and you know, like, like I said, like in this this particular child was constantly like saying, oh, can I borrow your notes, or can I borrow this. So, I think a lot of times, like kids just felt that like he wasn't pulling his weight. So, I think that was like another Issue that made it hard for the teachers to like make a community because you know they're trying to like say everyone has to pull their weight and be equal But when one person is not. It just makes them like turn against that person and then it's very hard. I think for the teachers to kind of like reverse that.

Tulip took a slightly different angle focusing on the response and impact of and on others if a student “doesn’t pull their weight.” They explain that in their experience, students don’t want to have someone

in their community that doesn't do their part of the "work." This educator also felt that a student not doing their work, or "pulling their weight," also impacted the teacher's ability to "make community." In this discussion, this educator points towards work as the key to being welcomed into the classroom community, as well as the key to supporting the teacher in creating a community.

When asked about why refusal and defiance were so problematic one educator explained:

Petunia: Um, I think they're completely contrary to everything that classrooms are there for... Classrooms are there for kids to do work, to you know put pencil to paper and read and so refusals completely opposite of that.

Each of these examples offers a different angle from which educators all ended up centering the concept of work. Petunia very plainly explains that schools/ classrooms are there for kids to do work and put pencil to paper and read. Because work is central, Petunia sees it as the key to classroom community building and membership.

Participants Discussions of Work

Petunia, in their claim that "putting pen to paper" and work being the sole reason for classrooms to exist clearly illustrates the centrality of the concept of work to the majority of participants' discussions around both challenging behavior and classroom

community; work seems to be another connection between challenging behavior and classroom community. While work was central to the majority of the participant conversations, there were some outliers that elucidate the significance of this finding.

Eli was an outlier throughout their conversations when compared to other participants. One example is their explanation of positive behavior.

Yeah, I think one of the most important ones is active listening, so regardless of who's sharing, you're not speaking your understanding what they're saying. Your, your body shows that you're listening. And then the other things, I think, rather than like rule following just being like conscious of your own body, so There are reasons why there is safety rules, but I don't want anyone to like feel they have to follow every single one. At every given moment. I mean like understanding that there are rules and then that if you break them there is something that you need to do to fix it.

Eli had a much different view of behavior. They centered being aware of your own body and listening to others rather than centering work or even following rules. This educator also answered the question about whether students can't learn until their behavior is under control in a way that pushes back on the centrality of work.

I think some teachers think that learning is just academic and sometimes I pushed back on that and say that emotionally and socially they're learning every single day and the content got can't catch up to their growth. I think it is true that behavior comes first, because I think, as I said before, challenging behavior roots from academic inequity and their inability to do the work. So sometimes I think if you make it more accessible and do it the same way they might resist less, but you haven't solved the problem. Like, that's the symptom of it.

Over and over, Eli talked about learning in contrast to most of the educators who talked about work. Not only did this teacher center learning, but a broad, encompassing view of learning that reached beyond academics. Petunia was another outlier in regard to work. They explained that "I don't think kids doing work is the right way to finish that either, because kids doing work, it's not necessarily the goal that we all need to kids learning."

Learning versus work, with work being much more common than learning as the common theme throughout the interviews, is a key takeaway from the data. It is important to note that work was prevalent in conversations about classroom community, challenging behavior, and the connections between the two.

Discussion

This chapter detailed several themes that emerged within the data:

- A strong classroom community minimizes student misbehavior
- A lack of classroom community negatively impacts student behavior
- Challenging behavior can be a threat to the classroom community at large
- Challenging behavior is an unfortunate and uncontrollable gatekeeper to classroom community and gen-ed placements
- Adults can and do negatively impact student behavior
- Adult impact on classroom community membership is not acknowledged
- Work is central to the classroom, to being a part of the community and to being seen as exhibiting pro-social behavior

The first part of the chapter focused on the ways in which participants identified and spoke about classroom community and challenging behavior being connected. Educators identified a strong correlation between classroom community and challenging behavior. The stronger the classroom community, the less challenging behavior occurred. Similarly, the weaker the classroom community, the more challenging behavior occurred. The focus in these discussions was at the classroom level rather than the individual level and educators

believe that strong classroom community supports students' pro-social behavior. This echoes the literature around classroom community in emphasizing the importance of classroom community (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins, 2005) and Sapon-Shevin's statement that "creating classroom communities where students feel accepted and feel like they belong is not just feel good curriculum. Rather, there are clear correlations between students' sense of belonging and their academic and social achievement" (2010, p. 5) Here, teachers emphasize the correlation between classroom community and minimizing challenging behavior, which teachers also attributed to supporting academics in the classroom.

Another important finding of the study was that these practicing teachers identified a link between classroom community and challenging behavior on a broader level. However, one was much less so identified on a more individual basis. When teachers were asked what adult influence they had experienced on challenging behavior and classroom community, their responses largely focused on adults negatively influencing student behavior. Participants unanimously agreed that adults can and do negatively impact student behavior, however none specifically talked about adults positively impacting student membership in the larger classroom community. When

discussing adults negatively impacting a student's behavior, the participants mentioned, again, lack of classroom community, power struggles and adults not treating students kindly and respectfully. These all go against what the literature promotes for supporting students through positive and humanistic behavioral supports. Jorgenson (2018) and Danforth (2014) stress strong classroom community membership as behavior supports. Scholars also have identified creating an environment where students feel safe and respected as positive behavioral supports (Danforth, 2014; Jorgenson, 2018; Weibe-Berry, 2006). Another support for positive student behavior that is outlined in the literature is explicit teaching of social and emotional skills (Danforth, 2014; Weibe-Berry, 2006). Each of these identified supports for positive student behavior were lacking in participants discussions of adults negatively impacting student behavior. Power struggles lack instruction, lack of safety and respect were both mentioned as well as lack of classroom community.

It is important to revisit the idea that, while all of the participants easily identified points in which adults negatively impacted student behavior, this was opposite when it came to classroom community membership. This brings me back to the point that while on a broader, classroom and school level teachers saw links between classroom community and challenging behavior, on an individual level it was

much less recognized and discussed. The practicing teachers didn't recognize or mention ways in which students' challenging behavior impacts their membership in the classroom community. This is in opposition to the research (Danforth, 2014; Jorgenson, 2018; Weibe-Berry, 2006). Keeping this in mind, it makes sense, then, that teachers also didn't recognize adult influence on community membership for individual students as they didn't recognize a connection between challenging behavior and classroom community membership on an individual level. It is impossible to recognize that adults might impact an individual student's membership in the classroom community, particularly through negatively influencing individual student behavior, if they don't even recognize the connections between individual's challenging behavior and their community membership.

Going back to Chapter 4, a dichotomy that emerged in the data was that many participants described challenging students based on labels and/or their perceptions about the student's "home life," whereas when disability and/or specific "home life" conditions were not seen as a factor for the particular child, they then described a separate list/conceptualization of challenging behavior. There was a chasm between students "who had hard home-lives" and students with disabilities and the rest of the students, either physically, socially,

and/or emotionally, for these educators. These two populations of students were described as outsiders. In Chapter 4, language such as physical or emotional disturbance challenges, some kind of chemical going on, trauma in their household, hard home life, crazy home lives, and part of his ADHD were all used as descriptors to separate students. Two participants had worked in segregated settings such as behavioral rooms and a separate program in a separate school, and both gave separate descriptions of challenging behavior. For gen-ed and co-taught placements these educators labeled defiance and work refusal as challenging, but in the segregated setting they described different and more challenging behaviors, such as punching, fighting, destroying rooms, cussing at the teacher, etc.

In Chapter 4, I outlined how teachers dealt with challenging behavior and how they determined when, if ever, outside help was needed and whether or not students got pulled out of the classroom. Stephanie talked about in-school and out of school suspension, specifically mentioning the student in particular they had in mind had “a hard home life.” Many participants explained safety as their marker for needing outside help, which generally meant a removal of the student from the classroom. It is important here to note that, when asked, nobody counted work refusal and or defiance in themselves as unsafe behavior.

Going back to the first part of the chapter, participants did not recognize that any of their or other adults' actions impacted individual student classroom community membership. I argue that it is because students who have disabilities and or difficult home lives are not being considered here. Because of the hard line drawn between challenging behaviors that exclude students and come from a very specific subset of students, when teachers were thinking of this question, they centered refusal and defiance. In centering refusal and defiance, students with disabilities and students with "hard home lives" were just not even considered. Pair this with the common thread that safety was the marker that determined for the educator whether or not students should be removed and or outside intervention came in, and it becomes clear that students who have the more challenging behavior are the ones that get the responses to behaviors that are most likely to jeopardize classroom community membership. As Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld (2011) discuss, removal of students from the classroom and school are associated with negative outcomes for students both socially and academically. Similar to the trends seen in this study, Buccanfuso and Kufeld found that students of color, students with disabilities and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience higher rates of behavior responses that include removing the student from the classroom.

It is crucial to unpack what students got completely excluded from the conversation and got pushed to the side, both literally and figuratively. As John Dewey once wrote, "The easy thing is to seize upon something in the nature of the child, or upon something in the developed consciousness of the adult, and insist upon that as the key to the whole problem. When this happens, a really serious practical problem- that of interaction- is transformed into an unreal, and hence insoluble, theoretical problem" (Collins, 2011, p. 5). As I began to unpack the chasm that was formed in teachers' discussions of challenging behavior and classroom community, it became clear to utilize a DisCrit as a theoretical lens to begin to understand and focus on "the ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 4). Focusing on how the participants described students with disabilities they put into separate categories highlights the ways in which racism and ableism are invisible, interdependent, and used to uphold constructions of normal. Over and over these educators made the delineation between behaviors that they explained by a disability or by a "bad home life" and other behaviors. In doing so, just as Dewey said it becomes insoluble and unreal and, thus, easier to just set aside. The ways in which the practicing teachers described students with disabilities who

exhibited challenging behavior either directly named emotional disturbance or hinted towards that with descriptors such as oppositional defiance disorder, chemical imbalances, emotional disabilities, etc. We know from the literature and the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection that students with labels of Emotional Disturbance and Autism are most likely to be the students who experience severe punishments, such as restraint and seclusion, and have less access to gen-ed placements than their peers served under different disability labels (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 36). To add another layer, black students are twice as likely to be labeled as having an Emotional Disturbance than their white peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 49).

When peeling back the layers of what the practicing educators said throughout the interviews, viewing it from a DisCrit lens, and backing it up with outside sources, it became clear that racism and ableism were an invisible, unrecognized force allowing educators to push to the side an entire population of students, so that when they were looking at adult influence on student's classroom community membership, students who often were removed from classrooms, received the most severe punishments, and students who were least able to uphold the traditional notions of normalcy were not even in the conversation.

The second part of this chapter focused on the centrality of work in the majority of the participant's conceptions of pro-social behavior and notions of classroom community. While most of the participants outright named work as pro-social behavior, it seemed to also slowly come out in their description of classroom community and membership. It became clear throughout the interviews that work was not only a common thread between behavior and classroom community, but was almost synonymous with membership of the classroom community. In order to be a part of the community, students must do work. There were not specific details shared about what "work" should look like for students, however Petunia talked about how with specific students, they gave up on everything but work, so as long as the student was working, they left them alone. Petunia also explained that work refusal and defiance were so problematic because they were in opposition to everything school was about, which is work. Stephanie very clearly illustrated what most participants echoed when they talked about the importance of productivity in school so that students grow up to be productive members of society.

Leanardo and Broderick (2011) explain that smartness is an ideological system that intersects with and upholds Whiteness as ideology. In this same regard, work and productivity seem to be used

in this group of educators in the same ways to uphold Whiteness. Work is used as a gatekeeper of sorts that keeps out anyone who threatens Whiteness and the power it holds. Educators were not discussing smartness, per say, as impacting classroom community or setting, but more so behavior. Behavior was used as a way to delineate which students would or would not be considered in discussions around challenging behavior and classroom community. Pro-social behavior was defined as work and challenging behavior was explained as being in opposition to work. So, in this way, work was the ideology used to uphold some constructed notion of who is worthy of membership and who isn't. Students of color and students with disabilities were most often cited as those who weren't even a part of the group that was considered when thinking about classroom community and challenging behavior. So just as Leonardo and Broderick explain smartness as upholding the ideology and power of whiteness, here, so does the notion of work. In the next chapter, I will more closely examine the ways in which diversity was attended to and not by educators when discussing classroom community and challenging behavior.

Chapter 6: “I don’t want to sound racist but...:”- Discussions of Disability, Race, Diversity and Support

In this chapter I address my second and third research questions:

- What supports and barriers do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?
- In what ways do teachers address and/or omit race and disability in their discussions around classroom community and behavior?

In Chapter 5 I discuss the centrality of the concept of work throughout educators’ discussions of classroom community and challenging behavior. Refusal to work was used by participants to position students to the margins of the classroom. As I analyzed the data, I found that in centering work as prosocial behavior and as community membership, educators were able to ignore all of the systematic and structural inequities, racism, ableism and hegemonic notions of schooling. In this study, discussions about students who exhibit challenging behavior and about students who struggle to be a part of the classroom community converged into questions of belonging: who belongs, and who doesn’t. In this chapter I address questions of belonging broadly, rather than splitting them up between challenging behavior discussions and struggles with classroom

community membership. These discussions highlight the ways in which teachers in this study made sense of students who do not conform to the hegemonic expectations typical of public k-12 schooling in the US. I split this chapter into 3 distinct parts. In the first section of the chapter, I concentrate at the individual teacher level: how did participants describe students who typically struggle with belonging in their classrooms and how were race and disability discussed. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on the larger building and district level: participants discussions of supports, or lack thereof, in supporting diversity and students who fall on the margins of the school and classroom community. Finally, I look at the outliers amongst the conversation, who were the outliers and how did they vary from the majority of the participants in their discussions of students who fall to the margins of classroom community and behavior in the classroom. Because this chapter covers a wide range of data, I structure it slightly different than the previous data chapters, to include smaller more pointed discussions and ties to the literature in each section rather than one larger discussion at the end as I do in the previous two chapters.

Examining Teacher's Positioning and Descriptions of Students
Disability on the Margins of the Classroom Community

Participants described students with disabilities in pathologized, medical model language. Teachers also aligned non-identified students with disability, in ways that surprised me given their background in inclusive education, in their discussions about who was seen as being outside of the classroom community. In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I describe how several participants separated students with disabilities and students without disabilities when talking about who exhibits challenging behavior. The ways in which the educators described this difference is important to unpack. Many participants used descriptions similar to Georgina, who referred to students who have “something chemical going on.” There were numerous educators who mentioned chemicals when talking about students who exhibit challenging behavior. Rather than mentioning a specific disability label, they just mention having something chemical going on in their brain. Along that same vein, Magnolia described students they had with challenging behavior as having “psychological problems.”

In a similar fashion, when teachers were asked which students were harder to bring into the fold of the classroom community, many participants spoke about disability as a reason that certain students could not become full members of the community. Daisy explained, “Okay. I’ll talk to one student. He’s currently my student. I also had him last year and he was we looped with our, they call it an IEP

cluster. So, our students with IEPs.” In answering the question about students who they had struggled to bring into the classroom community, this participant reflected generally that it was students receiving services through an IEP. In a similar way, Petunia began their response to the same question by stating, “Well, they're definitely more often students with disabilities. I mean the first thing that pops into my head, especially, you know, students with some social difficulties or processing skills, verbal skills, things like that.” Broadly speaking and thinking, this participant also generally saw a trend that students with disabilities were the students often times on the margins of the classroom community.

During their discussion around this same question, Kai spoke about a student who did not have very many connections in the classroom and had a particular fascination with narwhals. They explained, “She was on the autism spectrum. And she also was classified with an emotional disturbance on her IEP, so her fourth grade teachers also said that she excluded herself.” This student was someone who was not seen as being highly social with other students, and her labels of autism and emotional disturbance were described as the reason why the student did not have many strong relationships. This participant went on to say that this particular student, after many years of schooling, seemed to lack a lot of confidence in herself

because of her negative school experiences. For other educators who had interacted with her, her lack of connection was not seen as something to problem-solve around, but instead as something inherent to her because of her disability labels.

Magnolia had a wide range of teaching experiences, including some time teaching in what they called a behavior room. When they were asked about any students that they had a harder time incorporating into the classroom community (across all of their teaching experiences), one student quickly came to mind. Magnolia explained,

When I was teaching in a behavior classroom, I had this little friend who really challenged my teaching abilities and who I was as a person. He had a severe re-attachment disorder. So, he was really great at stirring the entire pot in my classroom and setting off kids on purpose so that they would destroy room and he could either avoid his work, or he just enjoyed watching the chaos, I think. And I mean, he would purposely we have to be like "So and so, no, not today." And it had to be a firm voice with him because otherwise if I was sing song or chill and happy with him, he would just take you for all you're worth. And I just, no matter what I did, I tried. But he just got under my skin and I could not for the life of me after trying for months being like, I

don't think I can do it anymore. Um, I mean, we were also just super curious if he was sociopathic because we had heard he tried to like to set his little brother on fire. He had grabbed one of the family cats. No lie. I hear those things and I'm like, I think you might grow up to be a sociopath. And I'm not sure I want you to remember me. I don't know how I feel about it.

While this participant was asked about students who were more difficult to create classroom community membership for, a very specific student came to mind and the discussion that continued was more about challenging behavior and this child's re-attachment disorder as the reason why they could not be a member of the community. In this specific discussion, it was clear that this student was seen as having such significant mental health needs that there was no hope of this teacher positively impacting them as a member of the classroom community.

As has been previously discussed by Stephanie, they had one student in their classroom who was seen as not being a full member of the classroom community because they spent the majority of the school day sleeping. Stephanie explained,

I have one student with autism. And that's the kid who sleeps. And it's because of his outside circumstances, his family's background. Supposedly he lives with Grandma and Grandpa

because Mom and Dad both died of overdoses. So, they blame the sleeping on a poor home life, but that's the only student I have with autism. So, he's high functioning for autism. So, I think they think, everything else is due to his home life so he could function in a nice, easy, ICT setting, and they don't think that he is on the spectrum as far as needing an access point."

When asked this same question, the first student who came to mind was a student with a label of autism. However, their discussion of this particular student quickly named autism, but then went on to explain a variety of personal circumstances that are seen as also impacting this student at school. The assumption made by the school district is that this student should be able to participate fully in an integrated co-teaching classroom, but this was the first student Stephanie thought of as someone who is challenging to include and bring into the classroom community.

Pathologizing students to explain positioning on the margins. In discussions of students who fell on the margins of the classroom community, participants described some students with identified disability labels, but they also described students using pathologizing language without clear reference to whether students were identified as having a disability or not. In both instances however, there were individual characteristics seen as influencing or

being responsible for the student's struggle with belonging. Next, I will look at the ways in which participants aligned students who fell on the margins of the community with disability through pathologizing language.

Two different participants referenced Oppositional Defiance Disorder in their descriptions of students who they had a hard time bringing into the classroom community. Daisy explained

Yeah, I did have one student. He was in [city] and everybody called him oppositionally defiant, you know. Oh, he's so defiant, he just never does anything you tell him to. He'll do opposite of what you're telling them to and you tell you one thing, and then and he'll do it in a completely different way just to make you mad.

Daisy said that everybody called the student oppositionally defiant but didn't allude to any identified disability. Magnolia described a student in a similar way.

So, on the surface like he was like an athletic kid. Like, he was very smart, but he had some like Oppositional Defiant type of qualities where when you ask him to do something, he would do the opposite, or he would purposely try to, like, sabotage, like, your lesson. He wasn't violent or dangerous or like anything like

that. It was just, like, these impulsive, like, behaviors that you're, like, what are you doing.

In both of these instances, instead of an actual disability label, certain characteristics and behaviors of students were named as being like those exhibited by folks who have a label of Oppositional Defiant Disorder and it was those oppositional and defiant behaviors that were seen as the reason that those students could not truly come into the fold of the classroom community. There was no talk of the teacher's role in the struggle for belonging in these students.

Magnolia also spent a good deal of time reflecting on students who had been challenging to incorporate into the classroom community across their teaching career. In this discussion, they first described students with challenging behavior and then continued to discuss a particular student that had been in a classroom this educator pushed into.

She was would get very violent, but then other times, she was almost bipolar where some days she would be very happy and then other days you were like, whoa, like this was kind of scary. So, one memory was when she took every pencil in the basket and snapped them all in half. She was like so worked up and then she drew. She started drawing and writing very graphic things about teachers and what she wanted to do to them so like

she wrote a story where she drew a picture of a teachers head in the guillotine.

This student, who was not identified as a student to receive special education supports and services, fell into this participant's larger category of children who were carrying anger, which they attributed to different characteristics of their home lives. However, when talking about this particular student, Magnolia used the term bipolar to describe differences in the student's moods. As she further described this student as "almost bipolar," the discussion also included a description of a very graphic drawing that the student created, an image that added to this educator's view of this student as "scary," as opposed to a number of other ways that she could have been seen.

Discussion of Pathologization and Disability. Historically, disabled people have always lived at the margins of our social world.... This is especially true in the context of U.S. public education. (Erevelles, 2014, p. 65)

I asked participants to describe students who they typically struggle to bring into the classroom community. These conversations centered around disability and problems located within individual students. While some students were talked about as having labels of disability and receiving special education services, others were simply pathologized and explained using disability language. Erevelles (2014)

explains that not only have medicalized notions of disability “contributed to the continued marginalization of students with disabilities,” but have played an important role as the “central analytic that organizes social difference within schools along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation” (pp. 66-67). In this chapter I describe how disability was used to explain and even justify why certain students struggled with belonging in school. Students who didn’t have labels of disability, but were outcasts, were described using medicalized and pathologized language in ways that Erevelles (2014) explains as organizing social difference in schools.

Participants Descriptions of Student’s Families

Family Make-Up. How participants described students who struggle to belong either because they exhibit challenging behaviors and/or are hard for the teacher to incorporate into the classroom community often included discussions of students’ families and home lives. These discussions about families and home lives generally fell under two categories. The first category being family structure or living situations, the second, discussions of race. Next, I will share the different ways in which participants described students’ families and home lives when describing who falls on the margins of their classroom.

Family make-up was one distinguishing factor participants cited when describing who typically fell to the margins of their classrooms, either because of non-conforming behavior or general struggles with community membership. Tulip talked about both single parent homes and grandparents raising kids as being a common denominator for students who exhibit challenging behavior.

Single parent home. And really just low academic skills and they just are trying to be, not be present. Not thinking that is needed. And that is not valued... So, most frequent flyers I think they were just avoidance, avoidance behaviors and value judgements with no true value of what education should be, it should be, you know, whether it be that their parents left or yeah. I mean a lot of, a lot of grandparents raising kids and I feel that that is also a common denominator for a lot of the challenge behaviors I face.

This educator explained that, for them, single parent homes, as well as grandparent led homes, are a common denominator in who they see as struggling most in their classroom with behavior and belonging. Within that conversation, Tulip also mentioned values of education and student choices to avoid work and academics and that being influenced by their parents and/or guardians' values of education. For this educator, being a single parent or a grandparent raising a student seemed to come with not valuing education. Here

again, there is a failure to consider all of the compounding factors at play, and an assumption that there was an education value difference between these parents/guardians and other parents.

Petunia also discussed family make-up when describing students who struggle to belong in their classroom. Petunia said,

A lot of the times it's the kid staying in a shelter who moves around a lot, or kids that are with a foster family. I feel like adults keep failing them, so when the adults at home, keep failing them they kind of look at us and, oh, well, my teacher is going to fail me also. I can't trust you.

Petunia talked about two separate things above, including not having stable housing and being in the foster system. This educator related each of these to being untrusting of adults, which they then related to struggling in feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom. Magnolia also described family makeup when describing students who struggled to conform to behavior and community norms. They explained,

So, in (city) a lot of those students came from poverty and had traumatic experiences, whether it was like a parent in jail or I don't know, tons of siblings at home without real attention. So, there was always factors that I could see kind of why this kid is carrying this anger or why they don't know how to connect.

Magnolia refers to “those students,” referencing students from a previous school they worked at that had far more challenging behaviors than this educator’s current school. They attributed the challenging behaviors and trouble with community membership to poverty, traumatic experiences, having parents in jail, or having a lot of siblings. These were all family attributes that Magnolia said contributed to students’ struggle to belong.

While Tulip stated that there was a lack of valuing education in students who came from nontraditional families (specifically being raised by grandparents), Petunia stated there was a lack of adult trust. Magnolia talked about anger and an inability to connect. All three attributed differences in student’s home lives to their feelings of and experiences within school that were non-normative and lead to a struggle to belong.

It is important here to unpack how participants perceived and explained families and how they connected certain families as influencing student’s challenging behavior. Petunia described a trend in students who exhibit challenging behavior being “shelter kids.” In the focus on student’s housing experiences as the sole identity marker, Petunia it not only erased all other identity markers, but allowed for all of the structural, systemic and historical oppression that influences housing security to be ignored. According to the National Alliance to

End Homelessness, the population experiencing homelessness is disproportionately Black and Hispanic. Poverty is a strong predictor of homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020) and Black and Latinx groups are overrepresented in poverty, and are most likely to live in deep poverty (Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Incarceration is also a significant predictor of homelessness and African Americans are incarcerated at six times the rate than their white counterparts (Kassa & Mokhiber, 2018). Next, I look further at ways in which participants identified race and cultures other than the dominant, white middle class as factors impacting children's belonging in their classrooms.

Race. Beyond family make-up, participants also identified race and cultures other than white, middle class as factors in which student's struggled with belonging. The following quote is from Tulip as they explained students who fell to the margins of their classroom.

Oh, I mean, I hate to say it, I don't want to sound racist, but I feel like a lot of them have been of color. I don't know if that's just a coincidence, but I do think a lot of it has to do with their home environments. In particular, when I had these two brothers, it was really interesting. The fact that they're both in self-contained special ed, I think a lot of it had to do with their environment. I'm not sure if the mom did any alcohol or drugs

during pregnancy, which could have also affected it. I had a child [in another school] who had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome so that was the cause for all the issues that he had. I think his grandparents are raising him. So, I think that's a common factor. When they're taken away from their parents, or not living with their parents, or in different environment with a blood relative but it's obviously not their mother or their father. You know, something like that.

Tulip starts their discussion with a caveat of "I don't want to sound racist but" as if recognizing that race impacts who is seen as exhibiting behavior is racist. This educator then went on to question whether a mom did drugs or drank alcohol during pregnancy and connected challenging behavior with not living with parents, but instead other blood relatives. Rather than looking at other factors and information, including what disability label the students were served under and placement trends within the district for that/those labels, Tulip started guessing why two students of color, who were brothers, were in self-contained special education with very clear attribution to components of their home life.

Tulip made another comment that made me question their understanding of racism when they said, "And, you know, most of the teachers in the school were all white and the people that are raising

them are extremely racist people, so they were kind of teaching them to hate white people.”

Tulip offered a particularly forward expression of white fragility, which was a common thread throughout participant’s discussions of classroom community and challenging behavior. As Diangelo (2018) explains:

Socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we (white people) either are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in conversations about race. We consider a challenge to our racial worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people. Thus, we perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable- the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses.

Tulip’s defensive response to parents and students of color highlights the discomfort they experienced in thinking and talking about race. This was not a unique phenomenon in this study. Participants overwhelmingly avoided talking about race unless directly asked, and, even then, they did talk about race, but they did not go into depth, or mentioned it but quickly moved to other descriptions as did Tulip when they quickly moved from race to what they called

“home environments,” without acknowledging that race was still a component of the conversation. While participants were quick to identify “hard home lives” as influencing what they perceived as challenging behavior, they were not reflective of why they deemed certain home lives as contributing to challenging behavior and others not. For the majority of participants, there was no acknowledgement of their own biases and/or privileges.

Another educator, as they explained how students from more complex families, similarly to Tulip, used language hinting towards racial judgements, that I will share next. Following the quote, I will examine how it fits in with the larger conversation I had with this educator, and points towards un-named racial components in the quote I share below.

I definitely think students that come from more complex families are usually more challenging... I'm thinking of one student I had who was homeless and she was another one that kind of was bebopping around to all these different friends and family. She kind of was all over the place. She was raising her two younger brothers in fifth grade, and she was one that full on koala bear latched on to like any teacher, any adult, any student, like, she just wanted it so badly. So, in like, her sense it was because she didn't have it. She wanted it so badly. She was one that, like,

was the happiest girl. She never, like, if you had met her, you would never know, like, what she was dealing with at home. Whereas on the flip side, there's the students that come with, like, so much anger about what they've been through. And a lot of times it's because, like, they haven't processed, like, you know, that's just kind of there, but they, they don't, they don't want to open up about it. And so it's, they're just super angry about it. (Jane)

It is important before discussing this quote to put it into context. Jane described their school as primarily Latinx, but when I asked them about the racial make-up of the segregated behavior room, they had a realization that it was made up of all black boys. After this realization, Jane spoke about the prevalence of family gang membership amongst Black students. The quote above was this teacher's response when I asked if they saw any trends in who they struggled to bring into the fold of the classroom community. What I want to point out here is this educator's use of "bebopping." This was not the only time Jane used this term throughout the two interviews and it became clear that they used it to describe black students navigating through space or a situation. Bebopping was used in this case to describe this student and how they moved around between different living situations, in another case how students navigated the school building. Boppin' around, or

bebopping,' is a slang term used to describe a person or group of people hanging around with no real purpose. Unproductive, wasted time, purposeless nonsense are all words used when defining bebopping. Bebop is also a form of Jazz music created by the Black community during World War II (Kubik, 2017). Jane used this term exclusively when describing Black students, without explanation or acknowledgement of use of the term. The term has historical cultural context, and there is a judgement placed on the ways and the meaning behind how these Black students navigate their lives, both at home and at school. The first tenet of DisCrit calls for a focus on the ways in which racism and ableism circulate to uphold the notions of normalcy (Annamma, et al., 2016). In this case, the ways in which Jane described Black students in ways that made assumptions about values, intent and productivity worked to uphold the white, able-bodied, middle class norms of the school system. In Chapter 5, I discuss how, in this study, participants use productivity in the same ways as Leonardo and Broderick (2011) describe smartness and goodness (2016); as property that upholds current privileges and powers. Drawing on that then, here these Black students are being described as unproductive and the perception of unproductivity, thus, serves as a rationale for keeping them on the margins.

Across the interviews, there were negative perspectives and stereotypical notions of families that were attributed to student's lack of belonging in the classroom. Within these interviews, I was very much interested in learning more about the ways in which the participants are supported to think about creating classrooms that value and support diverse students. While I was expecting a rich discussion of support, I instead learned a lot about how support was lacking within these k-12 systems. In this next section, I discuss how participants spoke about the supports in place for them.

"My principal likes when the teachers deal with most things in the classroom. Which is good to some degree, but sometimes you do need support." - Systematic Structural Support (Or lack thereof)

While it is easy to consider educator responses and recognize biases and positioning of students based on disability and race at the individual level, each participant is a part of a much larger structural system that makes up k-12 education in the United States. It is crucial to include a detailing of structural and systematics supports, or lack thereof, that are in place for teachers in supporting diverse students and in reflecting on their own positionalities and practices as teachers work within a system that values and upholds white hegemony. In exploring my second research question, "What supports and barriers

do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?” participants mainly talked about 3 things. First, they talked about Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as the general, fix-all for both challenging behavior and classroom community. Second, several participants discussed teams that were in place to come in and handle students exhibiting challenging behavior. Lastly, many participants spoke about a general lack of support for teachers in supporting students exhibiting challenging behavior and positioned on the margins. Next, I will detail the ways in which SEL was described by participants, which leads into exploring how for many participants, SEL was one of few, if not sole, supports they receive systematically in supporting diverse students.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a Fix-All

An unexpected discovery through analysis of the interviews was the prevalence of SEL in participants’ answers to my second research question. More participants than not cited SEL as one of, if not the sole, systematic support for challenging behavior and classroom community. Before detailing the ways in which participant’s spoke about how SEL was used in their schools, I will first share how the participants defined Social Emotional Learning.

Social Emotional Learning was described by educators in a few common ways. Petunia, Kai, Eli, Magnolia and Azalia all described SEL

as providing students and teachers with a common language to understand and describe emotions, as well as resources to support dealing with those emotions. About half of the educators who talked about SEL described it as a resource for teachers to have and share with students a common language to begin to understand and develop their emotions and to develop tools to deal with those emotions. While Petunia talked about SEL as just something individual teachers implemented, and not something that the district or school provided any materials for, other participants described SEL as a curriculum or set of materials that was handed to them, but that wasn't necessarily implemented or even useful. Magnolia described SEL as a series of "corny videos that looked like they were filmed in the nineties." Another participant described SEL as a something that often times is a book in a closet somewhere that nobody uses (Eli). There were several participants that defined SEL as a curriculum. Magnolia in particular, spoke of it as a set of particularly unhelpful materials.

Within discussions of SEL, it was the general consensus that SEL was a tool the district and schools employed to support classroom community and challenging behavior, whether helpful or not. Magnolia's district saw SEL as a way to minimize challenging behavior. They explained

So, my current district doesn't really have any like systematic behavior interventions per se, but they're more like let's front load the social, emotional curriculum and do things like that to try to help kids. Before they get to that point. But again, like this program that they bought that they think was going to fix everything was not like not going to do, like, give me any real resources, have some things that the kids can connect to.

This educator described SEL as the districts prevention system for challenging behavior, but spoke to the inadequacy of the specific SEL program, stating that it was just not relatable to the kids. This is the participant who explained the curriculum as being a set of corny videos. Magnolia goes on to explain that some of the content is good, but that the delivery is what makes it inaccessible to her students. Eli described their district's emphasis on SEL and implementation of an SEL curriculum, and then explained how they thought SEL impacted students perceived to have challenging behavior.

Yeah, um, I feel like it's those kids that are perceived to have challenging behavior. That's the only language that they want to speak is like socially and emotionally. These kids are probably more they're more hyper vigilant and aware. And I think one of my students in fourth grade. She was like one of my all-time favorites. I know teachers are not supposed to play favorites,

but it's really hard, but she Oh yeah, she like when we hit the turning point, I would hear her say like I felt sad when this happened. And now I don't know what to do with it and like instead of running away saying I don't know what's going on with my body. I don't know why I'm feeling that way. And I thought that was a significant amount of growth. Starting in September, when you see, you see her just run out of the classroom and called everyone names and said, and just like frustrated everyone. We got her to a point in March, where she would be like, "I'm really sorry that I get like that. And now I feel sad that I hurt you." But that in itself was like, that's growth. I think the kids that can't access the academics well, tend to access this better because they have a social piece. And that's their strength- their strategy in life is to be social. And they pick it up faster. I think kids with social skills typically just kind of like buy into. And they're like, oh yeah like I feel statements. Great. Kids who are not socially aware because of whatever x, y, z. They also buy into it when it's the kids who have feelings and are so big. That are always noticeable because you're like, I get that ticket that's going to go off in 10 seconds because we're about to start ... Those kids tend to pick up social emotional learning because they get to work with it with adults

not kids, kids, they get one on one time the curriculum is through picture books. It's through like activities and role play. We're going to reenact the argument you had a recess and they're like, okay, and then like already they're already engaged with it. And to me, that's a win. So yeah, I think it's the kids are like, always want adult time but they don't know how to get it and then you put this curriculum in front of them. They're like, oh... I can talk to you about things that I know is important.

Eli was particularly good throughout the interviews of offering examples of what they were trying to explain. Here they talked about a student who really benefitted from the SEL curriculum and emphasis. SEL was most often talked about in relation to classroom community, rather than challenging behavior. Carson explained their use of SEL in building classroom community.

But I think I've also learned a lot. Kind of throughout the four years about just really working on that community and kind of building up that social emotional learning and just making that a priority and [my current district] is putting out this huge thing this year about making SEL a really big priority.

Carson was hopeful the district wide prioritization of SEL would be helpful for both teachers and students in terms of building classroom community. Petunia also talked about the link between SEL

and classroom community. They said "I think the district in general has a very strong Community focus. I mean, SEL is a huge focus here. We have SEL plans, the district does, And that's part of our day."

Magnolia also talked about the general usefulness of SEL.

We talk a lot about, like, just that social, emotional, how, like, you know, what can you do to better your life or somebody else's around you like looking at the Choose love organizations like daily call to action. I'll just use quotes. A lot of the kids are like, I've never thought about those things. And I'm like, I know they're pretty cool. And I think it just like stretches their brain, like thinking oh yeah like I can live my life like this, too.

SEL was used both as a tool to support classroom community and minimize challenging behaviors on a district wide level.

Participants spoke to the usefulness of SEL as a concept in terms of building classroom community and in terms of challenging behavior in limited cases, but also alluded to the implementation disconnect on a larger structural level. It is important to again reiterate that SEL was one of two larger structural supports teachers expressed as having available to them through their schools and districts. So, when there is also expressed concerns in how SEL is operationalized for teachers, it minimizes the impact on one of two supports available to teachers

when trying to foster and build classroom community and support students exhibiting challenging behavior.

SEL is a current trend in US public schools and has been extensively covered in the literature. Specific programs such as Responsive Classroom (which was mentioned among my participants) have been shown to have positive correlation with academic achievement of students when very strictly implemented (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011; Wanless et al, 2013). SEL, and specific SEL programs have been critiqued as promoting “hegemonic positivity,” accepting the “neoliberal story of meritocracy,” and ignoring “the complex, intangible, and perhaps unknowable nature of human emotion and learning” (Stearns, 2016). The Abolitionist Teaching Network put out a guide to an abolitionist approach to social emotional learning citing that “SEL can be a covert form of policing used to punish, criminalize, and control Black, Brown and Indigenous children and communities to adhere to White, gendered norms and expectations” (Kaler-Jones, 2020). For SEL to be, often times, the sole structural support for classroom community and challenging behavior points to a lack of support for teachers in supporting and encouraging diversity within their classrooms.

Tenet 1 of DisCrit focuses on notions of normalcy are upheld through forces of racism and ableism, often in invisible ways (Connor

et al., 2016). As I was memoing about conversations that participants had around SEL as one of the only supports available to them as teachers, in order to then support students, I kept coming back to Tenet 1 and how the Abolitionist Teaching Network describes SEL as a way to push White, gendered, hegemonic norms, values and expectations. Throughout my memoing, I spent a lot of time thinking about what it means for teachers and, ultimately, their students, when the supports offered to them are not supports that value, honor, and support student diversity or inherently value diversity.

Response Teams as Educator Support

While this did not apply to all participants in this study, many did talk about how a main support available to them within their school building was other adult(s) who could be called in should a student demonstrate challenging behavior. In this next section, I will share and discuss the ways in which participants talked about who they could call when a child was in crisis.

Carson was one of the participants who explained why another adult sometimes feels necessary to them in the classroom.

I feel like once safety becomes an issue, then, at least in my mind, that's when it kind of escalates, like, or my radar goes up. But if I do need to call someone else, if either they're hurting themselves or if they're hurting their peers or myself just to kind

of bring another adult into de- escalate the situation. But I think the goal would definitely be that we would be able to have a conversation about, okay, like, if this happens like what are we going to do about it or how can I best support you in this moment to make sure that we don't have these kinds of bigger behaviors that are more challenging.

Certain behaviors, as I examine in previous chapters, signal concerns about safety to educators within the classroom and when those situations arise, there is a sense that another adult is needed to be able to de-escalate the situation and increase safety for the other students in the classroom.

When asked what building supports were available to teachers, Petunia explained,

So, we had a student support team, SST. The dean of students was in charge of that and then it was four or five TAs for the for the elementary school who, um, who supported and it's a pretty big elementary school, we have seven to nine sections of each grade. So, it's a big elementary school.

Upon further discussion about the SST team, this participant explained that this was a support that could not be used if a student was refusing to do work but could be used if a student was engaging in behavior such as throwing a chair, screaming, or swearing. Within this

particular context, there was a designated team of a few paraprofessionals who were called to come in when a student was demonstrating challenging behavior. Similarly, another participant described how their city first trained all special educators in Therapeutic Crisis Protocol, TCP, before creating a designated TCP team:

The city started to train teachers and it's called TCP is, I don't know if you're familiar with it. So, the following year, all the special education teachers got to have this the therapeutic crisis training. So, I wish that I had had it the year prior. But we did start to get it. Now we have like a TCS team and we have we kind of would turn-key information and provide strategies to the other teachers how to address, you know, certain behaviors.

(Petunia)

According to both of these participants, one of the supports their building provided was a team of people who could come to support when students exhibited challenging behavior in the classroom. In another instance, where a student began pulling another students hair, Tulip described calling the school resource officer:

And I remember I called the security guard, because I was like, you need to just get him out of here. Like, he needs to go somewhere else and cool off and, like, he needs to know that,

like, this is not okay. And I think after that, like he'd been removed from the school because he did not belong here. Like, he needed more intensive help and that was the reason why the mom got mad that I didn't call her. She was like, oh, you know, my kid could have been like dangerously hurt and whatever. And you didn't help her. Like she's saying, I didn't help the kid, which was not true. I sent her child to the nurse just to, just as a precaution because she wasn't bleeding. She was just crying because she was scared. (Tulip)

Participants mentioned two main supports being offered by districts and schools for challenging behavior. The first was SEL as a preventative measure and then the second a team of outside adults to come in and deal with the student exhibiting challenging behavior. Many different participants mentioned needing the support of other adults throughout the discussions on challenging behavior. There have been numerous studies examining support offered to students in crisis, or students deemed as needing support, specifically because of behavior (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005; Wall, Davis, Crowley, & White, 2005). Paraprofessionals or TAs were mentioned on being a part of these schoolwide crisis management teams, but yet, paraprofessionals report that they lack training, especially for supporting students with

behavioral challenges (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). Besides TAs, school resource officers were mentioned by participants as offering support during instances of challenging behavior in the classroom. The well-documented School-To-Prison-Pipeline refers to the ways that, primarily, students of color and students with disabilities are funneled into the path that leads to the prison system through school disciplinary procedures, including school resource officers (Annamma, et al., 2014).

In this current moment in time, there are way too many examples of how policing, both in school and in the community disproportionately affect people of color, more specifically black men. Violence against people of color by those in power are being pointed out through social media, on the news, and in our daily lives. You don't have to look far to find horrific stories of students being physically reprimanded by school resource officers or behavior intervention teams or black men and women being hurt and killed by the police. As I went through the data, employing constant comparison and member-checking to trace narratives offered by participants, it became clear in the majority of participants talking about behavior intervention teams coming in for students, that they were referring to students of color and students with disabilities. The School-to-Prison Pipeline Annamma et al. describe details the ways in which students of color are read,

treated and ultimately disciplined in schools leads them to the legal and, eventually, prison system.

The main two structural supports educators spoke about (SEL and Response Teams) were supports that have been documented to lack attention to and support diversity, and even target marginalized students. In this way, these supports were actually a part of a larger discussion on lack of supports for teachers in supporting students who exhibit challenging behavior and building classroom community. To reiterate here, it is important when unpacking the ableist, racist, and generally deficit-based perceptions and positioning of students by teachers without zooming out and looking at it as more than an individual issue, but rather as a structural and systemic issue.

Lack of Administrative Support

Within this next section, I examine the ways in which educator participants (unexpectedly) spoke about a lack of structural support when they were asked about supports in place for responding to challenging behavior and including diverse students within classroom communities.

Jane complained not only of a lack of support, but also efforts to control and suppress teachers on the part of the administration.

So, I'm actually in my third-year teaching; that school had a extremely high teacher turnover rate. My, I want to say, my

third year, yeah, my third year. I think we had had a 50 percent turnover of staff. Yeah, it was really bad. And it's a small district extremely small district. So, just to get kind of give you the vibe of the school like it was it was not a good culture, it was, it was really bad. So, my third year, actually, I developed anxiety like going to work because it was just like the pressure was so high, and there was zero support and at that point I was, I was in my third-year teaching on the fifth-grade team. I loved the fifth-grade team. We worked really well together and they just like completely destroyed the fifth-grade team like spread everyone out moved everyone like really bad. And it basically was like, Oh, they're too close to each other. They're too friendly. They work too well together. That's like not allowed. So yeah, it was, it was not great. And then they moved me to the middle school, because I was being too friendly with the team I was on.

In this case, not only did the school administration and district structures not support teachers, but Jane felt they actively broke up good collaboration teams and made decisions that seemed counter to supporting teachers to support students. Another educator explained that

They don't support you, they don't. When you ask for things for the classroom and you have, like, she wasn't provided that... my

director of PPS, you never saw, I never heard from him. So, every like even I just laughed. I got no email thanking me for [my] years of service now from my boss, not from the director of special ed, not from anybody. So, like that goes to show you that like, no, it's not from the top. Like, that's why I did in services. I was the only person in [my many] years in that district that did training on ICT. This year was the first year that they had somebody come in and provide for it because of a grant like so I provide an in-service training for people across the district. (Stephanie)

This educator spoke to the lack of training that the district provided for integrated co-teaching as well as how they just felt generally unsupported and unappreciated by the district. This was part of a larger conversation about another teacher in that district that Stephanie said was fired unjustly. While Stephanie and Jane detailed general district wide concerns about teacher support, there were also conversations around lack of building wide systems to support teachers and students during instances of challenging behavior. Daisy talked about her principal when she taught at a segregated special education school as picking and choosing when to get involved or not. She further explained how that seemed to be tied to who the principal was friends with or not and explained that when a student

was really struggling and exhibiting challenging behavior such as destroying the classroom

She would just look through the window and make sure we weren't you know that we were handling it the right way. I mean, there is never a right and a wrong way, but she wanted to make sure that we weren't, I don't know, doing anything that would get us in trouble.

This principal's only support was to watch through the door while a student and adults in the room were working through challenging behavior, to be sure that the adults were handling it in a way that was legal and wouldn't get them or the school in trouble. Rather than support, this seems like surveillance and legally covering the school, of both the educators and adults in the room, as well as the student. Magnolia stated, "My principal likes when the teachers deal with most things in the classroom. Which, like it's good to some degree, but sometimes you do need, like, support." This practicing teacher went on to explain that while some of the teachers in the building had teaching assistants, others did not and that sometimes it really is necessary to have more than one adult in the room.

Here I point out the discussions around the lack of administrator support for teachers in supporting students who fall to the margins of the classroom for a variety of reasons, including race, class, disability

or other diversity markers. This points to a larger, systemic issue. “Institutions are more than simply sterile and objective arenas, but rather environments latent with connected cultural understandings, beliefs, and expectations that mirror societal, social and cultural reproduction” (Fergus, 2016). At an institutional level, schools must challenge singular notions of identity, an acknowledgement and addressing of ways in which racism and ableism circulate to uphold notions of normalcy and recognize of whiteness and ability as property (Connor, et al., 2016). As I point out throughout this chapter, rather than seeing whiteness and ability as property, I noted a focus on justifying these racist and ableist structures by placing difficulties/challenges within the individual students, rather than within the system that was failing to support them.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I detail the ways in which participant’s address diversity in their discussions of students and families. These participants all attended the same university for either an undergraduate (13 participants) or master’s level (2 participants) teacher preparation/teaching licensure program. The program was an inclusive, social justice-oriented program. I was at first taken aback by the lack of attention to and support of diversity amongst these participants. Racism, ableism and a general use of problematic

language stood out throughout the analysis of the two rounds of interviews. At first glance, it is easy to notice individual descriptions of students as problematic, however it was clear that there was a general lack of structural support relating to diversity. Failure to address structural inequity at the school and district level was apparent in participants discussion of systematic supports available to them. The systemic racism inherent in the current school structures became very evident through analysis of individual interviews.

There were several outliers in how diversity was attended to. Participants Carson, Kai, Eli and Nicole each spoke about and attended to diversity in their discussions of students, families of students, and how they supported both classroom community and challenging behavior. Some of the characteristics among the outliers included being a part of diverse schools and districts, either currently or previously, discussions of systemic supports in place to support diverse student bodies, diverse identities of participant's themselves, and/or a strong individual social-justice orientation. Overall, participants of color and/or participants who strongly aligned with a social-justice orientation and attended to diversity within their discussions of students, were also either currently or previously teaching within a school that was diverse and had systems in place to support a diverse student body.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

When I began this research, I hoped to better understand how educators conceptualize classroom community and challenging behavior, and the ways in which they saw the two as being interconnected. In a world before COVID-19, I planned to enter classroom communities and observe educators, students, and other school personnel in action, learning through both being in the shared space observing and in conversations with both adults and students. As it became increasingly obvious that these plans could no longer be a reality, I had to reimage how I could learn about those same concepts in very different ways. After making a shift to learn from practicing educators, my query began hoping to answer the following research questions: 1) How do teachers conceptualize “classroom community” and “challenging behavior?” What connections, if any, do they make between the two? 2) What supports and barriers do teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior? 3) In what ways do teachers address and/or omit race and disability in their discussions around classroom community and behavior?

In this concluding chapter, I summarize my findings, outline strengths and limitations, and highlight implications of this study. As was to be expected with research that uses Constructivist Grounded

Theory (CGT) as its method, some of what I discuss within these chapters follows the original intent and expectations of the study, while in other areas the data took me in unexpected directions. In this next section, I will briefly summarize the key findings from this study.

Discussion of Findings

In this section I break down my findings by data chapter. First, I cover Chapter 4, "I think it Depends:" Educators' Descriptions of Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior. Next, I will discuss the findings documented in Chapter 5, "...if you're compliant...then you get the reward:" Connections Between Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior. Then, I will review the findings in Chapter 6, "I don't mean to sound racist but...:" Discussions of Disability, Race, Diversity, and Support. Finally, I discuss the overarching themes, as well as an important discovery gleaned from my own reflections throughout the study.

Educator's Conceptualizations of Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior

In Chapter 4 I focus on my first research question:

"How do in-service teachers conceptualize classroom community and challenging behavior? What connections, if any, do they make between the two?"

Participants conceptualized strong classroom community through participation and collaboration. Teachers gave examples like students showing care for one another and for the teacher, students feeling like they belong, and a physical space that is not only conducive to collaboration but is personalized to the students as key elements of a classroom community. Safety and respect were woven throughout educators' descriptions of participation and student's feelings of belonging. To build a strong classroom community, educators told students that they loved them, showed them respect, and implemented practices such as morning meetings, classroom community builders, and restorative circles. The practicing teachers in this study identified students with perceived and deficit-based differences, in ways associated with disability whether officially labeled or not, and students "with hard home lives" as struggling the most with classroom community membership.

There was a dichotomy that many participants used to delineate student behavior. Behavior that the participants perceived as being product of a disability or a specific "home life" were not categorized as day-to-day challenging behavior or were put in a separate category. In this separate category, participants described physical behaviors including punching, biting, and destruction of property, such as destroying the classroom and ripping everything off the wall. This took

students with disabilities and students with “bad home lives” out of the discussion of challenging behavior within general education classroom spaces. With the students left in the discussions, educators in this study defined challenging behavior as defiance, work refusal, and disruptive behavior. Among participants’ discussions of challenging behavior, work refusal and defiance were most common. When I asked who most often exhibited challenging behavior, the practicing teachers identified boys. When probed further, students with perceived deficit-based differences (associated with disability whether officially identified or not) and students with “hard home lives” came out as those most likely to demonstrate those behaviors labeled as challenging.

Participant’s discussions of classroom community and challenging behavior echoed current literature. Scholars place a similar emphasis as participants regarding the importance of valuing education (Ciani et al, 2010; Gaete et al, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins, 2005), having shared goals, student ownership, support of diverse contributions, and a sense of belonging (Gaete et al, 2016; Harriott & Martin, 2004; Morcom, 2014; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Watkins, 2005). Participants identified disability, race, and home life as markers for students who fell on the margins of the classroom community and as students who

exhibited challenging behavior, which also aligns with current data (Civil Rights Data Collection).

Connections Between Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior

Chapter 5 also focused on the first research question as well, specifically looking at the connections between classroom community and challenging behavior. Participants spoke about the ways in which challenging behavior occurred because of a lack of classroom community and the ways they saw classroom community membership as a way to minimize challenging behavior. Participants identified a lack of classroom community as contributing to student's challenging behavior, both on an individual and group level. Educators also discussed how a strong classroom community minimized challenging behavior, again at both the individual and group levels. The teachers in this study also talked about challenging behavior as a threat to classroom community. At the classroom level, educators described a ripple effect in which one student's challenging behavior would "set off" other students and would eventually lead to a classroom wide disruption. At the individual level, challenging behavior was described as a barrier to access to general education settings. In Chapter 4, I talk about how participants separated out students with disabilities and students with "hard home lives" from the other students in discussions

of challenging behavior and here I again point out the separation of this group of students on the basis of challenging behavior.

In Chapter 5, I detail a couple of other notable discoveries and themes I uncovered in exploring the first research question. I asked participants about adult impact on challenging behavior and classroom community. Although participants readily acknowledged how adults could impact student behavior, they were less likely to talk about ways that adults could impact on individual classroom community membership. There was a lack of attention to ways adults might negatively impact, through behavior responses or treatment of students, classroom community membership for individual students. A major theme throughout the data was the notion of “work,” which was also a thread that linked behavior and classroom community. Participants described work as a prosocial behavior that was almost synonymous with classroom community membership. If students were working, specifically working together and/or completing tasks, they were seen as being a part of the classroom community and exhibiting behavior that teachers were looking for. The notion of “work” was a common thread weaving all of these educator’s perceptions of students together. Thus, students not seen as able to perform “work” in ways that teachers recognize as such are disadvantaged and positioned to the margins. I begin to unpack the ways in which

participants upheld the construction of normalcy and the ways in which racism and ableism circulated throughout these conversations in Chapter 5, which leads to the last data chapter.

Discussions of Diversity and Who Struggles to Belong

In Chapter 6 I address the remaining of my research questions which all revolved around support or lack thereof for diverse students.

2) What supports and barriers do in-service teachers notice within school settings related to supporting classroom community and/or challenging behavior?

3) In what ways do in-service teachers address and/or omit race and disability in their discussions around classroom community and behavior?

Throughout discussions of who teachers identified as struggling to belong in their classrooms, there was a reliance on singular notions of identity, most often explained by labels of disability, pathologizing language, in relation to students and/or their perceived home-life, which led to conversations around race, poverty and cultural differences. In relying on singular notions of identity, these educators were able to justify marginalization of students who they categorized as having an individual difference or problem, thus relieving their own responsibility for problem-solving and the supporting student's full

membership into the classroom community and supporting their feelings of belonging.

As I asked participants about what systems and structures of support were provided for them when supporting students who exhibit challenging behavior and when building classroom community, there was a general lack of support. More importantly, overall, there was no support for diverse students in place. One of the few supports that participants mentioned in their interviews was building and district wide SEL, either in a provided curriculum or in a prioritization of SEL. SEL however, has been critiqued as promoting “hegemonic positivity,” accepting the “neoliberal story of meritocracy,” and ignoring “the complex, intangible, and perhaps unknowable nature of human emotion and learning” (Stearns, 2016). The one “fix-all” support that these educators mentioned having is not something known for supporting diversity within schools. Another support that participants talked about for students exhibiting challenging behavior was response teams that would come into the classroom and remove the student. This mirrors my own experience that led to this study and led me to look into how such responses affect classroom community. While I was anticipating educators might discuss classroom community membership impacting behavior and vice versa, the participants in this study only mentioned that students on the margins of classroom

community are most likely to exhibit challenging behavior, and never discussed how being a student seen as demonstrating challenging behavior might impact community membership for that student, as well as all students.

Unpacking Implicit Values: Critical Self-Reflections

During the time in which this research took place, there was more police brutality against Black Americans, the inequities connected to COVID-19 have been highlighted further and brought to the forefront of peoples' lived experiences, and the 2020 presidential election has exposed the deep philosophical divide across (primarily White) America. An essential component of this work is my own critical self-reflection, which has been a key component of the memo process. My participants were exceptionally vulnerable through their willingness to engage in conversations around behavior and classroom community, and therefore it feels important to name some of my own hidden values and biases that became apparent to me through my engagement in this research. Across my interviews with participants, it was clear that there was a certain limited level of willingness by participants to engage in critiques of their colleagues. Yet often times, educators who were enacting highly problematic and harmful practices were labeled as "good teachers" by participants who seemed to afford them a degree of respect and alliance as a fellow teacher. There

seemed to be a reluctance to speak too critically about others. Another participant, Magnolia, also spoke about the best inclusive educator that they worked with, a second-grade teacher, and described her as bubbly, outgoing, and someone who was easily able to form relationships with students. As I finished each initial interview, I found myself reflecting some on how the interview felt, as interviewing strangers is a very uncomfortable endeavor for me, and would, in part, leave the interview feeling like it went well because the conversation flowed easily, or hard because it felt hard to keep the conversation going and to get in-depth responses from folks.

In some of the interviews, I recognized problematic language as it was occurring. I would finish the interview and begin memoing about things that stood out to me in memory that I wanted to revisit and look closely at the transcript. For other interviews, it would end and I would memo some notes about things to go back to and so on. I would finish up the conversation with a positive feeling about the participant. In other words, there were inequities that I quickly began to notice in terms of how critical I was within and right after some conversations versus others. When I looked at this more closely, I quickly began to realize that I was not immediately seeing problematic language as readily as I should with participants who were bubbly, outgoing, or easy to talk to.

I was socialized to believe that it is important to always smile, be kind and respectful, and be apologetic, even when there is no reason to be. In other words, I was indoctrinated into many other hegemonic beliefs about what (white) “womanhood” means. As I continued to reflect on my own interactions within these interviews and visited and revisited the data, I was shocked, and at many points appalled, at what I had failed to fully notice in real time during my conversations with participants. While I noticed it when a participant named “bubbly and outgoing” as quality indicators of an inclusive educator, I was failing to notice the ways in which I was valuing those same characteristics in my conversations with participants. Folks who smiled, were easy to talk to, and so on were also often times the interviews that I left feeling as though it had gone pretty well. It was only down the road that I saw so much of what I missed at first glance. This is important to note, and be critically attuned to, both individually and on a much larger scale within our U.S. K-12 education system, because the majority of our educators are white women. It is important to recognize what is valued, including personalities and dispositions, so often within education that allows implicit, and explicit, bias to remain untouched.

Strengths and Limitations of this Research

Strengths

There are several strengths of this study that I will detail next. One of the strengths of this study is the make-up of the participants. The participants in this study mirror the make-up of the teaching force in the United States with 80% white and just over 80% female identifying. The participants represent a variety of experiences across rural, suburban, and urban settings, with a variety of diverse and majority white student bodies. There was a nice range in teaching experience across participants, ranging from one to 13 years of experience. Because the study was forced to be remote due to the pandemic, it made it possible for folks around the US to participate, which would not have been possible if interactions had been in person. Another strength of this study is that participants graduated from the same university, one that has an emphasis on inclusive education, which allowed for a control in their preservice preparation. Each of these participants talked about their experiences at their university in very similar ways and described the inclusive philosophy as being central to their education and teaching pedagogy.

Another strength of this study was that participants really started moving beyond political correctness as they got further into interviews. Initial answers were very carefully crafted, and quickly divulged into less filtered discussions of their experiences and of their students. An example of this is when several participants' initial

answer to whether behavior should play a role in decisions about gendered placements was no, but as participants continued to discuss this, it quickly turned into conversations about how in-fact yes, behavior should be considered in placements for students. While participants felt that “no” was the correct answer, they felt comfortable enough as conversations went on to get to their “real” answers.

Finally, this study offers a critical look at educator’s conceptualizations of classroom community and challenging behavior in ways that bring out important constructs to re-evaluate as preservice teacher education in order to support teachers in embracing, appreciating, and supporting marginalized students. This study calls us to question what community membership means. Many of the educators discussed community membership as synonymous with productivity and work, which brings up important questions of what community membership means in a classroom and what it should mean. Who do these ideas advantage and disadvantage?

Limitations and Future Research

All research inherently has limitations. In this next section, I will discuss some of the limitations of this work and discuss how I plan to use each limitation to guide future research. In particular, Constructivist Grounded Theory as method has an end goal of an emerging theory. Because of the limitations of this study, it is too early

to develop theory, but looking at the findings it seems as though future theory could emerge around hegemonic notions of work and productivity as being both how someone becomes a member of a classroom community and how someone exhibits “appropriate” behavior.

The most obvious limitation of this study is that it included only 15 participants. Each of these participants graduated from a university program that centers social-justice and represent a range of teaching experience, but this data was still gathered across conversations with only 15 participants. While the same institutional background is also a strength of this study, it also means that all participants were taught in similar ways, at least in terms of inclusive philosophy. Over the span of experiences included within this study, many of the participants would have even had access to some of the same faculty members. As a limitation, it means that I have not in any way, shape, or form captured the thoughts of educators who have completed any other teacher preparation program. It is unclear how other programs have addressed issues of equity and social justice in their preparation of future teachers and how different preparation programs may address these concepts differently. Due to the small sample size of educators with the same institutional background, insight can be gained about how THESE educators think about the various topics discussed, but the

results certainly cannot be generalized. What I did find across this study, however, was that I had a larger number of interested participants than were included within the IRB documents and teachers were very eager to discuss their experiences connected to classroom community and challenging behavior. This is promising for future research. Teaching can be a very lonely undertaking, especially in terms of adult connections, and participants repeatedly expressed an appreciation for engaging in critical conversations around these topics. Within future research, I plan to continue to learn from the perspectives of practicing educators, as well as other stakeholders, in order to see how a more expansive pool of educators think about these concepts, including how work is, or it not, centered in how they view students as community members and as students who are not seen as behavior concerns. Future research will allow for an expansion of perspectives and numbers to address this limitation.

A second limitation to this study is that I only engaged in interviews with teachers. Through these interviews, I was able to gain the perspectives of both general and special educators, but I was unable to include the perspectives of paraprofessionals who engage in those same classrooms. I also did not talk to administrators who oversee teachers and, oftentimes, work to put support systems in place for classroom level teachers. Finally, students, who I had originally hoped

to center in this research and who have the most intimate experience with how classroom community and behavior are approached within classrooms and impact one another, or parents/guardians, who have another unique perspective on how classroom and building level practices impact their child, were not included. Each of these perspectives would have deepened my understanding of how our U.S. education system conceptualizes challenging behavior and classroom community, who is seen as being on the margins, how diversity is attended to within those conceptualizations, and, whether or not this notion of work was also viewed as central to other key stakeholders. As I explain above, an expansion of what stakeholders are included in research about this topic will address this limitation in future research. When this study was originally envisioned, it was going to take place in schools. I planned to observe classroom communities and talk to various members within the space to add to the observational data. Because of this shift, another clear limitation of this study is the fact that all data was collected based on what educators said, not by observing what they did. While the participants engaged in rich conversations that included a great deal of depth, there is still always room for a difference to exist between what they say they would do and what they actually do in any given moment. In order to address this limitation in future research, once in-person schooling again

becomes safe for students and staff, I would like to continue this research in classrooms where I can do exactly what I had originally hoped: engage in observation, individual interviews, and focus groups, paying particular attention to notions of work and the erasure of diverse identity in order to more deeply understand how classroom community is fostered, how behavior is understood and responded to, and how particular students are seen as being classroom community members, or not.

Within this study, there were four participants who offered perspectives that were quite different from the rest. All of these participants were either teachers of color or work/have worked in highly diverse schools and really framed diversity as a community asset across their interviews. These educators all also explicitly mentioned a commitment to creating socially-just educational opportunities for students. A limitation of this study, connected to the sample size, is that it is unclear if educators who teach in highly diverse schools and who have an explicitly expressed commitment to social-justice tend to offer a different lens that center students, diversity, and behavior as communication in the ways that these four did. Another limitation of this study is that it did not offer the space and scale needed to really unpack which educators really look at students from a different lens than the majority of the teaching

workforce. As future research continues, I hope to be able to collaborate with educators with a strong social-justice commitment in highly diverse areas in order to explore this further.

Another limitation of this study is the time. A continual cycle of interviewing, analyzing, and re-interviewing could have emerged here, as each interview led to more questions and more topics to dive into deeper. It feels as though this study provided an initial glimpse and unpacking that asks for further inquiry. Hopefully, an ongoing line of research in this area will allow for greater depth of understanding to continually be built. In better understanding how teachers conceptualize classroom community and challenging behavior, erase components of identity, and center “work” as essential to belonging, that learning can help us to reshape teacher preparation from critical perspectives. We do not need teachers who reinforce the status quo, but instead need critical educators who are willing to engage differently with students, and step one to helping them do that is better understanding current constructions around these topics.

Arguably the most important to acknowledge, another limitation of this study is the current fatigue associated with challenges of teaching and researching in a pandemic. Multiple participants talked about how they have never worked harder than they are now in order to plan effective virtual instruction for their students or to make sure

all students follow procedures to stay safe in person and these participants were kindly giving up time on their evenings and weekends to engage in interviews for this study. Some interviews did not begin until after 8:30 or 9:00 pm, after folks taught all day and took care of duties at home following work. COVID-19 has drastically shifted what teaching and learning looks like and teachers are tired, physically and emotionally. One participant, for example, spoke about how they can't wait for the day they can hug their students again, while another spoke about how hard it was to watch her students be unable to hug one another. I made myself available whenever a participant asked for an interview, and while this particular limitation does not have an obvious solution, it is important in future research to consider how these topics could be studied connected to virtual learning should this global pandemic continue. In particular, I hear many educators currently talking about monitoring student cameras, screen, etc in the name of work, and I am curious what could be learned about how to foster community to support students engaging in *learning*, not "work," through virtual modes.

Significance and Implications of this Study

There is an ongoing recognition of the importance of classroom community (Sapon-Shevin, 2010). There is also a breadth of research around students who are most vulnerable to exclusion and othering in

public schools and in classroom settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2020; Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016). We also find ourselves in a moment in time where who is seen as a valuable member of our larger national community, both in relation to race and health within the COVID-19 pandemic, has been centered within our national conscience. I sought out to explore educator's perceptions of the connections between classroom community and responses to challenging behavior, however what I found was that while participants acknowledged connections between classroom community and challenging behavior on a classroom scale, they were less apt to discuss connections at the individual level and there was no recognition amongst participants of adult response to challenging behavior impacting classroom community membership for students (in other words, there was no discussion about how the ways in which adults respond to behavior deemed challenging might impact how that child is perceived and welcomed into the classroom community). For example, the participants within this study were not interrogating their own practice and the larger structural elements connected to classroom community and challenging behavior. Participants were willing to see certain students, through pathologized lenses, as being outside of community or behavioral norms because of something inherently different about the student(s) and their inability to conform

to hegemonic expectations, instead of considering how they might better create an environment that truly sees, incorporates and values diverse students, creating curriculum that is truly engaging for diverse learners, and is focused on learning instead of “work.” Along this same line, participants were naming what was wrong with students to place them on the margins without problematizing, or in most cases, noticing, the trends in who those students were. This sheds light on an area of need for future research. This study also highlights the centrality of “work” and productivity in teacher’s perceptions of student’s behavior and classroom community membership. Work became central in these educator’s discussions of classroom community membership and prosocial behavior. In its centering, work became a tool used to uphold white hegemonic notions of normalcy and a reason that certain (marginalized) students were seen as being on the margins of classroom community and/or as being someone who demonstrates school desired behaviors. While this is an under-researched area, it is also an area that we should be better supporting, from a social-justice lens, pre- and in-service teachers in interrogating. How can we expect teachers to value what students bring to the classroom differently if we are not making changes in pre-service teacher education around classroom community and challenging behavior? How can teachers approach behavior that they

feel is challenging, including work refusal and defiance, differently and from a problem-solving, support perspective and how can teacher education and professional development support them in these endeavors?

These findings have implications for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Within the realm of pre-service teacher education, it points to the need to further unpack biases and assumptions that folks bring to the classroom in order to reconceptualize a sense of belonging that is not directly tied to how productive a student is within the classroom. While this study focused on the perspectives of individual educators, it also points to the need for structural change to the systems that uphold the status quo. Many of the participants in this study spoke about the lack of structural support OR about limited supports, including teams designed to remove students from classroom spaces and Social-Emotional Learning, which also points to the need to improve the professional development that is provided, as well as the need for greater critical leadership from building and district administrators. How can teachers think about how to reconceptualize classroom community or a different approach for behavior they find challenging when these perspectives are not being offered by those in leadership roles? The findings of this study point to the need for educational leaders to provide support in unpacking

personal bias, problem-solving around challenging behavior and providing humanistic supports, and to envision and offer behavior support beyond a removal team or packaged SEL curriculum. Teachers need more support thinking about how to make all students feel as though they belong and how to proactively and positively create an environment where students do not need to demonstrate challenging behavior. We need school leaders who are providing those opportunities and helping to lead teachers through rethinking what makes someone valuable and a contributor, what behavior is communicating, and how that communication can be used to restructure our classroom expectations, curriculum, instructional activities, and beyond.

As a part of this top-down leadership, this study also calls for the need to be having educators critically engaging their own perceptions of students and families in order to be able to stop using certain circumstances as a justification for the positioning of certain students on the margin of the classroom and school community. Within this study, there was a lack of recognition that some of what is happening in participants' schools and classrooms is causing real harm to students and is actively contributing to systemic and cyclical marginalization. When teachers name disability and/or home life conditions as the reason why they cannot reach a particular student or

support them as a member of the classroom community, the positioning of certain students on the margins of membership is never disrupted. Within this study, there was a clear sense from participants that there are just some students who won't fully belong in the community or who will just demonstrate challenging behavior because of these specific characteristics regardless of participant actions as the teacher in the space. We need a critical shift in education where teachers feel responsible to support and bring all students into the fold of the classroom community and where they feel supported in doing so to create these very needed disruptions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how practicing educators conceptualize classroom community and challenging behavior, how educators are supported in supporting students, and how diversity is attended to across these conversations. What quickly emerged is that schools are microcosms of our society at large and that conceptualizations of classroom community and challenging behavior were riddled with racism, ableism, and a lack of consideration of identity and diversity. Among these educators' experiences, there was also a lack of systemic and structural emphasis and support for students with disabilities and students of color. Furthermore, it became clear across participants that work,

productivity and contributing were essential to being seen as a member of the community and as being someone who exhibits “appropriate” behavior. Work was used as a gatekeeper of sorts to uphold white hegemonic notions of classroom community and eliminate students from teachers’ responsibility and radars. This study starts a needed conversation around educator’s conceptualizations of students, in particular student behavior and how adult’s responses to challenging behavior are not currently seen as impacting student membership of the classroom community.

Appendix A

Recruitment E-mail and Consent Form

Recruitment Email

Greetings,

My name is Sara Scribner and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University in Special Education and Disability Studies. I am reaching out because I am beginning a **research study that I think you might be interested in participating**. Below you will find a description of the study and details for how to contact me if you are interested. If you know of anyone else who may be interested, please pass along my email and ask they reach out. I will then send them this information too!

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon!

Sara

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of this study is to explore practicing teacher's conceptualizations of challenging behavior and classroom community and the connections between classroom community and responses to and support for challenging behavior in the classroom.

Requirements to participate:

- 18 years or older
- Be a practicing teacher
- Practicing teachers must currently be a certified teacher and currently teaching in K-12 public schools in the U.S.
- Able to communicate in English
- Willing to engage in conversations about challenging behavior in schools

Time Commitment:

- This study will start in the summer of 2020 with the goal of completion in May of 2021. Participants will be asked to do up to 2, 1 hour interviews with Sara Scribner during the fall of 2020.

Location:

- This study will take place online. Interviews may take place via an online platform such as Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts.
- If you or a person you know might be interested, please use any of the methods below to contact me for more information.

Phone: (802) 793- 0613 (Texting preferred but calling also works)

Email: slscribn@syr.edu

Google Hangouts: sara.l.scribner@gmail.com

Oral Consent Letter

Protocol Title: Preservice and Practicing Teachers Conceptualizations of Challenging Behaviors: Impacts of Responses to Challenging Behavior on Classroom Community

Principal Investigator: George Theoharis; (315) 443-9080;
gtheohar@syr.edu

Key Research Personnel: Sara Scribner; (802) 793-0613;
slscribn@syr.edu

Introduction:

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about participation in a research study and offer you the opportunity to decide whether you wish to participate. You can take as much time as you wish to decide and can ask any questions you may have now, during or after the research is complete. You may contact the researchers at any time with questions at the emails provided above. Your participation is voluntary.

George Theoharis is a Professor of Educational Leadership and Inclusive Elementary/Early Childhood Education in the Teaching and Leadership Department at Syracuse University. He is the principal investigator on this study and will be supporting Sara Scribner who is the key research personnel conducting the research. Participants will be primarily interacting with Sara Scribner during this study, however may reach out to Dr. Theoharis for any questions or concerns.

What is the purpose for the research study?

The purpose of this study is to explore preservice and practicing teacher's conceptualizations of challenging behavior and classroom community and the connections between classroom community and responses to and support for challenging behavior in the classroom.

What will participants be asked to do?

Participants will be asked to participate in up to two one hour interviews done online via Skype or Google Hangout with Sara Scribner. During the interview participants will be asked about their conceptualizations of and experiences with classroom community, challenging behavior and the connections between classroom community and responses to and support for challenging behavior in

the classroom. These interviews will be audio recorded to then be transcribed for use in the study.

What are the possible risks of participation in this research study?

Participants may find the topic of challenging behavior and classroom community brings up some uncomfortable memories or discussions. To minimize risk, participants will be reminded of the risks, may take breaks at any point during the interviews and may opt out of the research at any time.

Participants may discuss topics during the interview in which actions, by others or themselves, were taken in response to challenging behavior that may in retrospect be unethical or abusive. To minimize risks, participants will not be called out for any questionable previous actions during interviews, and all identifying information will be removed so that nothing shared will be able to be traced back to the participants.

Whenever one works with e-mail or the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

What are the possible benefits of participation in this research study?

Participants will have the opportunity to think through concepts that impact their future and daily professional experiences and students.

Participants will not be judged or reported on based on discussions that occur during the interviews. Participants information will be protected to ensure privacy.

Participants get to be a part of research aimed to understand classroom community and challenging behavior practices in schools.

How will participant's privacy be protected?

All identifying participant information will be protected through coding using pseudonyms after interviews are transcribed. Only Sara Scribner and George Theoharis will have access to the code which will be kept on a password protected device in a locked desk. All identifying

information will be deleted after the end of the study and not used for any future research studies.

Sara Scribner will conduct all online interviews in the privacy of her home office with the door shut, so that privacy be maintained.

It is recommended that participants choose the location for their online interviews with privacy in mind. The location should be as private as possible such as a home office or bedroom with the door shut. Privacy will be compromised if interviews are done in public spaces with people that may overhear what is being said.

All identifiable information will be removed and pseudonyms used, so that if any information is shared that may potentially lead to a work or personal conflict, these will not be able to be placed with anyone or any place specifically.

Will photographs, audio, video, or film recording be used?

Audio recordings of the interview will be taken by Sara Scribner on a password protected iPhone. These recordings will only be used to transcribe interviews and will not be shared with anyone in any part of the research process. The audio recordings are used to ensure accuracy when referring to the information from the interview in the research process, but once transcribed will be deleted permanently.

Audio recordings deleted after transcribed by Sara Scribner. Only Sara Scribner and George Theoharis will have access to the audio recordings.

What are participant's rights in this study?

Your participation is completely voluntary.

You may skip and/or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

Whom may participants contact with questions?

For questions, concerns or more information regarding this research you may contact

George Theoharis ; (315) 443- 9080; gtheohar@syr.edu

Sara Scribner; (802) 793-0613; slscribn@syr.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

Do you have any questions?

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Do you agree to having your interviews audio recorded?

Where would you like a copy of consent for sent? We can email it or print it off and send a physical copy via mail.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Appendix B

Interview Protocols

First Round Interview Questions/Topics

Before interview starts:

I will give you a little information about this interview before starting. Is that ok? Just as a reminder, while we are talking, if I ask anything that you don't want to answer, you don't have to. You can decide to not answer or end the interview at any time. You are also free to ask me questions at any point.

Begin by giving them a little information about me and why I am interested in the topic.

Name, teaching background, background in supporting students (with and without disabilities) with challenging behavior in inclusive classrooms, interest in topic

Learning More about the Participant:

- 1) For the transcript, can you say and spell your name
- 2) Tell me about why you became a teacher. What brought you to this field?
- 3) Please tell me about where you studied to be a teacher and the accompanying certifications that you received.
- 4) What was your teacher preparation program like? What do you remember most? If you attended other schools and received other certifications, tell me more about those programs as well.
- 5) Let's talk about your teaching experience. Could you tell me each of the places that you have taught, how long you taught at each one, what did you teach, and information about the demographics of the school

Classroom Community:

- 1) Can you tell me about a time that you felt like there was a strong sense of classroom community? What about that example stands out? What allowed you to know there was a strong sense of community?
- 2) Can you tell me about a time that you felt a classroom lacked a sense of classroom community? What about that example

stands out? What allowed you to know there was a lack of classroom community?

- 3) If you think across your experiences with classrooms, what do you consider to be some of the most important considerations for building a strong and positive classroom community?
- 4) Have you ever experienced a time where there was a child you struggled to incorporate into the classroom community? If so, could you tell me more about that experience.

Challenging Behavior

- 1) When you think about the term “challenging behavior,” that we so often hear in schools, what sorts of behaviors come to mind?
- 2) Could you tell me about the most challenging behavior or most challenging behaviors you have ever experienced as an educator?
- 3) When this happened, how was the challenging behavior responded to, by you or by other adults in your school?
- 4) When challenging behavior occurs in your classroom, how do you determine if it is a behavior that can be responded to within the classroom, by you or other adults regularly in your classroom, or it is something you might need additional support from outside of your classroom to respond to?
- 5) In moments where a student exhibits challenging behavior, are there any school or district level policies that guide how you respond? If so, how do those policies support, or not, your response to the challenging behavior? If not, how do you decide how to handle the situation?
- 6) When you think across your experiences with challenging behavior, have you noticed any commonalities or trends amongst students who demonstrate the behaviors you have named as being challenging?
- 7) When you think about inclusive education, how do you think challenging behavior should be considered in educational placement decisions?

Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior:

- 1) What strategies have you used to build classroom community in your classroom? Have you found any strategies to be more or less effective?
- 2) How do you support classroom community membership for students who sometimes exhibit challenging behavior?

- 3) Have you ever had an experience where a student's behavior changed, positively or negatively, in response to their membership within your class?
- 4) Describe a time that you have seen an adult negatively impact community membership for students.
- 5) Describe a time that you have seen an adult negatively impact a student's behavior.
- 6) Describe a time a student re-entered your classroom after demonstrating challenging behavior. What did you do when they re-entered your classroom? What happened as and after they re-entered?
- 7) How do you see classroom community and challenging behavior as being connected? Can you think of any experiences from your teaching experiences that might help illustrate this?

When the interview is over, thank them and remind them that they may be asked back for a follow up conversation.

Second Round Interview Protocol

Classroom Community and Challenging Behavior:

- 1) What strategies have you used to build classroom community in your classroom? Have you found any strategies to be more or less effective?
- 2) How do you support classroom community membership for students who sometimes exhibit challenging behavior?
- 3) Have you ever had an experience where a student's behavior changed, positively or negatively, in response to their membership within your class?
- 4) Describe a time that you have seen an adult negatively impact community membership for students.
- 5) Describe a time that you have seen an adult negatively impact a student's behavior.
- 6) Describe a time a student re-entered your classroom after demonstrating challenging behavior. What did you do when they re-entered your classroom? What happened as and after they re-entered?
- 7) How do you see classroom community and challenging behavior as being connected? Can you think of any experiences from your teaching experiences that might help illustrate this?

When you think about student behavior, what are you hoping students will demonstrate within your classroom/teaching time with them?
What is positive "school appropriate" behavior?

Why are classroom management and "school appropriate" behavior important?

In the initial interviews, a trend that emerged was that refusal and/or defiance were some of the most challenging behaviors that educator's experience in classrooms. Do you think refusal and/or defiance are challenging behavior? Could you give an example of a time you experienced it/them?

IF YES/STORY: Why are refusal and/or defiance so problematic within classroom spaces?

One theme that emerged in first round interviews is the idea of behavior being manageable within a classroom until a specific line of "safety" is crossed. How do you decide if a behavior crosses a line of

safety? Can you think of an example with a student where their behavior went from safe to unsafe?

-Paper, crayons, standing on desk, table/chair on back, running

How would you define social emotional learning (SEL)?

What is the purpose of social emotional learning? Is it important? Why or why not?

What sorts of students most benefit from SEL? Can you think of a story that would bring this to life?

What connections do you see between SEL and challenging behavior?

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White, J. M., Li, S., Ashby, C. E., Ferri, B., Wang, Q., Bern, P., & Cosier, M. (2019). Same as it ever was: The nexus of race, ability, and place in one urban school district. *Educational Studies*, 55(4), 453-472.

Sara Scribner

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EDUCATION

- Ph.D.** Special Education, Syracuse University, May 2021 (expected graduation)
- C.A.S.** Disability Studies, Syracuse University, June 2020
- M.S.** Inclusive Special Education: Multiple and Severe Disabilities, Syracuse University, 2011
- B.S.** Inclusive Elementary and Special Education, Syracuse University, 2010
- B.S.** History, Syracuse University, 2010

PROFESSIONAL AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor, Special Education

Springfield College

Instructor

Fall 2020-

Present

Department of Education

- Courses: EDUC 238: Field Supervision, Pre-Practicum in Special Education
(Fall 2020)
- EDUC 342: Curriculum and Assessment in Special Education
(Fall 2020)
- EDUC 362: Instructional Strategies and Supports for Exceptional Learners
(Spring 2021)
- EDUC 461/464/465/466/467/467: Student Teaching Seminars
(Fall 2020)
- EDUC 642: Assessment, Interpretation and Planning in Education
(Spring 2021)
- EDUC 673: Teaching Exceptional Learners: Advanced Practices and Methods
(Fall 2020)

EDUC 699: Special Topic- Theory for Socially
Just Education
(Spring 2021)

Present	<i>Field Supervisor</i> Department of Education Field supervision of special education practicum students (undergraduate and graduate, with and without CAP cycles)	Fall 2020-
	<i>Research Fellow</i> Syracuse University Research Excellence in Doctoral Funding Fellow Fellowship Focus: Grant Writing	Fall 2019-Spring 2020
	<i>Instructor of Record</i> Syracuse University Department of Teaching and Leadership <u>Courses:</u> SPE 324: Differentiation for Inclusive Schooling (Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019) EDU 355/600: Fundamentals of Teaching for Non Majors, Co-Instructor (Spring 2017)	Fall 2017-Spring 2019
	<i>Teaching Assistant</i> Syracuse University Department of Teaching and Leadership <u>Courses:</u> SPE 705: Psychoeducational Clinic (Summer 2017) SPE 324: Differentiation for Inclusive Schooling (Fall 2016 / Spring 2017) SPE 724: Professional Practices for Inclusive Special Education (Spring 2016) EDU 203: Introduction to Inclusive Schooling (Fall 2015)	Fall 2015-Spring 2017

TEACHING CERTIFICATES

Certificate in University Teaching- Syracuse University

New York State Professional Teacher Certification:
Students with Disabilities, grades 1-6
Childhood, grades 1-6
Annotation in Severe and Multiple Disabilities, grades 1-6

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Inclusive Special Education Teacher

2011-2015

Minetto Elementary School
Oswego City School District
Oswego, NY

Inclusive Special Education Teacher

2010-2011

Oswego High School
Oswego City School District
Oswego, NY

Publications

Theoharis, G., Causton, J., Woodfield, C, & **Scribner, S.** (2020). In Leading inclusive schools for students with disabilities. In G. Theoharis & M. Scanlan, (Eds.) *Inclusive leadership for increasingly diverse schools (2nd Edition)*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Scribner, S. & Theoharis, G. (2019). Inclusive Teacher Preparation. In M. Peters (Ed) *Springer Encyclopedia of Teacher Education*. Switzerland: Springer.

Scribner, S. & Cartier, M. (2019). Thinking Outside the Box- Using Virtual Platforms to Collaboratively Co-Plan Effective and Engaging Instruction. In B. Rice (Ed) *Global Perspectives on Inclusive Teacher Education*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Scribner, S. (accepted, April 2021). “Oh, Now That You Mention It, They Were All Black:” Omissions of Identity Beyond Disability in Discussions Around Challenging Behavior and Community Membership. (Paper Presentation) New England Educational Research Organization, Virtual.

Dickens, B., Roquemoire, K., & **Scribner, S.** (Accepted, April 2021). Support, Not Silencing: Lessons Learned from a Multi-Year PAR Study. (Paper Presentation). New England Educational Research Organization, Virtual.

Roquemoire, K., Dickens, B., & **Scribner, S.** (Accepted, April 2021). "I Not a Researcher:" Lessons Learned from an 'Inclusive' Research Study. (Paper Presentation). Society for Disability Studies, Virtual.

Scribner, S. (April, 2020) How Do We Be Inclusive and Simple?" An Exploration of Shifting Understandings of Accessibility in a PAR Study. Symposium: Building Community and Creating Knowledge Through Participatory Research: Rethinking Intellectual Disability and Educational Research (Paper Presentation). American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. Cancelled conference.

Scribner, S., & Dickens, B. (April 2019). More Same than Different: Impacts of Social Norms and Special Education Labeling on Educational and Social Identities. (Paper Workshop). SDS @ OSU, Columbus, OH.

Caron, C., **Scribner, S.** & Dickens, B. (April, 2019). Claiming Our True Selves: Using Vulnerability to Disrupt Systemic Ableism (Panel Discussion). Society for Disability Studies @ OSU, Columbus, OH.

Dickens, B. & **Scribner, S.** (November, 2018) More Same than Different: Impacts of Social Norms and Special Education Labeling on Educational and Social Identities. (Paper Presentation) TASH, Portland, Oregon.

Scribner, S. & Dickens, B. (2016, June) Inclusive education in the rural US: Unique needs and lessons to be learned. (Paper Presentation) Disability Studies in Education, Des Moines, Iowa.

MANUSCRIPTS IN PROGRESS

Scribner, S. (In Review). "Behavior Management" in Schools: Is Justice Being Served?

Scribner, S. (In Progress). Work as Central to Belonging

Scribner, S. (In Progress). Preservice and Inservice Teachers Conceptualizations of Classroom Community, Challenging Behavior, and Their Interactions and Connections.

Scribner, S. (In Progress). "Oh, Now That You Mention It, They Were All Black:" Omissions of Identity Beyond Disability in Discussions Around Challenging Behavior and Community Membership.

Dickens, B., Roquemoire, K., & **Scribner, S.** (In Progress). Support, Not Silencing:

Lessons Learned from a Multi-Year PAR Study.

GRANTS

Community For All (Fall 2017-Fall 2019).

Foley, A. & McDonald, K. (PIs) (2014-2019). *Community For All*. **Scribner, S.** Assisted with toolkit Content Development, Accessibility Provisions, work group leadership, and self-advocate support.

Collaborative Equity Audit: Examining Opportunity Gaps. (Fall, 2016)

Ashby, C. & Theoharis, G. (PIs) (2016). *Collaborative Equity Audit: Examining Opportunity Gaps*. **Scribner, S.** assisted with data collection and participated in research meetings between the university and Syracuse City District Administrators.

SERVICE TO DEPARTMENT/COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY/PROFESSION

Service:

2020-Present	Faculty Advisor, Kappa Delta Phi (KDP), Springfield College
2020-2021	Search Committee Member, EDUC Literacy Position, Springfield College
2020-Present (NC)	Founding Member: Board of Directors and Incorporator: Rede Academy
Spring 2020	Editorial Review Board: <i>Integrating Social Justice Education in Teacher Preparation Programs</i>
2018-Present	Peer Reviewer for Journal, <i>Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning</i>
2018-2020	Summer Leadership Conference, Syracuse University; assist year round in the planning of the conference, including speaker recruitment, physical space
2017-2019	planning, CEU course registration, and other tasks
2017-2019	SOE Degrees and Curriculum Committee Member, Syracuse University
2017-2019	Assisted with and presented at the Intro Workshop at the Institute for Communication and Inclusion, Syracuse University
2016-2020	Inclusive Steering Committee Member, Syracuse University
2016	Assisted Dr. Julie Causton with the CEC SPA Submission for program accreditation

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Scribner, S. (2020) “Inclusive Education and Social Justice” Invited to present for EDL 423, Leading Inclusive Learning Systems, taught by Dr. Floyd Beachum, at Lehigh University.

Scribner, S. (2019) “Inclusive Education and Social Justice” Invited to present for EDL 423, Inclusive Learning Systems, taught by Dr. Floyd Beachum, at Lehigh University.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION/DISABILITY STUDIES COLLABORATIONS & CONSULTATIONS

Hospital Diversity Training Boston, MA

Spring 2021

Selected to collaborate with staff and other diversity and inclusion related consultants to create diversity training for the entire staff of a major Boston, MA hospital. Specifically responsible for training related to intersectional disability studies as it relates to staff interactions with patients who might identify (or be seen as) as disabled.

New Brunswick, NJ

Spring 2020

Completed observations across all middle school classrooms regarding implementation of the PBIS system in place. Then created and delivered a half day of professional development regarding PBIS, including a guided work time to support school staff in making some changes to their current PBIS system to be more positive based and student centered.

Support to Families

2018-Present

Provide tailored supports for parents/guardians around inclusive special education services and supports. Supports include document reviews and suggestions, attending meetings as a support and advocate, classroom observations, support and recommendations for the school team, and professional development for team members. Most of this work has been around the support of students with autism and/or complex support needs within the classroom and community.

Somers Central School District

Spring 2017

Team member for an inclusion audit in the Somers Central School District. As such, completed 3 days of independent classroom observations and wrote report sections utilizing observational data.

North Syracuse School District May 2017

Fall 2016-

Team member in the North Syracuse School District early education, elementary, middle, and high school buildings to complete classroom observations, provide feedback, and facilitate team meetings.

AWARDS

Syracuse University Dissertation Fellowship, Summer 2020 (1 of 10 fellowships)
Research Excellence in Doctoral Funding Fellow, 2019-2020
Syracuse University Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, 2017
Syracuse University Scholar, 1 of 12 “valedictorians” for graduating class of 3,000+,
2010
Syracuse University’s School of Education School Marshal, 2010
Spector/Warren Fellow, 2009

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
Society for Disability Studies

REFERENCES

Beth Ferri, Ph.D.

Professor; Coordinator of the Special Education Doctoral Program
Address: 150 Huntington Hall Syracuse, NY 13244
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