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Fernanda T. Orsati^a & Julie Causton-Theoharis^a

^a Special and Inclusive Education, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA

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Challenging control: inclusive teachers' and teaching assistants' discourse on students with challenging behaviour

Fernanda T. Orsati* and Julie Causton-Theoharis

Special and Inclusive Education, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA

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Describing students with disabilities as presenting 'challenging behaviour' is common in US schools. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the discourse utilised by teachers in order to understand their beliefs and practices surrounding young students considered to present challenging behaviour. This study examines teachers' language in four ways: which discourses they draw from, the consequences of engaging in the discourse on practice, what maintains the use of such discourse and finally the possibilities for change. The critical discourse analysis unpacked that teachers begin labelling the students as challenging, not the behaviour. Consequences of this thinking emerged as teachers excluded the students, or what they consider 'the problems' from the classroom. Exclusion was found to be the 'necessary' response when control is prioritised in the classroom. In sum, the discourse of control is available for shaping how teachers understand and support students. Developing a relationship with students empowers teachers to see past the labels, the control discourse, and truly support students in inclusive classrooms. Finally, implications for practice are shared to improve the experience of inclusive education for both student and teacher.

Keywords: inclusive education; behaviour; disability

Introduction

... the authoritative teacher, who drowns the freedom off the student, belittles student's rights to be curious and restless ... (Freire 1996, 60)

The purpose of this paper is to describe the discourse used by teacher in understanding young students considered as presenting challenging behaviour. This study examines the discourse teachers draw from, the consequences of this discourse on practice, what maintains the discourse, and the possibilities for change. We will begin this paper by introducing one of Nathan's stories.

It is circle time, the teacher is playing morning songs on CD and the students are singing. Nathan is moving his chair to get to the front. The teacher carries him in her arms and puts him in another chair, in close proximity to a teaching assistant. The number song begins and Nathan is singing with excitement, yelling the numbers out. 'Use your inside voice' said the teacher. He continues to yell the numbers out, along with the song. She asks again

*Corresponding author. Email: forsati@syr.edu

for him to use his inside voice, but the loud singing continues. 'He's done. Take him out!' the teacher said picking him up and carrying him by the arms to the TA assigned to him that day. Mrs. Smith takes him out by the arms and they sit on the bench right outside the classroom. Mrs. Smith and Nathan are looking at the wall. Nathan starts moving around, moving his hands and legs in the air and they hit Mrs. Smith. She carries him back to classroom, stops in the back of the morning circle stating: 'He's kicking bad'. All the kids look back and the teacher answers promptly 'So, why did you bring him in? Go outside, play with the basket and just bring him when he's ready'. Mrs. Smith carries him back outside, he engages in an activity for a few minutes before they go back to the classroom.

During lunch, the teacher said, 'Nathan must have been over-excited today because it's his birthday'.

Nathan was turning 6 that day. Nathan is in a kindergarten classroom and his teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) regularly describe him as presenting 'behaviour problems' or 'challenging behaviour', being a 'bully' or 'defiant'. Being carried out of the classroom by the TA is quite a routine for him.

There are several ways to make sense of what occurred on Nathan's birthday. His behaviour could have been understood as disturbing the morning circle; so his exclusion would have been for the benefit of the other students. It could also have been read as defiant behaviour and in need of consequences, so he could learn appropriate behaviour. Nathan also may have needed to leave the classroom in order to get his behaviour under control. We posit that all these are authoritative understandings of Nathan's behaviour that result in a student who is less curious and restless, as Freire (1996) defends. Alternatively, as the teacher was able to provide one of the possible descriptions later, the understanding that seems more humanistic and less authoritative would have been that, he was excited and participating intensively because he knew his mother was going to bring a cake to school for his birthday later that day. Even after the teacher was able to describe what could have been behind Nathan's behaviour, she employed a strategy based on the student's labels (defiant, for example), not the actual actions of a kindergarten-aged student. Depending on the understanding of Nathan's behaviour different responses might have been enacted. Excluding Nathan from the classroom seemed to be the first and most natural response when he did not comply with the classroom rules. Would the same consequences be taken for a typically 'well behaved student'? Would Nathan be excluded for yelling the lyrics of a song if he was not believed to present behaviour problems? What are the discourses on challenging behaviour in inclusive classrooms? And how does this discourse impact the education of students who have labels or histories of such behaviour?

In this study, the terms 'challenging behaviour', 'behaviour problem', or 'defiant behaviour' have been used interchangeably to describe students' behaviour issues with teachers and TAs in inclusive classrooms. The authors believe that challenging behaviour is a social construct that depends on the student's context, especially the rules established for social environments and relationships in the classroom. We believe that a behaviour problem is not an inherent deficit to the student, but a social construct. The social construct of a disability interrogates the use of deficit categories to interpret differences (Bogdan and Taylor 1989; Taylor 2000). Therefore this paper utilises a Disability Studies framework to understand students and their behaviours in classrooms. According to a disability studies framework students do not embody inherent deficit located in them due to the fact that they do not comply with school rules, for

example. But rather students' 'conditions' are actually products of institutionalised oppression (Gabel 2009). In this paper the authors use the teachers' language, examine and complicate it by showing how much power and oppression is embedded in such use.

Challenging behaviours

Literature shows that serious misconduct (United States Government Accountability Office 2001), behaviour problems (US Department of Education 2004), aggressive behaviour (APA 2000), misbehaviour, or challenging behaviours, for example, are all terms regularly used in schools to describe students that do not comply with the rules, or do not follow the norm expected for their behaviour. None of the terms above refer to a specific disability category; however, they are consistently used to describe students with disabilities in US schools. Emotional and behavioural disturbance is an Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) (US Department of Education 2004) category defined for children who respond inappropriately in emotional situations or may have difficulties on interpersonal relationships (Friend and Bursuck 2009). However, students routinely referred to as presenting challenging behaviour do not necessarily have the label of emotional and behavioural disturbance, or qualify for services and IDEA provisions. Teachers, principals, and related service providers use such descriptors routinely, but rarely examine their use. Other groups of students labelled as having a disability are commonly believed to present challenging behaviours as well: children with autism, and children with intellectual disabilities, for example. Autism is a disability category applied to children who generally are believed to have difficulties in social interactions, communication skills and show repetitive behaviours. Intellectual disabilities is a label defined by significant limitations in intellectual abilities and adaptive behaviours (Friend and Bursuck 2009).

When students' behaviours are considered as potentially hostile and sometimes violent, students tend to be labelled and placed in special education (Casella and Page 2004), often in segregated settings, largely impacting the student's educational future. Government data shows that the students labelled in the three categories cited above tend to be excluded from instruction in general education more often. Students with autism are educated on average 29% of their school day in general education classes, 32% for students with emotional disturbances and just 12% of the days for the students with cognitive disabilities (US Department of Education 2006). These percentages can be compared with 88% of the day for children with language impairments and 51% for children with specific learning disabilities (US Department of Education 2006). Therefore it is clear that students labelled with disabilities that present challenging behaviours are the ones that tend to spend less time in the general education environment.

Danforth's (2007) work examines metaphors and understandings of children with emotional and behavioural disturbances. The author analyses how typically 'unwanted behaviour' is placed squarely within the individual and considered a pathology. Danforth (2007) affirms that in schools 'deviant persons are subject to adaptation to the social order' (20). He adds that the aim for behaviour interventions in schools is social homogeneity and conformity. For that to happen, Danforth explains, teachers and other school personnel are the judges of wanted or unwanted occurrences in the classroom. The author affirms that the dominant understanding is that students need to learn – based on behaviour standards – to appropriately respond to the environment

around them. For that reason the regulator (teacher) is required to promote adaptation of the deviant behaviour to the norm. Such dynamics raise questions regarding power relations between teacher and student, equity issues regarding access to education, and construction of stability regarding emotional and behavioural disturbances.

Power relations between teachers, school personnel and students are also apparent in the labelling processes in schools. Labelling has a potential detrimental effect on the individual being labelled. Goffman (1963) reminds us of the 'special position of oral statements which attest linguistically, not merely expressively, to social and personal identity' (61). Goffman describes labelling as a stigma that is deeply discrediting for the person. The individual himself ends up holding the identity that the label gives him, in this study, for example, the identity of being challenging. It means that 'shame becomes a central possibility arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being defiling thing to possess' (7). Goffman describes that the management of such stigma imprinted in individuals is based on the societies' normative expectations regarding conduct and character.

Youdell (1996) examined the process of labelling present in schools. The author explains that students are marked by categorical identities constituted in everyday school practices based on race, ethnicity, nation, gender, sexuality and social class. Youdell also analyses discourses based on compliance and what constitutes a 'good student' or a 'bad student'. Those discourses get attached to students and generate identity beliefs impossible to avoid. As she explains:

linguistic, bodily and representational practices constitute subjectivities, subjectivities constituted through the coalescence of multiple categorical names that come together in various constellations and become meaningful through the multiple discourses that circulate in particular contexts. (94)

Ultimately these identities based on labels lead to the exclusion of the individuals, especially students that are beyond the desirable/undesirable dichotomies. Rather than seen as different these excluded students are seen as the impossible learners (Youdell 1996).

The conceptions and theories for understanding behaviours reflect social and cultural principles that prevail in society (Elkind 1998). They privilege control and discipline over learning and participation of all students in the classroom. Currently, schools adopt a relatively passive attitude and rely on punishment, and school exclusion when facing challenging behaviour (Kerr and Nelson 2009). Referrals and exclusion from the classroom are common strategies used to manage challenging behaviour; however, they disrupt continuity of instruction for the student and create academic exclusion which can lead to more behavioural issues. In the USA, the literature, open press and government reports provide alarming statistics on the use of exclusionary techniques such as restraint, seclusion and aversives to address behaviour problems in the classroom especially for students with disabilities (Costenbader and Reading-Brown 1995; Dillon 2009; US Government Accountability Office 2009). The consequences of the use of such techniques range from trauma and more behavioural problems to death (National Disability Rights Network 2010).

Alternative, more humanistic, ways of understanding behaviours are also provided in the literature (Kohn 1998, 2006, 2007; Pitonyak 2005). These scholars challenge the assumption that we require obedience and compliance from students because discipline can never be the end itself, and the end should be enhancing student's learning (Friend

and Bursuck 2009). In addition, Harrower and Dunlap (2001) reviewed the use of systematic strategies in inclusive classrooms, specifically for students with autism. Their findings show that a positive approach in dealing with challenging behaviour of students involves delayed contingencies, peer-mediated strategies and self-management, for example. All of them are positive approaches to the students' behaviours. In relation to teachers Leblanc, Richardson, and Burns (2009) report that training teachers in best practices and providing information about the students made their perceptions on students and confidence in teaching in inclusive settings improve.

Discourse in schools

Wong (2010) and Kang (2009) state the importance of analysing teachers' discourse on how they understand disabilities in the classroom. Such analysis provides insight into the construction and deconstruction of disability and behaviour issues in schools, as well as the practices and strategies put in place in inclusive classrooms to respond to students' behaviours. This section explicates the concept of discourse, knowledge, and power, and provides tools to understand teacher practices in classrooms.

Studying discourse is a way of understanding the language people use in everyday relations, how that influences and constructs meaning of the world around them, and clarifies the orderly practices and their implications for the conduct of social life (Wetherell 2000). Foucault defines discourse as a system of representation that expands the understanding of language and its functions in society (Hall 2003). The ways we talk does 'not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather [they] play an active role in creating and changing them' (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, 1). As a consequence, knowledge comes through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of people (Hall 2003). For example, Foucault (1995) describes the educational system, and how the 'educational space functions like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding' (147). In schools teachers are the ones with power and knowledge and who, as mentioned in Danforth's (2007) work, regulate rules and students' behaviours depending on the available discourses.

Power and knowledge are related elements in society (Foucault 1980), especially how these two forces operate within the 'institutional apparatus and technologies' (Hall 2003, 47). The apparatuses are the resources available in institutions for the people to act upon and through. They consist in strategies to establish relations of forces supporting and supported by certain types of knowledge. Schools have different apparatuses to make sense and respond to students' behaviours. The understanding of such available practices is another element that permeates teachers' discourses. Power and knowledge are embedded in discourses, and as a consequence in apparatuses, constructing subjects and relationships in society and institutions (Potter 1996). Discourse analysts are interested in studying the process of relationship construction itself, how truths emerge, how social realities and identities are built and the consequence of these processes (Wetherell 2000, 16).

Wong (2010) analysed classroom discourse to see how teachers drawn upon scientific discourses to understand students labelled with learning disabilities. Systemic ways are available to teachers for categorising students' diversity, which obscures their different life experiences. By offering a disability studies perspective, teachers can have a different discourse available to 'understand variances as ordinary and natural' (Wong 2010, 13). With such understanding teachers examine the context of the child

and in which ways it is promoting such differences to be considered a deficit ‘rather than trying to justify why human differences exist’ (Wong 2010, 13). Kang (2009) was able to identify a teacher that draws from this disability studies discourse, to understand and develop practices in her classroom. She shows how the teacher has to juggle competing discourses, for example, use of disability labels to describe students and understand each student as a singular individual. She also describes issues of power in the team. Kang (2009) articulates that it’s important to make the power circulate in schools, so teachers can be in a ‘better position themselves to act against the oppressive regime of disability construction in schools’ (11).

Discourse outside the classroom also influences and is carried over into the practice by teachers. Drawing from a policy and institutional perspective Casella and Page (2004) show that the processes that serve people who are determined to be having behavioural problems are ‘influenced by laws and regulations related to discipline, placements, rights, and the types of services required by schools’ (4). They explain that a formal diagnosis for behavioural problems has little to do with the behaviour of students itself, but more with the institutional processes used to make decisions about them. Thus the separation of students ‘into special education programs is far from a natural process or . . . objective diagnosis’ (2004, 6). Casella and Page (2004) explicate that identifying students with behavioural problems is based on routinised procedures that do not focus on providing services for children, but ‘guarantee that the organization for which professionals work continues to function for the benefit of those who are already benefiting from it’ (18).

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) can elucidate discourse of knowledge and power investigating ‘what structures and strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in’ models of reproduction involving discourse-power relations in institutions and groups (Van Dijk 1993, 250). CDA also identifies the centrality of discourse to understand pressing social issues as control and surveillance, and domination (Luke 2002). The dominance ‘requires justification or legitimation: it is “just”, “necessary”, or “natural” that some groups have ‘privileged access to valuable social resources’ (Van Dijk 1993, 263).

As seen in the literature and government statistics most of the students that present unwanted behaviours in school tend to be excluded from general education, not having access to the ‘valuable social resources’ described by Van Dijk (1993), which would be available in the general classroom.

CDA is not investigating the linguistic unit per se, but the social phenomena, which is necessarily complex and requires a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach (Wodak and Meyer 2001). Van Dijk (1993) describes CDA as a multidisciplinary and issue-oriented approach, mostly relevant when critically understanding social inequality and injustice. It ‘is characterized by the common interests in the de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic . . . investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken, or visual)’ (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 3). CDA has to involve a detailed description, explanation, and critique on how the dominant discourses influence socially shared knowledge and attitudes, and how discourse structures facilitate the formation of specific social representations (Van Dijk 1993).

Methods

This paper is part of a larger study involving consultations for teachers in inclusive classrooms. To begin this study, the teacher participants were contacted via email

and offered consultation in supporting students labelled as having a disability and challenging behaviour. Thus, in order to be participants, teachers were first asked if they had student(s) with challenging behaviour(s) in the classroom. We were not concerned only with students with the IDEA diagnosis of emotional and behavioural disorder, but students perceived as presenting challenging behaviour. The participant teachers referred to the students in their classroom as having a variety of disability labels: speech and language impairment, autism, attention deficit, hyperactive disorder, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities. None of the students mentioned by the teachers on the interviews had an official diagnosis of emotional and behavioural disorder, but all were believed to display challenging behaviour.

Four teaching teams were involved in this study. One team consisted of a general and special education teacher and the other three teams included a general education teacher and TAs. The larger study began with interviews, observations and consultations with teachers to provide ideas of how to support students with challenging behaviours in the classroom. In order to examine teacher and staff language for this paper, just the interviews with general and special education teachers and TAs were analysed using CDA.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants: 3 general education teachers, 2 special education teachers and 6 TAs. All participants were currently working full time in public schools in different areas of northeastern USA. All the schools were elementary with classrooms from kindergarten to fourth grades. The experience of the participants ranged from 5 to 20 years in teaching, and these 11 participants were drawn from four different schools, one urban, and three suburban districts. All of them were teaching, co-teaching or assisting in elementary general education classes at some point of the school day. The semi-structured interviews started with a guide, in which we asked the teachers to describe: their classroom; previous or current experiences with children with disabilities in the classroom; the academic range, the range of behaviours, and the social range in their classroom; the academic, social and behavioural expectations held for students; trainings received; approach to behaviour management; and finally strengths and concerns about their ability to support or manage student behaviour.

The interviews occurred in schools when teachers had breaks before or after the school day. Some teachers participated in two interviews when the time allocated for the first interview was not enough or follow-up information was needed. All interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes in length. The interviews were audio-recorded for posterior transcription in order to ensure accuracy of information.

Analysis

Schools are institutions where different discourses and power structures interact and complicate relationships. From plural competing discourses we chose to understand and make evident the discourse related to students who are believed to present challenging behaviours. We use Fairclough's work to describe the type of analysis utilised in this study. Fairclough (2001) establishes a dialectical-relational approach to CDA, a method that can be applied to social research. Fairclough (2001) states that discourse 'under certain conditions is operationalized or "put into practice"' (165). Examining practices of injustice, inequality, and lack of freedom by 'analyzing sources and causes, resistance to them' (163) make it possible to overcome them. We are using

Fairclough's methodology in the present study because it provides 'essential parts' to address what he calls social 'wrongs'. This study critiques, analyses and explains the ways in which dominant ideas and dynamics can be tested, challenged and disrupted (Fairclough 2001).

This study follows four steps to develop the analysis of texts: (1) focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect; (2) identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong; (3) consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong; (4) identify possible ways past the obstacles (Fairclough 2001). Text, in CDA, is understood in a broad sense, not just written texts but also conversations, interviews, and also multimodal texts of internet and television, for example (Fairclough 2001). Fairclough (2001) explains that the steps or stages do not have to be 'interpreted [or followed] in a mechanical way' (167) but it is an approach that addresses the 'particular significance of semiosis, and of dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements, in the social process (issues, problems, changes, etc.)' under investigation (166).

Transcription of the 11 teacher interviews were analysed using the dialectical-relational approach for CDA, defined above, in order to respond to the following research question: How are students who are considered disruptive described? How do teacher/staff perceptions influence the discourse of educational and behavioural practices adopted in inclusive education classrooms?

The authors read the interviews with the research questions above in mind and looked for indicators of the discourses around labelling and description of students with behaviour problems. The discourses referring to the students were indicators of the concept Fairclough describes as the social wrong. The social wrong can be understood as the semiotic aspect of 'social systems, forms or orders, which are detrimental to human well-being' (Fairclough 2001, 167). After finding the social wrong in teachers' discourse the authors found indicators of 'way[s] in which the social life is structured and organized that prevents it from being addressed' (Fairclough 2001, 169). Therefore the transcripts were read a second time and this step of analysis made visible the other discourses that make natural the process of informally labelling students in the classroom, and the practice of exclusion attached to it.

The third step asks us to question, 'in what sense might the social order "need" this?' (Fairclough 2001, 170). For this third step we revised the interview transcripts and it suggested that the classroom, and ultimately the school being a space of control is what maintains the practice of labelling (social wrong) and exclusion of students. Finally, the authors read the interviews a fourth time to identify possible ways past the obstacles. 'This includes developing a semiotic "point of entry" into research on the ways in which these obstacles are actually tested, challenged and resisted' (Fairclough 2001, 171).

Findings and discussion

Using a dialectical-relational approach as a background this paper reveals the discourse present in complex power relations in elementary classrooms when referring to students with disabilities and behaviour problems. The following points of the teachers' discourse were critically analysed in the sections below: (1) Social wrong: use of terms to describe students, not behaviours; (2) Obstacles: students' description define strategies used to manage their behaviour in the classroom; (3) Relation between social order and the social wrong: school as a space of behaviour control; and (4) Overcoming the obstacles: developing a relationship with students. For each

point analysed, examples of teacher interviews were given making evident the discourse permeating their language and as a consequence their strategies in the classroom.

Social wrong: use of terms to describe students, not behaviours

Teachers and TAs used the terms defiant, challenging, behaviour problems, and bully, to describe students that did not comply with the rules in the classroom. The use of these terms in classrooms had the function of identifying students as deviant from the norm or range of accepted behaviour. Teachers are informed by the discourse of unwanted behaviours for the classroom (Danforth 2007). They use such discourse to describe how they understand the students that they work with in the classroom:

They don't transition well . . . they just get stubborn . . . temper tantrums, and um when we have to pull them out of the classroom when they are being not too good, . . . And, and refusing to work. (TA – suburban school)

Um, when he doesn't wanna do something or you know . . . he's acting, he's hitting, pushing, um that kind of thing. That's, he's probably the most challenging . . . [he] will get stubborn, and just not want to do anything, get things, throw things, that kind of thing. But he doesn't get like really bad, I mean I've only seen him really agitated once. (TA – suburban school)

They scream, um, they run, you need to chase them. They get fixated on things that are not appropriate, um they throw things, and other behaviors you don't expect from 10 year old children, 9 year old children. (TA – suburban school)

Teachers and TAs also use the comparative discourse with well-behaved students to describe the students that present challenging behaviours, showing again that such terms are markers for identifying students that do not behave regarding the rules and the norm expected.

Not all of them, a couple . . . are just needing some extra help, and you know, you got to make sure you pay attention to them because they really aren't a problem, but you know they need help, and you know . . . But the others you just, it's defiance, that's what it is, it's defiance. (TA – from a suburban school)

In the excerpt above, the TA continued describing some students as defiant but in comparison with other students the defiant student embodies being 'a problem'. In relation to the norm of the well-behaved students, the students that do not follow the expectations become 'the problem' and their bodies are marked as problems. It is interesting that some teachers describe the behaviour as problematic, but others started describing students (not the behaviours) as problems in the classroom. Another example made it clear how the use of the descriptor for students makes the student become the descriptor itself:

There was a self-contained classroom that was most made up of kids that people didn't know what to do with. It was like, there were kids with MR, kids with Downs, kids with autism there were actually couple of LD kids too, which were just behavior problems, they weren't willing to deal with them so they just stuck them in there. (Special education teacher – suburban school)

The teacher in the excerpt above referred to some students as 'just behaviour problems' not students that have behaviour problems. What's the consequence of naming students

as problems? Students become problems and that becomes the reality in the classroom (Hall 2003). It means that when teachers see a behaviour from the 'defiant student' they will respond to the discourse of what being a defiant kid means not to the actual behaviour occurring in the classroom. This can be observed especially when the distinction of how students that are not challenging are described, as well as the type of supports they need is clear.

Students with disabilities, especially with unwanted behaviours in the classroom are routinely clustered in groups and also described as 'them', 'these kids', with a function of 'othering' some students. A good example is given by the TA passage before where she lists how she identifies challenging behaviour: 'They scream', 'they run', 'you need to chase them'. It directly refers to what Van Dijk (1993) describes as the function of a simple semantic process as the use of 'them' entails negative evaluations on the contrary of 'us', which implies a positive one. These descriptions imply that the students that teachers consider to be called as 'challenging behaviour' are believed to be different than others, and not just different but they get marked as 'less than' other students and the teachers themselves.

Student's family background and inherent and individual characteristics were also brought up in the discourse of understanding the student as presenting challenging behaviour. The discourse that certain students have deficit backgrounds, and that influences student behaviour in school is pervasive.

I know that this student comes with a lot baggage, a lot of issues at home, and depends, sometimes who is in the picture at home. (Teacher – suburban school)

One [student] in particular he's just, he is, it's his goal to be oppositional, to say no . . . and try to I think we actually got a boy who I think is kind of a bully . . . he's used to bullying because of the family that he's grown up in. So that's why he pinches and pushes and, and caused disruption on the rug this morning. (TA – suburban school)

A lot of children come here with dysfunctional family lives, and they depend on other students, their teachers to encourage them and give them maybe some things that are lacking in their home life, as much as you can, you know, without overstepping the mother/father boundaries. (TA – suburban school)

In the above cases, the cause for the occurrence of behaviours is located in the students and their family background. Inherent intentionality is also applied to students' behaviour when a teacher understands a kindergarten student as having a 'goal to be oppositional' as in the second excerpt from a TA. She assumes that students are intentional in being oppositional and goes on to explain what he intentionally tries to do. In the end, she identifies the family as the reason for such behaviour.

In the next section, the teachers and TAs show that they become apprehensive in being with students' unpredictable behaviour:

I think the toughest thing is not knowing what to expect from day to day. I think that's the hardest thing. You get up in the morning and you just say how's today gonna be like. Some days will go nice and smooth and then other days, like yesterday not so smooth, you know. (TA – Suburban School)

My biggest worry when I come here, my biggest heart palpitations come from when I have to handle Nathan cause he's so, because he's so defiant. You know, and when he sees, you saw it happening this morning when he sees that somebody is doing something wrong he wants to mimic that, he wants to copy it and, and, and, take it to the next degree of wrongness (laugh), you know? And I don't want to have to get, I don't like to have to get physical with a student. (TA – Suburban School)

This last example is very important to show how the occurrence of unexpected behaviours in the classroom had the teachers and TAs involved. They operate out of fear, and although the staff does not want to, the first way to ‘support’ is to ‘get physical’. Teachers were apprehensive of the day they would have to deal with the unpredictability of a student’s behaviour and this feeling got attached to the individual student. As a consequence, the teachers draw from the discourse on how to respond to students’ behaviour based on these apprehensions.

This social wrong section exemplified that behaviours were understood as an individual characteristic of the student, or their family; and when they get compared with the norm for students’ behaviours they were seen as inferior and marked as problems, challenge and deviant. It also shows how teachers perceive the students. The next section will show the consequences of labelling students.

Obstacles: the description of students define strategies used to manage their behaviour in the classroom

What happens when students’ bodies are marked as problems? How do teachers respond when they locate the problem on the individual, attribute problematic backgrounds and intentionality as the cause of behaviour, and have apprehensions about the occurrence of unwanted behaviours in the classroom? So then, what are the strategies available for the marked students in the classroom?

Exclusion from the classroom is a prevalent practice in inclusive settings for students with behaviour issues. The social practice of exclusion is used to respond to a student as a problem, because it is more acceptable to exclude problems from the classroom, not students with behaviour problems. The use of such practice structures the classroom as a space where the differences are not accepted, not allowing for the social wrong (labelling) to be addressed. ‘Getting physical’ as mentioned by the TA before is also routinely used in these classrooms. It can take different forms, as will be seen in the following passages, but it is officially called restraint (National Disability Rights Network 2010; US Government Accountability Office 2009). Different teachers show the rationale for use of exclusion or restraint as school apparatuses (Hall 2003) when a student presents unwanted behaviours in the classroom.

Cause we have to remove somebody and then they get more of a chance to talk than most other children would, you know. (Teacher – suburban school)

He needed to be removed. (TA – suburban school)

So I just took him outside in the hallway sat him on the carpet and held him until he stopped and we just discussed, and he stopped, within like 5 minutes, we’ve been doing this for 45 minutes, and now he was pretty exhausted when you’re doing that for a long time, and so it’s the, he was frazzled and I said, ‘ok, let’s discuss this’, and he is he’s discussing his problems, which is good. (Teacher – suburban school)

And I went and I got the social worker and I said he is so upset, and he will start, getting, he’ll, his legs will start shaking, and sometimes he cries, he is just, there is just so much energy inside him that he needs to release it, that we have to pull him out of the classroom. (Teacher – urban school)

The expectation is that you follow the directions, and if you don’t we have the time-out desk right there. So if you need to cool down, hum, sometimes they’ll go to another room for time-out. (Special education teacher – urban school)

All the passages above exemplify the discourse of necessary exclusion routinely present among teachers' strategies when managing the occurrence of unwanted behaviour in the classroom. For the maintenance of control in the classroom, there is clearly a justification for excluding students from the classroom as the 'necessary' or 'natural' thing to do (Van Dijk 1993, 263). Removal becomes the obvious choice when a student presents unwanted behaviour due to his or her different needs not being addressed, or incorporated into the curriculum or in the classroom day (Kluth 2007; Pitonyak 2005). Therefore, the students with non-normative behaviour become the 'impossible learners' (Youdell 1996) that need to be excluded. Phrases as 'he had to be removed' are common in teacher language and show how natural the exclusion response is for a child presenting unwanted behaviours. So, student membership and permanence in the classroom are dependent on their ability to control their behaviours or their energy. The idea of following classroom expectations is becoming more visible, and again locating inherently in the individual the intentionality of the behaviour and, as a consequence the capacity to control it.

The ultimate discourse of exclusion employed by teachers as well as by schools through administrators and other personnel is the exclusion from general education and/or inclusive programmes. Such discourse implies that some students present such serious unwanted behaviour that their placement in schools permanently changes. They are the impossible learners (Youdell 1996). The next passage from a TA describing a student in the classroom she works with is a great example of such temporary membership.

He can be disrespectful he's more hum, aggressive and disrespectful to the teachers and teaching assistants when he's being removed from a classroom, escorted, than he may kick or spit or call names. But not to the students, no, he's usually good to the students I would like to see that [him with a TA assigned 1:1 next year] if he does not go into a behavior program next year. (TA – suburban school)

As previously discussed, this ultimate strategy of exclusion from inclusive programmes is very common for students with disabilities who present challenging behaviours or behaviour problems (US Department of Education 2006). What are the behaviours not accepted in the classroom? Who draws the line? Who examines the result of a student being carried out of the classroom?

In the example at the beginning of this paper, Nathan was excluded from the classroom due to the fact that he is a student already known as defiant, who was doing the requested activity but not with the voice level required by the teacher. As a consequence, he was not allowed to stay in the classroom. Students that receive the label of defiant, problem or challenging student are not measured by the same standards as the 'well-behaved' students. The yelling instead of singing on his birthday from a 'well-behaved' student may not be a reason for exclusion from the circle time. The reason for that is that the student would not have been identified as a problem yet and support or 'help' for his unwanted behaviour would be offered. This dynamic is exemplified by a TA from a suburban school mentioned before: '[he] just needs some extra help, and you know, you got to make sure you pay attention to them because they really aren't a problem, but you know they need help'. The discourse of labelling students as per their actions so that students with unwanted behaviours become defiant or a problem makes teachers act upon or develop practices to label any unusual behaviour observed in the classroom, such as yelling the numbers out in the first example.

The next section will show that labelling followed by exclusion has the perceived function of maintaining the classroom control.

Relation between social order and the social wrong: school a space of behaviour control

Teachers and school personnel are the regulators of unwanted behaviours in schools, as stated by Danforth (2007). The need for control in the classroom is the premise that regulates the strategies employed. As described before, exclusion from the classroom is the available practice in the discourse. This practice is employed in inclusive classrooms and ultimately in schools when managing students labelled twice as having a disability as well as behaviour problems. Exclusion is a currently accepted practice due to the fact that it provides control over the non-compliant student and makes it possible to maintain dominance in the classroom. The exclusion of students that ‘challenge’ such order does not promote acceptance of difference, and does not focus on educational practices or learning (Friend and Bursuck 2009). In addition, it maintains the order in the classroom, which serves the professional not the students (Casella and Page 2004). In sum, exclusionary practices in inclusive classrooms avoid challenging the status quo of classroom control. We can further analyse that in the name of order, because controlling students’ behaviour through exclusion maintains the social order of dominance for groups of students that follow the rules and school norms: the ‘well-behaved’ students.

My classroom is an inclusive setting That’s how it is described. It’s considered a developmental kindergarten setting, um, which parents that are not, who do not have developmental kindergarten children are concerned about, cause, to see their regular kindergartener going to a classroom that they see or perceive as being a special ed. room. (Teacher – suburban school)

They would just distract the regular kids and they just don’t get anything done so they just don’t know how to manage them. (Teacher – suburban school)

The use of the othering term ‘them’ is very relevant when this teacher is describing how the students with unwanted behaviours are differentiated and become detrimental for the ‘regular kids’, as the second example shows. The reason for strategies, such as restraint or exclusion, to be put in place is that behaviours are not allowed in the classrooms and they bother other students. Ultimately the teachers’ discourse speaks of the exclusion of students, as young as kindergarten-aged, because they display behaviours considered inherent and intentional, in order to avoid the influence on other students in the classroom, especially students without disabilities.

Discourse of control and power are prevalent when teachers describe the students’ challenging behaviours and their responses to it.

You never know from day to day you’re on pins and needles cause you’re just trying to keep things contained, you know? (Special education teacher – urban school)

The behaviors that are huge problems are his refusal to work, and the minute you ask him to work, it becomes a power struggle. (Teacher – suburban school)

The idea of controlling the behaviour and keeping things under control is prevalent in these passages. When describing the relationship with students they identify as defiant,

teachers demonstrate how these students *challenge* not just the control in school, but the power relation between teacher and students. Students that do not comply with the rules *challenge* the basic premise in school: teacher–student hierarchy and rule following–control of behaviours.

The three previous sections show that when teachers have the discourse of labelling students as problems or challenges available, the teachers will respond to the label, not their behaviours (Youdell 1996). The most available response is exclusion which is the response that serves the purpose of maintaining control and order in schools (Foucault 1995). Deviance, challenges, and problems are excluded from the school environment where control and order are the ultimate goal (Casella and Page 2004; Danforth 2007; Luke 2002). This exclusion also serves students who are able to control their behaviours because they are believed to be valuable members of school and should not be ‘distracted’ by students who are not able to have control of their behaviours.

Overall, students with unwanted behaviours are believed to be incapable of controlling themselves. Thus how school is a space of control, external control, by restraint or exclusion, is employed by teachers and TAs as the school’s apparatuses and technologies (Hall 2003). In sum, the need for control in schools is the social order that maintains the understanding of students as deviant, challenging or problems. Freire (1996) tells us:

I never understood a strict humanly practice [education] being done as a cold, soulless experience, in which feelings and emotions, desires, and dreams should be reprimanded for a rational dictatorship. (146)

Therefore, the next session will address in the teachers’ discourses ways through which teacher find possibilities, out of the prevalent discourse, for changing inequalities and domination (Fairclough 2001).

Overcoming the obstacles: developing relationship with students

Among teachers’ discourse on labelling, strategies, practices and control, some ideas on how to overcome the obstacles can be identified. There are elements of the teacher’s discourse that include existing social processes to overcome the obstacles in addressing the social wrong in question. The discourse of developing a relationship with students is prevalent, as this teacher explains:

Most of the time I’m able to bring him down cause I’ve built a relationship with him . . . I think the key thing with these kids is building a relationship with them. (Special education teacher – urban school)

This discourse of developing a relationship also comes exemplified in other interviews as having ‘trust’, ‘building community’ or ‘establishing communication’. Teachers articulate the importance of such a relationship and community building as way to pass the obstacles, understand the students’ behaviour and try to provide what the students need.

Teachers explain that developing a relationship with the student makes the student feel comfortable with them and then it is possible to deal with behaviour issues. In the next example the teacher based on her relationship with the student makes him identify his feelings and own frustrations and later come to her to be able to ‘vent’ anything he needs in order to avoid and/or deal with the behaviour issue.

I started this relationship with [the student]. If [he] feels that he needs, that he feels it coming and he needs to let it out, he can take a pass . . . so when he shows you that he got the pass he can just walk out of the room, no questions asked. And you know he's coming to see me and he can say whatever he wants to me, he can vent to me. (Special education teacher – urban school)

One teacher assistant was able to incorporate all the discourses in her explanation on how to respond to students' behaviours and shows that there are some ways to break through the discourse around students who challenge the system:

You have to love the kids for who they are you can't put labels on them as much, so I think some people, some teachers and some teaching assistants just kinda they get frustrated with the behaviors, they don't really see that maybe they are causing some of it, and they don't get time to get to know the children and, they all have wonderful personalities, they all have a great sense of humor, um and they all have gifts that they offer and I think you have to realise that and then deal with challenging behavior as it comes. (TA – sub-urban school)

This passage made clear that developing a relationship with the student enables the teacher to get over the prevalent discourse of using labels to identify them. It allows teachers to see students as individuals. This teacher, as well as the previous passages, shows that an alternative discourse is available in the classroom: teachers understand students' behaviours as variances and differences (Wong 2010), not as problems or as being defiant. This analysis is aligned with Kang (2009) and Wong's (2010) showing that using a disability studies perspective in the classroom will be an important tool in deconstructing disability labels. In addition, overcoming labels makes teachers see the student for himself or herself, and just respond to the behaviours in context, implementing humanistic practices in the classroom (Kluth 2007; Kohn 2006; Pitonyak 2005). Passing the labels and developing relationships are points of entrance on teachers' discourse that can challenge their current and routine practices towards students with disabilities.

Conclusion

Embedded in the labelling discourse teachers attribute categories to students as, for example, children with challenging behaviour or children with behaviour problems. However, teachers start labelling the students as problems or as challenging themselves, not as presenting them. As a consequence, instead of educationally supporting students in dealing with their behaviours in the classrooms, teachers exclude the problems from the classroom. Behaviours are located individually and attributed to deficit backgrounds and lack of internal control of the child. With the objective of not distracting the other students external control is enforced. Exclusion was found to be the 'natural' and 'necessary' response for the need of control in the classroom. Thus, in the name of classroom control, behaviour differences are not tolerated. In actuality, students that present unwanted behaviours challenge the social order and teacher dominance in the classroom. The discourse of control is the one available for shaping how teachers understand and support students in the classroom.

A CDA also looks for ways in which the discourse is being overcome. In our interviews teachers showed that developing a relationship with students empowers them to see past the labels, the control discourse, and the impossibility of learning. Therefore, after developing a relationship with students, teachers can truly support and learn with

students' differences to achieve their potentials in inclusive classrooms. Such relationship building includes trusting, communicating, and listening, and should be the support in place for students' behaviours in classrooms. 'The real behavior change comes from a relationship; the more serious the need for change the more serious this relationship needs to be' (Lovett 1996, 224).

Returning to Nathan's story in the beginning of this paper, despite the fact that the teacher, based on her relationship with Nathan, was able to describe a possible cause for his behaviour the discourse of control determined her practice. The critical analysis of the discourse revealed how the judgment based on the students' labels determines their exclusion from the classroom. This paper reveals the thinking behind the practice, and help educators think of alternatives, outside available discourse, in supporting students whose behaviour they find challenging so that both students and teachers can feel more successful in inclusive schooling.

Learn *with* your student, not *about* your student.

(Freire 1996, 123)

Limitations

Due to the scope of the present study it presents some limitations. This study is part of a larger consultation project, which includes classroom observations; however, dialogues and interactions in the classroom were not analysed for this paper, just the semi-structured interviews. A CDA can include the investigation of semiotic data being written, spoken or visual (Wodak and Meyer 2001); which is the case for interviews. However, being focused only on interviews essential discussions regarding of everyday practice are not brought up. An example of a discussion missing from this paper is the intersectionality of disability labels and challenging behaviour labels with race, gender and socio-economic class (Ferri and Connor 2005). These issues were not raised in interviews but are present in everyday practice of schools in the USA. Future work using the observations in schools will intend to address such important points to understand different aspects of the discourse around behaviour in inclusive classrooms.

Regarding the analysis, authors in CDA explain that it is not considered a specific phase, but it is a 'matter of finding indicators for particular concepts, expanding concepts into categories' (Wodak and Meyer 2001). Therefore, the presence of indicators for the concepts in teachers' discourse was the interest of this research. This study was not interested in frequency or generalisation, but the presence of the discourse that already influences the practices. However, replication of this type of analysis with different materials such as classroom observation, student documents, individualised education plan, etc. could bolster the findings and analysis.

Implications

The present paper analyses the complex ways in which teachers and students relate in the classroom. It makes visible discourse of power and control in the classroom that underlie the practices used for students with challenging behaviour. But this study goes further to show that teachers have an escape from the predominant discourse when they develop a relationship with the student. The implementation of classroom practices needs to be aligned with this humanistic way of understanding students, as shown by this study. The literature confirms the present analysis and here are examples of recommended practices for teachers in inclusive classrooms:

- Deepen the understanding of the student, learn what the student enjoys and what are their strengths in order to build trust and a relationship (Kohn 1996; Lovett 1996; Pitonyak 2005);
- Regard action as communication (Lovett 1996; Pitonyak 2005) and understand students' underlying motives for their behaviour (Kohn 1998);
- Increase the motivation, create a community in the classroom (Kohn 1996) and help the person to have more fun (Pitonyak 2005);
- Work *with* the students, provide incentive for students' participation in decisions (Kohn 1998) and provide choices (Pitonyak 2005);
- Attend, listen carefully, take people seriously and do not assume anything before asking (Lovett 1996; Pitonyak 2005);
- Provide gentle support with calming voice and act in a comforting manner in a moment of crisis (Kluth 2003).

These are ways documented in the literature that correspond to the teachers' discourse in this paper, revealed as developing a relationship. In addition, teachers inclusive classroom should regard differences not as deficits (Gabel 2009), disattach the label of the individual himself (Youdell 1996) and provide adaptations and meaningful curriculum (Kluth 2003) which are also part of the system of best practices for inclusive classrooms.

Notes on contributor

Fernanda T. Orsati is currently a Graduate Student in the Special and Inclusive Education Program in the School of Education at Syracuse University.

Julie Causton-Theoharis, PhD is an assistant professor in the Teaching and Leadership Department at Syracuse University.

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