

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

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

Keywords : behavior, early education, special education, critical discourse analysis

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