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## Construction of Classroom Community in a Full-Inclusion District: Comparative Case Studies with Elementary School Teachers

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CONSTRUCTION OF CLASSROOM COMMUNITY  
IN A FULL-INCLUSION DISTRICT:  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Tri T. Nguyen

December 2020

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CONSTRUCTION OF CLASSROOM COMMUNITY  
IN A FULL-INCLUSION DISTRICT:  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

Tri T. Nguyen

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## ABSTRACT

### CONSTRUCTION OF CLASSROOM COMMUNITY IN A FULL-INCLUSION DISTRICT: COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

This research documented how elementary school teachers build, structure, and maintain classroom community in a full-inclusion district. Specifically, this study applied Invitational Theory to investigate the relationship between a full-inclusion school model and construction of classroom community. The study focused on the teachers' behaviors to structure and maintain an environment of inclusion, care, and belonging. This qualitative comparative case study documented teachers' behaviors over a series of 10 weeks at the start of the school year. Documentation evidence of classroom community-building were collected in two formats: classroom observations and teacher interviews. By the end of the observational period, 11 classroom codes, and 11 context-dependent sub-codes summarized teachers' actions. The codes were deduced into five groups based on context and behavior. These contexts and behaviors allowed for the synthesizing of trends and patterns to generate central themes, which are also the significant findings of the study. The significant findings of the study indicated that teacher's intention impacts the classroom environment, teacher encouragement affects student participation, and each teacher's design of the classroom environment facilitated conditions of learning. The study shared how teachers in a full-inclusion district built and maintained their classroom community. From the findings, the teachers noted the importance to purposefully personalize the learning experience for their students. The research also noted implications for school leaders to promote and enhance community-building experiences for students. Future research to align the relationship between a classroom community and student engagement can further highlight the importance in classroom community construction.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures .....	x
Chapter One: Introduction and Statement of the Problem.....	1
Background and Need for Study.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Significance of the Study.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Design Overview .....	8
Definitions and Terms.....	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	11
A Full-Inclusion Model.....	12
Challenges within a full-inclusion model.....	13
Attitudes and perception of full-inclusion.....	17
Potentials paths toward full-inclusion.....	19
Classroom Community.....	19
Social-emotional learning.....	20
Cooperative learning.....	22
Theoretical Framework: Invitational Theory.....	25
Human potentials and relationship.....	26
Perceptions and ethical human interactions.....	27
Democratic ethos.....	28
Perceptual tradition.....	28
Self-concept theory.....	29
Invitational theory implementation.....	30
Invitational and intentional levels. ....	31
Invitational theory in the classroom.....	35
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology.....	38
Overview .....	38
Comparative Case Study.....	38
Research Questions.....	39
Participants.....	40
Ms. Maxwell.....	41
Mr. Diaz.....	43
Mr. Zhu.....	45
Description of the Setting.....	47
Data Collection.....	48
Classroom observation.....	49

Interviews and personal communication.....	50
Observation and reflection tool.....	52
Data Analysis .....	53
Research Credibility.....	56
Background of the Researcher.....	57
Chapter Four: Findings.....	59
Overview of Findings.....	60
Central Theme 1: Teachers’ Design of the Classroom Environment Influences the Teacher’s Organization of Learning Time, Facilitation of Activities, and Management of Behaviors.....	64
Classroom runs on routines.....	65
Communal meaning making.....	69
Intervention and civil constructivist.....	72
Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 1: Teachers’ Design of the Classroom Environment Influences the Teacher’s Organization of Learning Time, Facilitation of Activities, and Management of Behavior.....	75
Central Theme 2: Teacher’s Intention Impacts the Classroom Environment.....	79
Social engineer of classroom environment.....	79
A community of structure, compliance, and consistency.....	83
The power of acknowledgment and motivation.....	87
Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 2: Teacher’s Intention Impacts the Classroom Environment.....	90
Central Theme 3: Teachers’ Encouragement and Motivational Moves Affect Student Participation and Community Cohesion.....	92
Structured student participation.....	92
Interaction rich learning environment.....	99
Mutual investors.....	104
Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 3: Teachers’ Encouragement and Motivational Moves Affect Student Participation and Community Cohension..	106
Conclusion.....	107
Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	110
Invitational theory application in the classroom.....	110
Full-inclusion as it relates to invitational theory.....	113
Student-centered environment.....	114
Implications for school districts and administrators.....	115
Implications for curriculum leaders.....	117
Implications for teachers.....	118
Recommendations for future research.....	119
Conclusion.....	121
References.....	124



Appendices.....	134
Appendix A: Observation Log Charting.....	134
Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions.....	135
Appendix C: Observational Comparison Charting.....	137
Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form.....	139
Appendix E: Codes, Definitions, and Examples.....	142

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Descriptors for Invitational Levels.....	34
Table 2.	Definition of 5 P's in Invitational Theory.....	35
Table 3.	Summary of Participating Teachers.....	40
Table 4.	Sample Observation Log.....	50
Table 5.	Sample Interview Coding.....	52
Table 6.	Observation Codes and Definitions.....	54
Table 7.	Evidence of the 5 P's in the Research Design.....	60
Table 8.	Interpersonal/Intrapersonal Intelligence Strategies.....	64
Table 9.	Five Pillars of Invitational Theory.....	111

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Progression Flow of Literature Review.....	11
Figure 2. Invitational Levels .....	32
Figure 3. Organization of Classroom Codes.....	55
Figure 4. Result from Observation and Reflection Tool.....	62
Figure 5. Total Count and Percentage for Observational Code.....	63
Figure 6. Teachers' Classroom Layout.....	65
Figure 7. Teachers' Control vs. Students' Autonomy.....	78
Figure 8. Principal Newsletter.....	83

## **Chapter One: Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

### **Background and Need for Study**

Public education has served various purposes, not limited to paving paths for democratic equality, social mobility, and global economic impact (Price, 2007). One possible path toward democratic equality can be implemented through a full-inclusion model, where 100% of the students are included in a general classroom. This study examined teachers' behavior to structure an inclusive community. More specifically, this study examined the integration of a classroom community in a full-inclusion model to include students in the classroom.

Public education has endured a long and continuous journey toward inclusive education. Special education policies have progressed through societal changes, historical policies, emotional responses, and cultural values (Jameson & Huefner, 2006). Compulsory schooling provides the most appropriate conditions for quality teaching and learning (Theoharis, 2007). Additionally, schools strive to ensure social values of inclusivity, diversity, and personal development (Price, 2007). Social concepts of inclusivity and diversity resonate behind the practices of a full-inclusion model (Colarusso & O'Rourke, 2017). On top of social values, schools must also address social demands such as the values of competition, transmission of knowledge, and conformity (McHahon, 2013). These competing ideologies pose a challenge in special education to provide equitable services and inclusive participation in public schools (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). The selection of an appropriate placement for students with disabilities continues to be a challenge.

According to Jameson and Huefner (2006), six major principles of IDEA are considered in a special education plan: individual education plan (IEP), least restrictive environment (LRE), parent-student participation in decision making, appropriate and accommodating evaluations/assessments, and procedural safeguards. Among the six criteria, the least restrictive environment criteria include the continuum of services. The variety of least restrictive options creates a barrier to adopt a full-inclusion model (Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). Research indicates that segregated learning environments to educate students with disabilities (SWD) further isolate these students from societal integration (Algozzine, Algozzine, & Ysseldyke, 2006; Colarusso et al, 2004). The integration of SWD in an inclusive learning environment supports social emotional development. This study examined how teachers construct classroom community for all students in a full-inclusion model.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the environmental place of students with disabilities (SWD) should be a prioritized step before the execution of educational service (Jameson & Huefner, 2006). Historically, the challenge in special education was focused on the rights to an education for SWD. Court cases and policies have made progress toward social rights and granted educational access for SWD to attain a quality education. Special education integrated into public school systems arose due to the support of policy development and societal changes. Currently, the focus of least restrictive environment has increased to identify and ensure

the most inclusive and appropriate setting for students with disabilities (Algozzine et al., 2006; Pugach & Warger, 2001).

Research indicates some structures and systems within K-12 public education perpetuate systems of social and economic inequalities (Brantlinger & Danforth, 2006). School district leaders noticed trends in the poor practice of classroom management, reduced graduation rates, low academic progress, and lackadaisical support for social-emotional learning (Brantlinger & Danforth, 2006). These concerns challenge schools to seek the most appropriate model of special education (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). One solution to challenge inequitable practices is the adoption of a full-inclusion model. A full-inclusion model incorporates special education services in general education classrooms and provides students with the same opportunity to participate in a mainstream classroom with full access to the same curriculum (Algozzine et al., 2006). A full-inclusion model fulfills the intended services under the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA 2004. IDEA mandates a free and appropriate public education for students eligible for special education. Additionally, IDEA guidelines ensure that interventions and services benefit students in the least restrictive environment (Cullen et al., 2010; IDEA, 2004). IDEA requires local education agencies (LEAs) to implement a program that meets student educational needs, regardless of the setting.

A full-inclusion model integrates instructional adaptations and targeted intervention services within the general education classroom (Algozzine et al., 2006). Students with disabilities learning in separate classrooms underperform SWD with some form of

general education inclusion on academic standards (Koenig & Bachman, 2004). However, qualitative and quantitative data on classroom community construction and the positive attributions from a full-inclusion school have not been examined. Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) called for empirical evidence on full inclusion as a means to understand the appropriate treatment and care for special education students. Polat (2011) noted that the removal of barriers for SWD by increasing access to all students showed a step toward equity for students with disabilities.

Additionally, this study documented teachers' behaviors to understand further how they facilitate their learning community through invitational practices. Invitational practices can be examined through Invitational Theory. Invitational Theory includes the elements of care, trust, respect, optimism and intentionality to establish and maintain an inviting environment (Purkey & Novak, 2008). The theory provides a theoretical framework to evaluate a classroom community learning through a full-inclusion model. A considerable portion of the research conducted on invitational learning environments support the tenets of a full inclusion education model (Harte, 2010; Purkey & Novak, 2008; Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, Shumaker, 1996). Invitational education allows teachers to use a systematic communication approach as a means to relay positive messages and affirmations (Purkey & Novak, 2008). Specifically, the research aims to observe how teachers use Invitational Theory when constructing a classroom community. These systematic invitational structures support with the transformation into an environment with respect, care, and civility (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011).

### **Significance of the Study**

There are two reasons to study a full-inclusion model and classroom community construction. First, public schools struggle to implement an inclusive model of education. As a result, school districts have not consistently implemented a full-inclusion model to assess the model for effectiveness. And, second, research has not indicated effective classroom community building within a full-inclusion model (Koenig & Bachman, 2004). For these two reasons, this study on how teachers construct classroom community in a full-inclusion district can inspire districts to adopt a new service model.

Inclusive classrooms provide students a learning environment with the least restrictions to attain a high-quality education. The reauthorization of PL 94-142 continues to maintain the importance of the least restrictive environment; however, there have been undefined parameters as to what constitutes the most inclusive or least restrictive environment (Hansen & Morrow, 2012). Local education agencies' hesitancy to implement a full-inclusion model arises from concerns such as attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers (Bines & Lei, 2011). Based on these concerns, new curriculum proposals and educational frameworks were established to reduce institutional barriers (Jones, Bailey, Brion-Meisels, & Partee, 2016). LaRusso, Brown, Jones and Aber (2009) noted that students need to feel supported in all school spaces, extending beyond the classroom. As such, educational frameworks must expand beyond curriculum aspects. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been integrated in inclusion districts to teach students about emotional and social/interpersonal skills (Jones et al., 2016).



In February 2018, California State Superintendent of Instruction Tom Torlakson released the California Department of Education’s guiding principles for teaching social and emotional skills. Torlakson’s initiative acknowledged the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) implementation and development in schools, “Educators know, and the science confirms that learning is not only cognitive but also social and emotional” (Torlakson, 2018, p.1). With these guidelines, the state Department of Education recognized the impacts of social-emotional wellbeing in relation to positive cognitive gain. SEL programs have been known to educate students on issues such as sharing, navigating social situations, experiencing social inclusion and exclusion (Astor, Meyer, & Pitnor, 2001). Studies have linked a positive classroom community with integrated social emotional learning to improve student learning and engagement (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2013). Nevertheless, social-emotional learning continues to be a supplemental curriculum in schools (McCallops et al., 2019).

According to the Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC, 2019), higher level critical thinking, more in-depth processing, and rigorous extensions are skills supported by social-emotional teaching and learning. Specifically, the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) along with educators throughout the state compiled resources for classroom implementation of social emotional teaching and learning. Moving onto the state legislature, the Superintendent of Instruction emphasized that schools need to foster an environment of social inclusivity through the adoption and implementation of a social-emotional learning curriculum (Torlakson, 2018). Initiatives to incorporate social-emotional learning into the classroom

support the construction and maintenance of classroom communities (Jones et al., 2016.)

### **Purpose of the Study**

Kavale and Forness (2000) suggested that moral arguments against a full-inclusion model without empirical evidence are illogical and unfair for SWD. Research has been heavily focused on special day classes, individualized education strategies, resource/collaborative models, and innovative teaching strategies (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). Full inclusion has not been researched with a similar investment to special day classes due to the limited number of districts adopting a full-inclusion model. The gap in research indicates the need to explore the full-inclusion model further and understand its contributing factors for improving students' learning.

Prosser, Trigwell, and Waterhouse (1999) noted two philosophies in teaching: teaching as transmitting knowledge and teaching as facilitating learning. Given that both philosophies are equally important (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) and both outcomes benefit students' learning (Slavin, 2002), the challenge requires the balancing of both philosophies in a learner's landscape. I argue that the facilitation of learning needs to be the initial step to an inclusive integration of all students. The facilitation of learning transforms teaching practices to promote collaboration and community building. Teaching as facilitating learning involves aspects of examining student's social-emotional learning (Collie et al., 2011), whereas teaching for transmitting of knowledge requires teaching and assessing standards (Sutherland et al., 2007).

Educational reforms have focused on creating effective, standards-aligned and academically rigorous classrooms. However, developing an inviting and responsive classroom is also important (Duranti & Rogers, 2011). Invitational Theory supports inclusive education. Despite the extensive research on Invitational Theory, the efficacy of Invitational Theory has not been examined in a teacher training program, special education or full-inclusion model. Prior studies have examined the effects in a math workshop (Kitchens, 2007), establishments of safer school models (Stanley, Juhnke, & Purkey, 2004), developments of resilience among at-risk youth (Lee, 2004), and inclusion of multicultural education (Arceneaux, 1992).

Inviting, caring, and inclusive classrooms enhance the community experience for all students (Duranti & Rogers, 2011). The acceptance of full inclusion classrooms can pave a progressive path toward social inclusion. Colarusso and O'Rourke (2017) indicated that students with disabilities in segregated classrooms experience lower levels of confidence and higher level of isolation. In the long run, these students suffer from isolated living conditions and experience a lack of interaction with their community (Algozzine et al., 2006). This research seeks to provide an understanding of how teachers build communities to structure inviting, caring, and inclusive classrooms.

### **Research Design Overview**

This comparative case study develops an understanding of how classroom teachers structure classroom community for all students in a full-inclusion model. The research addresses: (1) How do elementary teachers build classroom community in a full-inclusion classroom? (2) How are invitational practices within Invitational Theory used by

elementary teachers to build classroom community? The research observed elementary school teachers in a full-inclusion district and their construction of the classroom community. Teachers' structure of classroom community documented the teachers' intention and invitation approach.

Studies have also confirmed elements of care, trust, and respect influence student's learning achievement (Ormrod, 2006). This research examined the conditions of care, trust, and respect established by the classroom teacher to build community. The values and outcomes in a full-inclusion model are consistent with elements in the Invitational Theory of practice. This research includes the practice of Invitational Theory to document how general classroom teachers in a full-inclusion district structure their classroom community to be inclusive of all learners.

### **Definitions and Terms**

Full Inclusion – general education students and students with disabilities learn in the same classroom environment taught by a general education classroom teacher with collaboration with a special education teacher. Alternative models such as co-teaching includes a special education/resource teacher in the general classroom with the general education teacher. All students are taught the same curriculum (Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

Students with a disability [SWD] – Students who qualify for an individualized education plan and may have hearing/vision impairments, physical disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioral disorders, emotional disturbance, speech/language difficulties or specialized learning disabilities (Algozzine et al., 2006; Colarusso & O'Rourke, 2017).

Classroom Community – A classroom environment that includes the values of belonging, trust, and safety (Furman, 1998). A classroom community consists of creating a physically engaging environment where students have opportunities for collaboration, communication, interaction, and ownership (Rovai, 2002).

Invitational Theory – the theoretical framework of the inquiry design, the theory aims to bring forth the advancement and potential of individuals through four principles of intentionality: optimism, care, respect for people, and trust (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

## Chapter Two : Literature Review

This literature review provides research on full inclusion, classroom community construction, and Invitational Theory. The research aims to provide contextual evidence to understand: (1) How do elementary teachers build classroom community in a full-inclusion district? And (2) How are invitational practices described by Invitational Theory used by elementary teachers to build classroom community? Figure 1 shows the logical flow of the literature review starting with an understanding of full-inclusion model, following with classroom community research, and wrapping up with the theoretical framework of the research. Collectively, this section addresses how a full-inclusion model and the implementation of Invitational Theory aid in the construction of a classroom community.

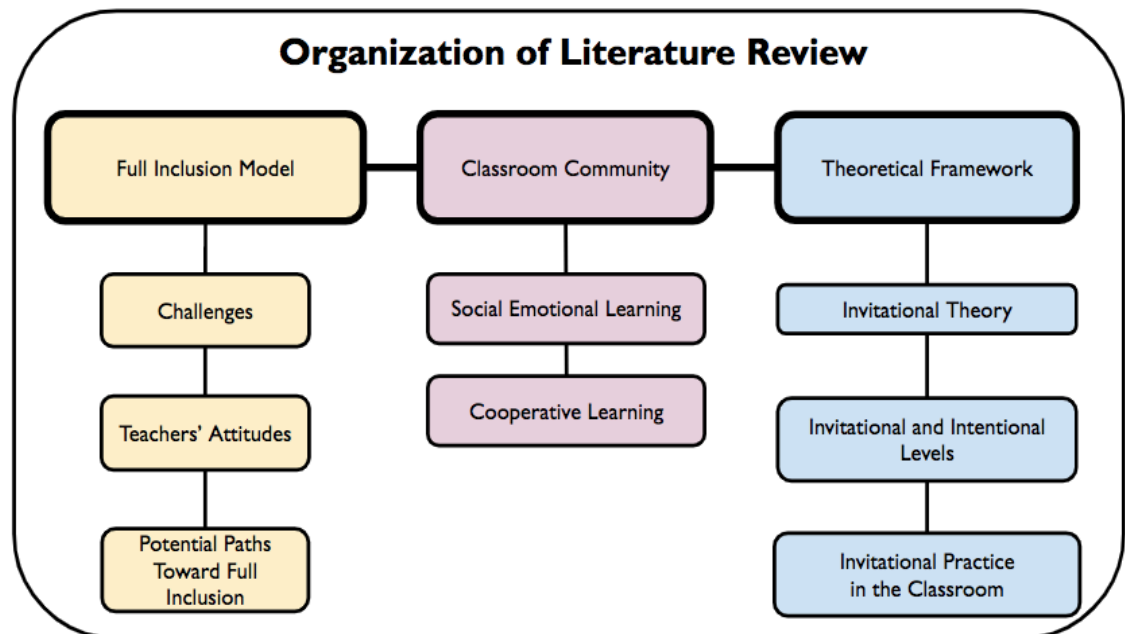


Figure 1. Progression flow of literature review.

## **A Full-Inclusion Model**

Though education reforms and policies can enact initiatives to support students with disabilities, determining an appropriate student placement continues to be a challenge within special education (Peters, Johnstone & Ferguson, 2005). The spectrum of student placements within the special education process follow the Cascade of Services model, which was grounded in the least restrictive environment (LRE) framework of the 1980s (Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). The Cascade of Services model depicts the variety of service placements. Additionally, the model framed the mode of instruction to be “specialized, individualized, and intensive” (Zigmond et al. 2009, p. 190). The language used in IDEA 2004 to explain “least restrictive” can be translated into a variety of placements (Kirby, 2017). The LRE mandate requires schools to provide the greatest possible accommodation to students with disabilities, preferably in a mainstream classroom.

A full-inclusion model is a type of least restrictive environment designed to equitably provide educational experiences for all students. Under a full inclusion program, schools move away from a restrictive environment to an all-inclusive learning environment. Full inclusion practices allow students with an IEP to be fully integrated into the general education classrooms (Peters, Johnston & Ferguson, 2005). Students with disabilities have exposure to the general curriculum, programs, and activities provided by a classroom teacher in a full-inclusion model (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Full inclusion allows students with disabilities to be a part of, rather than segregated from, their peers in a general education classroom (Solis et al., 2012).

Though the intent of a full-inclusion model was designed to be an inclusive and comprehensive model, this model has not been widely implemented. (Peters, Johnston & Ferguson, 2005). As such, current reforms have not progressed toward mandatory adoption of a full-inclusion model (Zigmond et al., 2009). Central to the success of a full-inclusion model is the collaboration and cohesion between general/homeroom teachers and the special education teacher and related service specialists. Collaboratively, the general education teacher and specialist teachers translate goals into appropriate accommodations and services to ensure personalized instructional design (Jameson & Huefner, 2006). However, the challenges in a full-inclusion model hinge on the quality of teacher preparation and professional development to adequately prepare teachers.

**Challenges within a full-inclusion model.** IDEA provides guidelines on how states and school districts can provide special education services to students with disabilities (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; de Jong & Harper, 2005). Yet, a full-inclusion model has not been universally adopted across any state (Able et al., 2015). With a variety of assessment tools and academic strategies or interventions to document student progress toward established IEP goals, state and federal educational policies continue to challenge schools to consider accommodating service delivery models (Bines & Lei, 2011; Jameson & Huefner, 2006).

To distinguish among various models of least restrictive environment, a full-inclusion model advocates for specialized curriculum integration strategically delivered in a general education classroom (Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003). This is in



comparison to special educational model where SWD receive instruction outside of the general classroom such as a special day class (Bines & Lei, 2011). The ongoing educational challenge for schools continues to be the issue of equity and how to appropriately integrate special education into the general education classrooms (Pugach & Warger, 2001). Full-inclusion models offer an inclusive approach to develop social skills, transforming peer attitudes, and fostering friendships among all students (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). However, without a wide adoption of full inclusion, its impact upon social skills, peer attitudes, and friendship development has not been thoroughly examined in research designs (Bines & Lei, 2011; Katsiyannis et al., 2003).

According to a meta-analysis from Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), though teachers expressed willingness to try inclusion, only one third of the surveyed teachers believed that general education classrooms were appropriate for SWD. Teachers expressed time, skills, training, and resources implementation as barriers to implementing full inclusion design. Scruggs and Mastropieri's study showed the conflict between the willingness to implement and the perception of success within a full-inclusion model. Additionally, the survey results indicated teachers' interest in a full-inclusion model increased when professional development and opportunities for collaboration were provided. Scruggs and Mastropieri's meta-analysis revealed an unfavorable attitude toward the implementation of full inclusion classrooms. As such, the challenge consists of transforming teacher perceptions and attitudes to recognize the benefits of a full-inclusion model before adopting the model.

Studies have indicated that teachers' attitudes, mindset, and self-efficacy prevent teachers from adopting inclusionary practices into the general classrooms (McCoach & Siegle, 2007). The involvement of general classroom teachers in the decision-making process of services and accommodations serves as one indicator of a positive attitude toward inclusion (Brown, 2005). Brown's (2005) research indicated that general education teachers who were involved in the transitional phase of implementing a full-inclusion model leaned favorably toward approving the model. In spite of evidence-based research on positive social support and academic gains when all students are mainstreamed, general education teachers continue to express concern for social adjustment and classroom acceptance in a full-inclusion model (Wood, 2010). As a result, teachers' mindset, attitudes, and level of involvement in providing recommendations and accommodations influences the acceptance of a full-inclusion model.

**Attitudes and perception of full-inclusion model.** Teachers' negative perceptions and attitudes towards a full-inclusion model deter the advancement of policies in support of the model (Algozzine et al., 2006). Idol's (2006) research examined eight schools with a full-inclusion model to discover indicators impacting staff acceptance of full inclusion. Indicators such as types of student disabilities, amount of time teachers spent in special education and general education classroom, number of personnel available, number/referrals for special education assessments, and staff perceptions of their skills all impact the acceptance of a full-inclusion model. As such, the key to successful

implementation of full inclusion consists of adequate training to build capacity, trust, and confidence between general and special education teachers (Idol, 2006).

School staff and teachers' attitudinal barriers inversely correlate with the acceptance of a full-inclusion model within a school site or district (Algozzine et al., 2006). One attitudinal barrier originated from societal assumptions of a person's disability as an "inherent flaw" (Kirby, 2017, p. 80). The medical model of disability as an "inherent flaw" may support a separate-setting approach to teach students with disabilities (Kirby, 2017). General education teachers recognized their skills as teaching only general education students (Kirby, 2017). Thus, students needing specialized support and accommodations were accepted in a special day class (Kirby, 2017). In summary, teachers' attitudes, perception, and mindset influence the type of least restrictive model and program for students with disabilities (Algozzine et al., 2006; Idol, 2006; Kirby, 2017).

Florian (2013) indicated that a full-inclusion model presents pragmatic challenges, such as social, emotional, cultural, or linguistic difference. Teachers view logistical demands such as scheduling and staffing as obstacles to the proper implementation of a full-inclusion model (Heflin & Bullock, 1999). Colarusso and O'Rourke (2017) stated that increased collaboration time between classroom teachers and specialists and a reduction of caseload can improve attitudes toward acceptance to a full-inclusion model.

Reviewed literature indicated a majority of the teachers viewed a full-inclusion model as negative due to their perceived lack of self-confidence to teach students with disabilities (de Boer et al., 2011). Valli and Rennert-Ariev (2000) analyzed the National

Commission on Teaching and America's Future research to identify a lack of training for general education teachers working with special education students. The findings from Valli and Rennert-Ariev (2000) indicated that a portion of teachers believe in separate-settings in programs such as Special Day Class (SDC) to provide instructional services. General classroom teachers believe SDC provide specific therapies, adequate resources, and targeted services to adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities (Winter & O'Raw, 2010).

Blanton, Pugach, and Boveda (2018) stated the division between general education teacher training and special education teacher training dated back to the 1800s and the Common School Movement. During this 1800s era, cultural norms dictated that special education required separate education infrastructure. In the 1970s, special education became a supplemental component of general education (Blanton et al., 2018). The Bureau of Education for the Handicapped attempted to provide training for special education and general education teachers through Dean Grants Projects; however, these grants were directly distributed to the deans rather than to the teachers. By allocating funds for deans, teachers were denied the professional training required to work with students with disabilities (Blanton et al., 2018). Although there has been ideological, political, and financial support for special education and a full-inclusion model, the determination of appropriate services, goals, and accommodations for SWD continues to be a challenge for school leaders.

**Potential paths toward full-inclusion.** Despite the challenges embedded in a full-inclusion model, the support of teacher professional development can lead to an

acceptance of a full-inclusion model. General classroom teachers request additional training and collaboration time with special education teachers to ensure appropriate accommodation in a full-inclusion classroom (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Solis et al., 2012). Additionally, teachers in Heflin and Bullock's (1999) study revealed that an increase in paraprofessionals in the classroom positively enhanced the support for an inclusion model.

Fundamentally, the challenge to transform teachers' attitudes and behaviors of learned teaching practices poses teacher preparation challenges. Teachers noted preparation time between educational specialists and classroom teachers have been a desired strategy to ensure equitable targeted services for SWD (Colarusso & O'Rourke, 2017). Blanton et al. (2018) found four factors which impacted the unifying of special education and general education teachers: policy, funding, timing, and norms of separation. Public schools need to reconceptualize the role of general and special education teachers by intentionally integrating targeted intervention support to address the needs of SWD (Blanton et al., 2018). General education teachers and special education teachers expressed feeling unprepared and unqualified to teach in a full inclusion environment without targeted professional developments (Polat, 2011). An opportunity to align support for general education teachers and special education teacher is the increase of professional development (Blanton & Pugach, 2017). The increased number of professional developments aligns with Scruggs and Mastropieri's analysis on favorable attitude for a full-inclusion model.

Teachers may have positive attitudes toward the value and philosophy of full inclusion but have negative attitudes toward their skills to teach in a full-inclusion setting. Cassady (2011) addressed this disconnection by recommending professional development training to inculcate the roles and responsibilities of teaching SWD. Teachers develop negative attitudes towards implementation due to the lack of professional development training to refine teaching practice. Among professional learning and teacher training programs, Shade and Stewart (2001) recognized the impact of one course on special education. Even one course on special education prior to the start of a teacher's teaching career alters a teacher's attitude towards adopting a full-inclusion model (Shade & Stewart, 2001). Teachers with prior training on teaching students with disabilities demonstrated a positive attitude toward to inclusion classrooms (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008). Without adequate training, professional development, and sufficient personnel, teachers feel unprepared to address the demands of a full-inclusion model.

### **Classroom Community**

Furman (1998) defined community as the experience of belongingness, trust, and safety. Within the classroom context, the development of classroom community includes the following: teaching practice, interpersonal interactions, classroom management and school/classroom philosophy (Bryant, 1999). Klidthong (2012) noted the importance for teachers to acknowledge the "kaleidoscope of background experiences" students bring into the classroom (p. 76). When teachers recognize the backgrounds of all students, students develop strategies to share ideas, respect individuals' rights, and maintain care for their collective environment (Bryant, 1999).

One way to understand the context of a classroom community involves looking at what makes up a community of learners. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2007) shared the three characteristics required to implement a community of practice: domain, community, and practice. Under “domain,” members within the community share similar interests. In an established “community,” members collaborate, discuss, and build on each other’s knowledge and skills. Lastly, the "practice" characteristic indicates that individuals within the community are known as practitioners and have developed ways to address problems and share practices (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2007). The details in Wenger’s research show the complexity within the system to create a classroom community. The combined three characteristics develop a community to validate that learning happens. Wenger et al. (2007) indicated that individuals who participate in a community by means of expressing perspectives and negotiating ideas demonstrate engagement in learning. Wenger et al. (2007) research highlights the importance of community building to ensure an inviting and accommodating classroom environment.

**Social-emotional learning.** The Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC) included the construction of classroom community as one “anchor competence” in developing culturally responsive teaching and social-emotional learning (Markowitz, Thowdis, & Gallagher, 2018). In recent years, schools also have been tasked with developing human values (Keddie, 2011; Lang, 2006). If schools are expected to develop human values, the construction of the classroom community is an important consideration at the onset stage of teaching and learning.

Ormrod (2006) claimed that prosocial skills, concentration, and enthusiasm unite students in a sense of community. The concept of “care” has also been applied to the concept of classroom community. Pedagogical care practices within instruction, discipline, and classroom organizations support the foundation of students’ kindness and attitudes (Noblit & Rogers, 1995). Various studies have linked teacher behavior to student motivation ( Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Ormrod, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Thus, an engaging classroom community benefits the students with regards to focus, motivation, and overall social emotional state of well-being.

Noblit and Rogers (1995) recognized the tendency for teachers to operate under “bureaucratic modes of organization” and the manifestation of “controls” (p. 682). Noblit and Rogers (1995) noted four barriers that impede the construction of classroom community building: predetermined curricula without flexibility for adjustments; destructive social comparison; disciplinary procedures to stop undesired behaviors; and factors beyond teacher control, such as class size, daily schedule, and administrative tasks. These four barriers contradict the structuring and developing of a classroom community. The combination of barriers, modes of organization, and manifestation of control prevents teachers from developing opportunities to bond and build relationships with their students (Noblit & Rogers, 1995). To meaningfully construct a classroom community, teacher and students’ interactions within a community further develop mutual respect, willingness to share, and ongoing collaboration (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Attentive and affective elements such as caring, trust, optimism, and



respect are necessary under learning conditions in order to establish authentic relationships between teacher and students (Rogers, 1999; Shaw & Siegel, 2010).

Mreiwed, Carter, and Shabtay (2017) noted the development of equal treatment and shared decision-making opportunities in a learning environment create empowered and connected students. This generative process strengthens the student's individual and group identity. Previous research on geographies of learning, trusting school climate, and shared decision-making support the construction of a classroom community (Littleton & Mercer, 2013; Ormrod, 2006). The elements of care, trust, optimism, and respect influence student's learning results (Haigh, 2011). Mreiwed and colleagues' (2017) research on the elements of care and respect through a classroom community in drama education indicated the importance of being comfortable within a setting for students to show success. Research also indicated that when students feel a sense of belonging, they feel empowered to construct a community (Noddings, 2003). When students feel needed, trusted, and safe within their environment, students recognize the power and importance to construct a community (Haigh, 2011; Mreiwed et al., 2017; Ormrod, 2006).

**Cooperative learning.** The construction of classroom communities involves a collective effort. Elements of cooperative learning should be present in inclusive classrooms. Cooperative learning integrates small group-oriented tasks and activities to enhance personal and group learning (Neese, 2007). The structuring of social goals as a class nurtures relationships, develops positive peer interaction, and enhances friendships in the classroom (Wentzel, 1991). Research indicates that teachers build and ensure

social goals in the classroom to help with the maintenance of sociable and cooperative relationships (Furman, 1998; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Mreiwed et al., 2017).

Neese (2007) noted that human cooperative relationships evolve with interaction among individuals. As such, harnessing cooperative learning can enhance the classroom community climate and culture. Franke et al. (2001) revealed that teachers who employ strategies of generative change with their students' needs improve their overall instructional design and classroom community. Under the generative change process, teachers refer back to their "epistemological perspectives" to build upon existing concepts and enhance their professional knowledge (Franke, et al, 2001, p. 670). Franke and colleagues' (2001) research examined new measures of success between teachers and students. According to Reynolds (2016), the new measures for instructional success consist of providing students with additional opportunities for students to explore creativity, compassion, and collaboration to foster a relationship-rich environment. Franke and colleagues (2001) and Reynolds (2016) described important values to improve human relationships which require examining generative change and new ways of measuring success.

Previous literature has indicated the power of peer relationships to promote psychological health and support an inclusive community of learners (Cheavens & Michael, 1999; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reeves, 2006). Within an inclusive classroom, students have varying needs; thus, varying degrees of intervention and intervals of times were observed to document how teachers maintain a classroom community (Arcia et al., 2000). For specific students, such as students with attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the classroom community structure continuously needs to be revamped, revised, and refined because such relationships require additional time to show desired social and learning behaviors (Greene et al., 2002). Mutual liking and respect are the results of cooperative efforts constructed within a classroom community (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

The three elements of positive interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing under cooperative learning are essential values for a classroom community construction. Sellars (2008) noted the challenge for general classroom teachers to direct and execute elements of cooperative learning. According to Sellars (2008), positive interdependence relates to the appropriate opportunities for students to experience both structured and unstructured opportunities. Students who developed positive interdependence relied on existing management routines and can redirect and advocate without prompting from the teacher (Kagan, 1990). Interdependence requires a level of cooperation among members within a group. Individual accountability indicates an increased awareness of personal progress and possessing the ability to control behaviors and anticipate negative/positive consequences (Kagan, 1990). The group process allows students to employ various techniques to achieve learning objectives, participate in group dynamics, and arrive at decisions. These three elements of cooperative learning facilitate individual effort to attain group-oriented outcomes, such routines and conditions exemplifying aspects of a classroom community.

### **Theoretical Framework: Invitational Theory**

Human behaviors are shaped and controlled both automatically and mechanically through the influence of environmental stimuli (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). A learning environment and its stimuli impact a student's social, emotional, and academic behaviors. One method of understanding the input-output of human behaviors derives from Invitational Theory (Purkey, 1992). Invitational Theory focuses on human thinking and behavior. Practices within Invitational Theory are grounded in the work of John Dewey, Sidney Jourard, Kurt Lewin, Abraham Maslow, Art Combs and other impactful researchers in the topics of teaching and learning (Shaw, Siegel, & Schoenlein, 2013). Additionally, Invitational Theory has roots in the four principles of intentionality: optimism, care, respect for people, and trust. The four principles of intentionality shape invitational education as a framework for motivational learning (Foote, 2014). The principles of optimism, care, respect for people, and trust align with practices, ideologies, and policies listed in IDEA (2004) to ensure fair treatment and the construction of such treatment for students. As intended, Invitational Theory develops care, trust, and belonging among individuals.

The connecting theme between Invitational Theory, classroom community, and cooperative learning involves the link to social-emotional learning. Invitational Theory highlights the importance in developing individual potential through intentional relationship building. Relationship building acts as the core within the classroom community and cooperative learning. At the core, the teacher engages in practices to structure and maintain experiences of belongingness, trust, and safety (Bryant, 1999; Furman, 1998; Klidthong 2012). Social-emotional learning provides strategies on how to

cooperate and collaborate with members in a classroom community. A successful social-emotional learning environment honors students' self-awareness, social-awareness, and self-management to reach his/her potential.

**Human potentials and relationship.** The successful implementation of Invitational Theory consists of advancing human potential by means of recognizing individuals' strengths (Novak, 1980). In theory and design, a full-inclusion model acknowledges the possibility and potential among all students (Algozzine et al., 2006). According to Purkey (1992), Invitational Theory purposefully brings forth the advancement and potential of individuals to “realize their relatively boundless potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor” (p. 5). At the core of the Invitational Theory, the following five acknowledgments support teachers to build empathy and effectively incorporate inclusive relationships (Alberts et al., 2010; Biron et al., 2008; Purkey & Novak, 2008):

1. People are able, valuable, and responsible
2. Education is a collaborative and cooperative activity
3. The process is the product in the making
4. People possess untapped potential in all areas
5. Potential can be achieved by places, policies, programs, processes, and people.

The incorporation of the five acknowledgements on human relationships and learning outlines the conditions necessary for the construction of a classroom community. Additionally, the acknowledgements value the investment of people, process, and product as a means to bring out inclusive practice.

The five acknowledgments in Invitational Theory highlight the importance in psychogeography to structure a collaborative learning environment. Psychogeography refers to the examination of the laws and effects of a geographical environment (e.g. classroom), consciously or unconsciously designed by the teachers to impact students' emotions and behaviors (Wood, 2010). Additionally, psychogeography examines how settings affect individual emotional states and in turn strengthen emotional intelligence (Haigh, 2008). In this manner, students begin to recognize their emotions and develop empathy for their environment. Students then begin to consider how their environment not only affects them but also others sharing the same environment (Haigh, 2008). The construction of a classroom environment has an impact to enhance or hinder the social-emotional development of students.

**Perceptions and ethical human interactions.** Invitational Theory builds upon perceptual psychology to emphasize that people behave according to personal subjective perception (Purkey & Novak, 2008). The frameworks behind inclusive practices reinforce that perceptions are taught and continually redefined through new learning and experiences. Students' potential can be measured when students' emotional, physical, and mental needs, known as the "triangle of success" have been accommodated in their learning environment (Jacobson, Hodges, & Blank, 2011). In order to establish a triangle of success, teachers need to build students' sense of acceptance and belonging (Jacobson et al., 2011).

Previous research (Dweck, 2012; Fretz, 2015; Purkey & Novak, 2008) has revealed that the construction of an effective, inclusive, and engaging classroom community

creates a desired learning environment. As such, the examination of teachers' invitational practices and classroom community construction behaviors may improve both the environment and student engagement. To ensure an accommodating and welcoming environment in a full-inclusion model, invitational practices need to be applied with integrity and consistency (Purkey & Siegel, 2003). Invitational Theory considers perceptions to understand human behaviors, actions, and interactions. The theory factors in ethical human interactions under three foundations: democratic ethos, perceptual tradition, and self-concept theory.

***Democratic ethos.*** Within the *democratic ethos*, guidance from the teacher to students consists of a participatory process through deliberative dialogue, mutual respect, and shared activities. In a democratic classroom, students gravitate toward “doing with” versus “doing to” exchanges of interaction when articulating concerns and formulating desired decisions (Purkey & Novak, 2008, p.12). The democratic ethos supports cooperative learning to foster positive interpersonal relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). When students experience positive interpersonal relationships, their ability to be attentive and engaged increases (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). The increase in attention and engagement supports the components of relationship building and belonging in an inclusive classroom community.

***Perceptual tradition.*** In a *perceptual tradition*, the teacher's consciousness serves as the influential factor as to how students behave, react, and feel (Purkey & Novak, 2008). Within this tradition, individuals are influenced by personal perceptions of events and their environment. Various studies (McClowry, et al., 2013; Noels, Clément, &

Pelletier, 1999) indicated how students' perceptions of teacher feedback (supportive or negative) can shape their educational experience. Perception can determine whether teachers choose to carry out practices such as cooperative learning structures, multidimensional student grouping, multilevel instruction, peer supports, concrete experiential learning activities, or community-based instruction (Garcia, Patall, & Perkun, 2016). The teacher's level of consciousness to address students' individual social emotional needs impacts social outcomes and sense of belonging.

***Self-concept theory.*** Lastly, Invitational Theory includes the *self-concept theory* to answer the broad question of "who am I and how do I fit in the world?" (Purkey, 1970). Individual views shape personal behavior through the translation of antecedents and consequences of their perceived experiences and events (Garcia et al., 2016). In the classroom context, interpersonal connections between instructor and students impact the level of interconnectedness (Norwich, 2002). Students experience interconnectedness behaviors when instructors integrate student individuality into a classroom climate and culture. Positive perception between teachers and students marks an initial stage of community building (Goodenow, 1993). Teachers can develop students' sense of belonging which can be measured through motivational behaviors such as appreciating and recognizing individual effort (Goodenow, 1993). The combination of the three foundations dictate human behaviors through self-perception and where one finds their place in the world. In conclusion, how teachers act and structure the classroom environment impacts student behaviors.



**Invitational theory implementation.** Purkey and Novak (2008) extended the Invitational Theory to study conditions that influence human successes or failures in the Invitational Theory of Practice (ITOP). ITOP does not replace educational programs or policies; however, it adds to the overall climate and culture of inclusivity. Stanley and colleagues (2004) mentioned that school cultures do not transform from additional policies, programs, and/or processes. The practices behind theory of practice exist to integrate members within a community.

Invitational Theory aligns to the values and expectations of a full-inclusion model. In order for a successful adoption of a full-inclusion model, general education teachers and special education teachers must have shared commitment toward providing equitable education for all students and not put students into distinct categories (Jenkins & Pious, 1991). Patterson and Purkey (1993) revealed that Invitational Theory highlights the qualities of empathy, warmth, and genuineness in the development of teacher programs.

Another component of the theory focuses on the intentionality of the instructional design as a means to structure and sustain an invitational learning environment. Novak and Purkey (2001) emphasized the transformation to an inviting learning environment can be traced back to the teacher's intention and invitation. With the adoption of Invitational Theory, correlations have been made between motivation and self-regulation (Schunk, 1999). Schunk's (1999) study noted that when teachers guided students toward goals and incorporated self-evaluation, students experienced a higher level of self-efficacy and became competent self-regulators.

Much of the research conducted on invitational learning environments supports the tenets of a full inclusion education model (Harte, 2010; Purkey & Novak, 2008; Tralli, et al., 1996). Invitational education allows teachers to develop a systematic communication approach as a means to develop positive messaging (Purkey & Novak, 2008). These systematic structures transform the overall environment of respect, care, and civility.

**Invitational and intentional levels.** The aspects of respect, care, and civility can be examined within the constructed invitational levels (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). The concept of invitation in Purkey's work derives from the message and method of invitation and intentionality from the sender (teacher) to the receiver (students) and vice versa. The message can be transferred in a verbal/non-verbal and formal/informal approach. Building on Invitational Theory, Purkey and Schmidt (1990) described four invitational levels: intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting (see Figure 2). Invitational levels focus on the delivery of a message with the intention constructed behind the message from the sender to receiver (Purkey, 1978). Invitational levels hold assumptions similar to social learning theory that knowledge acquired has relevance to individual's values (Wenger, 1999).

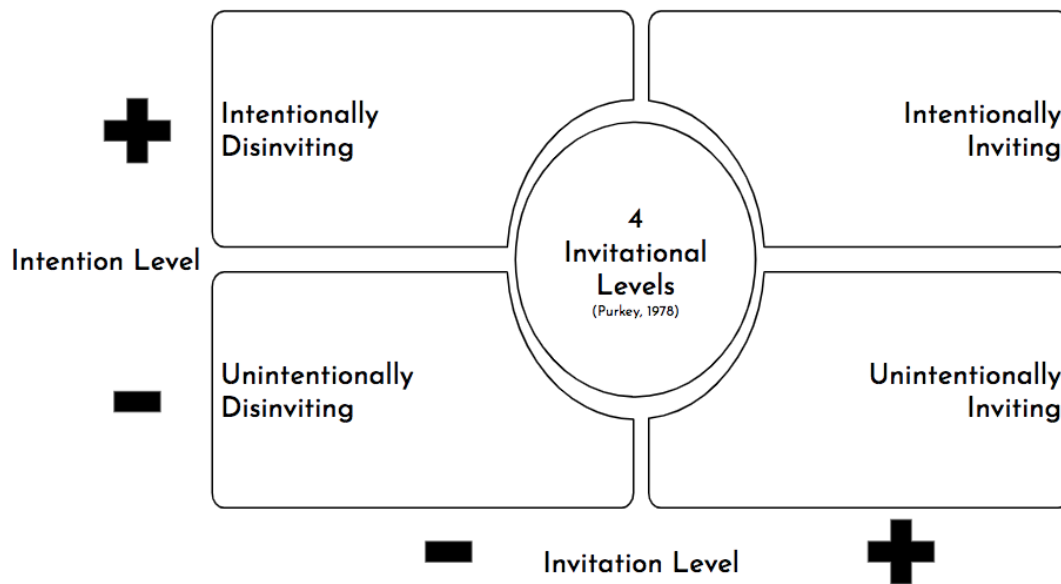


Figure 2. Invitational levels. Adapted from Invitational Theory (Purkey, 1978)

Purkey and Schmidt (1990) maintained that we live in a perceptual world where people behave in accordance to their perception and act in accordance with their perceived feelings, thoughts, and emotions. According to Stanley and Purkey (2004), invitational learning environments embrace and maintain trust, respect and optimism. Invitational Theory of practice (ITOP) builds student independence, ownership, and initiative through the development of self-concept and inclusive learner participation (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). The Invitational Theory of practice consists of the four invitational levels (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990), which can be translated into a strategy to build classroom community can possibly improve a student learning environment (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

Each invitational level impacts students' self-concept of their ability and performance in the classroom (Purkey & Stanley, 1991). Within intentionally disinviting (ID) environments, discouragement is practiced and creates an environment of

discrimination. Under an instructional environment with intentionally disinviting practices, the student feels unmotivated, discouraged, and insecure of their abilities. In the category of unintentionally disinviting (UD), the system creates negative and discouraging practices where the learners internalize an experience of distrust, disregard, pessimism and disrespect within the greater system, whether it be a community, school, or classroom (Purkey & Stanley, 1991). In such environments (classroom, home, etc.), individuals tend to experience inconsistency with purpose and outcome. Within the classroom context, individuals experiencing an unintentionally disinviting environment act in erratic and unpredictable manners. Thirdly, the unintentionally inviting (UI) level indicates an accommodating opportunity through unplanned process. While this level unintentionally shows respect and trust, the outcome occurs without careful purpose and happens on a whim. UI level shows inconsistencies and unprepared decision making. As a result, the recipients (e.g. students) experience inconsistencies and vulnerabilities. The final level of the four invitational level is the intentionally inviting (II) level. II level incorporates all pillars and principles addressed in Invitational Theory. The decision and process within this stage empower, engage, and energize targeted individuals. More importantly, the intentionally inviting stage nurtures, motivates, and encourages individuals to reach toward their potential. In return, students who experienced II become risk takers, confident, and empowered. Table 1 displays the four levels within Invitational Theory and its associated features, behaviors, and characteristics as adapted from Purkey and Schmidt's (1990) research.

Table 1

*Descriptors for Invitational Levels*

Invitational Level	Qualities & Behaviors
Unintentionally Disinviting (UD)	Inadvertent demotivation, display disregard, disrespect, distrust, insincerity, pessimism and a lack of concern.
Intentionally Disinviting (ID)	Directed behaviors designed to discourage, demean, defeat, demoralize, disempower and discriminate.
Unintentionally Inviting (UI)	Behavior happened by chance. Based on the lack of intent, this level is vulnerable to inconsistencies. As a result, the decision making in this stage is incapable of maintenance or further development.
Intentionally Inviting (II)	Directed behavior is consciously designed and implemented strategically. Actions and behaviors are genuine, empowering, nurturing, and ethically encouraging. The intention behind this action sees the potentials within the individual.

*Note.* Adapted from Purkey & Schmidt (1990, pp. 21–30).

The four levels, also referred to as the inviting/disinviting index (IDI), aid with the examination of behavioral impulses in educational situations and contexts (Valiante & Pajares, 2006). Valiante and Pajares (2006) motivational analysis of the IDI illustrated that a positive invitational IDI score correlates with self-regulatory practice and motivational feedback.

In order to authentically implement II, the effect and power of Invitational Theory of practice (ITOP) needs to include the elements existing within the 5 Ps (people, places, policies, programs, and processes). The elements of the 5 P's recognize the transformation of the collective system (Purkey, 2001). Purkey (2001) expressed that a cultural transformation with the 5 P's develops a genuine sense of ownership and belongingness for the members within an organization. Table 2 defined the five P's and

how each ‘P’ factored into Invitational Theory. The definition of each P outlined the goal in relation to the Invitational Theory. The research from Purkey (2001) and Parejes (2001) asserted that in order to expose a cultural shift, such as the implementation of a full-inclusion model, teachers need to implement the 5 P’s within their teaching and learning.

Table 2

*Definition of 5 P’s in Invitational Theory*

P’s	Definition
People	Collaborative and cooperative relationship built upon courtesy and respect
Places	A caring and cared for environment with conscious intention to build ownership and belonging.
Policies	Design and implementation of policies to respect individuals and their needs.
Program	Program focuses on community engagement, service, well-being and self-development.
Process	Processes and procedures as inclusive and democratic ways.

*Note.* Definitions for the P’s in Invitational Theory were summarized from Purkey (1996).

**Invitational theory in the classroom.** One of the components in Invitational Theory focuses on social-emotional learning through the assessment of “geographies of learning” (Haigh, 2011, p. 302). Research has indicated that schools with a greater amount of invitational qualities experience higher levels of respect and trust within the teaching staff and in turn have higher performance (Burns, 2007). Schools with the social context to ensure students’ basic psychological safety increase students’ motivation and engagement levels (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). As such, where students are situated

within the geographies of learning plays an influential role in their learning outcomes (Haigh, 2011).

Glasser (2000) attested to the central ideology of Invitational Theory as the nurturing of the self, specifically in self-concept, self-worth, self-image, and self-esteem. An effective construction of community allows students to connect their learning experiences and make connections to their own lives. Wolfe, Steinberg, and Hoffman (2013) indicated that student-centered teaching involves a cultural shift. Under such a cultural shift, individuals work to address challenges, raise awareness, and establish connections with each other (Wolfe et al., 2013). Mreiwed et al. (2017) addressed the need for teachers, specifically pre-service teachers, to experience “difference” and “togetherness” (p. 49). Experiences constructed with teacher and students allow for further understanding of belonging, trust, and safety (Mreiwed et al., 2017). Thus, as a means of adopting a full inclusion practice, teachers need to adjust standards of practice and assumptions to refocus on classroom design and accommodations to reflect students’ identities and experiences.

The work of Glasser and Purkey centered on the present moment as a precursor for change in behavior, thought, and action. A teacher’s invitation and intentionality to his/her students impacts progress and performance. As cited by Madeus and Shaw, the authors acknowledged intentionality as “purposeful application of conscious choice with respect to the direction and purpose of one’s behavior” (Madeus & Shaw, 2004, p. 90). The degree of intention impacts inviting and disinviting behaviors (Schmidt, 1996). Novak (1980) noted the importance of factoring in the physical setting, awareness of

personal biases, and frame of mental reference. In order to recognize stances, biases, and references, teachers need to become a reader of the situation. As readers of the situation, teachers have the ability to recognize invitational signs, factor in the type of invitation that is required, and evaluate personal feelings toward the shared invitation (Novak, 1980). Thus, the consideration for the individual's needs and structuring a welcoming environment both result in a construction of classroom community.



## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Overview**

This qualitative research documented behaviors and actions of how general education classroom teachers structured and maintained elements of classroom community in a full inclusion classroom. By taking a constructivist approach, the research allowed for context-dependent inquiry and inductive data analysis (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). The purpose of this research was to observe teacher classroom behaviors in structuring a classroom community within the first two months of the school year. The format of this research followed a descriptive research approach to capture teachers' characteristics and behaviors in the development of classroom community (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

### **Comparative Case Study**

Maxwell (2012) noted that comparative case study allowed for “process orientation” when examining how individuals interpret and connect with each other (p. 24). A comparative case study model documented classroom evidence from the observed teachers' settings and interactions. The activities within the classroom provided units of analysis to understand how certain situations, actions, or events influenced the classroom community construction. Comparative case studies allowed for the analysis of similarities and differences between the three classrooms (Goodrick, 2014). The parameters in comparative case studies helped answer “how” and “why” questions (Goodrick, 2014). The “how” within this research consisted of understanding how general education teachers build a classroom community in a full-inclusion school. The “why” in this research examined the intentionality of the teachers.

Case studies allowed for a comprehensive examination of each classroom community development and how the experience compared with one another. For each of the three observed classrooms, the study documented how the teachers built and maintained classroom community. The following research questions aimed to understand how teachers built a classroom community within a full-inclusion district.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in the study:

1. How do elementary teachers build classroom community in a full-inclusion district?
2. How are invitational practices within Invitational Theory used by elementary teachers to build classroom community?

By answering these questions, the research extended classroom strategies on how teachers built their class community. Within each observational period, the following questions were introduced: (1) What are the different approaches used by the teachers construct classroom community? (2) how does the overall construction of the classroom community compare between teachers? (3) what distinctive factors are applied within the teachers' classroom community construction? The research also examined teachers' involvement that reduced isolation and rejection experiences. Furthermore, the research compared the differences and similarities between the conditions for learning among the three teachers in a full-inclusion district. As a whole this case study signified the importance of establishing community-oriented classrooms not in place of performance-

oriented classrooms but as an integral part of achieving a performance-oriented classroom.

### Participants

Teachers from three grade levels (K, 2, and 4) were selected for classroom observations during the first two months of the academic school year. Typically, the first two months of the school year mainly involved the construction of classroom rules, construction of norms, and identification of systems for support. Table 3 outlines a professional teaching summary among the three participants.

To understand the intention and how teachers construct classroom community, the following teacher profiles provide contexts to familiarize the reader with the teacher participants. Table 3 organizes a general summary of the participating teachers.

Table 3

*Summary of Participating Teachers*

	Demographics	# of years taught	Experience in full inclusion	2018/2019 Grade-level
Ms. Maxwell	Caucasian Female 40s	5 Including subbing experience	5 years	2nd
Mr. Diaz	Latino Male 50s	21 years	21 years	K
Mr. Zhu	Asian Male 30s	8 years	8 years	4th

The profiles reveal findings from the teacher interviews to further understand the teacher’s philosophy, upbringing, and teaching experience. The selection of the

classroom teachers came from my previous work experience in the school district. The three teachers selected have between 5-21 years of experience teaching in a full-inclusion district. All three teachers' professional teaching career has been spent in a full-inclusion district. Two of teachers (Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz) were selected after my observation time with them for a doctorate course focused on organizational change. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz have been recognized by their current and former administrators as effective classroom teachers with consistent classroom management. Additionally, site administrators recommended two out of the three teachers' classrooms as model examples of inclusive classrooms. The third teacher was a new teacher to the school but had previous experience in a different school (within the same district) that adopted a full-inclusion model. In personal exchanges with the district director of special education, all three teachers exemplified ethical classroom community building practices and two teachers exemplified effective classroom community practices. The teacher vignettes below provide additional context to understand each teacher's teaching experience and philosophy.

**Ms. Maxwell.** Ms. Maxwell, a Caucasian teacher in her early 40s worked in the district for five years. Ms. Maxwell grew up in San Joaquin Valley, California. She completed her degree in liberal studies at Fresno State University. Prior to becoming a permanent full-time classroom teacher, Ms. Maxwell worked as a roving long-term substitute teacher for three years. She covered various grade-level classrooms ranging from kindergarten up to fifth grade for teachers on maternity leave or other health-related reasons in various school sites in the same district.

In her current placement, she was hired as a general education classroom teacher and completed a full instructional year. During the observational period, she started her second year as a full-time teacher. Sun Valley School District (SVSD) was the only district she has taught in her teaching career; thus, she did not have experience in non-full-inclusion districts. In previous observations of Ms. Maxwell's classroom, she maintained clear expectations with her students. She had the same expectations for all students with the exception of students with disabilities. By collaborating with the resource teacher, she modified procedures and protocols for students with existing IEPs. She spent approximately 2-3 weeks at the start of each school year to structure and organize her classroom in preparation for her students.

In our initial interview, prior to the observational period, Ms. Maxwell acknowledged the advantages of past teaching experience in different classrooms and grade levels. Her role as a long-term substitute teacher allowed her to learn different classroom management skills and instructional design based on each teacher and grade level for which she provided classroom coverage. She also acknowledged having the experience of working with different age groups and grade levels as an asset to better understand developmental stages across various age groups. In the introductory interview she noted, "I am able to see where students are at, instructionally, and where I can help them, knowing what the next grade level expects." Ms. Maxwell was sure of her position in the classroom. She commanded her classroom and ensured that all classroom rules and norms were posted in her classroom. Ms. Maxwell was proud of her assertive and commanding presence as an educator.

**Mr. Diaz.** Mr. Diaz, a Mexican American male teacher in his early 50s, has been a kindergarten teacher for over twenty years. As the veteran teacher at Birch Lane Elementary, he has been at the same school site since he first started his teaching career. Mr. Diaz grew up in the same neighborhood and was well known in the community. As a youth, he attended the same school as his current teaching placement. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students respected his engaging teaching and personable relationship building.

Mr. Diaz graduated from San Francisco State University with his multiple subjects teaching credential. Prior to entering the education profession, he performed with a theater company and eventually opened his own dance studio. Though he left the dancing profession, he continued to find opportunities to infuse dance in his classroom. Mr. Diaz incorporated dance at strategic physical breaks to allow his students the opportunity to stretch their bodies. He has previously been recommended by his administrator to serve as a mentor for new teachers in the process to clear their preliminary credential. Mr. Diaz has undergone various classroom community training workshops and district professional learning opportunities such as the Lee Canter Assertive Discipline approach, Restorative Practice, and currently Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS). He also served on a PBIS committee to learn more about specialized services. Mr. Diaz continued to seek ways to improve his quality of teaching by taking advantages of district professional development opportunities.

In addition to having familiarity with the local community, Mr. Diaz had an advantage over the other teachers. His ability to communicate with parents and students

in Spanish and English allowed him to keep consistent communication with parents. The home-school connection he cultivated with his families exemplified the close social bond he established with his students.

With over two decades of experience, Mr. Diaz understood the developmental needs of his students. His extended knowledge allowed him to leverage strategic ways of working with kindergarten-aged students. During the initial interview, Mr. Diaz acknowledged the importance of getting students to be a part of the classroom. He shared that, “The students need to feel like they are a part of the class; I have to be able to connect with the students.” Mr. Diaz understood the needs of his students through his long tenure experience. His ability to establish rapport with his classroom has been the exemplary model for new teachers in the district. While his environment and management systems are structured, Mr. Diaz understood the importance of “waver” in his approach. During our interview, we discussed the importance of understanding students’ needs, Mr. Diaz shared, “I learned quickly that one model cannot be for all students. You need to be flexible and waver in working with the kids. Each student is unique and definitely each kindergartener is unique.”

The “waver” approach in Mr. Diaz was one of his strengths. Waver, according to Mr. Diaz was the ability to adjust his routine, pace, or practice to address the needs of his students. He built his classroom environment with the students. The norms and classroom rules were established and agreed upon as a team, which strengthened the bond between teacher and students. His environment allowed noises, experimentation, and

collaboration. As such, Mr. Diaz always welcomed and opened his classroom doors to parents, colleagues, and administrators.

**Mr. Zhu.** Mr. Zhu, a Japanese American teacher in his late 30s has been working at Birch Lane Elementary for 8 years. Mr. Zhu grew up in the Bay Area of California and has resided in the area since birth. Mr. Zhu's career path did not initially aim toward teaching. After attending community college, he worked as a grocery store clerk for 4 years and coached an athletics program part-time. Parents noticed his natural talent in working with kids and encouraged him to pursue a career in working with kids. The parents' motivation motivated him to obtain his multiple teaching credential at his local state university.

Sun Valley School District has been the only district where Mr. Zhu has taught. He began his teaching career teaching sixth-grade English and History to two groups of sixth graders. As the school enrollment decreased, he was reassigned to fourth grade. Mr. Zhu expressed nervousness in transferring to a lower grade level considering the majority of his experience was with middle school students, as he shared, "The transition was daunting at first, luckily, I had a great partner, she encouraged me to teach with her. The kids are great, and I enjoy them as much as I do with my older students." Mr. Zhu acknowledged his support from his colleague as a transitional support. Though Mr. Zhu expressed trepidation in working with fourth graders, he was an organized teacher who balanced social-emotional wellbeing and academic content learning in his classroom.

Mr. Zhu was a respected teacher at the school site and among the district leadership team. His teaching was recognized and praised by the District Curriculum and



Instruction Department as they offered him the position of Teacher on Special Assignments (TOSA) to mentor and support beginning teachers and veteran teachers who have areas for growth. Mr. Zhu recalled being offered the position and shared, “I was honored to have been considered and selected. But I know my place in the classroom. I (can) do more with the students and that’s where my strength lies.” Mr. Zhu’s self-assessment of his strength and his commitment to working directly with the students was evident during our interview.

Mr. Zhu noted the daily joy of teaching was getting to his classroom and working with the students. As a member of the school leadership council, he was highly respected by his colleagues, administrators, and parents. With his background as a coach, he motivated his students to give their best effort with every task. He had a natural command with students and recognized every student for their effort and participation.

Mr. Zhu shared the classroom with his students and his students assisted with managing classroom routines. Since he has been teaching in a full-inclusion district throughout his career, he had no experience with a special day class model. Mr. Zhu believed in creating memorable learning experiences for his students. Mr. Zhu’s growth mindset for his own skills as a fourth-grade teacher has been recognized by his administrators. His perseverance and pride in his work were reflected in his command of his classrooms. He believed his efforts were best suited in working directly with students.

## **Description of the Setting**

Sun Valley School District (SVSD) operated a full-inclusion special education program. The setting of the classroom observation was in Birch Lane Elementary, a public-school setting with 450 students in transitional kindergarten up to the fifth grade during the 2018-2019 school year. The school enrollment has been decreasing for the past 5 years. Of the total population, 87% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch and 75% of the students are English language learners. SVSD has 60% of their English language learner students performing at the moderate level on the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). According to the California School Dashboard 2017-2018 data, the district improved on indicators to reduce chronic absenteeism and suspension rates. Standardized testing data noted that the district has improved on English Language Arts but continued to decline in mathematics performance.

All students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were taught in general education classrooms, accessed the general education curricula, and received various levels of supports and services. Due to litigation, SVSD's special education program and service delivery model followed a court-approved corrective action plan known as the "Sun Valley Self Improvement Plan" (SVSIP). SVSD developed its instructional program after the district-mandated "Schoolwide Applications Model" (SAM). This model integrated a comprehensive and inclusive integrated service delivery also known as an "inclusion" or a "full-inclusion" model. A full inclusion district was selected due to the unique model of integrated services. Additionally, SVSD's full inclusion introduced

a new approach of collaboration among classroom teachers and special education teachers to deliver accommodated services.

The Special Education Program at SVSD relied on special education specialists, classroom teachers, and paraeducators to coordinate and implement the district plan. Within SVSD, the key personnel, among many other stakeholders, consisted of a Special Education Director, Site Coordinators, Integrated Services Teachers (IST), and general education teachers. At the district level, the Special Education Director managed the entire department and delegated site coordinators to support integrated services teachers (IST), also known as special education teachers, and general education teachers. The special education department held weekly meetings to provide members from various school sites opportunities to collaborate, problem-solve new challenges, and address complex concerns. These weekly check-ins served as an open forum developed around structured norms, trust, and openness. The team also maintained consistent and frequent communication on an as-needed basis to resolve crises or other unexpected situations. At the core, the success of the SVSD depended on the collaboration and synchronization of academic services among site-based ISTs and general classroom teachers.

### **Data Collection**

A qualitative comparative case study approach was utilized to document teachers' behavior in the construction classroom community. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), case studies allow for "extensive description of a single unit or bounded system" (p. 45). The single unit in this research design consisted of the classroom community construction within a full inclusion educational program. In order

to document evidence of classroom community building, two sources of evidence were collected within the research observational notes and teacher interviews to further examine environmental/situational contexts and classroom routines and procedures.

**Classroom observations.** By adopting an interpretive and constructivist paradigm, the observations provided actions and strategies to further understand the construction of a socially structured classroom setting. The observation records summarized teacher behaviors and classroom actions during observation sessions. The collection of these records and the translations of teacher's behaviors explained how teachers constructed the classroom community.

The researcher took observational field notes in his role as classroom observer. Observations occurred over 10 weeks with each teacher receiving six visits. Each observational period lasted for 60 minutes. Observation notes collected teachers' actions, classroom procedures, instructional transitions, language used to express care, trust, and belonging. In addition, the observation notes also captured explicit teacher actions to establish a classroom community. The observations also focused on each teacher's discourse as a whole class, small group, or with individual students. Teacher behaviors such as proximity, intention, and management were examined and documented to further understand the situation.

This research followed an open-ended format with the inclusion of an observation log (see Appendix A). An observation log captured the following aspects: teacher's actions and a category for behavior coding. The teacher's action and behavioral coding occurred after the duration of each observational period. Audio recordings were used to ensure

accuracy in translating the teacher’s action. Table 4 represents an example of an observation log used during the observation.

Table 4

*Sample Observation Log*

Teacher’s Action	Behavior Coding
“Because you are not eating, I am going to help you put it away.” Said the teacher to reorient the student’s attention.	CR RB-P
“3 more minutes to finish breakfast.” Said the teacher to the whole class. Teacher continues to circulate to ensure all students are completing their breakfast routine.	CR CR MM
“I am glad you are telling your friend that you are reading your book at home, but right now I want you to finish your breakfast.”	RB-P
Teacher notices a student practicing blending sounds and acknowledges, “That’s why I love giving you books so you can practice at home.”	MM

The observation logs provided understanding about how teacher behaviors impacted their community. Data analyzed how teachers facilitated discourses of inclusion (Ames, 1990), ensured autonomy support (Reeves, 2006), and carried out norms of cooperative collaboration (Oldfather, West, White, & Wilmarth, 1999).

**Interviews and personal communication.** Teacher interviews were another instrument used in this study. The three sets of interviews conducted were semi-structured in manner. The interviews were both structured and fluid to allow for flexibility within the teacher responses. As a means to learn more about the teachers’ invitational practice, teacher interviews were conducted to gain baseline assessment on their classroom community design and teacher’s invitational approach. The researcher asked open-ended questions and structured questions (Appendix B) to discuss the

behaviors observed, teachers' classroom design, and teachers' intention. Three sets of interviews were conducted for each teacher. The initial interview before the observations allowed for a general understanding of each teacher's approach in setting classroom community, intentions, and classroom management strategies. Additional follow-up questions applied to understand teachers' intentions toward specific classroom behaviors. The second midway interview (after 4 weeks of observation) confirmed current understanding with regards to the teacher's intent and purpose. The final interview was conducted after the observation period to process any missing observational data or seek further understanding. In addition to the observations, the interviews provided additional contexts to understand the teacher's personal philosophy behind their classroom community building approach. The three sets of teacher interviews generated a clearer understanding when paired with the information obtained from the observations.

Brod, Tesler, and Christensen (2009) acknowledged that direct communication from interviews supports data with content validity. The interviews captured the participants' perspectives. Additionally, interviews generate new information to answer the research question and deny or confirm the researcher's understanding. The interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of each teacher's intent, context, and application to build classroom community.

The interviews were coded based on the teachers' responses and labeled with a behavioral code. Since one of the research questions focused on understanding how Invitational Theory factored into the classroom community construction, teacher responses from the interviews clarified teachers' intentions and invitational strategies.

Personal communication with the teachers after observations and interviews allowed for additional clarification and understanding of each teacher’s behavior or interview responses. Table 5 shows an example of interview coding where the teacher’s responses were coded with the behavioral coding designed in the observation.

Table 5

*Sample Interview Coding*

Interview Question	Teacher Responses	Behavior Coding
How do you invite students to participate (within academic activities and nonacademic activities?)	We have classroom rules that we practiced since the first week of schools, so students are expected to follow rules for participation. There are different activities throughout the day and the way students participate and work with each other will look differently, depending on the subject, grouping, and which students are (English) language learners. In group participation, I often work with a pair of students or a group of students.	CR – Classroom Routine  IP – Individual Personalization  SA-SE Social Adjustment- Social Engineering

**Observation and reflection tool.** In each case study, teachers’ behaviors were observed and transcribed into classroom observations and compiled in observation logs. In order to compare the three teachers’ classroom community, the compiled observation logs were calibrated utilizing the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Social and Emotional (SEL) Observation and Reflection Tool for Administrators (see Appendix C). The reflection tool compared the three teachers’ self-concept/self-awareness, self-regulation/adaptability, accountability and relationship building with the students. Additionally, the reflection tool also

provided a number of “red flags” to indicate negative behaviors, use of negative/directive language, no use of visual/verbal cues for routines, and no planned transition activities/strategies. Overall, the reflection tool provided a comprehensive approach to condense the observation logs and compare both classroom community building approaches among the teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

The combination of observation logs, three sets of interviews, and personal communication allowed for triangulation between the data collection sources. The combined three sources of data collection documented teacher’s behavior in constructing classroom community to allow for the examination of intention and invitation. Ford and Grantham (2003) acknowledged that when teachers presume positive intention, they recognized personal deficit thinking to acknowledge gaps before supporting students’ progress. The adoption of positive intent allowed teachers to teach students strategies to advocate for individual needs (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Thematic coding of these observation logs documented teacher behaviors with individualized codes to explain the relationships in the construction of classroom community. The observation logs noted the teachers’ observable verbal and nonverbal actions. Additionally, the observation logs described how teachers commanded attention, elicited participation, abided by existing community norms, motivated, and responded to students. Thus, the observation of teachers’ behaviors supported the understanding of explicit and observable behaviors that structured a classroom community.



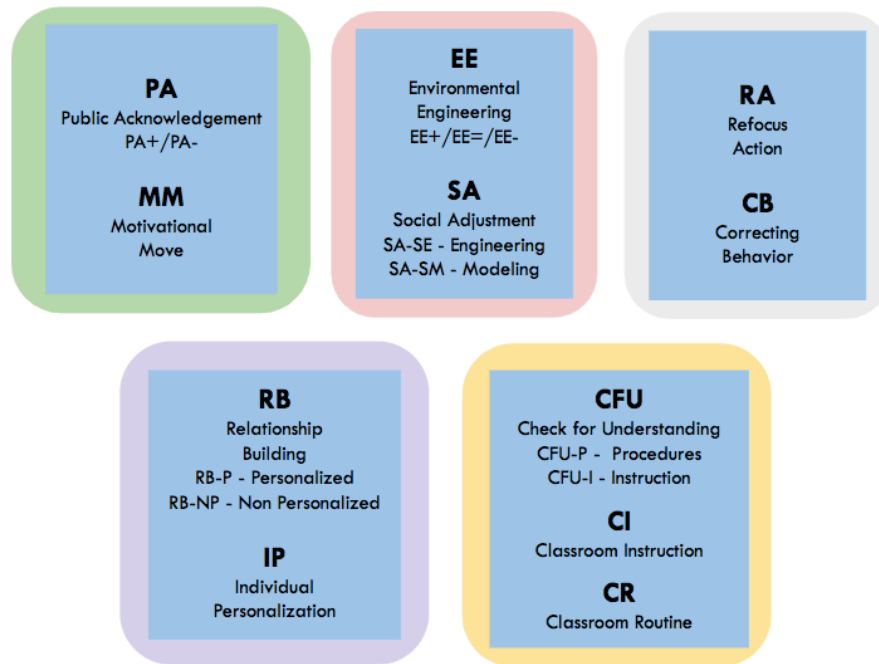
Initially, the researcher designed codes around Furman’s (1999) definition of classroom community, including trust, safety, and belongingness. However, new observational codes emerged beyond behaviors of trust, safety, and belonging. Table 6 presents the observational codes and the definitions of each behavior. Coding strategies were conceptualized through teacher actions and iteratively refined to reflect with teachers’ actions and behaviors. Appendix E includes the list of codes, definitions, and observational examples for each code and each sub code.

Table 6

*Observation Codes and Definitions*

Code	Definition
<b>CB</b> Correcting Behaviors	Occurs when a teacher corrects a student’s behavior that does not comply with a classroom routine or procedure
<b>CFU</b> Check for Understanding	Teacher intentional use of ways to determine if a student understood what was taught
<b>CI</b> Classroom Instruction	The teacher provides the instructional learning aspect
<b>CR</b> Classroom Routines	Learned rules and daily procedures transferred from the teacher to students
<b>EE</b> Environmental Engineering	Changes made to the classroom environment
<b>IP</b> Individual Personalization	Modification of a routine, content learning, social behavior for an individual student.
<b>MM</b> Motivational Move	Recognition of student’s actions and/or behavior that reflects classroom expectations through verbal/gestures to improve/encourage/excite students
<b>PA</b> Public Acknowledgement	Recognizes a student/group for their behavior
<b>RA</b> Refocus Action	Deliberate habit to regain students’ attention, regroup students to devote attention to the current task.
<b>RB</b> Relationship Building	Exchanges through words and actions that build trust between the classroom teacher to students.
<b>SA-SE</b> Social Engineering	Provides opportunities and a forum for students to interact (whether through discussion or other communicative exchanges)
<b>SA-SM</b> Social Modeling	Demonstration through gestures, words, and/or interactions/exchanges of how to conduct oneself or show an example

The codes were organized into five thematic groups around motivation, social/environmental adjustment, behavioral correction, relationship, and classroom related behaviors. These groupings, shown in Figure 3, arose from the analysis of observation logs, interviews, and conceptual development. The groupings of the codes supported with the development of trends and patterns among the three teachers.



*Figure 3.* Organization of classroom observation codes

*Note.* Classroom codes specified the context and situation to align with the teacher's actions.

Public Acknowledgement were coded with a (+/-) as sub codes to indicate whether the acknowledgement supported with classroom community in a positive or negative approach. The Environmental Engineering code were categorized as (+/=/-) to label whether the environment enhanced (+), made no impact (=), or hindered progress (-) to the overall classroom community. The Relationship Building codes were synthesized to

two contexts: personalized (RB-P) and non-personalized (RB-NP). RB-P indicated a personal connection between the teacher and an individual student. Instances when the teacher builds a personal connection to the student through verbal exchanges, dialogues, gestures, personal connection, conversation constitute as RB-P. On the other hand, RB-NP indicated a relationship building approached at the general group and unidentified individual. Lastly, the Check for Understanding code connected two contexts, a check for understanding on classroom procedures and logistics (CFU-P) or a check for understanding on academic content (CFU-I).

The code groups allowed for understanding teachers' routines, identifying patterns, and the sorting of trends. In order to understand the intent behind the teachers' invitational approach, post-observation interviews provided clarifications on intent. Invitational Theory provided a theoretical framework to evaluate classroom community and dissected which part within the theory is present in a full-inclusion model.

### **Research Credibility**

The selection of research methods utilized in the data collection contextualized the appropriateness of the measures (classroom community) and the setting of the observation (a full-inclusion school). According to Mertens and McLaughlin, "the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints" (2004, p. 105). Credibility within the research design and data collection followed a prolonged and substantial engagement approach in documenting observations from six classroom visits (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). With the duration of 10 weeks and 60-90 minutes

of observation per teacher, per week, the observation logs generated sufficient themes and examples to address the research questions. The six observational visits also prevented the researcher from arriving at premature conclusions. The observation logs indicated adequate time to provide contexts and conclusions to the three qualitative case studies. Audio recordings of the observations also verified accuracy in capturing teacher directions, feedback, and exchanges with the students. The researcher did not provide feedback to the participants.

Teachers in the case study were provided with observational notes without the codes to assist with follow-up questions during the second and final interview. The summaries of observations allowed teachers the opportunity to build on their experience or correct misunderstandings from the observation. This process allowed for the teachers to check and verify details within the observations. By including the participants in the debrief and data-verification process, the researcher aimed to maintain objectivity within the data collection process. The adherence to these credibility checks allowed for a critical analysis within this qualitative research study.

### **Background of the Researcher**

My current position and working experience in various capacities also impacted my body of research. With over 10 years of teaching experience, instructional coaching, and management experience, I recognize strategies to structure and maintain active classroom communities. I conducted classroom observations within my former district where I previously served as a school administrator. From a researcher's stance, I shared a clear message on my research topic. However, I was also mindful of over-sharing my

observation goals to steer away from teachers restructuring the day and program. I maintained transparency with my process to ensure comfort among the participants. Mainly, I allowed the teachers to continue their normal instructional day.

My teaching and administration experience did not serve as an expectation or metric to examine and document teacher behaviors but a reference and guide to analyze teachers' actions. Additionally, I maintained a reflective approach in my insider/outsider positionality. As the only person facilitating the observation, I relied on the observational reflection tool as a guide to calibrate teachers' behaviors and actions.

My attachment to the project aligned with my teaching and learning philosophy. In order for students to learn, social-emotional teaching and learning must be a priority. I believe the social-emotional teaching allows for students to tap into their interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. I stress the importance of these forms of intelligence since these areas aid in the enhancement of academic learning.

Though I understand my values, my experience in working with grades TK-8 posed a bias to understanding the greater K-12 system. Another bias consisted of framing the importance of classroom community due to my previous teaching experiences. As such, I presume that the classroom community approach functioned as a crucial investment at the start of the school year. My presumption served as a bias that I brought into the research. A classroom community operates as a collective responsibility to bridge academic gaps and improve students' educational outcomes.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

This qualitative research examined three teachers in a full-inclusion setting and their construction of classroom community in a full-inclusion district. The research questions were: (1) How do elementary teachers build classroom community in a full-inclusion district? and (2) How are invitational practices within Invitational Theory used by elementary teachers to build classroom community? The three participating teachers had varying years of teaching experience, grade levels, and teaching philosophies, which contributed to how they constructed their classroom community.

This chapter outlines findings from the classroom observations, interviews, and personal communication. Central themes were developed through the examination of teacher behavioral coding. A central theme analysis was noted after each central theme to analyze how the teachers' actions and behaviors compared in the development and maintenance of a classroom community.

In reference to Purkey's five P's in Invitational Theory, (People, Places, Policies, Program, and Processes), the findings focus on the "people" (teachers) and "processes" (teacher classroom behaviors) to examine levels of intention and invitation when structuring a classroom community. Table 7 adds on to Table 2 to indicate the evidence of each P in the research design. The findings described how teachers structured their classroom community through the examination of teacher's verbal and nonverbal actions.

Table 7

*Evidence of the 5 P's in the Research Design*

P's	Definition	Evidence in Research Observation
People	Collaborative and cooperative relationship built upon courtesy and respect	General education classroom teachers in a full-inclusion district
Places	A caring and cared for environment with conscious intention to build ownership and belonging.	Full inclusion classroom
Policies	Design and implementation of policies to respect individuals and their needs.	Least Restrictive Environment
Program	Program focuses on community engagement, service, well-being and self-development.	Districtwide Full Inclusion
Process	Processes and procedures as inclusive and democratic ways.	Classroom Community practices

*Note.* Definitions for the P's in Invitational Theory were summarized from Purkey (1996).

**Overview of Findings**

All three teachers had systematic procedures to orient students in the classroom; however, each teacher's intention in the construction of their classroom environment differed due to their personal perspectives of efficiency, effectiveness, and inclusiveness. Observation of the teachers' participation in classroom environment revealed three central themes:

Central Theme 1 - Teacher's intention impacts the classroom environment

Central Theme 2 - Teacher's encouragement and motivational moves affect student participation and community cohesion.

Central Theme 3 - Teacher's design of the classroom environment influences the teacher's organization of learning time, facilitation of activities, and management of behavior.

In the following sections, these ideas will be elaborated to demonstrate how teachers supported the construction of the classroom community.

In order to understand the three teachers and their classroom behaviors, a comparative analysis tool adopted from the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Social and Emotional (SEL) Observation and Reflection Tool for Administrators was implemented in the research. The findings indicated whether the behavior was observed regularly throughout the classroom observations (Y=Yes, N=No). The comparative tool provided a condensed summary of all observations recorded of the teachers.

All teachers demonstrated accountability with classroom management procedures. Ms. Maxwell, the outlier in the reflection tool, did not respond with frequent positive reinforcement toward her students. She resorted to control and accountability which resulted in a low number of instances in building relationships with her students (as noted in the relationships with others). Mr. Diaz fulfilled all categories listed under the relationships with others. In examining the students that he worked with and factoring in his understanding of developmental needs, he consistently adjusted to his students' social and emotional needs. The reflection tool (Figure 4) allowed for the observation of these adult behaviors to compare how Ms. Maxwell's, Mr. Diaz's, and Mr. Zhu's environment fulfilled concepts of self-awareness, self-regulation, adaptability, relationship building, and accountability.



<b>Adult's Behavior</b>	<b>Maxwell (M)</b>	<b>Diaz (D)</b>	<b>Zhu (Z)</b>
<b>Self -Concept and Self –Awareness</b>			
Using children's names; greeting children on arrival	Y	Y	Y
Using specific, positive reinforcement for good decisions, actions and behaviors; recognizing effort (e.g. "I like the way Andre is sitting on his shape!")	N	Y	Y
<b>Self-Regulation and Adaptability</b>			
Modeling appropriate self-control (e.g., staying calm, using warm tone of voice)	N	Y	Y
Monitoring children's behavior and modifying plans when children lose interest in activities	Y	Y	Y
Using classroom management strategies consistently (e.g., using signals and cues, redirecting, transition songs/activities, timing down, varying speech/intonation)	Y	Y	Y
<b>Relationships with Others</b>			
Using warm and responsive behavior and caring with children and other adults in the room	Y	Y	Y
Interacting with individual children, at eye level	N	Y	N
Guiding/coaching reluctant children to play with peers	N	Y	N
Helping children to learn from others, take turns and share (e.g., "after Lila has finished, it's Eli's turn")	N	Y	Y
Acknowledging children's acts of kindness to others, positive interactions	N	Y	Y
<b>Accountability</b>			
Keeping directions to manageable numbers (e.g., 2-3 step directions, 3-4 rules at specific centers/activities)	Y	Y	Y
Explaining/reinforcing rules, routines and expectations; setting boundaries (e.g., "What do we do during group share? That's right! You wait to hold the 'my turn to talk' ball!")	Y	Y	Y
<b>Potential Red Flags</b>			
Not connecting to individual children; talking only to whole groups	Y	N	N
Using negative or mostly directive language (e.g., "stop that!" "be quiet!"); yelling	Y	N	N
No visual/verbal cues about rules/routines	N	N	N
No planned transition activities/strategies; no anticipation of transition	N	N	N

*Figure 4.* Results from observational and reflection tool. Adapted from: New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Social and Emotional (SEL) Observation and Reflection Tool for Administrators.

Data from the classroom observational codes supported the comparison between the three classroom teachers. Figure 5 shows the total count for each code and the total percent for each teacher. The commonality between the three teachers was the focus of classroom instruction and classroom routines. Ms. Maxwell had a higher percentage of

correcting behavior than Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz. Figure 5 also indicates the varying percentages of motivational moves, individual personalization, public acknowledgement, and relationship building between Ms. Maxwell in comparison to Mr. Diaz and Mr. Zhu.

Code	M: Total Count	M: Total Percent	Z: Total Count	Z: Total Percent	D: Total Count	D: Total Percent
CB	40	10%	6	1%	36	6%
CFU-I	12	3%	36	8%	54	10%
CFU-P	42	11%	15	3%	26	5%
CI	77	19%	58	13%	86	15%
CR	77	19%	68	16%	71	13%
EE-	7	2%	0	0%	0	0%
EE+	5	1%	4	1%	19	3%
EE=	2	1%	0	0%	8	1%
IP	12	3%	42	10%	36	6%
MM	22	6%	45	10%	50	9%
PA-	15	4%	0	0%	0	0%
PA+	17	4%	49	11%	39	7%
RA	15	4%	11	3%	20	4%
RB-NP	17	4%	34	8%	13	2%
RB-P	5	1%	30	7%	50	9%
SA-M	21	5%	20	5%	39	7%
SA-SE	16	4%	16	4%	17	3%

Figure 5. Total count and percentage for observational codes.

The total count and percentage of observational codes also provided a way to categorize and identify how the teachers built on interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence (Sellars, 2008). The data from teachers' construction of community highlighted the behavioral differences between interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Teachers who carried out behaviors in motivational move, personalized relationship building, positive public acknowledgement, individual personalization, and positive environmental engineering influenced interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Table 8 shows sample strategies on the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence.

Table 8

*Interpersonal/Intrapersonal Intelligence Strategies*

Interpersonal Intelligence	Intrapersonal Intelligence
Peer Sharing	Reflection period
Group sculptures	Personal connection
Cooperative groups	Choice time
Board games	Feeling-tone moments
Simulations	Goal setting sessions

*Note.* Adapted from Sellars (2008).

The observational reflection tool to compare teachers' self-awareness and adaptability and overall total of the codes related to the findings between each teacher's control and students' autonomy. Teachers showing consistent practice of self-awareness and adaptability were more likely to allow students with greater level of autonomy. Discussions of self-awareness, adaptability, and level of autonomy were developed further in the central themes.

**Central Theme 1: Teachers' Design of the Classroom Environment Influences the Teacher's Organization of Learning Time, Facilitation of Activities, and Management of Behavior**

Purkey and Novak's (2008) study revealed that intentional practices and elements to develop community behaviors improve the classroom environment and increase student engagement. In Purkey and Novak's research, a teacher's design of the environment influences various instructional aspects such as the organization of learning time, coordination of activities and management of student behaviors. Figure 6 provides a physical layout of the three teacher classrooms to understand how each design influenced teacher's procedures and behaviors.

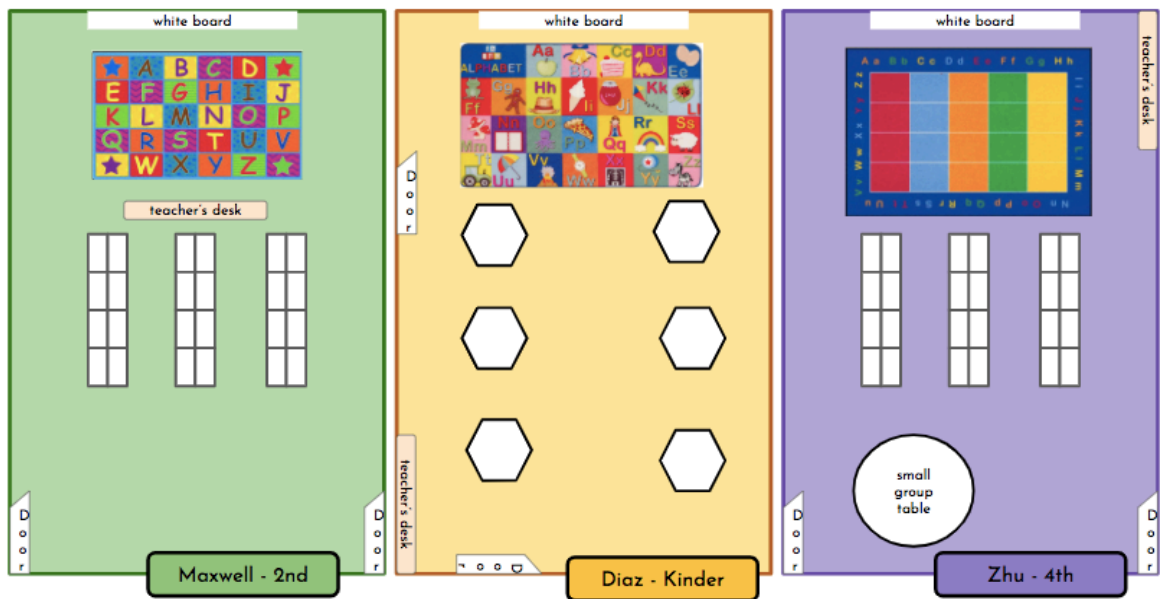


Figure 6. Teachers' classroom layout.

**Classroom runs on routines.** Ms. Maxwell constructed her orderly classroom environment in three groups of eight students. Each individual student desk was grouped together to assemble a large rectangle at the halfway mark of the classroom. The students appeared to be arranged in boy-girl assignments, as equally distributed as possible, which Ms. Maxwell noted as her intentional design. The whiteboard was directly positioned in front of the students. A large colorful carpet with colored squares served as a collaborative meeting spot positioned behind the teacher's computer projector station nearby the three groups. Upon entering the classroom, the organized room appeared untouched by the students. In every corner of the classroom, classroom materials were strategically arranged for students to use throughout the day. Student desks were organized with separate folders for different subject matters and a pencil box with the basic classroom supplies: pencils, eraser, a red correcting pen, a highlighter, a pair of scissors and a glue stick.

Ms. Maxwell also took the time to teach her students how to use various classroom supplies and materials. She reviewed various school supplies and distinguished to her students whether each item served as a tool or toy. The following observation captured Ms. Maxwell's exchange with her students:

Highlighter, is this a tool or a toy? The class responded with "tool." The teacher points to another classroom supply item, "Pencil, tool or toy?" The class responded with "tool." The teacher asks, "Eraser, tool or toy?" The class responded with "tool." Ms. Maxwell then told students, "No one should be playing with the tools" (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

The purposeful teaching of toy versus tool allowed students to properly use classroom materials for instructional purposes. According to Ms. Maxwell, the organization of student's material management benefitted her students by maximizing learning time. Studies have indicated that learning engagement is optimized under conditions that fulfill psychological needs (Omrod, 2006). While Ms. Maxwell devoted her energy to resource management and getting her students to abide by pre-existing classroom routines, the opportunities to fulfill psychological needs were not apparent during the classroom observation.

Though Ms. Maxwell hinted at the notion of working as a team with her students, her environment was mainly structured by her own design. Ms. Maxwell situated herself at the teacher's desk during students' working time as noted in a classroom observation, "The teacher is at her desk while the students are completing morning warm-up activities" (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell's isolated desk reflected her position of authority and power in the classroom. The noises in the classroom were regulated by the classroom teacher. She

managed her classroom with an assigned noise level. Students had distinct noise levels assigned for working, discussing, independent work, and there was also a “no-talking zone.” Ms. Maxwell also had a visual reference in front of the classroom to indicate the expected volume level. The noise level enforcement was evident when one of her students brainstormed aloud during a “no-talking zone” and was reminded by the teacher to maintain a quiet workspace, as publicly acknowledged by the teacher, “Vincent, not out loud, in your head. We’re at the no-talking, work zone” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019). Ms. Maxwell noted that it was her duty to create a classroom environment for all her students, as indicated in our interview, “I let them (the students) know that my job is to teach and your job is to learn; we need to work as a team, I need to teach” (Maxwell, Interview, September, 2019).

A plausible explanation for Ms. Maxwell’s control of her design and environment could relate to her multiple years as a long-term substitute teacher and the accumulation of multiple classroom experiences. She saw her teaching role as a transmitter of knowledge and followed her lesson plan with few deviations. The students’ work had to mirror the teacher’s version, “Remember, your paper should look like mine” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell’s design of her classroom environment empowered students to comply with orderly procedures. Her transitional routine, Ready 1-2-3, revealed the strict adherence to transitions, “Ready 1 - students get up and stand behind their chair, ready 2 - students face where they are going and Ready 3 - Students walk to the destination (rug, door, etc.; Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

The environment supported student transitions in different classroom procedures. In order to provide feedback, the teacher utilized ClassDojo, an online point distribution software to recognize students who demonstrated positive behaviors or followed classroom rules, as seen in a classroom observation, “The teacher uses Class Dojo to reward students’ points for attentive effort” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019).

In reviewing Ms. Maxwell’s environment, she employed controlled procedures to organize learning time, facilitate activities, and manage the behaviors of her students. The majority of the observations indicated that Ms. Maxwell mainly acted in the role as supervisor for her students, as demonstrated in her homework routine:

The teacher begins checking homework at 10:41 while the rest of the class works on correcting daily oral language sentences. The teacher sits by her computer as each student individually shares their reading log, math homework, and spelling homework. The teacher publicly rewards students for homework completion and takes away points using Class Dojo. The next student waits “on deck” by their chair for their turn to submit homework assignments (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

According to research, Ms. Maxwell’s practice did not fulfill the environmental support to develop a community of autonomy, competence, and relatedness due to the strict enforcement of environmental procedures (Haigh, 2011). Furthermore, Ms. Maxwell’s management denied her students the opportunities to take academic risks. Omrod (2006) stated that students enter the comfort zone and take academic risks when a sense of safety has been established in the classroom. Ms. Maxwell’s community has entered the precursory stage to achieve the goals of community by imposing consistency

in her management routines. For continual improvement, her environment needs to offer opportunities for students to experience the value of belonging and freedom.

**Communal meaning making.** Within the first 3 weeks of school, Mr. Zhu spent time to define, explain, and model classroom and school expectations. He recognized the importance of establishing processes and conditions for learning through the communal meaning-making of classroom rules and expectations. Mr. Zhu noted that the communal meaning-making experience allowed students to actively participate in an egalitarian manner, as demonstrated, “I want to create an environment with the students where they look forward to coming each day” (Zhu, Interview, September, 2019).

Mr. Zhu rejected a top-down management hierarchical management system and was in favor of a community norm-building approach. His goal was to bridge understanding and he started each day by greeting each student at the door with a personal check-in, as noted, “The teacher greets students at the door and says, “good morning x” he shakes each student’s hand. He makes eye contact with each student as they walk into the classroom (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Mr. Zhu’s strategy focused on behavioral engagement by providing his students with attention and varied opportunities for engagement in academic activities. Mr. Zhu modified his expected levels of participation to ensure all students had a voice within his classroom. Mr. Zhu differed from Ms. Maxwell in that his environment was based on his students’ needs rather than a teacher’s perception of what constitutes an effective environment. He devoted his day to cultivating communication skills with his students.



In one classroom meeting, he provided examples of how to be nonjudgmental and to respect each other's right to privacy and areas for growth:

The teacher transitions to sharing about tiger paws (TPs; school reward tickets). As you can see, I have TPs from last year and some this year. If you have TPs from last year, you cannot use them for this year. We want to be honest about our behavior (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

He applied social examples from recess, classroom transitions, and recreational activities for students to communicate feelings. Mr. Zhu emphasized his intention to get his students to be in a “rhythm” with the classroom routines and procedures. In our final interview, he explained that by having students take part in the structuring of community norms, “The students spend a good part of the day in the classroom. I want them to build a rhythm for themselves and collectively we build a class rhythm” (Zhu, Interview, November, 2019).

The communal meaning-making experience also supported Mr. Zhu’s belief in a student-centered approach. He valued independent thinking and community responsibility. These values were demonstrated in the physical design of his classroom. With a low number of students, he tried to group students in three groups of eight students. The students had partners and “table mates” to check for understanding and share their ideas and learning.

As soon as the students walked into the classroom’s environment, they experienced the community embrace. Students attended to morning tasks undirected and supported the teacher with basic housekeeping tasks such as, “Jaseen or Alex can you take down the extra chair please?” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

From Mr. Zhu's experience, the communal meaning-making experience transformed the environment from teacher-centered to student-centered. The students were the environment and Mr. Zhu orchestrated opportunities for students to interact and thrive in his classroom. The student-centered environment allowed Mr. Zhu to take on various roles in addition to being an academic content provider. In one classroom opening exercise, Mr. Zhu's transfer of student responsibility showed his trust within his community of learners, as seen in the following example:

Today, we will get a chance to explore the dictionary a little bit...First I want you to explore the dictionary.... I am going to give you a few minutes to explore the dictionary...then I am going to give you a dictionary paper, you are going to work with a partner, or you can work on your own. You are going to answer questions about this particular dictionary (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

The opportunity for students to explore before digging into the task acknowledged Mr. Zhu's comfort to allow his students the autonomy to explore their own learning. The environment Mr. Zhu created for his students had built-in accountability. He taught his students accountable talk frames to be utilized in conversations, discussions, and whole-class participation. Mr. Zhu taught accountable sentence stems such as, "I notice, I think, I wonder," and taught students how to critically reason and with questions such as, "Why do you think? How do you know? What else could explain?" These accountable talk frames allowed students to engage in focused conversations. These stems also ensured equitable participation in the classroom. Mr. Zhu often joined in with students and used accountable talk frames to model for his students, "Again, Esmeralda and I used accountable talk, and it allowed us to be accountable in our conversation" (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Mr. Zhu's environment followed Kluth's (2000) community-referenced instruction in which the teacher allowed for the sharing of resources, employment of creative planning, and active learning. Community-referenced instruction in Mr. Zhu's class allowed all students to be included in the learning aspect.

**Intervention and civil constructivist.** Mr. Diaz's environment was intentionally designed with the students' developmental needs in mind. He understood concrete ways to conceptualize and make emotional adjustments for his students. Like Ms. Maxwell and Mr. Zhu, Mr. Diaz had daily lesson plans and posted daily routines within his classroom environment. He was prepared to deviate from the plan when appropriate and necessary to serve the best interests of his students. During an instructional period, he noticed that his students were inattentive and moving around. He paused the lesson and inserted a body break for the students, "Everyone stands up for a minute, let's do a little stretching." the teacher guided the students in a series of quick body exercises: wiggle in-wiggle out, breathe in-breathe-out and wrapped up with a teacup dance" (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Mr. Diaz was a master at identifying student needs at the early stages and was amenable to change for the benefit of his students. Mr. Diaz joined in the learning with his students. Mr. Diaz understood the importance of how classroom practices can transform students' beliefs and attitudes. He honored students' attempts while teaching his students the correct approach, as noted in the following example:

The teacher models how to write the letter z. The teacher shares a backward z and explained the difference between the two. The teacher asks students to show their

whiteboard, “Chin it so we can see it.” The teacher gives a tiger paw to students who are chinning their whiteboard (showing their work) (Chinning allows the teacher to check for understanding) “Can you chin it for me, Marcos?” The teacher reviews all the whiteboards to check for accuracy in completing the letter z. “Alright, now you will erase and practice as many z’s as you can.” (The teacher sets the timer.). The teacher walks around and helps different students write the letter z. The teacher models the appropriate strategy to correct a student who made the letter z by making an equal sign and drawing a connecting line. That is a good strategy, but it will take more time when you begin to write words. You need to start practice writing the letter z the correct way (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

In addition to providing an environment where his students felt challenged, Mr. Diaz’s environment also promoted values such as civic responsibility and community involvement. Civic responsibility and community involvement were strengthened through the classroom job of being “scout” for the class. The “scout” served as a student leader who actively monitored his peers to recognize positive behaviors. The scout acknowledged attentive listeners, active participators, and responsible students. Mr. Diaz would call on the scout to ask for recognition as demonstrated, “Hey Scout, did you see someone who raised his hand quietly?” (The Scout answered) “Aiden, was he being responsible?” (Aiden answered) “Ryan, who did you see?” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

The role of the scout also allowed students to become motivators in the classroom. Even in instances when Mr. Diaz disagreed with the scout, he modeled the use of an I-Message. The exchange below indicated the disagreement between the teacher and the scout, as observed in a public recognition:

Scout, can you give a tiger paw to people who are following the classroom rules? (The teacher waits for the scout) Did you have someone Ryan?” (Ryan responded with “I choose Kimberly.”) Mr. Diaz did not agree with his selection and

explained I don't think Kimberly deserves a Tiger Paw because she was laying down (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Through contextualized and personal conversations, Mr. Diaz developed a sense of interconnectedness within his students. While he rejected the scout's nomination, he reasserted his expectation to indicate the overall command of his environment. Mr. Diaz also devoted time to ensure the processes of his environment run seamlessly through his expectation of whole-body listening. During the first few weeks of instruction he frequently referred to the whole-body listening chart to have his students engage in whole-body listening, as demonstrated, "Let's review our whole-body listening. The teacher points to the whole-body listening chart" (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

He was attuned to his students' energy and how it impacted their learning. Throughout their learning day, he embedded quick physical breaks to re-center and refocus his students. At one restless point, he noticed his weary students and added in physical activity:

The teacher taps his bongo drum to get students' attention. The teacher looks for his first assistant. He picks the wiggliest student to help him lead the activity. The teacher led the students on a series of ballet moves such as plie, releve, and sauté. The teacher noticed a swirly and overenergetic student. He approached the student and calmly said, "Let me help you control your energy. Remember you are in control of your energy" (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

Mr. Diaz took his time to ensure all students received feedback tailored toward their learning goals. He strategically incorporated motivational moves to ensure that students progressed toward their expected growth. The intervention and social-emotional building

experience he created allowed his students to develop an appreciation for being a part of a classroom community.

### **Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 1: Teachers' Design of the Classroom Environment Influences the Teacher's Organization of Learning Time, Facilitation of Activities, and Management of Behavior**

The three teachers' design of the classroom environment influenced opportunities for student learning, how instructional and social activities were carried out, and how they managed student behaviors. Ms. Maxwell's students complied with the conditions that existed in the classroom in alignment with extrinsic motivation. Studies have revealed that extrinsic rewards disrupt the path toward sharing knowledge (Bock et al., 2005). The three teachers used tiger paws to reward their students for following through with expected classroom behaviors or demonstrate acts of kindness. The difference in Ms. Maxwell's usage of extrinsic reward involved the consequence of giving back tiger paws when students need to use the restroom. The "pay back" approach disassociated the earned tiger paws from demonstrating a positive behavior. As a result, extrinsic rewards negatively impacted the communal aspect of belonging and trust. While Mr. Zhu's environment was similar to Ms. Maxwell's, the difference was in their positionality. Ms. Maxwell's authoritative figure and management revealed her position of power. Her power position limited her relational capacity to build a classroom community. Mr. Zhu's role came from creating a communal operation and establishment of a student-centered environment.

Bock et al. (2005) also found that strong social networks within a community did not have a formal extrinsic reward structure. Effective knowledge-sharing practices exist

within systems without extrinsic reward structure (Bock et al., 2005; Noels, 1999). Ms. Maxwell's system translated to extrinsic behaviors where students complied with system rules due to fear of the consequences or the desire to please the teacher. Referring back to Ms. Maxwell's consequence, the example below illustrated how a reward transformed into a punishment:

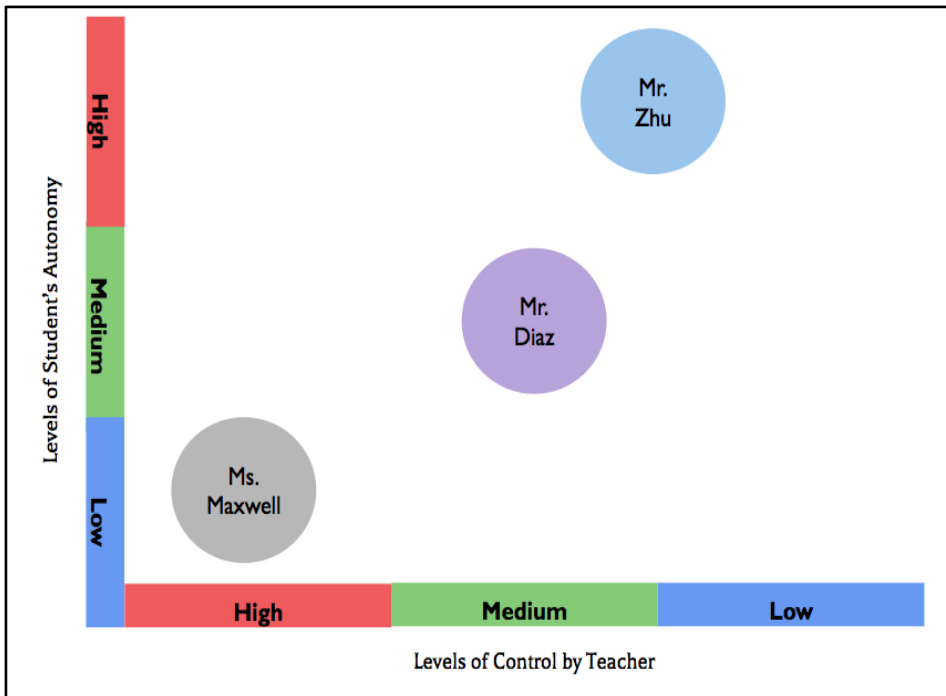
A student asked the teacher if he can use the restroom. The teacher responded with, "You owe me two tiger paws, you have two minutes." Students who use the bathroom during class time paid 2 tiger paws (earned reward tickets) to use the bathroom (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

The example above indicated the contradictory system of retracting a reward for an unrelatable and undesirable behavior. Ms. Maxwell's action contradicted the school's overall positive behavioral intervention program. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz also used an extrinsic reward in their classroom; however, the frequency and usage were paired with a positive acknowledgment of specific behavior. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz focused on expected classroom behaviors and instructional progress. More importantly, Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz established a sense of connection in their classroom by including students within the environment and did not incentivize students for adhering to the established community rules. Specifically, Mr. Zhu set higher goals to have students become autonomous and use the classroom for their own needs. Mr. Zhu allowed students the opportunity to practice classroom routines and procedures without overbearing monitoring. The students were given opportunities to practice routines through collaboration and team-building structured by the teacher.

The series of observations informed the level of control in the classroom and how the teacher's behavior affected the students' independence. As Invitational Theory connects

with perceptual psychology, students behave according to how they perceive or interpret their classroom environment (Purkey, 2011). Figure 7 reveals the three teachers and their levels of control and the experiences they created for their students. The teachers displayed different levels of control. The level of control indicated the teacher's position of power and the level of autonomy offered to students. Ms. Maxwell's high level of control validated her authoritative power and trained her students to adopt and implement preexisting classroom norms. On the other hand, Mr. Diaz and Mr. Zhu established acceptable limits for students to have a voice with classroom routines and norms. Mr. Zhu deliberately planned opportunities to teach students to make wise choices while training students about decision-making and consequences. Similar to Mr. Zhu, Mr. Diaz allowed opportunities for students to manage the classroom. Mr. Diaz's students were given opportunities to carry out individual responsibilities for the good of the overall community.





*Figure 7.* Teacher's control in comparison to students' autonomy. *Note.* Teacher's level of control aligned with the structure developed and maintained in the classroom community. The level of each teacher control was determined from the total number of refocus action, correcting behavior, social adjustment, and environmental engineering.

The level of control in Ms. Maxwell's class gave students limited opportunities for autonomy. Ms. Maxwell's structured routines, guided social activities, and controlled procedures limited students' ability for independence. Reeves (2006) indicated that power structure impacts social relationships and regulates emotions. Thus, the structure of power asserted by Ms. Maxwell also impacted how students built social relationships and regulated their emotions. Mr. Diaz's environment followed a certain level of control due to the age of the students. However, he allowed flexibility for students to explore and be curious in their own learning. With Mr. Zhu's communal creation, he allowed his

students to be co-creators of the learning environment. The frequency and quality of teachers' acknowledgments and motivational moves also revealed students' level of independence. With Ms. Maxwell making most of the decisions for her students, it showed her level of control in the classroom. Ms. Maxwell's level of control and student's autonomy reflected existing research on the influence of teacher's control and students' autonomy which say the higher level of teacher's control reduces students' autonomy (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004).

### **Central Theme 2: Teacher's Intention Impacts the Classroom Environment**

Classroom community experiences constructed with teachers and students allowed for acceptance, belonging, trust, and safety (Mreiwed et al., 2017). The implementation of teacher behaviors to establish belonging, trust, and safety were captured in the teachers' classroom observations. One central theme that emerged was the impact of a teacher's intention upon the classroom environment. According to Purkey and Schmidt (1990), when an action is designed and implemented with intentional invitation strategies, individuals feel empowered, nurtured, and encouraged. Based on teacher observations and studying their classroom execution, the teacher's behavior and structure showed varied contexts and intentions when developing a classroom community.

**Social engineer of classroom environment.** Each morning, before the school bell, Mr. Diaz opened his classroom door as a line of parents and children awaited outside for his arrival. Mr. Diaz welcomed parents and students into his classroom. Students had the opportunity for an early breakfast before starting their morning work. The teacher's intention to include parents as a part of his classroom illustrated an element of Mr. Diaz's

environmental engineering. He allowed the parents to strategically participate in the morning breakfast routine. In return, parents learned the pace and routine of the classroom. Parents acknowledged Mr. Diaz's well-being beyond the general courteous greetings. At times, parents shared home-cooked meals. These exchanges reflected the bond Mr. Diaz had established with these families. Mr. Diaz also utilized his routines to check in with parents. For example, observational notes said:

Teacher checks in with parents and answers parents' questions. One parent asked about a problem from the previous night's homework and one parent asked about an upcoming field trip (Diaz, Classroom Observation, November, 2019).

Mr. Diaz shared that by having parents in the classroom, parents can hear how academic content questions are being addressed. More importantly, parents can learn strategies to check for understanding to support homework completion beyond the school hours. Mr. Diaz also acknowledged that his teaching and guidance helped young or single parents enhance the quality of care at home. By having parents become active observers in the classroom, he purposefully integrated them into the community through his environmental engineering. Mr. Diaz's parent integration built a sense of belonging among the parental community. More importantly, his engineering may extend beyond the classroom and into the home setting. In an informal discussion, Mr. Diaz revealed his intention for including parents in the classroom, saying:

I invite the parents to be in my classroom for the morning to hear how I talk to my kids and hope that they adopt routines at home; not everything, but what can be transferred (Diaz, Personal Communication, November, 2019).

Mr. Diaz understood the overprotection that parents may have when sending their students to school. Thus, the allowance for parents to remain in the classroom during

breakfast time both eased parents' anxiety about sending their children to school and established a greater level of trust between home and school. Mr. Diaz noted that while he allowed the parents to be in his classroom environment, his intentions as to what the parents can and cannot do were established and agreed upon from the first day of school. The parents were not allowed to help students with tasks such as opening their milk cartons, cereal packages, peel bananas or clean up after breakfast as these tasks allowed the students to work together and structure a community. The parents' role in the kindergarten classroom was reflected in the teacher interview:

Parents watch their child but cannot help. A part of the kinder year is to develop motor skills and social skills. There are such opportunities to do this during breakfast routine (Diaz, interview, November, 2019).

His intention for his parents to be observers allowed students opportunities to independently follow through with morning routines and the practice of writing upper and lowercase letters of the week or of previous weeks. Primarily, his goal was for students to develop motor skills and accountability for self-care. While he could converse in Spanish, he continued to speak to parents in English and incorporated gestures during instructional hours. Under certain conditions, he would translate to Spanish, but he addressed parents in accordance with the language of instruction. This allowed his students to develop proper language fluency through hearing conversational exchanges that were different from peer-to-peer exchanges. He adopted the same approach with English language learners. Mr. Diaz's social adjustment to the language of instruction taught his students to persevere or utilize English-proficient students for peer support. He asked his students to be independent; he intentionally built in

opportunities for his students to engage in structured social opportunities to interact and encourage each other. In this manner, he expected active participation from every student in his classroom.

The teacher's level of consciousness to address students' individual social-emotional needs impacts social outcomes and a sense of belonging. As a Mexican American educator with over 20 years of teaching experience within the same district, Mr. Diaz infused cultural competence and reflective practices within his classroom model. He emphasized the importance of parent investment in education and how to ensure quality care in the home setting through his daily communications and modeling. He also devoted his additional time in leading and guiding parent workshops through the school Parent University Night (as noted Figure 8) to address issues such as students' social anxiety, challenging home life, and quality home care without overreliance on distracting technology.

*November 8, 2016*  
*Principal Newsletter*

**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Our goal is to have **100% of our parents** come to our Parent-Teacher Conferences next week (Tuesday, November 15 through Friday, November 18). If you do not have your conference scheduled by this Thursday, **please contact the school**. When you attend the conference, you are sending a message to your child that their **success in school is very important to you**. If you do not attend, you are likewise sending a message that school is not a priority. Parent-Teacher conferences are opportunities to celebrate your child's successes and determine the next steps to support their future success.

**Parent University, Thursday, December 1st, 6-8 pm**

Please save the date for our very important Parent University on Thursday evening, December 1st. We will have many different workshops for you to choose from.

Our parents have different interests, needs, and priorities. We seek to inspire, uplift and empower our parents by providing different workshops that address topics related to the **academic, emotional, social, and physical well-being** of their children and their families. After all, parents are the first and most important teachers!

Parents who attend will be entered in a raffle to **win gift cards for \$100, \$50, and \$25**. Students will have fun childcare activities and will be entered in a raffle to win **many prizes including bicycles**. See the **Green Flier** in the Tuesday folder for details on all of the valuable workshops!



*Figure 8.* Principal newsletter. The November Principal newsletter featured a Parent University night to educate parents about the supports and guidance to address family and parenting needs.

Through the inclusion of parents in his classroom, he took time to get to know families before sharing his expertise. Mr. Diaz used parent engagement as an approach to educate his parents about school. He participated in Parent University as an extension of his classroom. With his guidance, parents learned how to parent, how to offer support, and how to take an active role in their child's learning. With his years of experience and the number of multigenerational families he has taught, he has earned the trust of families who have been fortunate to call him their teacher.

**A community of structure, compliance, and consistency.** Noblit and Rogers (1995) noted three practices of pedagogical care to support students' kindness and attitudes:

instruction, discipline, and classroom organization. Ms. Maxwell's teaching approach operated under a disciplined management system with clear expectations of classroom procedures. She trained her students to abide by and follow the procedures before providing instruction and carrying out academic tasks. She truly adopted the notion of management before instruction. The observation records indicated that the majority of her actions and structure consistently followed mandated top-down classroom routines, refocused actions, and correcting behaviors. Ms. Maxwell's approach was framed around discipline and classroom organization as nonnegotiable conditions before engaging in instruction. The teacher's intentions and deliberate commitments assured that her students understood classroom norms and procedures. Ms. Maxwell's intention indicated a community under control and reinforcement. Students appeared to be concentrated on the morning task and abided by the highly-structured classroom rules, as observed in Ms. Maxwell's classroom monitoring:

Teacher models procedures for what she expects to see. She walks around each table group to ensure students are completing their Daily Oral Language task. The teacher paid attention to whether students have the right materials displayed in front of them. She hovered over a student to ask him about his highlighter (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

She managed her environment through student corrections and redirections. The level of teacher-support corrective feedback varied from student to student. For students with an individualized education plan (IEP), she guided her students through modeling of expected behaviors (e.g. clean up procedures, submitting assignments, or transitioning to the carpet). The teacher also made the effort to personalize support for individual

students to understand classroom expectations, as noted in the observation when a student did not complete the homework:

The teacher explains the expectations to the student; her voice is lowered as she clarified the homework expectations to her student. You need to do your homework each night. That means completing your math problems, write a sentence in your reading log and have parents sign your reading log. You do not have any homework done today (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Additionally, her use of verbal and nonverbal signals to provide corrective feedback or to refocus the actions of her students allowed students to request help, check for understanding on classroom tasks and procedures, and seek approval (bathroom usage, water break, sharpen pencils, seating position). The conditions and commands captured from the classroom observations revealed a controlled and contrite classroom community mainly orchestrated by the teacher, as noted in a whole class homework correction activity, “Your paper should look like mine. What I do, you do” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019). As reviewed in the literature, Noblit and Rogers (1995) categorized some teachers having the tendency to impose “bureaucratic models of organization” and the “manifestation of controls” (p. 682). Ms. Maxwell’s system and classroom routines followed strict operations of control and models of organization. The students operated under a system of “bureaucratic models of organization” where students are constantly engaged in classroom tasks dictated by the teacher, as shared, “Remember, if you are done, you’re doing your ‘may do’ work” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019). The teacher also provided classroom procedure feedback, “Arleen, do you want to keep your chair today? Please sit in your chair properly” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).



Ms. Maxwell believed that her structured environment provided the “triangle of success” focused on emotional, physical, and mental needs to support all her students (Jacobson, et al., 2011, p. 36). In our interview, she affirmed that in order to meet her students’ emotional, physical, and mental needs, she must have control of her environment. She reviewed classroom procedures and held students accountable for classroom routines throughout her instructional day. Her students were ready to follow directions before they even stepped into the classroom, for example, she noted, “I need my students to first know my routines before we can do the work” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell taught listening norms to support her students with whole-body listening. The teacher reminded the students of attentive expectations during community sharing or team-building activities, such as reminding her students, “Your brain is thinking. Your eyes are on the speaker. Your hands are folded. Your feet crisscrossed. And your heart cares” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell’s classroom also participated in a partner talk where her students were expected to follow the “look, listen, speak, turn, and wait” approach. The classroom observation documented students following each process to complete a partner-talk task. The teacher read the partner-talk expectations to the class and referred to a poster, “You look by making eye contact, you listen by taking a turn, you speak to make sure your partner can hear you, you turn back to the teacher when you are ready, and you wait quietly with a thumb on your chest (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

According to Ms. Maxwell, the intentionality behind the structured partner talk served to hold students accountable as a listener and attempted to ensure participation from all students. Ms. Maxwell acknowledged that her students needed structure in order to ensure a successful communication exchange, as she shared, “They (students) need structure, controlled conversations - having conversations for specific purposes for specific topics” (Maxwell, Interview, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell’s system of control and compliance revealed patterns and behaviors atypical of traditional community building. Though the expectations were taught to students, the teacher did not engage in relationship-building with the students during collaborative exchanges. The quality of “care” was measured through the frequency of positive public acknowledgement, encouragement, personalized relationship-building, and motivational moves. Regardless, according to Ms. Maxwell, her system connected with her students based on her consistent implementation of routines and procedures. Ms. Maxwell believed that when her students complied to her routines, her community had been established. She had a different definition of community building than the definition dictated in current research.

**The power of acknowledgment and motivation.** Mr. Zhu’s teaching revealed a pattern of acknowledgment and motivation of his students. The data codes public acknowledgment-positive (11% of total codes) and motivational move (10% of total codes) were frequently observed throughout the classroom visits with Mr. Zhu. The teacher acknowledged students for positive behaviors. In many instances where the students did not meet the expected behaviors, Mr. Zhu provided opportunities and

encouragement for the students to self-correct. His messages such as “I believe in you,” “you’ve done this before,” and “I know you can achieve this” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019) provided students with the emotional support and confidence to correct behaviors and learn the expected skills. He asked targeted and specific questions to direct students to make the right decision. His questions conveyed intentions of acceptance and belonging, as noted in two series of classroom observations, “Why is it important for us to follow the school rules? What did you learn from yesterday that you can apply today? Do you want me to come back to you? Would anyone like to come and share their picture and ideas?” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

Mr. Zhu carved out time in the morning to hold classroom meetings. The classroom meetings built a sense of community by having the students learn about the teacher. These meetings, as he intentionally structured, were opportunities to further “humanize” his role as a teacher and allowed his students to see his life outside of the classroom. The classroom meetings began with the students’ experiences, concerns, or curiosity followed by Mr. Zhu’s sharing of his day and reflection. Mr. Zhu’s intention to acknowledge, encourage, and motivate his students ignited a sense of trust and belonging where students further self-reflected in sense-making with regards to be the best students they could be.

Mr. Zhu’s intention in his classroom also included the values of safety, care, and respect. As a means to prevent off-task and avoidant behaviors, he devoted his first three weeks of instruction to focus on social-emotional developmental skills. Mr. Zhu took his time to build relationships, teach routines, and hold students accountable for their actions.

The combination of these investments enhanced students' wellness in academic areas and social-emotional development. Mr. Zhu shared that his goal was for his students to become cooperative, supportive, and mindful problem solvers. His routines and structures incorporated elements of collaboration to teach empathetic behaviors. He publicly acknowledged his students in a manner that also validated the experiences of other participants, as noted in the classroom observation, "Sabrina, you're giving some support to Tristian, you mentioned what characters do, and I like how you used the word actions in your share" (Zhu, Classroom Observation, October, 2019)

As a constant motivator, Mr. Zhu acknowledged the presence and participation of all students. Occasional instances where students forgot a point to share, his response was, "If it comes back, let me know," or to ask the students, "Do you want me to come back to you?" (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019). In discussing Mr. Zhu's practice, his teaching and learning conditions allowed students to learn through active participation. Mr. Zhu's classroom provided students with opportunities for social negotiation by infusing critical thinking exercises and reflective inquiries, as observed in this dialogue:

Before you whisper to your partner, I want you to share with your partner on how characters change and go back to the story to find the specific event. Remember to use your accountable talk. Partner discussion begins. Teacher refocuses the students, '1-2, eyes on me.' Students chorally responded, '1-2-, eyes on you.' Teacher asked, 'Who would like to share? What do you think? Who have we not heard from?' Teacher scans the room and asks, 'Carlos, we have not heard from you. Can you please share what you and your partner talked about?' (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

These collaborative exchanges were strengthened through personalized content built upon students' interests. Mr. Zhu's strategy relied on behavioral engagement and

provided his students with frequent opportunities to partake in academic discussions. He devoted his day to cultivating proper communication skills in his students. He modeled the approach of rigorous “accountable talk frames” and allowed time for students to practice. Mr. Zhu instructed his students, “When working with your partner, I want you to think about the following frames (he read each frame to his students) I notice...I think...I wonder...Why do you think? How do you know? What else could you explain?” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

To further support collaborative exchanges, Mr. Zhu provided examples of how to be nonjudgmental and to respect each other's right to privacy. Outside of the classroom, he applied social examples from recess, classroom transitions, and recreational activities to transform students’ intense anger into opportunities for students to communicate their feelings. For students experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety, Mr. Zhu organized a calming corner and allowed students to take a body/mental break by stepping outside through a use of silent signals agreed upon by the teacher and students. Mr. Zhu noted that he intended to get his students to be in the “rhythm” of the classroom routines and procedures.

### **Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 2: Teacher’s Intention Impacts the Classroom Environment**

Both Ms. Maxwell and Mr. Zhu utilized elements from the Invitational Theory of practice to build their version of community. Mr. Zhu’s acknowledgment and motivation honored what Klidthong (2002) noted as the “kaleidoscope of background experiences” (p. 50). Mr. Zhu recognized the backgrounds of all students and developed strategies to incorporate the students into the classroom community. On the other hand, Ms.

Maxwell's intent focused on how students followed her routines. The difference between Mr. Zhu's and Ms. Maxwell's intent differed on which "P" within Purkey's five P's in the Invitational Theory was focused on. Mr. Zhu focused on the 'people' which were his students, whereas Ms. Maxwell focused on the 'processes' which were her classroom routines and procedures.

While Ms. Maxwell intentionally structured her environment, her students followed predetermined norms through models of control and compliance. The models of control were personally developed by the classroom teacher before the first day of school. In contrast, Mr. Zhu built his community through the development and refinement of interpersonal relationships. Mr. Zhu structured his environment through his motivation, encouragement, and acknowledgment. These opportunities allowed his students to have meaningful communication exchanges and collaborative activities. Mr. Zhu included ice breakers, classroom meetings, personal check-in check-out routines, and collaborative projects to engage students in interpersonal activities. Ms. Maxwell built her community through the reinforcement of norms, routines, and procedures. The amount of decision-making between the teacher and students also differed among the three classroom teachers: the teacher who made the most decisions for her students was Ms. Maxwell, she rarely took her students' requests and feedback into practice. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz shared decision making (when appropriate) with their students. Both teachers resonated with the themes of inclusion and empathy, which allowed students to actively be a part of the classroom rules and procedures.

Mr. Diaz represented the outlier group by infusing adults into his classroom environment intentionally and strategically to foster an extension of the classroom community. His social engineering allowed parents to improve the family community beyond the school hours. Mr. Zhu and Ms. Maxwell mainly worked with their students to model, refine, and review behaviors.

### **Central Theme 3: Teachers' Encouragement and Motivational Moves Affect Student Participation and Community Cohesion**

With the observations conducted in a full-inclusion school, the study examined how teachers used encouraging ways and motivational moves to generate student participation and build community cohesion. Student participation operates as one measure to indicate student learning (Freiberg, 2005). To motivate students, teachers needed to understand different cultures, learning styles, and physical and mental abilities among the students (Freiberg, 2005). The observed teachers varied in their motivational moves and as a result, structured different classroom communities. As such, the teachers' encouragement and motivational moves impacted how their students participated with their peers, the classroom teacher, and the greater community.

**Structured student participation.** Ms. Maxwell's classroom management strategy aligned with her structure when eliciting student participation. She approached student participation through collaborative structures such as think-pair-share and neighbor chat. During the think-pair-share student participation, Ms. Maxwell asked general comprehension questions such as who, what, where, how does, how can, what would, etc. Students' responses mainly involved an element of recall and recognition or using a skill or concept. Examples of Ms. Maxwell's participation routines include: "What is a

noun?” “Raise your hand and tell me what “estimate” means.” “What is this called?” (Teacher points to an example number sentence and gives a sentence stem) “This is called a blank sentence.” (Teacher waits) “Class?” (The class chants) “A number sentence” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

From the questions shared by the teachers to garner students’ participation, Ms. Maxwell did not attempt to ask deeper level critical thinking questions that required strategic extended thinking and complex reasoning. In cases where critical thinking questions were introduced, the questions only occurred in written assignments through the school-adopted curriculum. However, there were no instances of these questions shared in oral whole-class discussions during the weeks of observation. In an event where a student had a question beyond general comprehension, the teacher redirected the students to use the “Ask three before you ask me” approach, as noted when a teacher asked, “When do I use the exclamation point?” The teacher responded with ‘Good question Kalize, can you ask three before you see me? You can ask the question to the left or right or in front of you’ (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

The established environment by Ms. Maxwell allowed her students to check with three partners before asking her. In this format, Ms. Maxwell hoped to build accountability for students to support one another. When questioned, what happens if the students do not have the correct response to accurately participate, she mentioned in an interview, “I give them opportunities to discuss and share ideas with one another. Also, ‘ask three before you ask me’ also gives them (the students) the chance to check (for)



understanding amongst each other” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

According to Ms. Maxwell, support structures such as ask three before me, think-pair-share, and partner chat allowed students to clarify amongst each other. However, with limited opportunities to check for their understanding, students lacked sufficient time to thoroughly discuss content-related topics. These data were noted by the low number of Check-for-Understanding, Instruction (3% of total codes), Individualized Personalization (3% of total codes), and Relationship-Building, Personalized (1% of total codes) from the observations. The teacher provided limited opportunities for students to build on independent thinking and reasoning. The majority of student participation was based on predetermined answers according to the tight curriculum adherence. Additionally, the collaborative structures used by the classroom teacher did not follow actual steps to preserve the integrity in each step of collaborative exchange. Ms. Maxwell capped the time for collaborative structure rather than allowing for a natural flow within the discussion, as noted:

When they say ‘bedtime blue’ what does that mean? Share with your partner. (students share ideas) ‘So what does it mean?’ (teacher brings students back by counting down from 5). She called on four students who raised their hands. The teacher clarified the meaning to the class (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019).

Unique to Ms. Maxwell, the opportunities for students to participate primarily involved responding to classroom routines and procedures rather than instructional content. Ms. Maxwell’s approach in checking-for-understanding for classroom procedures was 11% of the total codes compared to her checking-for-understanding for

instructional aspect, which made up of 3% of the total codes. Ms. Maxwell's structure allowed students to orally participate at specific times and they were guided under her direction rather than allowing a space for student-led participation. The low number of positive public acknowledgments (4% of total codes) and motivational moves (6% of total codes) given by the teacher during participation reflected the low number of opportunities students had to participate with their peers. Likewise, most of Ms. Maxwell's public acknowledgments, positive and negative, hovered around task completion and adherence to classroom rules. Evidence of the frequent focus on recognizing students for procedure compliance included, "The teacher uses ClassDoJo, a virtual program to reward or retract students' points for desired and undesired behaviors (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019), "The teacher asks a student to repeat instructions" (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019), and "Great complete sentence" as she publicly acknowledged a student who shared his response in a complete sentence format (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell also had a few occasions when she publicly acknowledged her students in a negative approach (4% of total codes compared to 0% from the other two teachers). In one classroom observation, she singled out and shamed a student for his action, "I am glad Sergio did not take your advice and made a better choice" (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019). In another classroom observation, she asked, "Arleen, do you want to keep your chair today? Please sit in your chair properly." (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019). In another observation, she publicly acknowledged a student in a negative approach, "The teacher provided corrective

feedback to a student ‘Sit down and let’s try it again’ (the teacher waits for the student to sit down.) ‘See how one person distracted the whole class’ (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell provided a greater quantity of corrective feedback among the observed teachers (corrective feedback total to 10% of total codes). During the interview, Ms. Maxwell shared her rationale for providing corrective feedback as a means of attaining student cognitive engagement:

Students need to know when it’s time to work and when it’s time to have fun. I need to keep them focused, they are second graders, they need that. I want them to be serious in their learning. (Maxwell, Interview, October, 2019).

Though her classroom included structured orders and procedures, she lacked specific feedback to positively motivate students. In addition to being an essential practice within community building, research has indicated that motivational engagement supports cognitive engagement (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012; Reeves, 2006).

In instances where students engaged in community bonding experiences, Ms. Maxwell’s “get to know you” activity was formulated in manner that hindered self-expression and creativity. In one whole-class activity, Ms. Maxwell asked each student to draw a Skittles candy from a bag and then respond to a prompt that matched the color:

If your color is red, you will tell me your favorite thing you did this summer. If your color is pink, you will tell me your favorite food over the summer. If you have yellow, tell me something new you did over the summer and if you have orange – you’re going to tell us one thing you are looking forward to in second grade or your favorite thing or what you like (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, August, 2019).

According to Ms. Maxwell, the Skittle interactive activity was designed with the intent to establish a community. She noted, “They are second graders, they needed guided prompts to respond” (Maxwell, Personal Communication, September, 2019).

Ms. Maxwell’s series of guided interactive activities revealed her lack of individual personalization. The introduced building activities limited students’ creativity to share based on their own interest. A plausible explanation for her need to control conversations was indicated by her tepidness to refocus students after providing an unstructured opportunity for conversing, as indicated, “All right you have 2 minutes to discuss with your partner.” A minute passed; she reminded the students of the remaining time. “All right, time is up. Let’s see which pair is ready to share.” The students were not done sharing and some members within a pair did not have the opportunity to share (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, September, 2019). In a homework correction activity, Ms. Maxwell asked students to discuss with a partner whether the answer was choice A, B, or C. Two minutes into the discussion, Ms. Maxwell hurriedly reminded the student “Remember, you are figuring out which answer is correct.” This example showed the control in validating a response without allowing appropriate time for sufficient discussion.

Another example of Ms. Maxwell’s sticking to the lesson plan involved her lack of follow-through in teachable moments arising from students’ social conflicts. Ms. Maxwell did not allow student conflicts outside of the classroom to distract the scheduled day. In one classroom observation, two students reported a playground conflict to Ms. Maxwell after returning from morning recess. Rather than granting the experience to

become a teaching moment for the greater community, she redirected the two students to solve their problem at the right time and place as observed in the classroom observation, “Students shared their recess problem regarding a pushing/shoving incident at the tetherball: “Did you report it at recess? We are not at recess right now, so we can’t solve the problem at this time” (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

The community that Ms. Maxwell created for her students was based on what she believed was best for her students. Her intentions aligned with previous working models in her years as a substitute teacher. Her requests and questions to her students were more frequent than her motivational moves and acknowledgments. Ms. Maxwell framed her checking-for-understanding approach around students completing expected tasks as observed in her questioning, “Where is your reading log? Where is the other homework? Where’s the sentence of what you read? What should you do first? (Maxwell, Classroom Observation, October, 2019)

To summarize, Ms. Maxwell’s encouragement and motivational moves were reflected only when students complied with classroom routines. She did not provide opportunities for her students to have ownership of the classroom routines. Ms. Maxwell’s approach revealed that she owned the routines and students followed the expectations. These motivational moves did not align with all aspects of Furman’s definition of community as being safe, trustworthy, and belonging.

The environment structured by Ms. Maxwell ensured students’ safety; however, with the limited opportunities for students to independently get to know each other, freely celebrate successes, and open discussions, the classroom lacked aspects of trust and

belonging. In events where students had the opportunity to build community, the experience was guided, directed, and managed by the classroom teacher. The limited opportunities for student-driven or student-led activities revealed additional examples of the structure of control and compliance in Ms. Maxwell's classroom.

**Interaction rich learning environment.** The overall learning environment in Mr. Diaz's class effectively utilized every instructional minute to motivate, encourage, and teach his students. The motivational moves began at the start of the day, even in his daily attendance-checking attendance routine:

Mr. Diaz asks, "Who would like to help me count?" A student raises his hand and Mr. Diaz asks, "How many students are here today?" The student circulates the room and taps each student shoulder as he counts, "Let's count together." Mr. Diaz counts with the students and shares, "We have 11 people in attendance, 6 people are absent." The teacher then poses questions for students to think about how many total students are in the class (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

His students collectively participated in classroom routines and instructional content. Ms. Diaz had a similar morning routine to that of Ms. Maxwell; however, the difference was in the management of the routines. Mr. Diaz's routine allowed for student participation and included elements of checking-for-understanding through content review. He organized student seating positions to allow for partner and group interactions. Mr. Diaz intentionally aligned his students with hexagonal tables which allowed him to strategically circulate and provide instructional intervention. While Mr. Diaz's physical environment resembled Ms. Maxwell's, he moved within his environment and circulated among his students. Ms. Maxwell, on the other hand, positioned herself in front of the classroom, near the teacher's desk and requested that her students meet her at her desk when they needed help. In Mr. Diaz's classroom, checking

for understanding was essential, as demonstrated, “Can you do me a favor? Can you go back to the beginning and read all the words you have written?” Mr. Diaz continues to circulate and ensures that all students are completing their morning work (Diaz, Classroom Observation, November, 2019).

Mr. Diaz’s environment allowed him to conduct academic intervention through individual personalization, checking for understanding, and motivational moves. More importantly, Mr. Diaz organized each table group with a different number of students based on their academic and behavioral needs. In one hexagonal pod, he paired his language learners with bilingual students. In another hexagonal pod, near the front of the class, he positioned talkative students, where they were easily reachable for redirection. His strength included his ability to circulate and provide timely feedback both on procedural tasks and content learning.

In connecting with his students, Mr. Diaz met students at their eye level when working with students. His eye-level focus and intentional invitational approach allowed his students to feel heard, empathized with and cared for in their personal needs and development, as he shared, “Oh I feel generous today, thank you so much for being responsible, for sitting down and using your whole body.” Teacher hands out tiger paws, student reward tickets that can be redeemed for prizes (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019). Mr. Diaz was intentional in ways he approached students, especially during collaborative partnership learning, “During a prereading activity, the teacher brings the book cover to various pairs to check in for understanding. He asks a pair for

permission to be a third partner to check for understanding” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

At the start of the school year, he reiterated the need to structure meaningful social and interactional opportunities between students to teach rights and responsibilities. A few examples of his interaction-rich classroom consisted of modeling how to give an I-message and respectfully advocating for one’s needs. The conversation between Mr. Diaz and his students showed his intimate level of support, “Did you give him an I-message? The student shakes his head no. Mr. Diaz responds, “Right now you are working and what happened yesterday we can’t solve today, that’s why you need to use your I-message when it happened” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, August, 2019). The way Mr. Diaz helped students problem-solve social issues illustrated his conscious awareness of how to build a healthy social environment. Strategically, Mr. Diaz recognized and valued the contributions of his students in various communal activities, such as when he asked students to name sounds, letters, numbers, and sight words in daily oral reading. His communication technique varied in tone and expressions according to the English language development, needs, and situations of the students. Mr. Diaz also applied situational awareness to motivate and redirect his students, as demonstrated in the various check-in accounts:

The teacher regrouped the students, “I am going to have to use my instrument because people are not listening.” The teacher models an “I Message” “Hey class, I feel sad when you make a lot of noise and take away learning time” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

The teacher calls on individual students to share the sound of the different vowels. Some students were shouting and rushing to provide the directed student the answer, Mr. Diaz reminded the class, “Let her think before you give her the answer” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019)



The teacher shows a sample of a student's completed work. He said, "This makes my heart swell up and makes me happy because I know this student is responsible. Class, does it make you proud of your friend, Aiden?" Mr. Diaz asks the class (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019)

Regardless of the social circumstances, Mr. Diaz encouraged students to assume responsibilities through an open communicative context regardless of their language fluency. He worked with native Spanish speakers to communicate frustration, resolve conflict, or request help. His facilitation of discourse between peers allowed students to manage equitable participation in the problem-solving process. In one exchange where the student struggled with a task, Mr. Diaz allowed the student, Julissa, an English language learner, to individually attempt the task before adding a layer of support, as noted, "Mr. Diaz noticed a student helping a student, "Let's let Julissa do it herself." The student refused to do it by herself. Mr. Diaz then asked a peer to help Julissa" (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

On the academic front, Mr. Diaz reached out to all students. In fact, he recognized deficits as learning opportunities and understood the power in students motivating students. In one example, he reminded a student to refocus and motivated her to continue learning, "Jayla, Jayla, let's focus. You said you are ready to learn." Then the teacher works with the student individually to complete her task (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019).

He engaged in active teaching in both verbal and physical interactions. Every student in his classroom received a different level of support based on their academic needs, such as, "The teacher circulates the classroom to ensure that all students begin their morning work. The teacher announces, "You have seven minutes, I am looking around." The

teacher continues to circulate around the classroom and check in with different students (Diaz, Classroom Observation, November, 2019).

Mr. Diaz interacted with his students in the context of the lesson by personalizing individual needs such as supporting the students' English language development, building background knowledge, or activating content schemas. He motivated his students' creativity and honored progress. During an informal check for understanding, Mr. Diaz asked all his students to "chin it" by showing their whiteboard to share their progress. In a classroom observation, Mr. Diaz celebrated a range of effort as indicated:

The teacher pulls up two whiteboards, one board was blank, and one board was messy. The teacher asks the class "Which board give it a try?" The class acknowledges the messy board. The teacher explains why the messy board did some work versus the blank whiteboard. The teacher continues to recognize effort among the students (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

In addition to motivating students to recognize effort and progress, Mr. Diaz also taught students equitable participation when he redirected a frequent volunteer to work on honoring turn-taking in the classroom, "A student shares "I didn't get a turn." Mr. Diaz responds, "Does everybody get a turn every time?" The class collectively chants, "No" (Diaz, Classroom Observation, October, 2019). This example indicated that Mr. Diaz focused on celebrating progress and honoring equitable participation. He recognized the importance of preventing over-participation and used student examples to teach social skills. Mr. Diaz also personalized his motivation to correct classroom behaviors. He often shared his feelings followed by a reminder of the expected behavior. The reminder became more personalized and personal with the public share of Mr. Diaz's feeling, as he

shared, “I am getting a little sad when I call your name, I want to hear one voice only” (Diaz, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

To conclude, Mr. Diaz’s motivational moves and encouragement improved the quality of discourse from student to student and student to teacher. He held high expectations for his students and modeled his expectations. His intentional acts and purposeful execution allowed for active participation among his students. With his situational awareness, over 20 years of teaching kindergarten students, and understanding their developmental needs, Mr. Diaz motivated and encouraged his students to bring out their learning potential.

**Mutual investors.** From the start of the school year, Mr. Zhu made a mutual investment with his students to co-construct a classroom community. As partners in the development of a classroom community, the students became creators for classroom procedures. On a daily basis, Mr. Zhu reviewed the schedule and agenda and allowed the students to question daily events and activities:

The teacher reviews the instructional outcome for the class, “Today, we are continuing to develop our character work.” The teacher waits for students to take out their previous assignment. “Whisper to your neighbors, what have we learned about characters so far.” While the students discuss in partners, the teacher helps a student who arrived late. He asks about her morning and if she would like breakfast (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Mr. Zhu’s distinction between the schedule and agenda for the day served as motivation and encouragement for the students. The schedule organized the timeframes for content areas whereas the agenda detailed the learning objectives under each subject matter. In our conversation, Mr. Zhu explained the fluidity within his schedule, “The agenda is not a script, we might spend additional time in one area and that’s fine, I adjust

my pace of instruction to the needs of my students.” (Zhu, Personal communication, October, 2019).

Mr. Zhu hoped that his students did not see the written agenda on the white board as a stopwatch but as a checkpoint for their learning. He built in active participation opportunities to check for understanding in various format: one-on-one, with a small group, or as a whole class. As a means to incorporate all students in the active learning process, Mr. Zhu leveled his participation question for all students to participate, as demonstrated in three variety of questions, “Javier, I want to see you participate, please.” “Miranda, can you add to what David shared?” “Would you like to share where we can start?” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, August, 2019). The leveled questions indicated Mr. Zhu’s modification to equitably ensure whole-class participation. Additionally, the teacher tried to incorporate students’ contributions and consolidated collective ideas, as demonstrated, “The teacher continues to write with the students and gathers students’ ideas, charting them as the students orally shared with the whole class” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

As the research indicated, caring, trust, optimism, and respect support the development of authentic relationships between the classroom teacher and students (Rogers, 1999; Shaw & Siegel, 2010). Mr. Zhu devoted himself to craft students’ experiences that included elements of care and exercises to build and gain trust. He modeled this approach by including all students in his classroom community. Absent students, early finishers, and late arrivals received varying levels of support. The varied

scaffolding levels revealed the teacher’s intention and initiative to include all students in the learning process were captured in a series of ways Mr. Zhu supported his students:

The teacher checks in with students who were absent and shared what papers/assignments they missed out. The teacher checks in with a student who is finishing up and provided targeted and guided support. Teacher circulates the classroom to monitor and check in on the student's progress. Teacher collaborates with a student (odd number out of a pair) and allowed wait time for students to share ideas (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Mr. Zhu also utilized various ways of incorporating students into classroom participation, such as random calling to check for understanding such as, “The teacher circulates with a can of popsicle sticks and asks students to draw names for participation. He carefully selects students exhibiting non-engaging or fidgety behaviors” (Zhu, Classroom Observation, September, 2019).

Examples such as the popsicle sticks showed his experience in getting all students to participate whether the task related to a routine or to instructional content. Mr. Zhu was knowledgeable about observing his students and intently determined to motivate and engage students.

### **Comparative Analysis for Central Theme 3: Teachers’ Encouragement and Motivational Moves Affect Student Participation and Community Cohesion.**

Research indicates the need to establish “shared conditions” and “shared needs” to develop contexts for engagement (Borg, 2004, p. 275). The shared conditions and shared needs ranged in development, encouragement, and level of motivation by the teachers. In comparing the teachers’ motivational moves, Mr. Zhu had 10% of the total codes, Mr. Diaz had 9% of the total codes, and Ms. Maxwell had 6% of the total codes.

Theoharis (2007) stated that under a system of compliance, students with disabilities (SWD) experience exclusion and marginalization from the learning experience. Ms. Maxwell's motivational moves and encouragements were based on her students' adherence to classroom routines and procedures. During instructional interaction, the limited range depth of knowledge questioning from Ms. Maxwell revealed her lack of comfort in allowing students to freely extend their thinking or take control of the discussion process. Ms. Maxwell went against Zhou's view of community as a "coalition detection system" where individuals can challenge preconceptions (Zhou, 2015, p.56). Ms. Maxwell's approach allowed for a student-proof environment where every process and procedure had a preplanned course of execution.

On the other hand, Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz understood that the natural tendency to challenge preconceptions can happen within a community. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz motivated their students to be independent individuals through the various opportunities shared within the classroom. Though the three teachers enforced routines and procedures to sustain focus and engagement, the teachers' systems of implementation varied. Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz's system worked with the students as Ms. Maxwell's system worked when her students were following her established norms.

## **Conclusion**

The three teachers' development of their classroom environment was based on their intentionality, invitational strategies, and the overall classrooms design. The study noted positive and negative experiences when teachers publicly acknowledged students within the classroom community. The messaging and context behind each acknowledgment

dictated how students participated, engaged, and internalized the learning process. Similarly, how teachers built relationships was factored into personalized and non-personalized contexts. The quality of the relationships mattered when teachers personalized toward individual students or small groups.

The observed school showed a synchronized system between various stakeholders. Each teacher intentionally included all students within their classroom community practice. The classroom teacher coordinated effort with the special education specialist and paraeducator to ensure inclusive practices. Ms. Maxwell noted the coordination between the classroom teacher and the integrated services (special education) teacher occurred in a weekly meeting, “We discussed support plan and accommodations for students with an IEP on a weekly basis” (Maxwell, Teacher Interview, September, 2019). The coordination between the teacher, special education teacher, and paraeducators revealed the intentional integration of services to meet the students’ needs. For example, the special education teacher and classroom teacher have designated instructional planning time together to address SWD needs. In addition, special education teachers met with paraeducators to provide student updates with regards to behavior, progress, social needs, and overall wellness as expressed by Mr. Zhu, “What is helpful is meeting with the paraeducator and integrated service teacher to ensure consistent support for students with an IEP” (Zhu, Teacher Interview, October, 2019). Since Mr. Diaz did not have students with an IEP in his kindergarten classroom, he utilized the integrated service teacher to provide support with students who exhibited social and emotional challenges atypical of kindergarten aged students, “We (integrated teacher) and I work to design

behavioral support plan to support students who are underdeveloped in their developmental needs” (Diaz, Teacher Interview, September, 2019). The coordination between the different team members validated the intent and invitational design to support all students.

The works of Shaw and Siegel (2010) and Rogers (1999) shared how attentive and affective elements of care, trust, optimism, and respect aid in the establishment of an authentic relationship between teacher and students. The three teachers demonstrated varying levels of care, trust, optimism, and respect toward the students. The varying levels revealed a different construction of classroom community environment. The levels of care also differed among the teachers, as Ms. Maxwell’s care tendency revolved around students following classroom routines and procedures. Mr. Zhu’s and Mr. Diaz’s care met the students within their area of needs, whether the need came from the academic or social-emotional perspective. The observations among the three teachers revealed how teachers’ encouragement and motivational moves influenced how students participated and the level of cohesion within a community.



## **Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This dissertation examined teachers' actions and behaviors as they constructed classroom communities. Classroom experiences constructed with teachers and students allow for the acceptance of belonging, trust, and safety (Mreiwed et al., 2017). This research used a case study design to explore how three teachers in a full inclusion classroom constructed and maintained their classroom community. I found that two of the three teachers utilized invitational approaches in their relationship-building to demonstrate care, trust, and belonging. A classroom community will not be inclusive unless a teacher is intentional with how they construct the students' environment.

The key findings in this research indicate that personalization, intentional invitation, and relationship-building influence a sense of belonging in the classroom community. The behaviors carried out by the teacher lay the groundwork building a cohesive classroom community. This chapter details the discussion with regards to Invitational Theory application in a full inclusion classroom, a discussion on the links between the classroom community and Invitational Theory, implications for school administrators and policymakers, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion to the research.

### **Discussion on Invitational Theory Application in the Classroom**

The framework behind this present study focused on full inclusion classrooms and specific teacher behaviors that built the classroom community. Invitational Theory links the teacher's invitational design with the teacher's intention. Invitational Theory defines five pillars that support inclusive relationship building (Purkey & Novak, 2008). These five pillars established in Purkey and Novak's work were modified in Table 9 to illustrate

the pillars required to create an inviting classroom environment. It is the teacher's responsibility to implement these pillars into their classroom.

Table 9

*Five Pillars of Invitational Theory*

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1. Students are able, valuable, and responsible
  2. Community building is a collaborative and cooperative activity
  3. Community building is a product in the making
  4. Students possess untapped potential in all areas
  5. Students' potential can be achieved by places, policies, programs, processes, and people.
- 

*Note.* Adapted from Purkey & Novak (1996)

Although the teachers were never directly exposed to the five pillars, the teachers' classroom designs closely aligned with the priorities illustrated in Invitational Theory. Each teacher adjusted their design to create accommodating classroom procedures and norms that were inclusive for all students. Although the observation period did not present teachers' targeted intervention for SWD, the whole class teaching method introduced skills that helped all students regulate emotions, develop prosocial behavior, and maintain cooperative relationships. Teachers used their words and actions to acknowledge and affirm their students' academic contributions and personal involvement in the classroom. The teacher observational codes organized the various ways teachers commended their students' effort. These commendations included individual personalization, public acknowledgment, and relationship building.

The observation periods also demonstrated how community building evolved as a collaborative and cooperative activity. Teachers in the study structured their environment for students to collaborate through group discussions, "I messages," and guided discourse using sentence frames. Students' physical classrooms also included classroom posters to

remind students of group expectations, advocacy strategies, and responsibilities of team members. These opportunities highlighted pedagogical care practices to generate a student community focused on kindness (Omrod, 2006). The teachers also influenced a sense of belonging by creating an environment of trust and safety. All teachers started their day by greeting their students in a personalized manner. Each morning, Ms. Maxwell gave her students the option of a fist pump, high five, handshake, or hug. Mr. Diaz and Mr. Zhu lined their students at the door and greeted each student as they walked into the classroom. In Ms. Maxwell's and Mr. Zhu's class, the special education teacher met with the students on a few occasions and greeted the students. These community norms became classroom routines to create a relationship-rich environment.

Invitational Theory also addresses bringing out the potential among individuals. Among the teachers observed, Mr. Diaz's and Mr. Zhu's environment emphasized the power in student-centered teaching. Students were given opportunities to co-construct classroom procedures such as sharing ways to collaborate and exchange ideas. The power of building classroom communities requires teachers to make an intentional effort at the start of the school year. As an administrator, I witnessed the struggle teachers experienced without a consistent classroom community when conducting evaluative formal observations. The lack of a student's voice, relationship building, and personal connection within a classroom community result in higher discipline referrals from teachers. Based on my observations, students in a classroom without a community structure lose significant instructional time due to corrective feedback, redirections, and refocusing actions. For these reasons, the development of a classroom community as a

collective investment increases positive relationship building, reduces procedure corrective feedbacks, and enhances social development.

**Full-inclusion as it relates to invitational theory.** Within this research, the five P's in Invitational Theory (People, Places, Policies, Program, and Processes) were applied in a full inclusion classroom to understand the relationships between the five P's and a full-inclusion model (Purkey, 1996).

To align the five P's with a full inclusion classroom, the classroom serves as a "place" and the teachers as the "people" and the full inclusion program as a "program/policy" and classroom community building as the "process." This study specifically examined the process of how classroom community building was represented from a full inclusion service model. Collectively, as a service model, an intentional and well-implemented full-inclusion model fulfills ideologies, practices, and values outlined in Invitational Theory.

The commonality between the three participants was their experience in a full-inclusion district. All three teachers have only taught in a full-inclusion district. Thus, their understanding of alternative models for special education has been limited to a full-inclusion model. Beyond the classroom, the school also adopted positive behavioral intervention support (PBIS) program to promote positive relationship building. At the beginning of the school year, during pre-service teacher workdays, the district provided training for all teachers to be familiar with positive behavioral support.

The collaboration among the teachers (classroom teacher and integrated service teachers) indicated the ongoing commitment for the students' "triangle of success"

(Jacobson et al., 2011). To successfully achieve the “triangle of success,” teachers have incorporated inclusive practices to accommodate students’ emotional, physical, and mental needs (Jacobson et al., 2011). In summary, the combination of the teachers’ experience in a full-inclusion service model, the school positive behavioral program, the district’s commitment pre-service training, and team cohesion to address students’ needs show how the Ps in Invitational Theory combined to build a classroom community.

### **Student-Centered Environment**

In order to construct an environment that allows for student-centered teaching, teachers go through a classroom cultural shift (Wolfe et al., 2013). Under such a cultural shift, teachers provide students different ways to address challenges, raise awareness, and establish connections with each other (Wolfe et al., 2013). Additionally, classroom cultural shifts allow teachers to explore new ways of working, understand differences and togetherness (Mreiwed et al., 2017). This research suggests that effective classroom communities require teachers to adjust practices that are reflective of students’ identities and experiences. Since the observation period occurred within the first 2 months of school, teachers dedicated time to build rapport with their students. The teachers made an effort to build relationships with their students by holding daily morning meetings, daily student greetings, and daily check-in-check-out procedures for students who required additional motivation and encouragement. During the first four observations, the classroom observation codes focusing on motivation, relationship building, and personalization were frequent in Mr. Diaz’s and Mr. Zhu’s classroom.

According to Davis et al., (2012), co-regulated classrooms allowed for the construction of classroom rules through the negotiation of norms between students and teachers. The student-centered environment allowed students to be invested in their learning environment. Under the negotiation of norms, Mr. Zhu allowed students to develop classroom norms and procedures. These routines and norms were practiced frequently in the whole class setting. Teachers also assigned students specific roles and responsibilities to support classroom management and routines. For example, at the kindergarten level, Mr. Diaz's assignment of scouts as student leaders allowed students to recognize their peers' positive behaviors. Mr. Zhu's and Mr. Diaz's co-regulated classrooms instilled a sense of inclusion and belonging within their students

The observation period also revealed the practice of a self-regulated classroom, where Ms. Maxwell served as the conduit to help students understand how they learn, monitor progress, and achieve goals (Davis et al., 2012). Ms. Maxwell's self-regulated classrooms focused on identifying goals for instruction, monitoring for efficacy, and helping students to comply with classroom rules and routines. While Ms. Maxwell's approach was different from Mr. Zhu and Mr. Diaz, her overall community goal of student cooperation and learning did not allow for students to construct their environment. As such, the co-regulated and self-regulated classrooms revealed two different approaches to obtain student-centered environments.

### **Implications for School Districts and Administrators**

The significant findings of this research reaffirmed the importance of classroom community construction. The central themes in this research, along with current

research, suggest that the implementation of classroom community will develop human values and positive prosocial skills (Keddie, 2011; Lang 2006 Ormrod, 2006). In personal interviews with participating teachers, teachers requested tailored professional development on positive behavioral intervention and classroom support. These teachers' requests require school districts to develop and provide targeted professional development learning to expand social-emotional learning strategies.

When districts provide adequate training and tailored professional development, teachers gain new skills to offer a spectrum of accommodations and interventions for their students (Berry & Petrin, 2011). Targeted training supports teachers in addressing the needs of their students and, as a result, helps to improve the overall classroom community (Guskey, 2002). From teacher interviews in this research, teachers revealed that previous differentiated training impacted their ability to address student behavioral needs. Additionally, the three teachers expressed needing professional training on topics such as social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, engagement in learning, and cultural competency.

The California Standards of Teaching Practices (CSTP) Standard 2 focuses on "creating and maintaining effective learning environments for student learning" (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). The standard outlines the school and teacher's responsibility to create a caring environment that reflects diversity, encouragement, and, productive interaction. More specifically, CSTP Standard 2.6 notes, "Employing classroom routines, procedures, norms, and supports for positive behavior to ensure a climate in which students can learn" (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). Standard 2.6 was demonstrated through

the various approaches that teachers in this research adopted in their classrooms. Additionally, another implication consisted of how to support teachers to achieve expectations outlined in Standard 2. Standard 2 expects school districts and administrators to monitor the students' environment as a condition of learning. The implication for school administrators is finding proper evaluative criteria to assess teachers' creation and maintenance of student community.

### **Implications for Curriculum Leaders**

As noted, the implications for school districts and administrators involve strategic professional development, structured interventions, and the challenge to meet Standard 2 in the California Standards of Teaching Practices. With help from curriculum leaders to adopt classroom community strategies and social-emotional learning, these practices can improve the classroom culture for students. This research revealed that teachers' intentional classroom community design takes into account the investment of students' social well-being. In order to ensure the social-emotional well-being of students, the Department of Education needs to implement a curriculum that supports classroom community building and invitational practices. In California, State Superintendent Tom Torlakson has outlined guidelines for Social Emotional Learning (Torlakson, 2018, p. 1). The guidelines need to become mandates to ensure social-emotional learning functions as an integrated practice within preschool and K-12 education. The outcomes of social-emotional learning allow students to maintain emotional management, positive relationship building, and responsible decision making (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). The effort to achieve the outcomes of social-emotional learning can be seen in the



construction of a classroom community. I believe that when the guidelines are adopted and implemented as mandates, schools experience a positive impact on the quality of social interaction through community building practices.

Administrators have witnessed the struggle teachers experience without a consistent and nurturing classroom community (Kindelan, 2011). The lack of classroom community construction creates an unpredictable environment, which results in higher discipline referrals from teachers. Additionally, the lack of community building devalues positive relationships and depersonalizes learning. Two of the three observed teachers experienced the "apprenticeship of observation" through their personal educational experience (Borg, 2004, p. 56). Within the apprenticeship, teachers entered the teaching profession with the belief that managing classrooms was similar to their own experiences (Borg, 2004). As a result, teachers structured students' environments based on their perception of what constitutes a meaningful learning environment (Borg, 2004). Most commonly, teachers design their classroom environments through exposure from their teaching training program (Collie & Perry, 2011). Thus, higher education and credentialing programs need to reexamine and integrate the framework of classroom community and social-emotional learning in the program coursework and field study. These research findings strongly encourage state-level curriculum leaders to implement social-emotional teaching and practices of the classroom community as an integrated K-12 curriculum and a body of coursework in teacher preparation programs.

### **Implications for Teachers**

One implication for teachers includes the balancing of classroom community-building with instructional teaching. Teachers expressed the pressure to align their teaching to the standards-based instructional materials (Williams, Kirst, & Haertel, 2005). The teachers in the observations attributed their community-building experience to the school investment in a behavioral support program. The school adopted a positive behavioral intervention support program and introduced teachers to social bonding routines such as class meetings and collaborative community activities. As such, the teachers expressed that a whole-school behavioral support program allowed them the flexibility and comfort to carry out social activities to build cohesion.

While the teachers had experience in building classroom community due to the school-wide investment in positive behavioral intervention support program, they expressed desire for additional opportunities for professional development. A classroom community cannot be built through a generic formula. Experienced teachers such as Mr. Diaz and Mr. Zhu recognize and adapt their practice to meet the student needs. Due to the unpredictability of student needs, teachers must have management strategies and targeted interventions to address the varying needs (Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009). In personal interviews with participating teachers in this study, the teachers requested tailored professional development on positive behavioral intervention and classroom support.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

One of the foci in this dissertation examined the teachers' invitations and intentions when managing a classroom community. The research focused on the teachers'

intentions and invitational approaches. As a means to understand the teachers' intentions and invitations, interviews were conducted with the teachers. A future study to gather students' responses to the teachers' invitations and intentions could add insight to the current research. Additionally, another limitation within this research included the lack of visible evidence of collaboration among the classroom teacher and the integrated service teacher. Additional research on the coordination and collaboration between classroom teacher and special education teachers on structuring a classroom community can identify on the respective contribution from each teacher. Furthermore, the additional research on coordination between general education classroom teacher and special education teacher can determine which aspect of inclusion impacted the establishment of a classroom community.

This research documented how teachers delivered messages and how the delivery impacted the ways students collaborated, shared, and contributed to the overall class. Though the research did address teachers' management, discourse, and behaviors, research on implicit/explicit behaviors and verbal/nonverbal messages and its effect on the classroom community could be further explored. In a positive community-oriented model, research has demonstrated that students feel respected and valued as a member of the classroom (Jameson & Huefner, 2006). However, future research to align how a classroom community can build cognitive regulations such as attention control, working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility could further highlight the importance of social-emotional learning.

Student engagement with the learning material in a classroom community was not a focus in this study. I recommend future studies examine the link between classroom community and student engagement. Observing students' engagement levels would provide further evidence to support the conclusions of this research. Current research indicated classroom communities are built through students' active construction rather than acquiring knowledge (Bryant, 1999; Davis et al., 2012). In this comparative case study, classrooms with built-in community practices have proactive strategies to resolve social, emotional, and academic issues. However, unstructured classrooms may cause emotional stress for students when procedures and processes have not been put in place to resolve unexpected social conflicts. Additional research on the impact of the unstructured classroom community and its impact on students' engagement and behaviors can validate the need for effective classroom community.

## **Conclusion**

The construction of the classroom community requires teachers to construct positive emotional responses, meaningful and authentic engagement to personalize a student's learning experience (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). Teachers in the study shared that social-emotional teaching and learning help students to improve self-concept, self-worth, and self-esteem. Grade level academic standards and Common Core implementation in education dictate a heavy focus on content learning (teaching standards) contrary to personalized learning (understanding how students learn). While both outcomes of learning are relevant and have a place in education, personalized learning and the construction of classroom community need to be the initial consideration in public

education. As a result, I promote a paradigm shift for schools to adopt and implement social-emotional learning practices within the PK-12 educational system.

The construction of the classroom community in this research links with cooperative learning and social-emotional learning. The three elements of positive interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing under cooperative learning appeared in the classroom community codes (Sellars, 2008). A classroom that aims for authentic personal engagement takes into account the values of self-disclosure, and mutual trust, and provides opportunities for engagement enhancing aspects of inclusiveness (Jameson & Huefner, 2006). As the teachers demonstrated through the effort of seeking commonality and building rapport, the students established relationships with the teacher and their peers. Classrooms with characteristics of trust nurture a deep interconnectedness among participants through a shared ethic of being cared for, supported, respected, and valued (Noddings, 2003).

In order to achieve an equitable classroom environment, educators must reexamine systems of privileges and enact intentional behaviors toward their students. Students cooperatively learn through an environment of belongingness, trust, and safety (Bryant, 1999; Furman, 1998; Klidthong, 2012). Invitational Theory applied in this research highlighted the importance of developing individual potential through intentional relationship building. The aspects of respect, care, and civility were examined within the teachers' four invitational levels (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). The current research's findings indicate relationship building as the core function to achieve a classroom

community. With teachers being purposeful in executing nurturing behaviors, students thrive in a positive classroom environment.

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## Appendix A: Observation Log Charting

*Teacher X*

*Date: xx/xx/xxxx*

Teacher's Action	Behavior Coding
"Because you are not eating, I am going to help you put it away." Said the teacher to reorient the student's attention.	CR RB-P
"3 more minutes to finish breakfast." Said the teacher to the whole class. Teacher continues to circulate to ensure all students are completing their breakfast routine.	CR CR MM
"I am glad you are telling your friend that you are reading your book at home, but right now I want you to finish your breakfast."	RB-P
Teacher notices a student practicing blending sounds and acknowledges, "That's why I love you giving you books so you can practice at home."	MM

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interviewer:

Teacher:

Date:

Thank you for participating in this study. The information gathered in this study will be useful to other educators, administrators, and stakeholders interested in implementing classroom community construction in the schools and classrooms. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and it will be audio-recorded. When completed, you may check the transcription for accuracy. Your responses to all questions between the different sessions will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions?

### Interview Questions for Teacher A + B [1st Interview]

1. What is your current role?
2. How did you get into teaching?
  1. How long have you been teaching?
  2. What grade levels have you taught?
3. Please share your own schooling experience of how your teachers established community in your classroom, to the best of your memory?
4. How do you get to know your students?
  1. What are some considerations you take into account when working with your students?
5. Please share your strategies with regard to the physical construction of your classroom community.
6. What professional training have you received in order to understand social emotional learning, invitational theory, or classroom community building?

### Interview #2

1. How do you invite students to participate (within academic activities and non-academic activities?)
2. Please share a few examples on how you intently worked with a student or a group of students to improve a behavior as a means to improve the classroom community?
3. What systems do you set in place to structure your classroom community?
4. When you encounter a difficult situation in building classroom community and how do you overcome such challenges?
5. How do you build trust with your students?
6. How do you know that you have gained trust from your students?

Interview #3

1. From the 10 observation weeks, how did your community of learners different from the first week to the 10th week?
2. What adjustments did you make in your routines when constructing your classroom community? How do you ensure accountability and maintenance of the routines?
3. How did you prioritize the needs of your students when constructing the classroom community?
4. What is the most challenging aspect when constructing a classroom community?
5. If you were to provide words of advice for new teachers around structuring classroom community, what would you share?

### Appendix C: Observational Comparison Charting

Adult's Behavior	Maxwell	Diaz	Zhu
<b>Self-Concept and Self-Awareness</b>			
Using childrens' names; greeting children on arrival			
Using specific, positive reinforcement for good decisions, actions, and behaviors; recognizing effort (e.g. "I like the way Andre is sitting on his shape!")			
<b>Self-Regulation and Adaptability</b>			
Modeling appropriate self-control (e.g., staying calm, using warm tone of voice)			
Monitoring childrens' behavior and modifying plans when children lose interest in activities			
Using classroom management strategies consistently (e.g., using signals and cues, redirecting, transition songs/activities, timing down, varying speech/intonation)			
<b>Relationships with Others</b>			
Using warm and responsive behavior and caring with children and other adults in the room			
Interacting with individual children, at eye level			
Guiding/coaching reluctant children to play with peers			
Helping children to learn from others, take turns and share (e.g., "after Lila has finished, it's Eli's turn")			
Acknowledging childrens' acts of kindness to others, positive interactions			
<b>Accountability</b>			
Keeping directions to manageable numbers (e.g., 2-3 step directions, 3-4 rules at specific centers/activities)			
Explaining/reinforcing rules, routines and expectations; setting boundaries (e.g., "What do we do during group			

share? That’s right! You wait to hold the ‘my turn to talk’ ball!”)			
<b>Potential Red Flags</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not connecting to individual children; talking only to whole groups</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using negative or mostly directive language (e.g., “stop that!” “be quiet!”); yelling</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No visual/verbal cues about rules/routines</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No planned transition activities/strategies; no anticipation of transition</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Summary</b>  To what extent did adults (teachers, assistants, volunteers) consistently demonstrate skills and competencies to support social and emotional development? What kind of support might the adults need?</p>			

**Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form**  
**Teacher Consent Form**  
**Agreement to Participate in the Project Study**

**STUDY TITLE**

Construction of Classroom Community in a Full-Inclusion District:  
Comparative Case Studies of Elementary School Teachers

Name of Researcher:

Mr. Tri Nguyen, SJSU Doctoral Candidate  
Dr. Allison Briceño, Professor and Chair

Purpose:

This research will document how elementary school teachers build, structure, and maintain classroom community in a full-inclusion district. Specifically, Invitational Theory will be used to investigate the relationship between a full-inclusion school model and construction of classroom community, mainly focusing on the behavior patterns of teachers. The project seeks to impart your classroom community building practices to ensure inviting classroom environment.

The study results and findings will be shared to the dissertation committee as a part of the approved activities. This consent form seeks your approval to share such findings and results from the projects.

Upon your participation consent:

- You will be observed on a regular academic school day with no modifications to your routines, practices, and/or management.
- Data will be collected on ways you ensure students sense of safety, belonging, and trust.
- You will be asked to participate in three interviews, each ranging from 45-60 minutes to further understand your design. The first interview occurs before the observation period, the second interview occurs at the midway point, and the final interview follows the final observation.
- The observations and interviews will be audio recorded to capture all necessary details.
- The observation timeline will begin after the second week of school with a duration of 60 minute per observation.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** The teacher participation in this study is strictly voluntary. The teacher's decision whether or not to participate will not affect their current or future relations with the school or the researcher's institution. If teachers initially decide to participate, they are still free to withdraw at any time.

**Potential Risks:** There is minimal risk associated with this study. Possible risks include anxiety associated with a classroom teaching environment where observations are conducted by the researcher. The researcher will minimize anxiety by providing adequate details on the study with regards to classroom community building. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will assign identification codes in lieu of names and other identifiable information in all documents used for research.

**Potential Benefits:** By participating in the study, the teacher may learn new strategies with regards to classroom community building. Findings from the research will also yield best practices for assisting all teachers to implement procedures and processes within the classroom community construction that support all students.

**Compensation:** There will be no compensation provided for teacher's participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private, locked, and password protected. In any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify the teacher, the classon, the school, and the district. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and only the researcher and advisor will have access to the records.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

- For further information about the study, please contact the researcher:  
Tri Nguyen, [nhattri.nguyen@sjsu.edu](mailto:nhatti.nguyen@sjsu.edu), 408-759-0923
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Bradley Porfilio, Director of Doctoral Programs, San Jose State University at 408-924-4098
- For questions about participants' rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research, San Jose State University at 408-924-2479.

### **Signature**

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to voluntarily participate in the study. The details of the study have been explained to you and that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form, signed and dated by the researcher, to keep for your records.

Participant Signature

The signature of the participant on this document indicates agreement to participate in the project.

Participant's Name

(printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Signature of Person Obtain Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix E: Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code	Definition	Examples in the Classroom
<b>CB –</b> Correcting Behaviors	Occurs when a teacher corrects a student’s behavior that does not comply with a classroom routine or procedure	<p>“All right, on the count of 3, nobody should know if your marker is working because we haven’t opened the marker yet.”</p> <p>“I noticed that the students who were not listening were talking while I was calling different tables for dismissal.”</p>
<b>CFU –</b> Check for Understanding	Teacher intently use ways to determine if a student understood what was taught	The teacher circulates the classroom and reads the problem to the student who needs help
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CFU-P</b>  <b>Check-for-Understanding, Procedures</b>            Assess student’s understanding of classroom procedures, rules, and routines</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You should be on page 3 on the bottom, you should follow along with me.</li> <li>• When asking a student why he did not have his reading log (weekly night homework), “What do you mean your reading log broke?”</li> </ul>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CFU-I</b>  <b>Check-for-Understanding, Instructions</b>            Assess students’ understanding of classroom instruction or curriculum comprehension.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher circulates the classroom and reads the math word problems to the students who need help.</li> <li>• Teacher asked. “Thinking about this boy and the character trait, think about “what did the boy do?”</li> <li>• The teacher calls on individual students to tell the sound of the different vowels.</li> </ul>
<b>CI –</b> Classroom Instruction	The teacher provides the instructional learning aspect	“We have studied the characters in short videos and books.”

<p><b>CR – Classroom Routines</b></p>	<p>Learned rules and daily procedures transferred from the teacher to students</p>	<p>[A student asked the teacher if he can use the restroom.] “You owe me tiger paws (tps), you have two minutes.” [Students who use the bathroom during class time will need to pay 2 tps]</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CRC</b> <b>Classroom Routines - Compliance</b> Routines established for the students to adhere to the classroom rules.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The only thing that should be out is your reading log.</li> <li>• Teacher projects the morning warm-up routine (2 grammar sentences, 2 vocabulary sentences, 3-4 math questions and reading passage with comprehension questions) on the document camera.</li> </ul>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CRE</b> <b>Classroom Routines Enhancement</b> Routines established to improve the conditions and qualities of instruction.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student taps on each student to count to check for daily attendance (Kindergarten)</li> </ul>
<p><b>EE - Environmental Engineering</b></p>	<p>Changes made to the classroom environment</p>	<p>Students sat around in a circle and everyone brought an object to share with the class.</p>
<p><b>EE+ Positive</b></p> <p>Changes to improve the quality and conditions of the existing environment</p> <p>The teacher models an I-message way to give a class an I-message.</p>	<p><b>EE= Neutral</b></p> <p>Changes do not positively or negatively impact the learning conditions of the student.</p> <p>“Highlighters should lay flat.”</p>	<p><b>EE- Negative</b></p> <p>Changes that negatively impact a student’s learning</p> <p>The teacher explains why he had to move a student</p>

<b>IP - Individual Personalization</b>	Modification of a routine, content learning, social behavior individual student.	A special aide teacher comes and releases a student for support
<b>MM – Motivational Move</b>	Recognition of a student’s actions and/or behavior that reflects classroom expectations through verbal/gestures to improve/encourage/excite students	Teacher rewarding student points for the completion of morning warm-up activities.
<b>PA – Public Acknowledgement</b>	Recognizes a student/group for their behavior	I am glad Sergio did not take your advice and made a better choice.
<b>Public Acknowledgement Positive (PA-P)</b>		<b>Public Acknowledgement Negative (PA-N)</b>
<b>E.g.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aiden has a good point, “tv” doesn’t have a vowel. It means that (the word) is shorter for bigger words.</li> </ul>		<b>E.g.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daniel are you with us? Marlyne is he with us? Does your paper look like mine?</li> </ul>
<b>RA – Refocus Action</b>	Deliberate habit to regain students’ attention, regroup the students to devote attention to the current task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“If you can hear my voice, look at my two fingers.” (10/23)</li> </ul>
<b>RB – Relationship Building</b>	Exchanges through words and actions that build trust between the classroom teacher to students.  Instances when the teacher relates to the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher checks in with parents in the morning (in Spanish)</li> <li>Teacher checks in with parents and students with questions about homework or any updates</li> <li>“good morning, good morning, good morning boys and girls... it is 9/18/19”</li> </ul>

	student through verbal exchanges, dialogues, gestures, personal connection, conversation,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher greets students in the morning with a handshake</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship Building - Nonpersonalized (RB-N)</b></p> <p>Relationship capacity does not extend to an undefined individual student (possibly intentional uninviting or intentional uninviting)</p> <p>The teacher brings the book to share with various pairs and check-in for understanding.</p>	<p><b>Relationship Building - Personalized (RB-P)</b></p> <p>Personal connection attempted to establish a feeling of trust, belonging, and acceptance (usually initiated with intention)</p> <p>“Words can sometimes hurt more than a punch.” (reflecting on a problem at recess and sharing to the whole class)</p> <p>“Are you scouting for good behaviors?” The teacher has preselected a student to be a “scout” for good behaviors and give students tiger paws</p>	
<b>Social Adjustments - SA [SA-SE or SA-SM]</b>		
Facilitates public problem-solving to improve communication, interaction, and situation		
SA-SE – Social Engineering	Provides opportunities and a forum for students to interact (whether through discussion or other communicative exchanges)	<p>“I am getting a little sad when I call your name, I want to hear one voice, only.”</p> <p>“Good question Cali, you ask three before you see me. You can ask the person to the left or right and in front of you.”</p> <p>“Who should you worry about? Him or you? This is your work (points to the work) and I want you to get your work done.”</p>

		<p>Remember this is what you need to when you are partner talk</p> <p>Turn and Talk  Look – eye contact  Listen – take a turn  Speak – make sure you are speaking so your partner can hear you  Turn – turn back to the teacher  Wait – wait quietly with a thumb on your chest</p> <p>“It is very important for you to keep your hands to yourself and that you are kind with your words.”</p>
<p><b>SA-SM – Social Modeling</b></p>	<p>Demonstration through gestures, words, and/or interactions/exchanges on how to</p>	<p>Teacher models how to walk out quietly and checks in the student’s line.</p> <p>The teacher models the “I message...” by personalizing an I-message to his class current’s behavior: “Hey class, I feel sad when you make a lot of noise.”</p>