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# Regulating Discourse: How Children With and Without SEND Internalize the Evaluative Framework of Adults

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## Abstract

This study presents a Bakhtinian analysis of discourse among children with Special Educational Needs and Disorders (SEND) in two elementary classrooms, delving into the complicated interaction of voices and perspectives within their communication. The research investigates how the evaluation of peers provides a contextual backdrop for the voices of children with SEND. Conducted as a longitudinal investigation in an English primary school, data were collected over a three-month period to disclose communication dynamics. Notably, the discourse analysis reveals the use of “hybrid constructions” by students, wherein they skillfully blend adult values with their own viewpoints when discussing peers, thus navigating their positioning vis-à-vis institutional norms and their peers. The central question, “Who is taking the lead in the conversation?” undrapes a rich interchange of voices within each dialog excerpt. This interaction encompasses the speaker’s own voice and resonates with reflections of institutional discourse. Importantly, the analysis elucidates how diverse pedagogic discourses contribute to shaping social relationships between teachers and students, as well as amongst the students themselves. By capturing these multifaceted interactions, this study reveals a paramount conduit through which institutional values are communicated and internalized within the discourse of children with SEND. This focused exploration contributes to a nuanced understanding of how children assimilate external voices while communicating and how they forge connections with peers facing unique learning challenges.

## Plain Language Summary

### Understanding the Voices of Children with Special Educational Needs and Disorders (SEND) in Elementary Classrooms: A Study on Communication and Inclusivity

This study’s goal is to explore how children with Special Educational Needs and Disorders (SEND) communicate in elementary classrooms. Using an approach inspired by Bakhtin’s ideas, the study aimed to understand how these children’s voices interact with others and how their peer evaluations play a role. To accomplish this, the researcher observed and collected data over three months in an English primary school. The conversations were carefully analyzed to uncover the way students blend their own ideas with those of adults in what we call “hybrid constructions.” These constructions help them navigate social norms and their relationships with peers. A central question guided this investigation, “Who is leading the conversation?” This question discovered a rich mix of voices in each dialog, including both the individual speaker’s voice and reflections of what the institution values. The findings suggest that various teaching approaches impact the relationships between teachers and students, as well as between students themselves. Children absorb institutional values through these interactions, which shape their understanding of inclusivity. However, it is important to acknowledge the study’s limitations. The study was conducted in one school, and the data collection covered a relatively short period. In conclusion, this study provides insights into the communication experiences of children with SEND. It suggests that creating an inclusive classroom environment goes beyond practical strategies—it is about valuing every voice, fostering personal growth, and

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recognizing diversity. The findings also encourage teachers to reflect on the power dynamics within their classrooms, with the ultimate goal of creating an environment where all voices are heard and respected.

### Keywords

discourse, Bakhtin, special education needs, disorders, inclusion, pedagogy, linguistic ethnography

## Introduction

Inclusive education aims to create equitable learning environments for all students, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disorders (SEND). Traditionally, the focus has been on academic progress, but there is a growing recognition of the need to explore the social aspects of inclusion, especially how students with SEND are positioned and identified in peer interactions and institutional discourse (Wahl et al., 2022).

Historically, research on students with SEND has been predominantly academic-focused, overlooking their socio-emotional development (Hill, 2020). This gap was acknowledged in the 1987 report by the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities (ICLD), which highlighted the challenges faced by students with SEND in forming social relationships (Wahl et al., 2022).

To move beyond the traditional academic-centric focus, inclusive education must encompass not only academic progress but also social interactions, identity formation, and emotional well-being for students with disabilities. This study explores how teachers and peers' position and identify students with SEND. We adopt a sociocultural perspective, considering non-verbal cues and gestures alongside words, enriching our understanding of discourse within inclusive educational environments (Twiner et al., 2021).

While quantitative methods have been prevalent, this study uses linguistic ethnography to delve into qualitative aspects of student experiences. We focus on verbal interactions, social dynamics, and belief systems to provide a holistic understanding of inclusive education challenges and opportunities. Our central question is: "In what ways are students with SEND positioned and identified in mainstream education settings by their teachers and peers?" This question guides our exploration, aiming to shed light on these mechanisms and promote more inclusive and supportive environments (Maine & Čermáková, 2021).

In the following sections, we delve into theoretical foundations, contextualize our study, outline our methodology, and present our findings. Through this analysis, we aim to deepen our understanding of the interplay between discourse, positioning, and identification within inclusive education.

## Bakhtin's Discourse Theory

Utilizing Bakhtin's discourse theory, verbal interactions that shape the context within local discourse communities are analyzed. The research question focuses on how students with SEND are positioned and identified in peer interactions. Bakhtin's discourse theory (Bakhtin, 1981a) underpins this investigation, including dialogism, social languages, authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse, and evaluation. Dialogism, central to this framework, highlights word meanings emerging through interactions among voices and perspectives. This concept is vital for our study because:

1. Collaboratively constructing meanings of students' words impacts the positioning and identification of students with SEND.
2. Negotiating meaning in classroom contexts shapes how students position themselves and their peers.
3. Communication molds learning environments as a social event, emphasizing its importance in education.
4. Dynamic meaning generation through "hybridization" underscores the collaborative nature of research into discourse meanings.

Bakhtin's dialogic views enable us to explore how students' discourse reflects their positioning and identification within the classroom, offering insight into the interplay of discourse, positioning, and identification.

Subsequent sections will delve into Bakhtin's discourse theory concepts, establishing a theoretical framework to investigate students with SEND in inclusive education's social dynamics.

### Hybrid Construction

Bakhtin's (1981a) concept of hybrid construction suggests that an utterance can embody two distinct speech styles, languages, or belief systems within its structure (pp. 304–305). Language evolution, as per Bakhtin, is shaped by hybridization, where two social languages merge in a single utterance (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 358), notably evident in classroom dialogs—inherently heteroglossic. In these dialogs, students blend voices from

teachers and other social groups, shaping their speech with multifaceted perspectives.

In discussions on inclusivity, hybridization emerges prominently. Students draw from diverse voices, incorporating both classroom language and external discourse communities. Their dialog reflects a rich tapestry of experiences and exposure to varied discourse communities, aligning with Kim's (2020) perspective on intercultural communication through language. This interaction between language, culture, and experience enriches their understanding of inclusion.

Translanguaging, as discussed by Zhou (2023), mirrors Bakhtin's hybrid construction. It is a manifestation of heteroglossia, where language converges diverse voices and linguistic repertoires, akin to the coexistence of different speech manners and beliefs within an utterance.

An exemplar of Bakhtin's hybrid construction can be found in Dickens' "Little Dorrit" where subjective and objective opinions coexist within a single passage, illustrating the fusion of distinct voices:

"That illustrious man and great national ornament, Mr. Merdle, continued his shining course. It began to be widely understood that one who had done society the admirable service of making so much money out of it, could not be suffered to remain a commoner. A baronetcy was spoken of with confidence; a peerage was frequently mentioned" (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 306).

Bakhtin's hybrid construction, emphasizing dynamic voice and discourse interaction, aligns with our study's goal to reveal how students with SEND are positioned and identified in classroom contexts.

### *Double-Voiced Discourse*

Central to Bakhtin's framework is "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981a). This concept is closely tied to hybrid constructions and illustrates discourse representing two speakers with distinct intentions. In this complex discourse, a character's direct intention aligns with the author's refracted intention, creating an interaction of voices, meanings, and expressions (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 324).

Double-voiced discourse captures differing viewpoints within a single utterance, facilitating dialogical interactions between contrasting intentions. It allows the voices of both the speaker and the author to harmonize, adding multi-dimensional meaning. For instance, a character's words may convey their immediate intention while echoing the author's broader intent, adding depth and nuanced meaning to the text. This phenomenon is relevant in classroom dialogs, where students' voices converge with institutional intentions, shaping discursive realities (Skaftun & Sønneland, 2021).

In exploring double-voiced discourse, this study recognizes the intricate interplay between students' voices and institutional discourse. This alignment with Bakhtin's concept offers a valuable lens to analyze how students with SEND are positioned and identified in mainstream educational settings.

### *Ventriloquation*

Bakhtin introduces "Ventriloquation," a captivating discursive phenomenon wherein one voice is articulated through a different voice or voice type within social language. In Bakhtin's words, "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 293).

Discourse emerges from the interplay between individual intentions and the voices of others. Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1983) stress the intricate link between discourse and ideology, emphasizing that each utterance carries content, meaning, and significance rooted in ideology. People develop their ideological consciousness by selectively assimilating and appropriating discourse from various voices (Bakhtin, 1981a). This process extends to language acquisition, where individuals incorporate others' voices within their societal circles. Language learning involves re-externalizing modes of discourse, whether through memorization or re-narration in one's words.

Bakhtin's exploration also highlights the relationship between others' discourse and individual behavior, including the conflict between "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse." Authoritative discourse encompasses non-negotiable voices of authority, like teachers or parents, while internally persuasive discourse embodies personal beliefs and values that shape an individual's self within the broader world (Bakhtin, 1981a). Arvaja and Sarja's (2021) study aligns with Bakhtin's perspective, examining how pre-service subject teachers negotiate their identities within various discourses. This study reveals the complex process of identity negotiation through the interplay of ideologies and voices. The evaluation process deeply influences students' socialization into the values and beliefs of their classroom community, particularly evident in how they position their peers with SEND based on their own perspectives and the prevailing values of their environment.

Ultimately, Bakhtin's framework illustrates how discourse serves as a conduit for conveying intentions and contextual influences from previous speakers. It sheds light on how students' identities are shaped through the fusion of voices, ideologies, and discourses. This alignment with the study's objectives provides insights into the dynamics underlying the positioning and identification of students with SEND in mainstream educational settings.

**Table 1.** Students With SEND's Information.

Name	Age (years)	Gender	Disability	Sunny hill school year	Support
Harris	12	M	MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulty)	4/5	TA-In class
Zen	12	M	GDD (Global Developmental Delay)	6	TA-In class
Mary	12	F	D (Dyslexia)	6	TA-In class
Barry	12	M	D (Dyslexia)	6	TA-In class

## Materials and Methods

### Subjects

The study included a group of participants with Special Educational Needs and Disorders (SEND) comprising four 12-year-old students: Harris from year 4/5, and Zen, Mary, and Barry from year 6, all presenting mild to moderate disabilities. The names used in this context are pseudonyms and are presented in (Table 1).

At Sunny Hill School (pseudonym), a UK middle-class village's mainstream school, 122 students aged 5 to 11 years attended. Of these, 17 received School Action Plus support, and 7 had School Action support. Most students were of White British ethnicity, with some from minority backgrounds. Families had a lower socioeconomic status, per 2008 Ofsted data. Students with SEND were integrated into regular classes with classroom assistants and attended separate sessions for Numeracy and Literacy. Selection criteria for students with special needs ensured their cognitive and linguistic capabilities for interviews, recalling events, and class discussions.

In addition, eight students without SEND, aged 11 to 12 years, from years 4/5 and 6 respectively, also participated in the study. Their profiles are outlined in (Table 2).

Both the students with and without SEND participated in focus groups and lesson observations, with written consent from their parents. All participants have been anonymized using pseudonyms.

### Procedure

**Data Collection.** This study explores student interactions in diverse settings, including classrooms and non-classroom areas. It analyzes student-teacher interactions during various tasks and extends data collection to corridors, dining

**Table 2.** Students Without SEND's Information.

Name	Age (years)	Gender	Sunny hill school years
Larry	11	M	4/5
Paul	11	M	6
Daisy	11	F	6
Bill	11	M	6
Tom	12	M	4/5
Lisa	12	F	6
Stephen	12	M	6
Marcus	12	M	6

**Table 3.** Summary of Data Collection Approach.

Data type	Sources
Lesson observations	Classroom settings, various contexts
Focus groups	Classroom settings
Field notes	Classroom settings, various contexts
Informal interviews	Various contexts
Document analysis	Classroom materials, student work

areas, assembly spots, and the playground. This comprehensive approach uncovers both structured classroom interactions and subtle informal exchanges in different spaces. The investigation specifically focuses on understanding conversation dynamics, participants' motivations, the formation of social circles, and behavior evaluations involving labels. Additionally, it explores how children with SEND encounter labeling in their interactions and its impact on their positioning and identification.

The communication context in year 4/5 and 6 classes is significantly shaped by teacher strategies and learning activities, impacting interaction patterns among students. Table 3 summarizes the collected data types and sources, offering an overview of the data collection approach at Sunny Hill School for years 4/5 and 6.

This multifaceted data collection strategy (Table 4) was strategically designed to capture the diverse dimensions of student communication and their experiences within both the structured and unstructured educational spaces.

**Observations of Lessons.** To deeply grasp classroom dynamics, field notes and audio during lessons were meticulously recorded. This combined approach aimed to thoroughly document the learning environment, covering various activities. We wanted to uncover possible variations in how teachers handled students with SEND, especially compared to mixed-ability classes later in the day. This method served a dual purpose: it sought differences in teaching methods for students with SEND and offered insights into their inclusion experiences. Morning sessions at Sunny Hill concentrated on subjects like Literacy and Mathematics, fostering personalized learning. Afternoons featured mixed-ability group tasks, providing insights into collaborative interactions. Observing both settings enriched our understanding of how

**Table 4.** Data From Sunny Hill School, Years 4/5 and 6.

School	In-lesson observations	In-lesson, conversations with SEND and without SEND students	Focus groups with SEND and non-SEND students
Sunny Hill	12-Year 4/5 11-Year 6	6-Year 4/5 6-Year 6	1 group non-SEND-Year 4/5 (Larry; Paul Daisy; Bill) 1 group non-SEND—Year 6 (Tom; Lisa; Stephen; Marcus) 1 group SEND-Year 4/5 and 6 (Harris; Zen; Mary; Barry)

students with SEND are positioned and identified during different instructional contexts.

*In-Class, Tape-Recorded Conversations.* Recording conversations during mixed-ability tasks, spanning subjects like Mathematics, Geography, Art, and ICT for year 4/5 students and Science and Art for year 6 students, deepened our understanding of interactions among students, including those with SEND. To ensure authenticity, conversations were tape-recorded approximately 1 month after the study's start, allowing students to acclimate to the researcher's presence.

This data collection method was instrumental in capturing genuine dialogs, shedding light on communication patterns and interaction subtleties. Focusing on mixed-ability tasks naturally revealed how communication and positioning dynamics unfolded when students of varying abilities collaborated. Integrating lesson observations and taped conversations strengthened our empirical foundation, providing a comprehensive view of social dynamics in both individual and collaborative learning settings, aligning with our research questions and objectives.

*Focus Groups.* This study employed two focus groups: one consisting of students without SEND from years 4/5 and 6 and the other comprising students with SEND from the same age groups, chosen due to limited participant numbers. These groups aimed to explore students' perspectives regarding communication, positioning, and identification dynamics. Participants, aged 11 to 12 years, were thoughtfully selected to examine their school interactions during a crucial stage of social development (López de Aguilera et al., 2020). Each focus group comprised four students, allowing for dynamic interactions, debates, and collaborative dialog (Rinkus et al., 2021). A topic guide guided discussions on themes related to inclusion without posing direct questions, ensuring authenticity. Findings were cross-referenced with observations and recorded interactions, enriching the examination of communication, positioning, and identification dynamics from the participants' viewpoints. Focus group interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, revealing recurring themes and patterns, which served as the foundation for

analysis categories, especially “peer communication” (López de Aguilera et al., 2020).

The inclusion of focus groups facilitated a thorough exploration of students' viewpoints, strengthening the investigation into the positioning and identification experiences of students with SEND within their educational context.

## Analysis

This study meticulously analyzes communication dynamics among four 12-year-old students with SEND and eight peers without SEND from years 4/5 and 6. To grasp these intricate patterns fully, we explore interactions within their unique historical, cultural, and institutional context (Zhou, 2023). Thus, Linguistic Ethnography (LE) is an analytical method, for illuminating subtle meanings negotiated in children's conversations both inside and outside the classroom. Children use discourse to understand their social environment, fulfill communication needs, express emotions, and build interpersonal connections (Emery et al., 2021). This framework effectively addresses our research questions and objectives, providing insights into complex communication processes related to positioning and identification experiences of students with SEND and their non-SEND peers.

## Linguistic Ethnography (LE)

This section explores the foundations of Linguistic Ethnography (LE) as it relates to the study's focus on verbal interactions among students in inclusive education. LE captures nuanced linguistic interactions in inclusive classrooms, providing insight into students' social positioning and identification processes (Maine & Čermáková, 2021). LE reveals the symbiotic relationship between language and social reality, making it suitable for examining classroom interactions. Ethnography contextualizes the study, while linguistics adds analytical depth (Zhou, 2023).

This approach treats the classroom as a unique cultural domain, analyzing how language constructs social identities and phenomena within it (Kim, 2020).

Ethnographic methods, such as field notes and transcriptions, capture the richness of interactions (Twiner et al., 2021). LE facilitates an exploration of interactions between students with SEND and their peers, uncovering how classroom discourse influences their positioning and identification. It aligns with the study's objectives, revealing how communication and discourse shape these processes (Maine & Čermáková, 2021).

### ***Data Analysis Process: A Qualitative Grounded Theory Approach***

The systematic analysis of data adhered to qualitative research methodologies, with a specific focus on grounded theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The analysis initiated with open coding, a process involving the categorization of data into non-hierarchical free nodes. This initial step aimed to identify similarities and differences within the data and group these instances into emerging categories. Subsequently, these categories were hierarchically organized into tree nodes, facilitating a systematic exploration of the data. Open coding involved an in-depth examination of the data, questioning its content, and comparing various incidents, events, and phenomena to reveal patterns and relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:74).

Axial coding followed, enabling consideration of how categories and subcategories interconnected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This phase facilitated the exploration of connections between emerging concepts, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying data structure. The iterative process of moving between open and axial coding, coupled with the naming of nodes/categories, ensured a meticulous and reflective approach to analysis (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a).

The software NVivo played a crucial role during the coding process, aiding in data management and organization. It enabled efficient navigation between open coding and deeper analytical exploration. Through continuous questioning, comparison, and thematic development, the analysis proceeded systematically, guided by grounded theory principles (Yu & Smith, 2021).

### ***Memo Writing***

During qualitative data analysis, theoretical questions, comments, and reflective notes were meticulously recorded as memos. These memos preserved analytical insights, captured thoughts during interviews, focus groups, field note reviews, and photograph examinations, and explored the significance of emerging codes and categories. Memos allowed further exploration of code meanings, their interconnections, and relevance to broader themes (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022b).

Each node/category had an accompanying memo outlining why specific text segments were included and explaining the category naming process. This practice ensured transparency throughout coding and analysis, documenting how codes and categories evolved (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data analysis followed a rigorous, systematic approach, including coding, categorization, and theoretical insight development. Open and axial coding, along with memo writing, facilitated a thorough exploration of communication dynamics in the positioning and identification of students with SEND and their non-SEND peers in inclusive classrooms.

### ***Multimodal Analysis***

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of communication, our analysis extended beyond verbal language to encompass non-verbal cues, gestures, facial expressions, and spatial arrangements. The utilization of multimodal analysis (Twiner et al., 2021) enriched our examination by capturing the holistic nature of communication in the classroom. Aligned with the linguistic ethnography framework, this approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how various modes of communication intersected to shape the social interactions and positioning of students.

### ***Validation***

To enhance rigor, member checking was employed, sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate themes (López-Zerón et al., 2021). To fortify our analysis, we used triangulation, cross-referencing findings from lesson observations, recorded conversations, and focus groups to validate interpretations (Dockweiler & Diamond, 2022).

These methods enabled a comprehensive exploration of communication dynamics and deepened our understanding of how students with SEND are positioned and identified in inclusive education. They uncovered themes in explicit and implicit interactions, revealing the complex processes in inclusive classrooms.

### ***Data Analysis***

The analysis in this section delves into the discourse of students with and without SEND, shedding light on how they talk about SEND, and whether these conversations can be seen as instances of double-voiced discourse.

### ***SEND and Perceptions of Academic Capability***

The exploration of students with and without SEND's discourse sheds light on how differentiation and ability grouping contribute to the construction of self-perceptions among students with SEND (Excerpt 1).

**Excerpt 1.** Students With SEND (Year 4/5, 6).

- 
- Barry: *Because I'm rubbish at literacy because I can't... because my brain isn't very... I'm not good at literacy, but I'm okay with Maths. It's just the signs... the signs in the literacy I'm rubbish at, I have trouble with.* 3
- Zen: *I feel okay. It's just that... sometimes when you have learning difficulties; you wish that you were never born with them, never born with it.* 5.
- Harris: *I didn't know that I had dyslexia until I moved here. I didn't know I had a problem until my mum told me a week ago.* 7
- 

These excerpts resonate with the study's objective to understand how communication patterns influence self-identity among students with and without SEND.

One could be forgiven for thinking these children were discussing a serious *illness* (5). Barry's expression of struggling with literacy indicates how academic difficulties can shape self-evaluation (1, 3). Zen's sentiment of wishing he didn't have learning difficulties accentuates the impact of academic challenges on self-esteem (5). Harris' revelation of learning about his dyslexia through his mother emphasizes external factors in shaping self-concept (7). These insights correspond with the research question exploring the influence of academic experiences on students' self-perceptions. Parents and school are the two most significant factors in children's lives (Erikson, 1964) and can affect whether children have high, realistic, or low expectations in a variety of social situations (Woodgate et al., 2020).

In the same vein, students' interactions with their peers are intertwined with their perceptions of academic competence (Excerpt 2). This analysis aligns with the study's objective to investigate the impact of peer interactions on self-perceptions of students with SEND.

**Excerpt 2.** Students With SEND (Years 4/5 and 6).

- 
- Harris: *No. Like we can when he says "you can sit anywhere you want" but she\* picks the morning places and stuff like that.*
- Barry: *Because all the time she wants us to sit with some people that will help, that are intelligent, so she puts like the clever people with the not so clever people 4 so... 5.*
- Mary: *They're probably the people you're not going to actually work with but...*
- 

Note. \*She: the teacher.

Barry distances from "clever" students, revealing how ability grouping affects self-perception (4). Mary's reluctance to interact with peers in lower ability groups links peer dynamics and self-efficacy (6). Harris' discontent with seating arrangements mirrors classroom practices' impact on self-concept (1). This discussion aligns with

the objective of examining classroom structures in shaping self-identity.

Barry's actions signify low expectations, separating himself from "clever" peers (4). Mary's response implies reluctance to interact with peers she won't work with (6), suggesting how low ability grouping influences performance and socialization. Harris expresses dissatisfaction, contrasting what they could do with what happens (1). Barry highlights teachers' seating arrangement practices, effective for learning but rigid in ability differentiation, as teachers noted in interviews.

**Peers' Perspectives and Hierarchies**

Excerpt (3) offers insights into the perspectives of students without SEND regarding their peers with SEND (year 6). This discussion pertains to the study's objective of exploring how students without SEND perceive their peers with SEND.

**Excerpt 3.** Students Without SEND (Year 6).

- 
- Tom: *In the afternoon they come in and do stuff with us, like topics and stuff because they're probably a bit easier for them.*
- Lisa: *Yes.*
- Stephen: *I think it's like the maths and English level that they sort of struggle on and the whole reading and writing prospect.* 5
- Marcus: *Barry is quite a good reader.*
- Lisa: *Yes, he likes reading.*
- Stephen: *And he's quite a good storyteller as well because he makes a lot of comics and things.*
- Lisa: *Yes, he likes comics and stuff.* 10
- Tom: *He isn't bad at English it's just the maths I think he struggles with.*
- Lisa: *Yes, but in a way, they struggle, but in a way they don't because they're not struggling at their level, they're struggling at year 6 level. But there's only one person in there, well two, who have 15 got something wrong with them. Because Jo has got epilepsy and Katie has got dyslexia, so I think we're a pretty good class really.*
- Tom: *Yes. I think really, I think the ideal that Miss Bam would want is everybody would work hard and behave. I think that would be 20 like a perfect lesson to her.*
- Lisa: *Yes, but it doesn't really happen like that.*
- 

The next discussion from the three focus groups of children with and without SEND from years 4/5 and 6 illustrates the students' personal meanings as they evaluated their own and their peers' attitudes.

Tom, Stephen, Marcus, and Lisa's conversation highlights awareness of differentiated instruction for SEND students (5) and reflects societal norms through their use of labels (16, 17). Emphasizing Barry's strengths in reading, storytelling, and comic design connects to peer evaluations and perceptions. They perceived peers' struggles



in Maths and English due to separate SEND lessons, accepting the hierarchical system, *social ordering* (Foucault, 1979). Institutional labels like *epilepsy* (16) and *dyslexia* (17) were part of their evaluations. They discussed Barry's weaknesses while emphasizing his strengths in reading, storytelling, and comic design.

These excerpts align with the study's objectives and reveal how communication, academic experiences, and peer interactions shape students' self-perceptions, offering valuable insights into identity dynamics in education.

### Discursive Self-Positioning

Mary, Barry, and Harris, SEND students in years 4/5 and 6, expressed dissatisfaction and resistance to their labels [Excerpt 4]. This section addresses the study's objectives by illustrating how students with SEND shape their identities in response to categorization. They voiced frustration with labeling and special support provision (1, 5, 9). Mary's use of "issues" highlights resistance to defining themselves solely by difficulties (2). Barry and Harris discussed differentiated sessions, suggesting how these experiences affect their self-perceptions (4). Mary mentioned shared and specific teachers, adding complexity to their educational experiences (9). These excerpts explore students' resistance to labels and its impact on their self-concept, aligning with the research question.

#### Excerpt 4. Students With SEND (Year 4/5, 6).

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Mary:	<i>Because we all have kind of issues, like I'm dyslexic, Sat's got... I don't know what it's called, but all of us have got a problem.</i>
Barry:	<i>So, we go like into this group, me and Zen don't go into this group like... and we do like part Maths.</i>
Harris:	<i>I'm an ace at Maths. 5</i>
Mary:	<i>Where you went with Lisa and Bill and everyone yesterday. That's where we usually go. I go out with a lady called Miss Kilford. We all have the same teachers but like because we must go out, we sometimes have different teachers to other pupils, because people with issues have different teachers. 9</i>
Researcher:	<i>I see, okay.</i>
Mary:	<i>Because I go out with the woman who helps people with problems, when everyone in my class has got a problem. 12</i>

---

Mary identifies with a group characterized by "problems" or "issues" reflecting resistance to being labeled as a SEND student. She mentions, "everyone in my class has got a problem" indicating the children's absorption of cultural views about difficulties and labeling, evident in, "people with issues have different teachers."

Harris, despite potential negative labeling, is positively recognized as "an ace at Maths" influenced by cultural

differentiation. The students' efforts to define a "good student" reveal insights into their self-positioning regarding external expectations (Excerpt 5). Mary, Harris, and Zen emphasize qualities related to social interaction and support, aligning their self-perceptions with accepted norms. They also show commitment to the teacher's definition of a "good student" indicating the influence of predetermined criteria on their identities. These observations align with the study's objective of understanding students' self-perception and identity negotiation within the classroom context, influenced by both external and internal factors.

#### Excerpt 5. Students With SEND (Year 4/5).

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*R:	<i>What do you think it means to be a good student?</i>
Mary:	<i>Somebody who behaves. Somebody who is like... they get on with everybody. 3</i>
Harris:	<i>They don't just go round with one person and leave..., they can share. 5.</i>
Zen:	<i>Somebody who will help when you're stuck.</i>

---

Note. \*R = Researcher.

Furthermore, the excerpt involving a collaborative conversation among students with SEND offers a deeper look into how they define their weaknesses and support needs (Excerpt 6). This contributes to addressing the study's objective of investigating students' self-perceptions in relation to their academic challenges. Mary, Harris, and Zen associated the profile of a good student with sharing (5), friendship and sociability (3). This suggests that part of the children's identity rested on identification as participants in various groups, for example, family, school, peers. Mary, Barry, Harris, and

#### Excerpt 6. Students With SEND (Years 4/5 and 6).

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Mary:	<i>I find reading difficult... I</i>
Harris:	<i>I struggle with numbers...</i>
Zen:	<i>I don't have any problems with my lessons... I can't think of anything although I have just joined the group of Mrs. Daisy for support. He* told me to attend some sessions with Mrs. Daisy but I don't understand the reason because I don't have a particular problem with my lessons. I have no problems! 6</i>
Barry:	<i>I wouldn't know. But I'm glad I'm not in the group. 7</i>
Zen:	<i>He* does not always help and finds it easier to ask my friends for help. He sometimes becomes frustrated when we don't get it. 9</i>
Mary:	<i>We understand that he is an adult, and he could not think the way the children do.</i>
Barry:	<i>He writes on the board to help us understand the lesson but sometimes he gets frustrated when we don't understand what he says and needs to repeat it. 13</i>

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Note. \*He = The teacher (year 6).

Zen, the four SEND students discuss how they felt about attending the pull-out sessions of special support with their specialist teacher, Daisy.

Students articulate their weaknesses and assistance requirements, reflecting awareness of their learning challenges. Barry's disengagement from pull-out sessions and Zen seeking help from friends highlight their coping strategies, aligning with the study's objective of exploring how students express learning difficulties and support needs. The conversation focuses on competencies like reading and numeracy, justifying their attendance in the support group. Zen resists identification as someone needing extra help, possibly asserting his independence. Barry, with SEND, expresses disengagement and ignorance, stating he has never attended the pull-out sessions. Zen, Mary, and Barry also shift their focus to their teacher's teaching skills, possibly explaining their weaknesses. They confidently criticize their teacher through various comments and inputs.

In a science interaction during a lesson, Mary engages in a dialogic interaction with her SEND peer, Zen (Excerpt 7). This demonstrates Mary's attempt to play a supportive role, possibly influenced by a teacher-like voice, relevant to the study's exploration of peer interactions and their influence on identity formation. Mary takes on the role of a teacher by scolding Zen for not being engaged in reading and lacking motivation to continue.

**Excerpt 7.** In-Lesson Conversation of Zen and Mary, Two Students With SEND, Over a Science Task in Year 6.

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M: *Come on read me that one, which do you want to read first, that one or that one? 1*

Z: *That one.*

M: *Which one?*

Z: *Both.*

M: *Both? You've got to read one first, you can't read them both at the same time, unless 5 you've got two mouths! Come on it's time for work now; you can chat at home time. So, what does that word say? Zen, what does this word say? 7*

Z: *"Tree."*

M: *So, it says "gases". Go on! You can read it, go on! Read it for me! 9*

Z: *Trees.*

M: *Well done! Right then, let's stick all these little other ones which are floating around before we have to do it. Right Zen, put some glue on that one, put that on your page somewhere, but not on your date or anywhere, because you need a picture by that one. What does it say? Oh, sulphuric acid. There! Oh, this is another one for the tree! Your tree needs, your tree needs some water, see if you can fit that water on by your tree. It needs to soak up the water. Right! [Laughter]. I need to do mine now! Right Zen, see if you can read your work?*

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(continued)

**Excerpt 7.** (continued)

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Z: *How come Zen needs...?*

M: *Go on, read it to me. Read all your work to me? Read your date and then read that one, the one by the tree. 20*

Z: *"The trees has died"*

M: *That wasn't all of it! Go on! Do it properly! "Gases..."*

Z: *"Gases and ...."*

M: *Acid...*

Z: *acid..."*

M: *No, "gases and acid in the air" you keep forgetting "in the air" "damage trees; they lose their leaves and die". Go on! Read that now! No! We need to stick all these on! Go and ask Greg if you can borrow his glue stick, go on, go, and ask Gregory. Zen, Zen attention please! Right, pick one of them to read.*

---

In this interaction, Mary, despite having SEND, appears self-confident and dominant toward Zen. She assumes a strict position while encouraging Zen to continue with his reading and project (1; 6; 19). Initially, she allows Zen to choose what to read (1), suggesting openness, but becomes more encouraging ("You've got to read one first...") and nurturing ("Come on, it's time for work..."). Zen seems resistant, offering one-word responses or failing to read correctly when Mary repeats her question ("So, what does that word say?"). Mary concentrates on encouraging Zen's participation ("Go on! You can read it, go on!") and adopts a different position, resembling an adult voice ("Read it for me!").

She expresses enthusiasm when Zen reads correctly ("Well done!"), guiding him using imperatives ("Right then...", "let's stick..."). After explaining Zen's project, she moves on to her own, communicating this clearly ("I need to do mine now!"). Zen appears somewhat bewildered, asking himself in the third person ("How come Zen needs...?"). Mary might interpret this as attention-seeking and interacts with Zen again ("Go on, read it to me!"). She takes an authoritative position when persuading Zen to contribute ("Read all your work to me?") and positions Zen as the listener, outlining what he should do imperatively. Zen negotiates in the learner role ("the trees have died"), while Mary takes an authoritative position, possibly to maintain Zen's attention or assert dominance. They operate in Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" ("That wasn't all of it! Go on! Do it properly!"). Zen appears submissive as the responsive listener ("acid"), while Mary's authoritative and persuasive style ("No 'gases and acid in the air', you keep forgetting 'in the air', 'damage trees; they lose their leaves and die'") emphasizes her dominance. Mary constructs a dominant self through her interaction with Zen, communicating her position by choosing which adult voice to merge with ("Go on! Read that now! No! We need to

stick all these on! Go and ask Greg if you can borrow his glue stick, go on, go and ask Gregory”). Her detached approach leads to Zen’s disengagement (“Zen, Zen, attention please!”).

Mary’s communication reflects a protective stance, akin to a teacher-student interaction. She positions Zen as the listener, initially submissive but gradually resistant. This interaction highlights asymmetric roles and the emergence of identity formation through personal communication. Mary’s nurturing role and teacher-like voice demonstrate her dominance in guiding Zen (1, 6, 19), while Zen’s responses reveal engagement but also resistance (6, 19). Mary’s efforts to scaffold Zen’s involvement align with the study’s exploration of student interaction dynamics and identity formation.

### *Inclusive Peer Perceptions*

The following interaction involving Tom, Lisa, and Stephen, students without SEND, contributes to addressing the study’s objectives by providing insights into how students without SEND perceive their peers with SEND, Zen, Mary, and Barry, and how they position themselves toward inclusivity. Tom, Lisa, and Stephen engage in a dialog reflecting their understanding of their peers with SEND and their stance on inclusion (1). Lisa’s assertion of treating their peers equally and avoiding singling them out is relevant to the study’s objective of examining how students without SEND position themselves in relation to those with SEND (3, 5). The notion of fairness in their perspective (5) aligns with the study’s exploration of peer interactions within the context of inclusive education.

#### **Excerpt 8.** Students Without SEND (Year 6).

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Tom:	<i>But we still accept them as people in our class and we talk to them I and everything</i>
Lisa:	<i>Yes; you don’t like single them out because they’re already out and that because they’ve got special needs. But we don’t want to make them feel that way because it’s not really fair on them. 5</i>
Stephen:	<i>They just feel part of the class really.</i>
Lisa:	<i>They are all part of the class; it’s just they’ve got learning disabilities and they’re different.</i>
Tom:	<i>And there’s nothing wrong with that because everyone’s different.</i>
Lisa:	<i>Everyone is different. 10</i>

---

Lisa explains their peers’ positioning, stating that they “got learning disabilities and they’re different” (7). Collaboratively, they emphasize that “everyone is different” (9) and express acceptance, mentioning that they talk to them because “they’re already out” (3), highlighting it is not fair on them (5). These students have developed a moral stance (fair, 5) and social awareness about embracing diversity. They reflect on how school practices

may single out peers due to their special needs. While they seem to accept their labeling as different (8), they counterbalance it with the idea that “there’s nothing wrong with that” (9). Their collaborative statement that “everyone is different” (9) underscores their recognition of diversity within the classroom. This insight connects with the study’s objective of exploring students’ perceptions of inclusivity and diversity.

The conversation involving Tom, Lisa, and Stephen highlights their awareness of their peers’ inclusion as integral class members (1). Their discussion about singling out peers with special needs (3, 5) directly addresses how students without SEND position themselves concerning their peers with SEND, a key research question. Their ability to recognize their peers’ learning disabilities while emphasizing belongingness and individuality (7) showcases their understanding of classroom diversity, aligning with the study’s objective of investigating how non-SEND students perceive the unique qualities of their peers with SEND. Additionally, their statement, “there’s nothing wrong with that because everyone’s different” (9, 10), reflects their inclusive attitudes and the normalization of differences, in line with the study’s exploration of peer attitudes toward diversity and the integration of students with SEND. The interaction among Tom, Lisa, and Stephen sheds valuable light on how non-SEND students perceive and position themselves in relation to their peers with SEND, aligning with the study’s objectives regarding inclusivity, diversity, and the inclusion of students with SEND in the classroom.

### *Expressiveness and Evaluation*

In the following discourse (Excerpt 9), Tom, Lisa, and Stephen, students without SEND, express their perspectives on the efficacy of the support provided to their peers with SEND. Their dialog unveils a compassionate outlook toward their peers’ needs, contributing to the development of social awareness regarding the advantages of SEND provision.

#### **Excerpt 9.** Students Without SEND (Year 6).

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Lisa:	<i>I think it’s good because they’re being assessed on their special needs. Because I’ve got a friend who’s dyslexic and she’s been dyslexic like from year 2 or something. And they’ve only noticed it now and she’s been struggling, and no one helped her; no one has helped her at all until Mr. Graham came. 5</i>
Tom:	<i>Yes, and he’s a lovely teacher.</i>
Lisa:	<i>And then Mr Graham has helped her but now Mr Graham is leaving, and Mrs Bolding won’t help her. So, I think it’s good that these people get extra help and because they need it. They’ve got a better chance in life because they’ve had it, I think. 10</i>

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(continued)

**Excerpt 9.** (continued)

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Stephen:	<i>And they'll also be ready for things to come like secondary school and stuff.</i>
Lisa:	<i>And university.</i>
Stephen:	<i>Yes... if they want to go.</i>
Lisa:	<i>If they want to go. 15</i>
Stephen:	<i>I think it is very, I think it is quite important and it's nice to see them getting on really well.</i>
Lisa:	<i>Yes, getting on with their life, not worrying over their special need and that.</i>
Stephen:	<i>Yes, it's quite nice because I think it's pretty good that they can work at their level as well which helps because... 20</i>

---

Tom, Lisa, and Stephen's dialog reveals non-SEND students' attitudes toward peer support (3, 5). Lisa's remark that students with SEND are assessed based on their special needs aligns with exploring perceptions of SEND provision (3, 5). Their acknowledgment of a friend's dyslexia highlights timely support's importance for academic experiences (5). Tom's endorsement of Mr. Graham emphasizes teachers' positive role in inclusive education (7). Lisa's comment about the life-altering impact of extra help relates to broader implications of SEND provision (10). Stephen's mention of preparedness for secondary school and university addresses long-term benefits of SEND provision (11, 13). Their interaction reveals negotiation and collaboration in evaluating SEND provision (8, 9). Lisa's assertion that peers with SEND have a "better chance in life" relates to improved opportunities (9). Their agreement on tailored education and working at their level aligns with perceptions of differentiated learning (20). Their affirmation that peers with SEND can focus on "getting on with their life, not worrying over their special need" connects to well-being and self-perception (18).

Lisa tends to dominate and becomes verbally competitive, challenging Stephen's comment—*And they'll also be ready for things to come like secondary school and stuff* (11)—adding *and university* (13). Stephen maintains the conflict in the conversation by challenging Lisa's comment *Yes... if they want to go* (14), and then Lisa reverts to a collaborative style as she repeats and rephrases Stephen's comments *If they want to go* (14) and *Yes, getting on with their life, not worrying over their special need and that* (18). The dialog reveals the position of these children regarding the benefits of provision for their peers with SEND, which extend beyond the academic side of education, as according to Lisa *these people get extra help...because they need it.* (8) and *They've got a better chance in life* (9). Lisa and Stephen seem to negotiate an evaluative framework that identifies peers with disabilities as better catered for have had

it (10), *to see them getting on* (16), *getting on with their life* (18) when the *educational system provides them with work tailored to their needs, so they can work at their level* (20), *not worrying over their special need* (18). Stephen and Lisa appear to see benefits in classifying students by ability level as something that could really motivate their peers with SEND to aspire for their education in the future.

The students' dialog provides insights into how non-SEND students perceive support for their peers with SEND, aligning with the study's objectives. Their empathetic and evaluative viewpoints shed light on perceptions of SEND provision and its broader impact.

**Collective Thinking**

Within the following excerpt (10), Tom, Lisa, Marcus, and Stephen, students without SEND, engage in a collaborative discussion regarding two of their peers with SEND, Barry and Zen. As they build upon each other's remarks, they collectively evaluate the personalities, strengths, and needs of their peers with SEND, thereby contributing to the development of a comprehensive understanding of their classmates.

**Excerpt 10.** Students Without SEND (Year 6).

---

Tom:	<i>I think they're quite nice.</i>
Lisa:	<i>Yes, they are, they're not like aggressive with their special needs, they are quite fun, aren't they?</i>
Marcus:	<i>Yes, they are...</i>
Tom:	<i>Yes, because Barry sometimes comes up with some jokes. 5</i>
Lisa:	<i>Yes, he's got like a really good imagination and he's good at making things up and stuff. He likes drawing and crafts and stuff.</i>
Stephen:	<i>Zen's a bit accident prone a little bit, isn't he?</i>
Lisa:	<i>Because he's always knocking stuff off if there's stuff to be knocked down, so that's funny in a way but he finds it funny too. 10</i>
Stephen:	<i>He is quite nice Zen.</i>
Lisa:	<i>He's brilliant, he's really smiley. You rarely ever see Zen without a smile.</i>
Marcus:	<i>He's quite a happy person.</i>
Stephen:	<i>Barry quite likes me, so he quite likes to talk to me, so I talk to him.</i>
Lisa:	<i>I do talk to him. Actually, Barry just likes anyone that will talk to him 15 really.</i>
Tom:	<i>Yes, we are actually quite good friends with Barry.</i>
Lisa:	<i>Anyone that talks to him he just sort of counts them as a friend.</i>
Tom:	<i>And we play with him, don't we?</i>
Lisa:	<i>Yes, we play with him. Like if looks over we get him to chase us, and he quite likes it. He does like chasing us. 21</i>

---

In this dialog, students discuss their peers with SEND, offering an evaluative perspective (1). Lisa starts by praising their positive qualities, highlighting their non-aggressive and enjoyable nature (2–3), a sentiment echoed by others (5, 12, 13). Tom adds humor by commending Barry's wit (5), and Lisa elaborates on Barry's strengths, including his imagination and artistic talents (7–8). Stephen playfully mentions Zen's accident-proneness (8), with Lisa expanding on this, noting Zen's amusement (9–10). Their evaluation centers on their peers' unique qualities and quirks (8, 9, 10). Stephen and Lisa collectively recognize Zen's positivity and constant smile (12, 13). Stephen mentions Barry's enjoyment of conversations with him and Lisa (14), emphasizing their mutual friendship. Lisa's comment that "Barry just likes anyone that will talk to him" demonstrates their understanding of their peers' social interactions (15). Tom highlights their friendship with Barry, underlining the inclusiveness within their class (17). Lisa and Tom's discussion of playing with Barry showcases their involvement in his interactions and play preferences (19–20), aligning with the study's exploration of classroom social dynamics. This collaborative discourse reveals the students' shared evaluative framework, focusing on their peers' personalities, preferences, and strengths. Their awareness of these aspects enhances their ability to relate to and engage with their peers with SEND, contributing to the study's objective of understanding peer perceptions in inclusive classrooms.

Lisa speaks supportively about the positive side of SEND peers: *they're not aggressive due to their special needs; they are quite fun, aren't they?* (2–3). Stephen notes Zen's accident-proneness (8). Lisa justifies this by explaining why Zen is accident-prone (9–10) and gives her own interpretation. Lisa again takes the lead—*that's funny in a way* (10)—focusing on the humorous aspect of Zen's personality. The other children echo Lisa's comment with similar remarks: *nice* (Tom, 1), *brilliant, smiley* (Lisa, 12), and *happy* (Marcus, 13). Meanwhile, Stephen attempts to steer the conversation with a new comment—*Barry quite likes me* (14).

Their talk evolves in an emotive and evaluative manner, reflecting their empathy for their peers' different positions and moral attitudes toward this disparity. They conceptualize the identity of their SEND peers as it emerges through practice, positioning them differently but acknowledging their worth (14). Stephen, Lisa, and Tom's remarks on Barry's interactions and friendships show a common evaluative framework that they share and reinforce ("I talk to him," Stephen, 14), ("I do talk to him," Lisa, 15), ("Yes, we are actually quite good friends with Barry," Tom, 17). Tom and Lisa continue to support each other's evaluations of Barry's personality and play preferences, emphasizing their interactions and

friendships ("And we play with him, don't we?" Tom, 19), ("Yes, we play with him," Lisa, 20). The children construct and replicate an evaluative framework for age-related values, primarily focusing on emotions, social interactions, and friendships.

In excerpt (11), the conversation focuses on students with SEND's academic performance and behavior, revealing how students without SEND internalize and replicate their teachers' viewpoints when evaluating their peers. This dialog illustrates the influence of authority figures and classroom rules on the children's perception of their peers' actions.

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#### Excerpt 11. Students Without SEND (Year 5).

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Larry:	<i>And Sam in our class, he is always moving down the chart and he gets into fights all the time.</i>
Paul:	<i>Thomas used to be the bad one for going on the chart, but he's steadied.</i>
Daisy:	<i>Because he was talking a lot and being silly.</i>
Bill:	<i>Thomas is probably on the chart once a week. 5.</i>
Paul:	<i>He used to be on every day nearly, but he's calmed down a lot.</i>
Larry:	<i>Sam's near enough on it every day but Sam was here yesterday but he isn't here today.</i>
Bill:	<i>Like Larry said, it makes you feel embarrassed because they're not following school rules and they're like letting your class down. 10</i>

---

Larry initiates the discussion by noting Sam's consistent placement on the behavior chart (1–2). Paul acknowledges Thomas's past behavior issues and his subsequent improvement (3–5). Daisy adds context to Thomas's previous behavior, mentioning his tendency to talk excessively and act silly (6). Bill quantifies Thomas's current behavior, estimating his appearance on the chart about once a week (7). Paul emphasizes the contrast between Thomas's past and present behavior, highlighting his significant improvement (8–9). Larry comments on Sam's frequent chart appearances and his absence on that day (10–11). Bill's comment about feeling embarrassed underscores the students' adherence to school rules and their identification with the class's reputation (12).

This dialog demonstrates how students internalize and echo teachers' perspectives and rules (2, 12). Their evaluations of their peers' behavior are framed within the context of adhering to or violating school rules, reflecting their understanding of their role in upholding these rules and maintaining a positive classroom environment. Additionally, the conversation indicates the children's tendency to differentiate themselves from their peers with SEND based on behavioral profiles (2–3, 6–7). Their evaluative frameworks center around notions

of “good behavior” and “deviant behavior,” showcasing their internalization of classroom rules and the concept of conformity.

Classroom rules shape their evaluative views, citing fights (2) or excessive talking (4) as reasons for peers’ behavior changes. This reinforces their self-image as well-behaved students versus those seen as deviant. Teachers’ regulations heavily influence their understanding of peers’ actions, revealing classroom power dynamics. Their evaluations form individual and collective identities tied to behavioral norms. This excerpt highlights how students without SEND internalize authority figures’ perspectives when assessing peers’ behavior, actively constructing interpretations. Their shared evaluative framework enhances their ability to engage with peers with SEND, aligning with the study’s aim to understand peer perceptions in inclusive classrooms.

### *By Way of Contrast: A “Naughty” Student with SEND Resists His Positioning*

In the subsequent excerpt (12), the discussion revolves around Sam, a student with SEND who is often labelled as “naughty.” Suzy and Lucy, adopting the teacher’s perspective, contribute to positioning Sam in this manner. *Who is doing the talking in this stretch of discourse?*

#### **Excerpt 12.** Mixed Ability Group of Students With SEND (Year 5) Cas’ Classroom.

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Louise:	<i>Because Sam’s always being naughty. I</i>
Sam:	<i>Well sometimes I’m not, am I?</i>
Suzy:	<i>Yeah, like he’s on his own table, like where you sit when you come, and Mr. Cas said, because he’s naughty, but if he’s good...</i>
Sam:	<i>If I behave, then I get to sit on another table with somebody 5 else.</i>
Louise:	<i>And it’s done with Brandon because there’s a spare seat on his table, so they’re put together.</i>
Albert:	<i>And he always asks Mr. Cas, but he’s not allowed. Mr. Cas always says you’ve got to be good. 10</i>
Sam:	<i>Well, sometimes he lets me just sit there... sometimes.</i>

---

In this dialog, Sam is labeled “naughty” (1) based on his behavior. Suzy and Lucy cite Mr. Cas, the teacher, to justify their stance on Sam, aligning with the study’s aim to explore teacher influence on students’ perceptions (3–4). Sam defends himself (2), countering “always” naughty with “sometimes” (2), highlighting nuance. His remark, “sometimes he lets me just sit there” (11), resists fixed classification. This exposes classroom power dynamics, teachers significantly impacting positioning and self-identification (3–4, 11). Sam’s resistance to the “naughty” label shows his agency, departing from a predetermined identity.

Here, children navigate their relationship with a classmate labeled “naughty” (1), closely linked to teacher rules. They cite the teacher as authority to justify labeling Sam. Sam defends himself, resisting constant naughtiness, emphasizing “sometimes” (2) over “always” (1). He mentions the teacher’s decision to allow him to move, saying, “sometimes he lets me just sit there” (11). Regulatory discourse shapes their perceptions, defining a “good student” (5) within the teacher’s framework.

Children may articulate assessments of good students differently in conversations compared to interactions with authority figures. This excerpt (12) illustrates how students incorporate teachers’ voices into peer evaluations, influencing their perceptions.

## **Results**

### *Perceptions of Academic Inclusion*

Analysis of conversations among SEND students reveals a range of positive and negative experiences related to their academic and social interactions with teachers and peers. Institutional practices significantly influence these perceptions. Within both Sunny Hill classes, SEND students often hold negative views about the academic benefits of inclusion. They are dissatisfied with teaching strategies and learning content that do not cater to individual needs. The absence of tailored instruction for diverse learning styles and grouping individual needs within broad ability categories contributes to pessimism about their academic prospects. This aligns with Bandura’s (1981) concept of self-efficacy, where such experiences influence aspirations, motivation, and self-identification as low achievers, leading to learned helplessness. This passivity, coupled with limited teacher engagement and peer collaboration (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022), reinforces their perception of cognitive deficits and academic underachievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

### *Nurturing Inclusive Environments*

The research highlights the feasibility of cultivating positive, supportive inclusive educational environments (Hansen et al., 2020). However, achieving such outcomes depends on more than practical strategies. Successful inclusivity requires a broader paradigm shift encompassing beliefs and values (Francisco et al., 2020).

Hansen et al. (2020) emphasize the significance of a belief system that anchors inclusive practices in equity, personal development, and celebrating diversity. To foster an inclusive environment, stakeholders must collectively reimagine educational values, embracing the idea that every student, regardless of their learning profile, deserves equal opportunities. Integrating a belief system valuing

diversity and individual growth becomes foundational to an educational terrain where diverse needs thrive.

In practical terms, this shift involves creating an environment where teachers, administrators, and students commit to these principles. Francisco et al. (2020) stress proactive collaboration between teachers and the community in nurturing inclusive spaces. This effort extends to re-evaluating curricula, teaching methods, and assessment strategies through an inclusive lens. While the findings highlight the feasibility of inclusive educational environments, they also underscore the need to go beyond strategies. The real transformation lies in embracing a belief system that champions equity, individual growth, and diversity. This holistic approach paves the way for a comprehensive, sustainable shift toward genuine inclusivity (Hansen et al., 2020).

### *Social Positioning and Identity Negotiation*

This study explores SEND students' social positioning and identity through interactions with both SEND and non-SEND peers, revealing complex classroom dynamics. Non-SEND students exhibit hierarchical thinking based on academic levels (Emery et al., 2021), reinforced by the classroom environment. However, when interacting informally with SEND peers, they become more aware of these hierarchies, often criticizing peers for reluctance to engage with SEND students (Hill, 2020).

These observations depict the intricate social dynamics inside and outside the classroom (Emery et al., 2021). Both formal and informal interactions profoundly influence SEND students' perceptions, attitudes, and identity in the broader educational context (Van Mieghem et al., 2020). This underscores the need for an inclusive environment that dismantles hierarchies (Brown et al., 2020).

### *Academic and Social Dynamics*

Conversations in the classroom, involving both SEND and non-SEND students, reveal insights into academic and social dynamics. In mixed-ability groups, non-SEND students often assume authoritative roles, creating imbalances with SEND peers, limiting their learning opportunities (Miller et al., 2021). SEND students often engage passively, relying on peer support (Francisco et al., 2020). Informal exchanges during tasks show moments of cooperation and social interaction, from academic discussions to playful interactions like singing and teasing, highlighting the complex interplay between academic and social dynamics (Van Mieghem et al., 2020).

These findings stress the interconnectedness of academic inclusion, social positioning, and identity

negotiation among both SEND and non-SEND students (Van Mieghem et al., 2020). They emphasize the need for holistic, inclusive environments based on equity and individual growth (Emery et al., 2021). By promoting positive academic experiences and genuine social interactions, education can truly embody inclusivity (Emery et al., 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

## **Discussion**

This discussion explores the intricate interplay of power dynamics and symbolic control in shaping the positioning and self-identification of SEND students. Within Sunny Hill classes, institutional classifications of ability manifest in verbal interactions, intertwined with prevailing social practices (Wahl et al., 2022). The hidden curriculum's subtle messages are conveyed through multimodal pedagogical representations (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). These conversations implicitly transmit knowledge, values, norms, and attitudes, impacting students' understanding of the learning process.

Students integrate conventional social ordering principles into their evaluations, using labels like "epileptic" or "dyslexic" to categorize peers. This reinforces the "us and them" distinction, echoing teachers' perspectives in unidirectional double-voicing (Bakhtin, 1981b). Teachers' voices shape evaluations regarding academic prowess or behavior.

Students tend to echo teachers' voices when discussing "good" or "naughty" students due to explicit instructional and regulatory discourses (Wahl et al., 2022). Classroom discourse transmits rules, norms, values, and identities, guiding student socialization into school dynamics (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). This influences students' categorization of SEND peers based on conformity to established norms.

In non-SEND students' focus groups, persuasive discourse invokes authority figures to substantiate positions aligned with teachers' authority (Wahl et al., 2022). SEND students negotiate their identities within focus groups, sometimes resisting peer-driven positioning academically and socially. Negative socialization experiences foster self-perceptions characterized by disability, poor academic attainment, and limited aspirations, emphasizing the role of dialogic conversations (Bakhtin, 1981b).

Non-SEND students' discourse reflects individual evaluations, showing empathy or criticism toward SEND peers' limited socialization, isolation, and academic progress. Shared voices emerge during collaborative utterances when both SEND, and non-SEND students echo shared information or exhibit friendship. A dynamic unfolds during the negotiation of SEND students' identities within focus groups, often marked by individuals assuming dominant roles, regardless of gender (Miller et al., 2021).



Overall, these findings reveal the complex interaction of academic inclusion, social positioning, and identity negotiation among SEND and non-SEND students (Johnson et al., 2022). Fostering true inclusivity requires a belief system grounded in equity and individual growth (Emery et al., 2021). By connecting enriching academic experiences with genuine social interactions, education can become a truly inclusive realm (Wahl et al., 2022).

## Conclusion

This study explores inclusive education, emphasizing the interplay of power dynamics, identity negotiations, and social interactions within classrooms (Arvaja & Sarja, 2021; Efthymiou, 2013). It highlights the importance of fostering beliefs rooted in equity, growth, and diversity recognition (Campbell, 2020; Francisco et al., 2020; Yu & Smith, 2021). Authoritative voices shape student perceptions through evaluations and interactions (Bakhtin, 1981b; Voloshinov & Bakhtin, 1983). Institutional norms and teacher judgments influence student evaluations (Bandura, 1981), but this influence is dynamic, with voices converging, diverging, and harmonizing (Bakhtin, 1981b; Voloshinov & Bakhtin, 1983).

SEND students' identity negotiation journey, marked by resistance against categorizations, reflects academic and social complexities (Efthymiou, 2013; Maine & Čermáková, 2021). Hybridization, merging diverse perspectives, shapes their evaluations (Bakhtin, 1981b; Voloshinov & Bakhtin, 1983). Non-SEND students' perceptions vary from empathy to critique, revealing the multidimensional impact of inclusion (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022; Wahl et al., 2022).

Optimism prevails amidst complexity, urging institutional transformation and introspection into classroom interactions' impact (Hansen et al., 2020; LoÇ pez-ZeroÇ n et al., 2021; Sanger, 2020; Twiner et al., 2021; Yu & Smith, 2021; Efthymiou 2023). Educators, researchers, and policymakers must nurture environments where empathy and collaboration transcend labels, dismantling hierarchies and weaving diversity into learning.

This study illuminates inclusive education's complex dynamics, calling for further investigation (Emery et al., 2021; Woodgate et al., 2020). The pursuit of authentic inclusion embraces diverse perspectives, aiming for fairness, empowerment, and shared comprehension.

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