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# Conflict within Special Education for Mothers of Children with Invisible Disabilities: A Case Study

Nicole R. Quint

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Conflict within Special Education for Mothers of Children with Invisible Disabilities:
A Case Study


by


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A Dissertation Presented to the
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy


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**Nova Southeastern University**
**Halmos College of Arts and Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Nicole R. Quint under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the mothers, fathers, and caregivers of children with invisible disabilities and their unique experiences of advocacy as they fight for their children. I truly hope this study sheds some light on the unique challenge of neurodiversity, that which society views as disability that is not visible, thus not understood.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to the amazing educators who support students with invisible disabilities, the "game changers" who truly see the child and find the way to teach them and support their family in the process.

Finally, I also want to dedicate this dissertation to the seven mothers who bravely shared their story with me. I can never understand what their emotional journey has been, but I saw firsthand their spirit, love, and their selfless gift of sharing their story to potentially help others. It was obvious it was difficult and painful at times, but they chose to go on this journey with me and I am so grateful for that. It was their courage and strength that served as inspiration to motivate me to finish this dissertation.

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Abstract

In the United States, children with disabilities receive special education services under

the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides free appropriate

public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Evidence shows that

parents of children who receive special education (SPED) experience conflict within the

school system. Invisible disabilities (NVD) are unseen but affect learning or behavior in

school, include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities, are

eligible for special education. There is evidence that parents of children with NVD

experience conflict while accessing the system and receiving services and mothers are

often the primary advocate for SPED services for their child. What is not fully understood

is how NVD influences the conflict process and influences the experiences for mothers.

This study explored the experience of mothers of children with NVD who experienced

conflict in the special education system using a qualitative case study methodology.

Interviews and Kawa River Model drawings of the conflict experiences provided insight

into the conflict experience, using Deutsch's model of conflict as the primary theoretical

framework. The findings included the following themes: Square Peg in a Round Hole,

Bear the Brunt, Adding Insult to Injury, Game Changer, and Sea Change. Key findings

include NVD-related conflicts involve identification and eligibility, the conflict

experiences evolve from intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural level conflicts,

which influence their advocacy, and the paradoxical experience of being both a

professional in the workplace and a mother advocating for her child in special

education, and how that influences conflict.

*Keywords*: special education, invisible disability, conflict, Kawa Model, advocacy,

qualitative case study

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Students with special needs related to medical conditions and learning

disabilities face unique challenges within the public school system in the United States.

Despite formalized processes designed to promote successful special education within

the legal provisions, there is evidence that indicates consistent conflict between parents

and school personnel during the special education process.  The following section will

introduce the reader to the basic provisions of special education and the conflicts that

arise during the special education process and provide contextual information about

special education and the ensuing conflicts, from the mother's perspective.

Additionally, a problem statement indicating the need for this study and the gap in the

literature will be provided, followed by the research questions.

## Background: Special Education

In 1647, colonists in Massachusetts Bay noticed that their new neighbors were

arriving, unable to read.  Literacy, a perceived key survival element of the Puritans' faith,

motivated them to instill a law that towns with more than 50 families hire a teacher to

ensure every child could read the bible (Turner et al., 2016).  This law, "…reflected the

idea that the local community was responsible for the well-being of all

children…because the whole community depended on it" (Turner et al., 2016, para. 15).

Fast forward to the current education system and the concept behind education is that it

is a "public good, and paying for it could be considered a public obligation" (Turner et

al., 2016, para. 16).

Within the United States, there are legal provisions that address special education in public schools. Access to accommodations and modifications are provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504. Section 504 requires access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE), regardless of disability, and provision of special education and related aids and services to meet the student's needs (USED, n.d.-a). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) provided the right to public education for children with disabilities, who previously had been excluded from public schools (Ong-Dean, Daly, & Park, 2011). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, formerly known as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, (IDEA, 2004) provides six major principles of legal requirements for special education within the United States: a) FAPE (free, appropriate public education), b) appropriate evaluation processes, c) least restrictive environment (LRE), d) parent and teacher participation, e) procedural safeguards, and f) an individualized education plan (IEP). In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA resulted in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; P.L. 108-444). The stated purpose of IDEA includes multiple elements:

- Ensuring that all children with disabilities have access to education.

- Guaranteeing their rights are protected.

- Assisting states, localities, and educational agencies to provide education to children with disabilities.

- Supporting states in coordinating multidisciplinary and interagency systems of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

- Ensuring educators and parents have necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities.

- Guaranteeing effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Despite these legal protections, there is documented friction between parents and professionals involved in these educational processes for students with disabilities (Gershwin & Vick, 2019; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Mueller, 2017; Mueller & Vick, 2019; Valle, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, special education services under IDEA serve approximately 7.1 million children (about twice the population of Oklahoma) in the United States, which includes 33 percent of students (year 2018-2019; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b). The disability types and their percentages served range from specific learning disability (SLD, 33%), to other health impairment (15%), autism spectrum disorder (ASD, 11%), intellectual disability (6%), and orthopedic disability (1%) (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a). *Other health impaired* (OHI) can include having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, asthma, Tourette syndrome, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, leukemia, or diabetes (Colorado Department of Education, 2020, p. 2), but can vary amongst states. Attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder, commonly known as ADHD or ADD, is also included in the OHI

designation for special education eligibility (Colorado Department of Education, 2020;

Florida Department of Education, 2021).

There are ten basic steps in special education, indicated by federal law (IDEA/

IDEIA): 1) identification (identifying child who possibly needs special education services

and supports, 2) evaluation upon parental consent, 3) eligibility consideration

(categories of disabling conditions and criteria that must be met), 4) eligibility

determination (after disabling condition confirmed, educational need must be

confirmed), 5) individualized education plan (IEP) meeting scheduled (can be combined

with eligibility meeting), 6) IEP meeting held and IEP written, 7) special education

services provided, 8) progress measured and reported to parents, 9) IEP reviewed and

revised (revision as needed), and 10) child is re-evaluated (at least every 3 years)

(Kupper & Kohanek, 2000). This process is important to identify the boundaries of the

case being investigated in this study. It is also important to indicate that conflict can

happen at various steps within this process.

### Variations in Special Education Services

Despite federal laws governing special education provisions, there are significant

variations in processes of service delivery. Differences can occur at the state and district

level; IDEA provides some latitude in setting eligibility criteria, defining disability

categories, and allowing how states determine processes for identification and

evaluation of children (United States Government Accountability Office, 2019). Thus, a

child who is eligible for special education services in one state might be ineligible in a

different state. Additionally, many states have some type of regional entity that guides

services in a geographically broader area than individual district areas. Some examples

include educational service agencies (ESA), the special school district, or programs that

assist with special education administrative services. The ESA approach focuses on

providing a continuum of services without burdening single districts, such as

professional development, new program start-up assistance, and launching and

administering a new program through districts that are banded together, with examples

in California, Connecticut, Indiana, New York, and Rhode Island (Moran & Sullivan,

2015). Special school districts address the needs of students who have severe needs

that cannot be met by local districts and/or regionalize special education staff to deliver

services, noted in Louisiana, Missouri, and New Jersey (Moran & Sullivan, 2015).

Programs assisting special education administration, such as in Illinois and Nebraska,

include support in IEP database system development, IEP tutorials, decision-making

support, and/or assistive technology partnerships (Moran & Sullivan, 2015).

  *Charter Schools.* While the concept of serving the public good might underlie the

system, the funding mechanisms have become more complex. According to Turner et

al., (2016), the funding comes from a combination of three sources: a) local money

(approximately 45%), state funding (approximately 4%), and federal funding

(approximately 10%). The local funding comes from local property taxes, which varies

significantly from neighborhood to neighborhood, thus creating disparities between

districts. Some states address the disparity by providing funding to compensate for any

local imbalances; however, this is not most cases. Because of the high percentage of

funding from local property taxes and the resulting disparities, lawsuits have been a

consistent way for parents in poorer school districts to fight for funding to raise the

standards of the environment and services provided (Turner et al., 2016).

Though public schools rely on their three funding streams and receive oversight

through federal laws and district policies, charter schools are a different kind of public

school. Charter schools involve a 'contract' or 'charter', agreed upon by those who run

the school and the entity that authorizes its existence (National Charter School Resource

Center, n.d.). Authorization for a charter school has multiple options, including school

districts, for-profit companies, or boards of education, thus retaining autonomy to

develop curricula, budgets, and personnel (Jason, 2017). They are tuition-free and open

to students on a first come, first serve basis or through a lottery system. Charter

schools, seen as a public school of choice, are unique in that they "…are exempt from

significant state or local regulations related to operation and management but otherwise

adhere to regulations of public schools…" (National Charter School Resource Center,

n.d., para.1). Thus, they are accountable in the public context, but have more flexibility

in operations and management than standard public schools.

Charter schools have more flexibility, but Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of

1973 (Section 504) and IDEA Part B are applicable. According to the U.S. Department of

Education, (2017, p. 1), students with disabilities in charter schools have the same

Section 504 rights as other public school students with disabilities (FAPE, equal

treatment and nondiscrimination in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and

accessibility). Additionally, charter schools may not try to convince a student or parents

that the student should not or should not continue to attend the school because of

disability. Charter schools must also adhere to IDEA and FAPE, including utilizing SPED

approaches of LRE for students, IEP implementation, and ensuring appropriate education

for students with disabilities (USED, 2017).

    While charter schools are required to adhere to Section 504 and IDEA, evidence

points to potential disparities in meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

According to Bergman & McFarlin (2018), charter schools are less likely to respond to

application inquiries for students with severe disabilities (5.8%). Federal data indicates

that in traditional public schools, students with disabilities make up approximately

12.84%, but only 10.79% in charter schools (National Center for Special Education in

Charter Schools, 2019). Additionally, a systematic review of court filings involving

special educational students and charter schools identified repeated episodes of federal

disability law violations (Wong, 2021).

## Invisible Disability

    The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one in four

adults live with a disability that impacts major life activities, which equates to 61 million

Americans (CDC, 2018a). The United States Census Bureau reported that U.S. childhood

disability rate increased in 2019, up 0.4 percent (from 2008) to 4.3 percent of the under

18 population, equating to over three million children (Young & Crankshaw, 2021).

Specifically, the most common type of disability among children was cognitive difficulty.

Racial differences were also significant; American Indian and Alaska Native children had

highest rate of disability (5.9%), followed by children of more than one race (5.2%), Black

children (5.1%), Non-Hispanic White children 4.3%), Native Hawaiian and other Pacific

Islander (3.2%), and Asian Children having the lowest rate (2.3%). Childhood disability

rates are higher for children living in poverty (6.5%) than those living above the poverty

threshold (3.8%), which becomes important, as families living in poverty tend to have

fewer financial resources to take care of the child with a disability.  As Young and

Crankshaw (2021, para. 14) point out, "children with disability may have additional

needs that prevent one or more family members from participating in the workforce.

This can create financial strain for families, and in some cases may contribute to a

family's entry into poverty". According to the Center on Disability Studies (CDS), invisible

or 'hidden' disabilities (NVD) have the following common denominators:

- the disability is unable to be 'seen'

- there are no 'visible' supports to indicate a disability (e.g., canes, sign language, wheelchair)

- the disability may be managed through medication or behavior approaches

- the disability is permanent that is dealt with daily

- the disability needs to be documented to receive ADA accommodations

- the person is in physical or emotional pain (CDS, 2007, para. 2).

NCLD identifies that one in five children have learning and attention issues such as

dyslexia and ADHD (2017a).

Uniquely, invisible disabilities interfere with daily functioning but lack a physical

manifestation. Common NVD include neurobehavioral diagnoses such as attention

deficit disorder/ hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD),

learning disabilities (LD), psychiatric disabilities (e.g., bipolar disorder, anxiety

disorders), traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, chronic fatigue

syndrome, and cystic fibrosis (CDS, 2007). Unique challenges for an individual with an

NVD can include a lack of awareness that they have a disability, lack of diagnosis, lack of

knowledge regarding what they need, or they do not identify as disabled. Conversely,

some people with NVD do know what they need, but have difficulty articulating said

needs or they suspect something is wrong but are unsure how to address it. Individuals

with NVD can feel misunderstood, ignored, or invalidated, and this may apply to the

parents of children with NVD (CDS, 2007, para. 3).

There are pervasive myths or confusion surrounding invisible disability. One idea

is that children with learning disabilities will outgrow them, despite knowledge that

these are lifelong disabilities (Accardo & Lindsay, 1998). According to a 2019 survey,

one third of respondents identified "poor diet, too much television, and kids 'just being

lazy'" as causes of learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities Association of America,

2021, para. 1). The Learning Disability Association of America and the International

Dyslexia Association, through their White Paper, identified significant need with 13

percent of students in K–12 public schools identified as students with disabilities and 34 percent classified as having a learning disability, but that a significant number of students with learning disabilities do not meet eligibility criteria for services or are educated in private schools (LDA/ IDA, 2018, p.3). Myths that hinder successful educational services, obtained by a 2010 survey, included: a) 70 percent of parents, educators and school administrators linked (incorrectly) learning disabilities with mental retardation; b) the majority of the public (including parents) indicated a belief that learning disabilities are a product of the home environment; c) 51 percent correlated learning disabilities with laziness; d) more than two thirds of parents identified learning disabilities as something a 2–4 year old child would grow out of; e) 80 percent of the general public associated mental retardation and autism with a learning disability; and f) 40 percent associated learning disabilities with sensory impairments such as deafness or blindness (LDA/ IDA, 2010). Additionally, 43 percent of educators placed partial blame on the home environment for causing learning disabilities.

Children and adolescents with internalizing disorders are less likely to be disruptive, therefore, their academic performance issues may go unrecognized, or even be misconstrued as irritability or boredom (Bravender, 2008). Students might be misunderstood as being disengaged due to ignorance of NVD (NCLD, 2017b). With respect to behavioral disorders, males are more likely to present with externalizing problems, while girls are more likely to present with internalizing disorders, thus making them more easily missed (Bravender, 2008). Specific learning disability (SLD) is

the largest category of school-aged children who receive SPED services, approximately

2.3 million (Learning Disability Association of America, 2021).

Matthews & Harrington (2000, p. 201) provide the rationale for using the term

'invisible disability' over other terms for these types of disabilities, as there has been

"confusion over how to label" them:

> A more compelling reason to use the term invisible is the subtle, yet important,
>
> distinction between the meaning of these terms. N*onvisible* or *hidden* implies
>
> that the condition can be seen if only one would look and discover it; *invisible*,
>
> however, implies that the condition cannot be seen. This distinction becomes
>
> important when considering an individual's motivation to communicate about
>
> the disability or keep the disability concealed.

The last statement emphasizing motivation regarding concealment, could also pertain to

parents of children with NVD, and highlights the difficulty with even understanding if

one has a disability, relating to the challenging contexts of this group of disabilities.

Thus, invisible disability serves as an umbrella term and will be used moving forward for

this study, to align with the distinction that they are disabilities that cannot be seen by

others or self, rather than waiting to be uncovered or revealed.

## Conflict in Special Education

Lake and Billingsley (2000) employed a grounded theory methodology to analyze

factors that contributed to parent-school conflict within special education in the state of

Massachusetts. Within their study, they referred to Deutsch's (as cited in Lake &

Billingsley, 2000) model of conflict as their operating definition; two people interact and perceive incompatible differences between/ or threats to their resources, needs, or values and this causes them to behave in response to the interaction and their perception of it. They indicated that "little is known about the experiences and perspectives of those who are involved in special education conflicts" and how the "…situations that escalate conflict are handled", indicating gaps in the literature to support their study (Deutsch, as cited in Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 241). Since this study, there has been sufficient proof that the conflicts exist, however, there is still a paucity of research related to identifying the dynamics related to conflicts within special education, particularly those involving students with invisible disability and the experiences of the mothers who are the primary advocates and caregivers for children with invisible disabilities.

According to Mueller, Singer, & Draper (2008), U.S. school districts spent approximately $146 million in the year 2000 on the resolution of disputes between school districts and the families of children with disabilities. The costs of due process "hinder low-and middle-income parents" particularly hard, adding to the financial and time burdens associated with disability (Pudeleski, 2016, p. 3). This topic is a national problem, identified as a concern by multiple researchers and policymakers (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Mueller, Singer, & Draper, 2008; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). According to Mueller & Vick (2019), "…the majority of research, which spans well over 30 years, shows

parents are often excluded, ignored, and in some cases, challenged during IEP

meetings" (p. 100). The documented negative parent and teacher experiences with IEP

meeting practices and adverse outcomes resulted in the addition of due process being

written into special education law (Mueller, Singer, & Draper, 2008). Despite being

inserted as a solution, due process can create more conflict within the process, because

of expense, emotional toll, and the amount of work involved (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses,

2002; Mueller & Vick, 2019; Massey & Rosenbaum, 2004; Pudelski, 2013). Mediation,

added in 1997 as an alternative to due process, has not necessarily reduced the

conflicts experienced, either (Mueller & Vick, 2019).  As a result, new strategies such as

facilitation are being introduced into the process, with the goal of reducing conflict and

enhancing the process (Mueller, Singer, & Draper, 2008; Mueller & Vick, 2019). While

alternative dispute resolution (ADR) practices, such as facilitation, appear to be a

positive approach to reducing the conflict within special education, utilizing ADR

practices as an intervention indicates there is a dispute mechanism inherent to the

process. The specific constructs of that dispute mechanism are still unknown.

The costs of conflicts, identified within the literature, clearly go beyond monetary

when considering school-parent conflicts within special education. The needs of parents

(primarily related to communication and agency building) and potential resolution

strategies to the conflict experienced have been studied (Mueller, Singer, & Draper,

2008; Murata & Aoyama, 2016) with trends moving toward facilitated IEP as a preventive

strategy (Mason & Goldman, 2017; Mueller, 2009). The challenges of student advocacy

for teachers (Gartin, Murdick, Thompson, & Dyches, 2002) and the consequences of

stress and burnout on teachers has also been investigated (Braun-Lewensohn, 2016),

with significant outcomes related to attrition, health issues, and negative student

outcomes (Brunsting, et.al., 2014).

It is also known that student-teacher relationships are important to the learning

process, but children with autism or attention deficits or hyperactive disorders (both

invisible disabilities) experience increased conflict and dependence on teachers, thus

negatively affecting the student (Prino, et.al., 2016). An additional challenge for children

with invisible diagnoses includes the strain diagnoses such as attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can have on the parent-teacher relationship. A systematic

review found that parents of children with ADHD feel criticized, identify as being

different (or otherness), and harbor perceptions that the problem is the school (Rogers

& Ford, 2015). The authors of this study felt that the outcomes would be generalizable

to children and parents with other invisible diagnoses, as there are parallels noted in the

literature with similar results. Invisible disability, or those that are not outwardly visible,

include diagnoses such as ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), sensory processing

disorder (SPD), and learning disabilities (LD) (Center on Disability Studies, 2007;

Solomon, 2020). Specifically, invisible disabilities have common denominators beyond

observability, including lack of visible supports to indicate disability (i.e., wheelchair or

sign language), that the disability is permanent requiring daily coping, managed through

behavior strategies and/ or medication, and the person is in physical or emotional pain

(Center on Disability Studies, 2007). Thus, the contextual challenges of invisible

diagnoses, which often involves behavioral issues, can be exacerbated by the fact that

the individual "may not know what they need" or "may suspect something is wrong, but

not know what it is or how to fix it" (Center on Disability Studies, 2007, para. 3).

Invisible disabilities make up a considerable percentage of special eligibility,

approximately 70 percent (SLD 33 percent, speech or language impairment, 19 percent,

OHI, 15 percent, and autism, 11 percent) of the 7.3 million children in special education

programs in the United States, school year 2019-2020 (USED NCES, n.d., para. 1-2).

According to Davis (2005, p. 153), "when individuals are not 'seen' as disabled, it

can be more difficult for them to secure the assistance or accommodation they need to

function effectively". The impact of the disability is not lessened or less serious by the

invisible nature of it, rather, individuals with invisible disability must often "bear the

burden" of obtaining the assistance needed to address needs related to their disability.

Other specific challenges related to invisible disability include having to "convince" other

people that they really are disabled rather than seeking an unfair, special advantage.

Davis contends people with invisible disability "face a double bind: either they forgo the

assistance or accommodation they need-and thus suffer the consequences of

attempting to do things they may not be able to do safely by themselves-or they endure

the discomfort of subjecting themselves to strangers' interrogations" (2005, p. 154).

This creates a stressful situation of dealing with the added layer of scrutiny and

repeated needs for self-advocacy. These challenges are identified in the literature

through specific conflict challenges within special education and create a need for

further investigation.

## Problem Statement

While Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified factors involved in the conflict process,

denoted as factors that escalate and de-escalate the conflict, there are still only limited

studies on the contextual elements of the conflicts experienced. Specifically, Lake &

Billingsley (2000) identified communication, reciprocal power, valuation, service

delivery, knowledge, and trust as influencing conflict in special education. They also

included discrepant views of the child or the child's needs and highlighted fiscal,

personnel, time, and team functioning constraints as influencers. Endres (2007)

highlighted abstract systems, relations, and the resulting conflicts between both

constructs, with influences from legal systems and other special educational procedures.

Additional challenges include conflict frequency, which can directly influence

achievement of treatment goals (Wright, Wright, Kooreman, & Anderson, 2006). Finally,

themes related to inequalities, power imbalances, and politics within organizational

arenas can influence conflict, but also influence potential collaboration (Zaretsky, 2004),

which parallel some of the themes found by Lake & Billingsley (2000). Thus, while there

have been studies to capture contextual elements, perceptions of parties involved,

challenges for teachers, and influence of disability, there lacks explicit information on

the dynamics of conflict related to the experiences of mothers of children with invisible

disability. Since the research shows that invisible disability has unique influences on

some of the causes or drivers of conflict or have potential to influence conflict by the

very nature of their invisibility, this needs to be studied to better understand how to

prevent or resolve the conflict. This project explored the conflict phenomenon unique to

students with invisible disability within the public school system, from the perspective of

the mothers who experienced the conflict. Qualitative methods were used to identify the

constructs related to conflict within special education for students with invisible

disability, utilizing a retrospective case study methodology, which allowed for extensive

description and exploration of the issues (Yin, 2014).

## Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the specific dynamics that influence or

drive this conflict, answering the question, what are the dynamics of conflict interactions

within special education services in public schools for mothers of children with invisible

disability and how invisible disability affects the conflict process. This is thus, an

exploratory qualitative research report.

## Research Question

While there is sufficient evidence that conflict exists within special education

services and identification of some of the drivers of that conflict exists, a lack of

specificity related to the constructs and contextual mechanisms of conflict processes

within this specific phenomenon related to the experiences of the mothers of children

with invisible disability remains as a gap in the literature. Therefore, a qualitative case

study approach to explore the dynamics involved in driving or reducing conflict in

special education, specifically with mothers of children who have invisible disability,

addresses this need.  The significant contribution of this study is to explore dynamics

related to both the escalation of conflict and de-escalation of conflict between parents

and the school (personnel of the school) related to children with invisible disability and

to better understand how an "unseen" disability influences conflict. According to Yin

(2018), the research question(s) for qualitative case study emphasize *how* and *what* for

exploratory studies*.* The following research question and sub-questions guided the

exploration of the case of conflict in special education for families of children with

invisible diagnoses:

- What are the dynamics of conflict within special education practices for

  mothers of children with invisible disability?

  o What are unique elements of invisible disability in the conflict process?

  o How does an invisible disability affect the conflict process from

    identification through re-evaluation?

  o How do mothers of children with invisible disability describe the

    evolution of the conflict within the various steps of the special education

    process?

  o What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-

    escalation of conflict?

## Overview of Research Design

This qualitative research design utilized a case study approach through intensive interviewing and Kawa River drawing for data collection. Through purposive and snowball sampling, seven participants met the inclusion criteria and completed the study. Coding relied upon process coding and the use of idioms to incorporate contextual elements and cross comparisons were made to identify overall themes and answers to the research questions. Individual case studies are provided with conflict and contextual analysis. The answers to the research questions and themes incorporate conflict analysis and the theoretical framework. Because case study involves a constructivist approach, particularly the social construction of reality, it allowed the researcher to investigate and understand the participants' actions, behaviors, thoughts, and experiences to examine the particulars of the conflict dynamics in question.

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study involves enhancing the understanding of the conflict within special education, particularly for children with invisible disability, from the perspective of the mothers who experience this conflict. This could potentially help to identify the unique conflict profile of children who constitute upward of 50% of special education students, to eventually better provide alternative dispute resolution strategies to limit or prevent conflict from occurring or more effective resolution options. Current research is starting to examine strategies to address conflict in special education, particularly facilitated IEPs, however, understanding the development and

contextual attributes of the conflict could better provide opportunity to intervene or prevent more effectively. Ultimately, improved understanding and descriptions of the conflict process from the mother's perspective could provide insight into policy and school reform practice and create a hypothesis(es) that can be used for future study(s).

## Definition of Terms

**Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** – ADR provides opportunity for parties to resolve disputes in collaborative manner to avoid lengthy and costly litigation (USED OGC, 2011).  In public special education, mediation, resolution sessions, and facilitation are common approaches.

**Assistive Technology** – Technology, such as software or equipment, that helps students with disabilities navigate their school activities and enhance their skills.  Examples include low tech and high-tech equipment, such as communicators, infrared systems, assistive listening devices,  speech to text software, adapted keyboards, timers, etc.), iPad tools.

**(Public) Charter Schools** – A publicly funded school typically governed by an organization or group under a legislative contract with the district (or other entity) and the charter exempts the school from certain state or local regulations to promote flexibility and autonomy.  The charter school must meet accountability standards outlined in the charter and is reviewed periodically.  Charter school students with disabilities have same Section 504 rights as other public school students with disabilities (FAPE, equal treatment, accessibility) and follow IDEA, including LRE (USED OCR, OSERS, 2017).

**Conflict** – Real or perceived differences that arise from specific circumstances, producing negative emotion as a consequence (Deutsch, 1973).

**Cultural Capital** – Agency used by individuals within their cultural currency. Capital refers to power and emphasizes symbolic elements of culture. Associated with *habitus* and *field* and proposed by Bourdieu (1977).

**Due process (or procedural due process)** – The legal procedures and requirements developed to protect the rights of children, parents, and school districts.  This process also guarantees free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive educational setting (LRE) for students with disabilities.  With respect to students with disabilities, it protects the rights of parents to have input into educational programs, placement of their child, options in cases of disagreement with the recommendations of the school district.  For school districts, it offers recourse in cases of parent resistance with a request for evaluation, challenges to an independent evaluation sought by parents at public expense, or an unwillingness of parents to consent to the individual education plan (IEP) Committee recommendation (National Association of Special Education Teachers, n.d.).  In this study, it will also be considered as phase four of the conflict continuum, per CADRE Continuum.

**Facilitation** – ADR approach with a skilled, independent, trained professional (facilitator) who guides the process between the dispute parties. IEP facilitation specifically provides facilitation services for disputes related to IEP development or implementation (CADRE, 2017).

**Field** – The context is the "game" or the larger arena (education system/ special

education subsystem in this study), with its own set of positions, practices, and

competition for power (capital).  It is connected to *habitus* and *cultural capital* and was

proposed by Bourdieu.

**Feminism** – Theory focused on equality of the sexes/ gender through understanding the

nature of gender inequality.  Examines women's social roles and lived experience.

**Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)** – Free and appropriate public education must be

available to all children between ages of 3 and 21, including children with disabilities

(USED, 2017).

**Family educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** – Federal law that protects the privacy

of student education records.  FERPA applies to all schools that receive funds under an

applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education (USED, 2021).

**General Education (also referred to as 'gen ed')** – Classroom composed of students of

whom at least 70 percent do not have special education eligibility.  The general

education classroom utilizes general curriculum and is taught by an educator certified

for general education.

**Gifted** – Many school districts classify a student with a full scale IQ of 130 or above as

gifted.  This can be adapted for students who have ESL/ESOL (English as second

language) and qualify for Plan B (reduced lunch) may enter at lower IQ scores.  Students

are considered to have superior intellectual development or capable of high

performance in educational setting.

**Habitus** – The "*feel* for the game", specifically the physical personification of cultural

capital and power within various field(s).  Connected to *cultural capital* and *field* and

proposed by Bourdieu.

**Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)** – Federal law to

protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without consent/

knowledge of the patient (CDC, 2018b).

**Inclusion** – Although this term does not appear in IDEA legislation, it is used throughout

special education communications. It refers to the notion of including children within

special education programs in general education programming.  Examples include

specials (art, music, physical education), lunch, and subject matter.

**Invisible disability** – Physical or mental impairments that are not readily apparent to

others, including learning disabilities, diabetes and other chronic illnesses, allergies,

epilepsy, low vision, poor hearing, emotional disturbances, and neurobehavioral

diagnoses (autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

(ADHD) (USED, n.d.).  Also referred to as nonvisible or hidden disabilities.

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** – IDEA defines IEP as the written document for a child

with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the laws

related to IDEA.  Parents and school staff (and often the student) work together to meet

the student's unique needs for the special education process, as it guides the delivery of

supports and services USED, 2019).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA)** – Federal law enacted in 2004 that makes available a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities who are eligible within the nation. It ensures special education and related services to those who are eligible. Infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth through age 2, receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth with disabilities ages 3 through 21 receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B (USED, n.d.-a).

**Kawa Model** – Occupational therapy therapeutic method using a metaphor of a river to depict one's life journey. It can be used in a cross-sectional depiction to demonstrate contexts (riverbed), personal attributes (driftwood), barriers (boulders), and river flow (life flow) (Iwama, 2006). In this study, the life journey is replaced by special education journey, with the driftwood, boulders, and river flow depicting specific elements of special education experience.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** – School districts are mandated to educate students with disabilities in general education classrooms with nondisabled peers, in their districted school, to the maximum extent possible.

**Paraprofessional (special education)** – Assist education process by providing one-on-one tutoring, assist with classroom management, aid or support with computer, library, or media center activities, act as a translator, or provide instructional services under supervision of teacher (Every Student Succeeds, n.d., para. 7).

**Procedural safeguards** – System of protections designed to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their parents within IDEA. Examples include the right to participate in all meetings, the right to written notice when the school proposes to change or refuses to change the identification evaluation or placement of a child.

**Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973** – Federal law instituted to protect individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education. Specifically, the law prevents exclusion of individuals with disabilities from participating in activities, as well as discrimination. FAPE is guaranteed to students with disabilities under this law (USED, 2020, para. 2,3).

**Special education** – Specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to caregivers/ parents, designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It includes instruction in the classroom, home, hospitals, institutions, and other settings, including physical education. Special education includes speech language pathology services or any other related service (if considered special education rather than a related service under State standards), travel training (for severe cognitive disabilities), and vocational education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a).

**Related services** – Transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education services. Related services can include speech language pathology, audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation services, counseling services, mobility services, and medical services (USED, n.d.-b).

**Occupational therapy (OT)**– Health care profession that helps people throughout the lifespan engage in the things they want and need to through the therapeutic use of daily occupations, referred to as occupations (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

**Speech-language pathology (SLP)** – Health care profession that seeks to prevent and treat speech, language, communication, cognitive skills, and swallowing disorders throughout the lifespan (American Speech-Language-Hearing-Association, n.d., para. 1).

**Physical therapy (PT)** – Health care profession focused on movement and quality of life achieved through exercise, hands-on care, and patient education with the goal of improving ability to move, reduce or manage pain, restore function, and prevent disability (American Physical Therapy Association, 2021, para. 1, 2).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is significant evidence that conflict exists between schools and school personnel and parents of children with disabilities, despite procedural safeguards and special education supports. The unique element of invisible disability and conflicts in special education also exist, however, there is a lack of evidence related to the dynamics of conflict experienced by mothers of children with special education, as they serve as the primary caregivers and advocates. This study focuses on investigating that experience for the mothers, through qualitative case study methodology. The following dissertation will include chapters two through five, focusing

on the literature related to conflict in special education, particularly conflict related to

students with invisible disabilities and will provide a theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter three will focus on the methodological approach of this qualitative study.

Chapter four will provide the findings, particularly the themes identified through

qualitative case study and the answers to the research question and sub-questions.

Finally, chapter five will provide a discussion on how the findings relate to the literature

review, key findings unique to this study, and implications for research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides the literature review pertaining to conflict in special education, invisible disability within special education, and the methodology used for this study, including the theoretical framework. The information in the chapter pertaining to conflict within special education is outlined by the themes identified by Lake & Billingsley (2000), to organize the information from the known areas of conflict within special education.

## Theoretical Framework

While it is documented that conflict exists in special education and studies have identified conflict elements related to specific NVD diagnoses and categories, the specific experience of the conflict for mothers has not been investigated. To understand the dynamics of conflict in special education for mothers of children with NVD, the theoretical framework required conflict theory, specifically theories related to interpersonal conflict and different levels of conflict. Additionally, the theory of feminism and the theory of habitus provided a means to examine the mothers' experiences from psychological and societal influences. Finally, the Kawa Model afforded a method of data collection and data analysis through symbolic representation to further examine contextual elements of conflict and the overall dynamics involved.

**Conflict**

      **CADRE Continuum: Special Education Conflict.** According to the Center for

Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE), there is a Continuum of

dispute resolution processes and practices (CADRE, 2017). Specifically, there are five

stages of conflict and five levels of intervention: prevention, disagreement, conflict,

procedural safeguards, and legal review. Within the various stages, there are multiple

assistance/intervention options (CADRE, 2017):

- Stage I (prevention): family engagement, participant and stakeholder training,

  stakeholder council, collaborative rule making;

- Stage II (disagreement): parent to parent assistance, case manager, telephone

  intermediary;

- Stage III (conflict): facilitation, mediation models, ombudsperson, third party

  opinion/consultation;

- Stage IV (procedural safeguards): resolution meeting, mediation under IDEA,

  written state complaints, due process hearing; and

- Stage V (legal review): hearing appeal (two-tier systems), litigation,

  legislation.

Finally, they identify dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the

Continuum, including, third-party assistance, decision making by the parties, interest-

based, informal and flexible at the early stages, and third-party intervention, decision

making by third-party, rights-based, and formal and fixed at the post conflict end of

the spectrum.  This Continuum and its components will provide elements of conflict

during the analysis process of the collective case studies and allow for analysis of where

conflict takes place and during what dimension.

**Interpersonal Conflict**

**Deutsch Model of Conflict.** While there are many definitions of conflict, this study

required a definition that focused on perceptual differences appropriate for the context

of special education services, a form of interpersonal conflict. Deutsch emphasized two

forms of conflict: a conflict is *destructive* if the participants feel dissatisfied with their

outcomes, or *constructive* if they feel they gained because of the conflict (Deutsch,

1973, p. 17).  He contended that a competitive outlook trends toward the destructive

end of the spectrum, while a cooperative approach improves the chances of a

constructive outcome (Deutsch, 1949). Therefore, the focus should be on how to turn

destructive conflicts into more productive ones, with a collaborative outlook and

approach serving as that affordance. Thus, the definition from Deutsch (1973), that

conflict is defined as real or perceived differences that arise from specific

circumstances, producing negative emotion as the product, best meets the needs of this

study.

According to Deutsch (1973), there are five types of conflicts: personal

preferences, differences in values, control of resources, what is reality and what is not,

and the nature of the relationship between the parties. The nature of the relationship

between the parties includes the length of the relationship (short or long term),

temporary or lasting, and under the conditions with which the parties interact. Deutsch

provided a conflict process describing the pattern of conflict, regardless of size or type

(e.g., interpersonal v. personal), emphasizing how conflict evolves as people interact and

perceive incompatible differences or threats to resources, needs, or values. He

emphasized that the point of conflict is the moment when people behave in response to

this perceptual dynamic. The sequence provided involves:

1. two or more people interact and perceive

2. incompatible difference between or threats to

3. resources, needs, or values

4. which causes them to behave

5. in response to the interaction and their perception of it; and

6. conflict then either escalates or deescalates (Deutsch, 1973, pp. 5–8; Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Deutsch Model of Conflict*
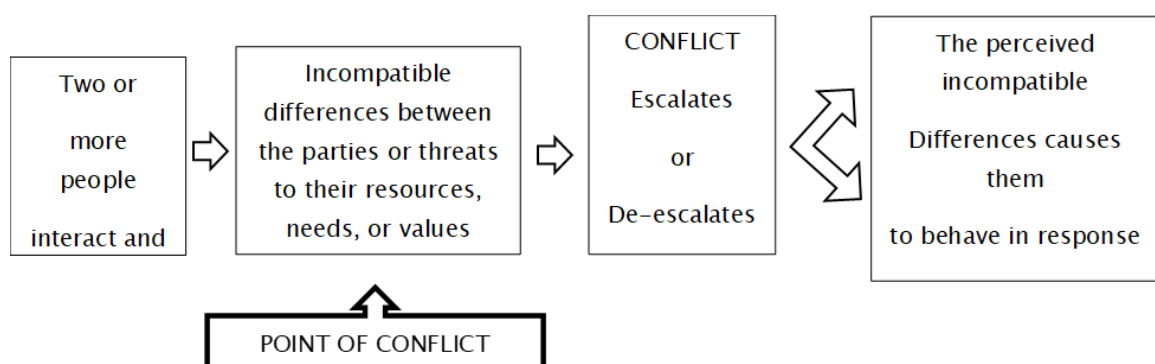


*Note.* Adapted from Deutch, M. (1973). The resolution of conflict. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

An important element to understand with Deutsch's model of conflict involves the psychological processes which lead to both types of conflict. For the conflict to move toward the constructive outcome, the participants emphasize common interests and feelings of honesty, trust, and openness from the other party. On the other end of the spectrum, destructive outcomes have a climate of mutual distrust, which leads to threats and counterthreats, resulting in a vicious spiral toward negative conflict experiences. He referred to the potential for constructive conflicts to devolve into destructive outcomes by the presence of competitive attitudes of one of the participants; it is more difficult to reverse the vicious spiral of destructive conflict into a constructive conflict (Deutsch, 1973). He described his own "Deutsch's crude law of social relations" (p. 365) as an examination of the self-fulfilling processes of both cooperation and competition. Specifically, "cooperation breeds cooperation, while competition breeds competition". Thus, the context of the initial interactions and the outlook of the participants is crucial to a positive outcome.

These conflicts earlier identified as the source of incompatible differences include resources, values, preferences and nuisances, beliefs, and nature of the relationship between the parties. Determine whether the conflict will be resolved with constructive or destructive results (Deutsch, 1973, p. 8). Values, motivations, and aspirations, as well as beliefs about conflict, the party's strategy and tactics, and power within the relationship affect the consequences of conflict. Conflict outcomes are predisposed by the prior relationship the parties have with one another and

expectations about each other, thus, trust and degree of polarization become influential. Furthermore, the nature of the original issue, the scope, rigidity, formulation bear consequence along with the social environment and contexts involved. Deutsch recognizes the strategies utilized by the parties, the use of incentives or threats and punishments, coercion, transparency of information and communication, legitimacy or illegitimacy, as well as credibility, commitment, and motives add effect (Deutsch, 1973).

The typology of conflicts proposed by Deutsch delineates destructive and constructive conflicts:

- vertical conflict, which exists objectively and perceived accurately;
- contingent conflict, which is contingent upon an easily altered feature of the environment;
- displaced conflict, which the parties are disagreeing about the wrong issue;
- misattributed conflict, where conflict is between the wrong parties and wrong issues;
- latent conflict, which is a conflict that should be occurring, but is not; and
- false conflict, which involves no objective basis for a conflict and is based upon misperception or misunderstanding (Deutsch, 1973, p. 12).

Destructive conflicts, which tend to both expand and escalate can become independent of the initiating cause, resulting in a protracted existence (Deutsch, 1973). The expansion spreads throughout the conflict by way of the number of motives, number of participants, principles at stake, costs to the participants, intensity of

negative attitudes, and/ or movement away from social norms of moral conduct.

Competitive elements that can drive escalation include poor communication,

enhancement of power while minimizing other's power, suspicious and hostile attitudes

increase sensitivity to differences and threats, which result in a view that the conflict can

only be solved by one side, through devious or forceful approaches (Deutsch, 1973).

Destructive conflicts involve a commitment to confrontation.

Constructive, or productive conflict, potentially create social change through an

interaction that is mutually rewarding to the parties involved. Change results through

the act of direct confrontation, which comes at a cost, or through problem solving

approaches, which has more desirable outcomes. Deutsch proposed three key

psychological elements that create opportunity for mutually beneficial outcomes:

(a) appropriate level of motivation arousal to solve the problem at hand; (b)

conditions that allow for reformulation of the problem once impasse is reached; and (c)

concurrent outflow of ideas that can be flexibly interwoven to create new patterns.

These psychological key elements are grounded in the process of creative thinking;

productive conflict resolution and constructive conflict resides in the features of creative

thought processes (Deutsch, 1973). The process, grounded in cooperative problem

solving, involves the contrary elements of competition identified earlier, open, and

honest communication, recognizing legitimacy of other's interests, trusting and friendly

attitudes, resulting in convergence of beliefs and values. The notion of *benevolent*

*misperception*, minimized differences and enhanced perception of the other's goodwill,

has a dampening effect on conflict. This process relies on a commitment to cooperation; the parties seek enhancement of mutual power and focus on mutual interests, rather than positions of competition.

Deutsch connected interpersonal conflict as providing a potential situation for intrapersonal conflict. Specifically, it is postulated that "when structures and attitudes are in balance, no intrapersonal conflict exists, and the individual is free to behave in an unambivalent manner toward his counterpart" (1973, p, 313). When an imbalance exists, then an intrapersonal conflict exists. Deutsch proposes that intrapersonal conflict can be resolved in one of two ways, through orienting one's behavior to align with attitude, or through changing one's attitude to align with the behavior. In other words, the individual seeks to maintain cognitive balance.

**Barki and Hartwick Model of Interpersonal Conflict.** This model defines conflict and relates it to conflict handling styles and involves a multidimensional approach by defining interpersonal conflict on three properties: disagreement (cognitive), interference (behavioral), and negative emotion (affective) (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). The model, indicated by a Venn diagram demonstrates the interplay between the properties (Figure 2), with the context of interdependency underscoring the properties of conflict. Specifically, Barki & Hartwick defined conflict as "a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals" (2004, p. 234). They

conceptualized how each of the three properties relates to the interpersonal conflict's

focus: task content/ task process or interpersonal relationship:

- Disagreement (cognition):

  o Task content/ task process: the disagreement focuses on the other

    regarding what should be done in a task or how the task should be done

  o Interpersonal relationship: the disagreement focuses on the other

    person's values, preferences, viewpoints, etc.

- Interference (behavior):

  o Task content/ task process: focus is on preventing the other from doing

    what they think should be done/ how the task should be done

  o Interpersonal relationship: focus is on preventing the other from doing

    things unrelated to the task

- Negative emotion (affective):

  o Task content/ task process: feelings of anger and frustration are directed

    toward the other about what/ how a task should be done

  o Interpersonal relationship: feelings of anger and frustration are directed

    to the other on a relationship level (at the person) (Barki & Hartwick,

    2004, p. 236).

Within this study, this framework provides a way to analyze the three properties

of conflict as well as identifying where the property focuses, on the task or the person.

The task(s) would include eligibility processes, IEP implementation, teaching and

instruction, related service implementation, and inclusion of mother as part of parent in

the special education process as mandated. Additionally, the three elements within a

Venn Diagram can help to analyze interpersonal conflicts (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Barki Hartwick Model*
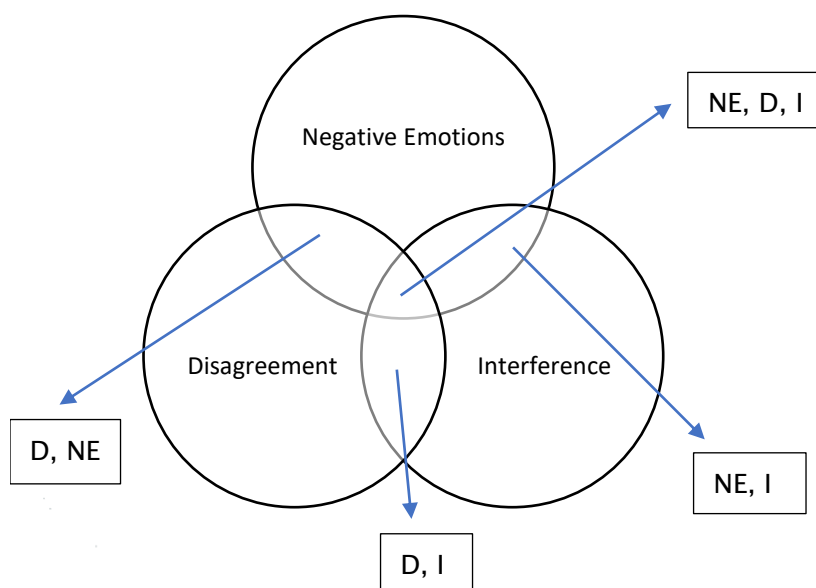


*Note.* The three properties of a conflict can overlap, providing additional information on
the specific nature of a conflict.  Adapted from Barki, H., & Hartwick, J. (2004).

Conceptualizing the construct of interpersonal conflict. *International Journal of Conflict*

*Management*, *15*(3), p. 219. Copyright 2002 École des Hautes Études Commerciales de

Montréal.

**Interpersonal Conflict Handling Styles.** Deutsch proposed a bifurcated model of

interpersonal conflict, but two-dimensional models of conflict expand the notion of

competitive vs. cooperative interactions and conflict, such as the Managerial Grid (Blake

& Mouton, 1964). The two dimensions identified five conflict management styles that

included elements of collaboration, hiding or ignoring conflict, withdrawing through

avoidance, forcing through power and competition, and sharing through acquiescing.

Building upon this basis, explanations of conflict handling have been developed utilizing

the two-dimension axes (Hall, 1969; Filley, 1975; Thomas & Killman, 1974; Thomas,

1992) and validity has been supported (Ruble & Thomas, 1976).

**Process Model of Conflict Episodes.** This conflict model involves elements such

as awareness, thoughts and emotions, intentions, behavior, outcomes within the first

"episode" and then the cycle starts again with the same elements in the second

"episode" and so on (Thomas, 1979). It is important to note that during behavior, the

"other's reaction" can influence thoughts and emotions, creating a feedback loop. This

model helps to analyze repeated instances of conflict within special education services

and can enhance the Barki Hartwick Model as the process related to affective elements

and interference.

Rahim described four types of conflict, intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup,

and intergroup. Building off the original classification for interpersonal conflict styles by

Blake & Mouton (1964), Rahim classified five conflict handling styles: integrating,

obliging, avoiding, dominating, and compromising (2011). These strategic intentions,

which involve two dimensions of integrative and distributive with relation to concern for

others and concern for self, help to analyze the competitive or collaborative nature of

the relationship in the conflict proposed by Deutsch, allowing for understanding of the

behavioral aspects (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Conflict Handling Styles*

| Integrating style: high concern for self/ others | Collaboration between parties with openness, exchange of information, examination of differences to reach solution agreeable to both parties (known as "problem solving") |
|---|---|
| Obliging style: low concern for self/ high concern for others | Attempts to play down the differences and emphasize the commonalities to satisfy concern of the other party. Forms include selfless generosity, charity, or obedience to another party's position (known as "accommodating") |
| Dominating style: high concern for self/ low concern for others | Involves win-lose orientation or a forcing behavior to win one's position while ignoring the needs and expectations of the other party (known as "competing") |
| Avoiding style: low concern for self/ others | Involves withdrawal, buckpassing, sidestepping issue and may take the form of postponing until a better time or withdrawing from a threatening situation (known as "suppression") |
| Compromising style: intermediate concern for self/ others | Involves both give and take or sharing, with both parties giving up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. Approaches include splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position. |

*Note.* Adapted from Rahim, M. A. (1992). Managing conflict in organizations (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers (pp. 42-45).

## Systems Analysis of Conflict

**Nested Model of Conflict.** The Nested Model of Conflict (Dugan, 1996) contextualized conflict into four concentric orbs nested and overlapping at one end, while expanding on the opposite end (Figure 4). This structure includes four conflict contexts: a) issues-specific, b) relational, c) structural: sub-system and d) structural: system (Dugan, 1996). Issues-specific, the innermost nested orb, refers to the most basic and frequent form of conflict, occurring between or among individuals or groups

and one or more issues (Dugan, 1996). The source of the conflict, one or more issues, could include disagreements related to differing perspectives or interpretations of "agreed-upon information" or contradictory interests related to the information or issue at hand (Dugan, 1996, p. 15).  Examples of issues-specific conflict include two colleagues competing for the same position, resulting in perceptions of unfair treatment by their employer, neighbors experiencing discord related to barking caused by one neighbor's dog early in the morning, or two members of a family might have an ongoing dispute related to their political differences.  Although it was stated that this type of conflict is the most common and basic of the nested levels, it is not necessarily the easiest to resolve (Dugan, 1996).

The next layer, relational conflict, materializes from problems related to interpersonal interactions. The source of this type of conflict stems from interactions between two parties and their emotional regard for each other. For example, two students might have an ongoing feud over a previous boyfriend and derogatory statements said to each other, causing feelings of hurt and shame. Siblings might have an ongoing conflict over the distribution of the will and their parents' estate, but the real discord results from feelings of guilt and blame regarding one sibling taking care of an ailing parent and hurtful interactions that took place. Dugan (1996, p. 15) provides the example of two sports teams sparring over a shared stadium due to "personal animus between their owners", thus again showing how the personal conflict can also affect more than those directly engaged in the interpersonal friction.

The third level of conflict, structural: sub-system, the third layer of the nested orbs, moves away from disputing parties toward institutional systems serving as the nature of the conflict. Specifically, the subsystem lies below social levels and within the organization. A sub-system conflict includes those related to inequities of racism, sexism, classism, and other *isms* to the places in which humans interact (churches, homes, streets), and can also include those not produced by society at large. A boutique owner who has a conflict with a customer over their sexual orientation would be considered a sub-system conflict.

Finally, the outermost layer focuses on system-level structural conflict. This results from "inequities that are built into the social system" (Dugan, 1996, p. 15). Dugan emphasizes this level of conflict "emerges from inequities that are built into the social system" (p. 15). These inequities, the result of human constructs, would not include differences that are naturally occurring. Considering the previous example of sub-system conflict, this conflict could be systemic if there were influences outside the internal policy of the boutique, for example, broader legislated discrimination against certain individuals at the governmental level, indicating presence sub-system conflict as well.

**Figure 4**

*Nested Model of Conflict*
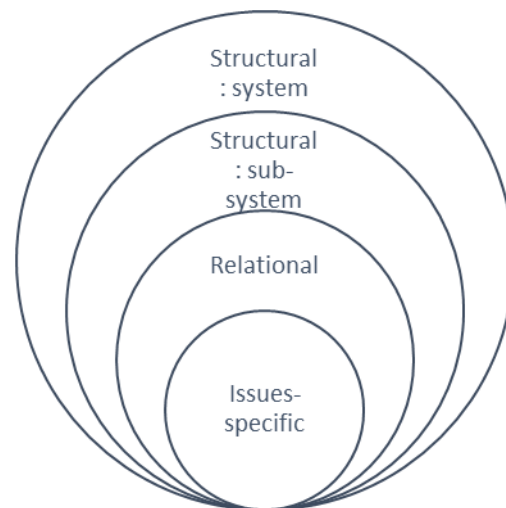


*Note.* Adapted from Dugan, M. (1996). A nested theory of conflict. *Women in leadership*, *1*(1), p. 14.

Within this nested theory, each embedded conflict lies within the other levels; therefore, all subsystem level conflicts also include relational and issues-related conflicts. Thus, the systems levels of conflict become more complicated as they move outward. This ensures consideration of the nested conflicts as well as the systems-level conflicts within organizational disputes (Dugan, 1996).

Considering Deutsch's Model and the Nested Model of Conflict, there are relationships that strengthen the theoretical framework constructs. Within the issues layer, personal preferences, values, needs, and resources would be the conduits for conflict. Considering the relational layer, the nature of the relationship, as well as the perceived reality v. actual reality inform this layer, particular to the concept of how the discord between people harbors the underlying issues, which correlate to displaced

conflict (wrong issue), misattributed conflict (wrong parties or issue), or false conflict

(no objective basis for conflict as it results from misperception or misunderstanding).

Finally, the layers of sub-system and systems level, influenced by power differentials

and societal inequities, the rigidity and scope involved are compounded by the social

and contextual environment, particularly related to the institution.

<div align="center">**Contextual Constructs**</div>

**Feminist Theory**

The term "feminism", first referred to in the mid-1800s to refer to the qualities

of females, has both a normative and descriptive assertion. First, men and women are

entitled to equal rights and respect, and second, women experience disadvantages

related to rights and respect, when compared to men (Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy, 2018). Feminist theory emphasizes that one must understand the

oppression before determining how to achieve the end goal (Turner & Maschi, 2014).

Applying feminist theory to motherhood, intensive mothering can be criticized as a

sense of oppression, as though women must fulfill their roles as mother and wife, thus

potentially losing their identity to husband and child (Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy, 2018).  "Although intensive mothering has also been maligned by those who

have experienced too much of the burden of child rearing, it has been affirmed and

legitimated for the American culture as a whole by such influential experts as Benjamin

Spock, T. Berry Brazelton, and Penelope Leach" (Gross, 1998, p. 270). Hays (1996)

indicated the following assumptions about child-rearing: a) mothers are the ideal and

preferred caregivers for children; b) the best child-rearing is expert-guided, emotionally

absorbing, and labor-intensive; and c) children are sacred and thus priceless. Therefore,

these societal perspectives on motherhood, while seemingly indicating positive

characteristics of women with respect to child rearing, simultaneously oppress women

with burden. According to Gross, the onerous demands related to intensive mothering,

including time, emotions, and finances coincides with the chronic ambivalence that

results from seeking a sense of accomplishment out of the home and the guilt

associated with motherhood expectations or perceptions. Gross (1998) refers to this as

the "superwoman-supermom" syndrome, which refers to experiencing both defeat and

disappointment with regards to the personal dreams of women yet seeking intensive

motherhood validation.

Relating these challenges incurred by families engaging in special education

services within the public school system, feminist theory emphasizes that the "personal

status of women is shaped by political, economic and social power relations" (Turner

& Maschi, 2014, p. 153).  The intensity and proclivity for conflict within special

education creates a context for parent implicating, particularly associating student-

related challenges to the other not achieving the expectations associated with effective

mothering, or mother blaming. Specifically, mother blaming is a sex-specific form of

oppression that creates a unique burden for parents (Jackson & Mannix, 2004),

particularly parents within special education contexts. According to Caplan (2013, p.

100), who investigated mother blaming, "we found that mothers were blamed for

virtually every kind of psychological or emotional problem that ever brought any patient

to see a therapist". Colker (2015, p. 1206) reinforced this by stating, "blaming the

mother is a longstanding cultural tradition in the United States". Mother blaming within

special education conflict cases is evident by the decisions within the cases; other than

the District of Columbia, school districts prevail in a majority or near majority of cases

that move into due process, thus reinforcing mother blaming as a phenomenon in

special education and disability (Colker, 2015). Specifically, Colker refers to the paradox

mothers of children in special education experience; school officials may blame mothers

for not doing enough for the child, but then will also fault them for advocating or

seeking to do too much for their children.

**Theory of Habitus**

Habitus refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions (norms)

humans possess because of individual, unique life experiences (Bourdieu, 1977).

Therefore, when people move to action and demonstrate agency, they simultaneously

reveal social structure. This is applicable to the context of this study as it considers the

class of mothers advocating for services, deploying resources to overcome barriers.

Additionally, cultural capital and field explain cultural elements related to agency and

expectations that influence behaviors and interactions between mothers and special

education stakeholders.

**Cultural Capital.** Cultural capital refers to the collective symbolic elements (skills,

tastes, clothing, mannerisms, posture, material objects, intellect, credentials), that one

acquires because of their belonging to a particular social class (Bourdieu, 1986). The act

of sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others creates a sense of collective

identity and group inclusion; it can also create social inequality as some forms are

valued over others. Thus, cultural consequences create disparities within social mobility,

just as wealth and education can. *Cultural capital* then functions as an economy of

practice and system of exchange, comprised of accumulated cultural knowledge

functioning in the currency of social status and power (Barker, 2004). Within the special

education context, cultural capital relates to advocacy by mothers for their children who

receive services and can be intertwined with access to economic capital (Trainor,

2010a/b).

**Field.** The *field* or *fields*, refers to various social and institutional arenas in which

people express dispositions, thus competing for the resource of capital (McNay, 1999).

Tensions and contradictions arise when people engage and are challenged by different

contexts; differing behaviors result as people might behave one way in one context and

different in another. Differential power can be explained by *fields*, as individuals are

socialized to behave differently in public, private, or intimate arenas of power

(VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). Due to socialization differences, there are resulting gender

differences, thus creating differing behaviors and differing expectations of behavior. In

special education, there will be expectations of behavior as well as ways that mothers

will behave based upon socialization and the institutional contexts. For habitus, cultural

capital, and field, the influence of disability on social status, power, and institutional attitudes will also be explored.

### Critical Disability Studies

Critical disability studies utilize a sociopolitical orientation to disability to contextualize the lived experience of disability situated within the societal meanings ascribed to human differences (Linton, 1998). This framework differentiates disability from impairment; impairment refers to functional limitations whereas disability results from denial of life opportunities by way of inaccessible contexts and ableist beliefs (Linton, 1998; Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). The medical model of disability involves the perspective that the differences that result from disability deviate from the norm, thus require intervention to fix, cure, or treat the condition with the goal of moving toward normalcy. Connor (2012) refers to this medically bound approach as the primary model of special education. The social model of disability, on the other hand, which "views disability as socially produced, not simply an individual deficit that needs to overcome" (Orsini, 2012, p. 806), stands in contrast to the medical model.

Ableism refers to negative or discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities (Smith, 2010) or devaluing of people with disabilities based upon a belief system of superiority over others (Shapiro & Baglieri, 2012). Scholars within disability studies in education (DSE) focus on "illuminating fundamental inequalities for students with disabilities and dominant practices in schools that lend support to the persistent practice of ability-based segregation of this group of students" (Lalvani & Hale, p. 29).

Parsons (2020) tested hypotheses based upon influence of risk, policy beliefs, and trust

on the development on relational ties within educational policy networks, utilizing data

from a 2016 collection of surveys from both public and private special education

stakeholders in Virginia. Using exponential random graph models (ERGMs), Parsons

found evidence of homophily regarding the medical model of disability as a "function of

the dominance of government actors (e.g., LEAs, stage agencies) in autism and special

education policy networks" (2020, p. 52). This indicated that individuals who share

beliefs related to the medical model of disability are "more likely to work together in a

special education policy subsystem," thus demonstrating consistency with the

"argument from critical disability studies that guidelines for special education services

are largely developed around the medical model" (p. 52).

**Kawa Model**

The Kawa model (Iwama, 2006) is an occupational therapy model that can be

used for both assessment and intervention and involves a metaphor of a river to

symbolize the flow of life.  Through a visual construction of the river, participants can

identify the following: a) riverbed, the contexts related to the special education process,

b) the logs within the river that involve personal strengths and supports, c) boulders

that block river flow and are the perceived barriers to the process, d) river flow and the

functional movement of the water to indicate movement, or lack thereof (Figure 5).

According to Iwama, Thomson, & Macdonald (2009, p. 1129), *mizu-* (Japanese for

'water'), "envelopes, defines and effects" the other elements of the river; "…when water

flow weakens, whether individually or collectively defined can be described as unwell, or in a state of disharmony."

The Kawa model focuses on contexts as they "shape and influence the realities and challenges" of daily experiences, and in this case, the experiences of special education services (Iwama, Thomson, & Macdonald, 2009). Kawa model was not only used as a data collection process, but also as a means by which to analyze the data, using the specifics of the model for each element. The cross-sectional view of the river emphasizes the contextual elements while the longitudinal representation emphasizes the temporal context and evolutionary aspects of the conflict.

**Figure 5**

*Kawa Model: Cross-sectional View*
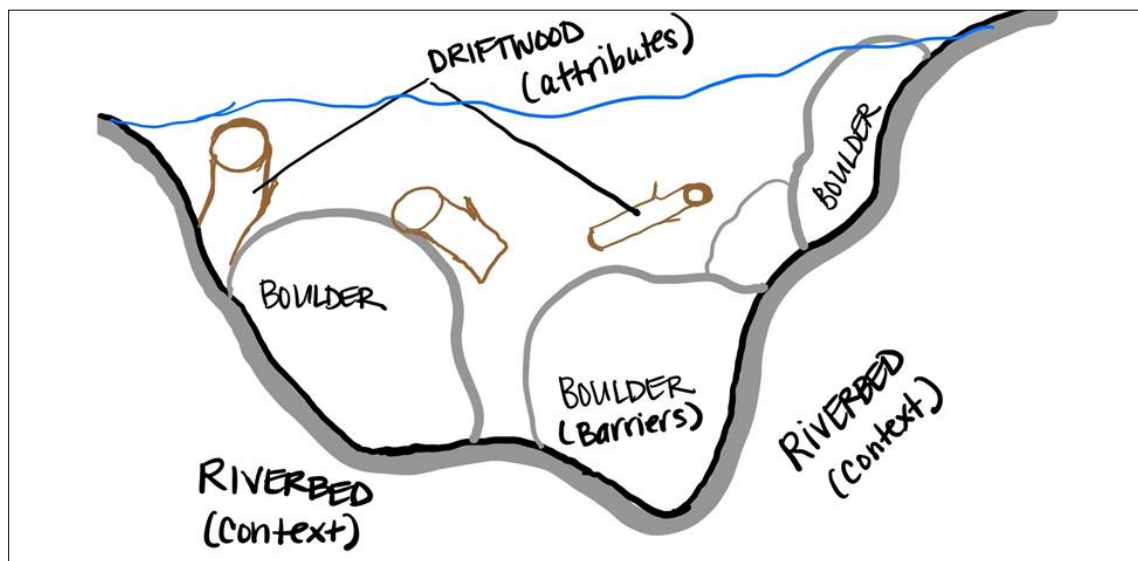


*Note.* This figure illustrates the Kawa Model River and metaphors used to explain personal context and experience. Adapted from Iwama, M. K. (2006). *The Kawa model: Culturally relevant occupational therapy*. Elsevier Health Sciences. (p. 152)

**Figure 6**

*Kawa Model: Longitudinal View*
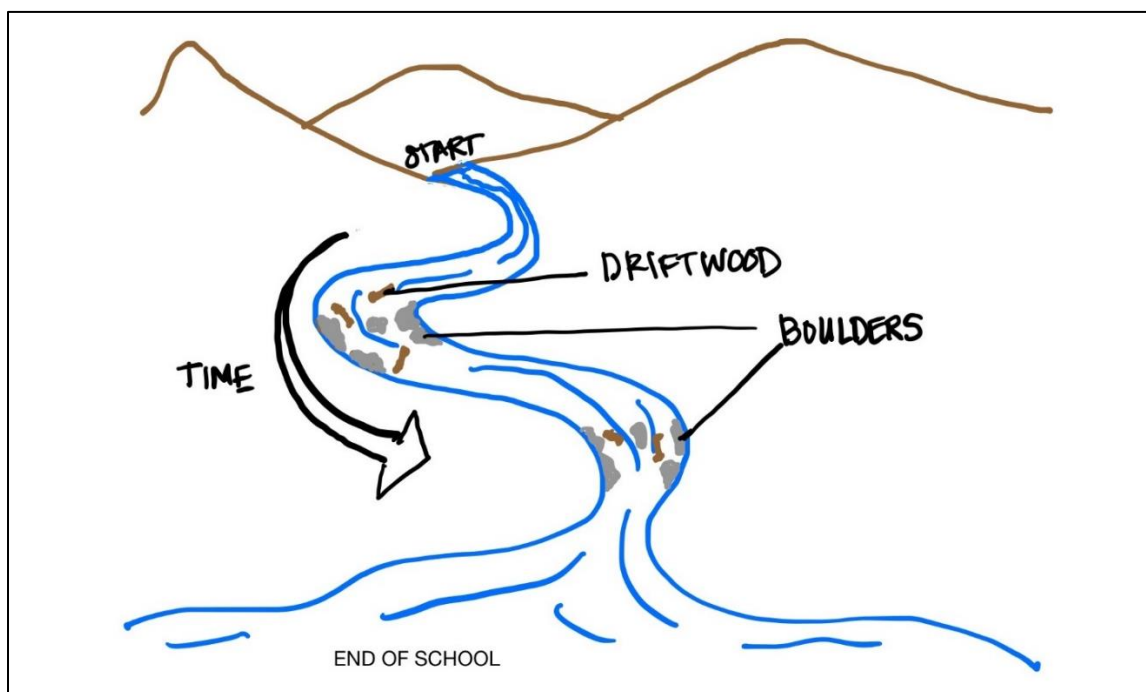


*Note.* This figure illustrates the Kawa Model River and metaphors used to explain the temporal context of the special education experience. Adapted from Iwama, M. K. (2006). *The Kawa model: Culturally relevant occupational therapy.* Elsevier Health Sciences. (p. 189)

## Conflict in Special Education

The disputes related to the special education process, particularly the IEP and installation of accommodations, have been documented and investigated. As previously mentioned, Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified eight factors that either escalate or de-escalate parent-school conflict from the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities, as well as school administrators and mediators within their grounded theory approach. Completing 44 semi-structured and open-ended interview questions with parents, school officials, and mediators, the researchers then completed qualitative data

analysis to complete their grounded theory. They found eight factors that either escalate or de-escalate parent-school conflict: a) discrepant views of a child or his/ her needs, b) knowledge, c) service delivery, d) reciprocal power, e) constraints, f) valuation, g) communication, and h) trust (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). While this study included parents of students with varying disabilities, it can still be used to categorize conflict sources for parents of children with hidden disabilities.

Lasater (2016) identified barriers to partnership development and eventual parent-teacher conflict, particularly the perceptions identified as "challenging parents" and "lack of teacher training" (p. 239). Negativity felt by parents was also conveyed by Hsaio et al., (2017), parents described not being welcome into the child's school and perceived as adversarial, demanding, and hostile by the system overall. Other studies also identified challenges through qualitative means, specifically identifying parent perceptions and challenges with the processes within special education services. Gwernan-Jones et al., (2015) conducted a systematic review of qualitative research to explore school-related experience of parents of students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), an NVD. They identified grounds for conflict related to parental blame for pupils' disruptive behavior, stating high quality parent-teacher relationships were found to be the exception within special education (p. 2). Specific drivers of conflict included dashed expectations, feeling criticized, being different, perceptions that the origin of the problem was in the school, and escalating resistance (Gwernan-Jones, et al., 2015). Broomhead (2013) found similar themes utilizing a semi-

structured interview approach; parents reported experiences of blame and guilt, thus

focusing on obtaining labels of special educational needs for their children. These

strategies can influence other drivers of conflict, related to barriers within the

processes, particularly bureaucratic processes schools utilize (Broomhead, 2013;

Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015). Medical and deficit discourse, professionalized discourse,

policy interpretations, and meeting practices that create power struggles also drive

conflict (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). This information highlighted the disruptive

behaviors that influence the conflict process, which has implications for children with

behavioral challenges.

In the current special education climate, the importance and value of school

professional-parent partnerships in the education of students with disabilities is housed

within IDEA, which grants parents the right to be involved in all aspects of planning and

decision making (IDEA, 2004). As previously introduced, despite these laws and intent of

equal partnerships, there is a body of research that reveals the conflicts that exist

throughout the special education process. To organize the common sources of conflict

in special education, the following categories will be utilized:

- design of services: placement, eligibility, student's needs

- delivery of services: IEP goals, placement, educational practices

- relationship issues: Communication, trust, reciprocal power, valuation,
  discrepant views of a child

- constraints: resource restrictions

- knowledge: lack of educational training, dispute resolution practices.

Researchers identified these five categories as the consistent drivers through previous

studies (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002; Mueller, Singer, &

Draper, 2008).

## Design of Services

Diagnosis and eligibility, as previously discussed, exist within the first steps of

the ten-step education process. Within IDEA, parents can secure appropriate educational

services, through request or suggestion of an independent educational evaluation

during eligibility determination deliberations (IDEA, 2004; Trainor, 2010a/b). Mueller &

Carranza (2011) examined 575 special education due process hearings from 41 U.S.

states to identify themes in relation to descriptive nature of the hearings, initiated within

the 2005-2006 school year. The mean age of the students involved was 12 years, with

(N = 329) identified as male, and ASD and specific learning disability and OHI making up

over half of the disabilities represented in the hearings (61.6%), which are all invisible

disabilities. The authors found the most common due process hearing disputes were

related to issues with placement (25%), IEP and program appropriateness (24%),

assessment/ evaluation process (12%), and eligibility (11%). A pattern related to

disability category became evident through analysis:

- Most disputes related to ASD related to placement (34%), IEP and program

  appropriateness (27%), and assessment and evaluation (10%).

- For emotional disturbance disability disputes, 36% for placement, 17% related to IEP and program appropriateness, 16% over behavior, and 11% related to eligibility.

- For OHI, 23% related to IEP and program appropriateness, 23% to placement, 13% for eligibility, and 13% for behavior.

- For specific learning disability (SLD), 25% were related to IEP and program appropriateness, 20% about placement, 18% about assessment and evaluation, and 12% about behavior (Mueller & Carranza, 2011).

Overall, placement and IEP and program appropriateness were the most disputed issues.

Within the ten steps of special education, identification is the first step (Kupper & Kohanek, 2000). With respect to students with invisible disabilities, many are not identified as having a disability or the identification happens after significant struggling (i.e., repeating a grade). The reasons for this delay or lack of identification come from the challenging nature of invisible disabilities, in that the signs of learning and attention issues may be overlooked or misinterpreted (NCLD, 2017b). Recent statistics show perplexing trends with special education and specific learning disability (SLD). Identification of developmental delays and speech/ language impairments decreased from 2007 to 2011, with 6.6 % of students in special education identified with SLD at age 6. Interestingly, the number increases to 40.8% by age 10 (NCLD, 2017b). While it might seem that the decreases were due to students being reclassified with SLD, the shifts do not account for the other 40,000 students who were identified with SLD at age

10 (para. 18). "Because many students with SLD struggle with reading, waiting to identify the issue in the upper elementary grades and beyond puts students at significant risk of experiencing academic difficulties in later grades" (para. 19). Additionally, some parents refuse to let schools "label" their child; current statistics indicate parents follow recommendations only 56% of the time (NCLD, 2017b). Also, the response to intervention (RTI) process can be used incorrectly to delay or deny timely identification and evaluation for students suspected of having a disability, resulting in action from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) issuing formal letters reminding states that intervention strategies cannot be used to delay or deny evaluation of students (Lhamon, 2016). Finally, there is evidence that schools incorrectly determine that students who are both gifted (have gifted eligibility) and have learning disabilities (referred to as twice exceptional) are not eligible for special education services because their test scores are too high. In 2015, the United States Department of Education (USED)had to intervene to the barriers by reminding states that students with learning disabilities cannot be found ineligible for special education solely because they scored above a particular cut score established by state policy (USED OSEP, 2015).

While there are inconsistencies with respect to SLD, an invisible disability, and identification within special education processes, there are also disparities in ADHD diagnoses, another NVD (NCLD, 2017b; CDC, n.d.). These disparities have been connected to race, socioeconomic status, adverse childhood experiences, ethnicity, and prevalence and identification of learning and attention issues. As a result, federal

regulations were instituted in 2016 to bring equity to IDEA (USED, 2016). DuPaul et al.,

(2019, p. 1309) utilized parent-reported data for 2,495 children with ADHD aged 4 to

17 years from the National Survey of the Diagnosis and Treatment of ADHD and

Tourette Syndrome (NS-DATA) and found "about one of every three students with ADHD

were not receiving any school-based interventions and two of three were not receiving

classroom management, which represents a major gap in addressing chronic

impairment related to ADHD symptoms". They also found that secondary school

students with ADHD are less likely to receive school support than younger children, even

though they have higher levels of need or impairment. There was also evidence of

ineffective approaches such as grade retention and school expulsion specifically for

students with ADHD. Trainor (2010b) also identified another issue of concern, the

disability label or category of service, as national studies indicate that outcomes for

children with health impairment labels are more positive than those with learning

disability labels.

Additional challenges to identification and eligibility result because of the

combination of NVD and differences amongst state policies. For example, not all states

include dyslexia in service provision (NCLD, 2017b).  Most state laws created a specific

definition of dyslexia for educational coding indicating it is a type of learning disability

that impacts reading, only 24 states have dyslexia laws specific to early identification

and intervention for dyslexia (NCLD, 2017b).  States that have disabilities laws include

California, Missouri, Texas, and Ohio, while Florida and New York do not.  States such as

Washington, Oklahoma, Utah, and Pennsylvania created pilot programs they are

implementing, while Maryland and South Carolina have task forces in place (NCLD,

2017b).  Third grade reading laws also vary from state to state, compounding the

barriers to identification, with California, Florida, Missouri, Ohio and New York all having

third grade reading laws, while Pennsylvania does not (NCLD, 2017b).  In 2016, the

Research Excellence and Advancements for Dyslexia Act (READ Act) was signed into law.

It requires the National Science Foundation (NSF) to spend 5 million dollars per year (at

minimum) on SLD research, with a requirement that half the funding must focus

specifically on dyslexia. The authors of the NCLD white paper on SLD related this law to

potential improvements that may result: (a) identification of dyslexia earlier; improved

training for educators to better understand and instruct students with SLD and/ or

dyslexia; c) increased curriculum and educational tools for children with SLD or dyslexia;

d) development and implementation of effective dyslexia interventions (Whittaker &

Burns, 2021).

Educational placement also creates a situation for potential conflict, particularly

when parents feel their child should receive more inclusive educational services (Erwin,

Soodak, Winton, & Turnbull, 2001; Lalvani, 2012; Sauer, 2007; Wang et al., 2004). On

the contrary, there are other parents who feel that their child would be better served by

a self-contained classroom, particularly when they perceive the teachers as more willing

and prepared (Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Ryndak, Storch, & Hoppey, 2008) and/ or it is a "safe

haven" (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Lalvani, 2013). While Trainor (2010b) found differences

amongst participants based upon cultural and ethnic backgrounds, other researchers

found that some parents view inclusive classrooms as a risk for social isolation and peer

rejection or lesser education due to unprepared or unwilling teachers (Leyser & Kirk,

2004; Ryndak, Storch, & Hoppey, 2008; Lalvani & Hale, 2015). Additionally, parents,

typically those categorized as "White," envision inclusive settings for their child but were

directed toward self-contained education, resulting in the need to "fight" for inclusive

education (Lalvani, 2012; Sauer & Albanesi, 2013; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Lalvani & Hale,

2015).  Fish (2006, 2008) and Sauer & Albanesi (2013) found that some parents go to

the extent of litigation or hire experts to advocate for inclusive classrooms, while others

"shop" for diagnoses, requesting certain labels to be used or not be used on

documentation. Lalvani (2012) linked these parent perceptions and behaviors to mostly

middle-class parents.

## Delivery of Services

Conflict within delivery of services can take place during IEP design, meetings,

and implementation, student placement, and during educational practices.  According to

Mueller et al. (2008, p.194), "the majority of conflict between parents and school

officials takes place during IEP meetings", and these meetings "often trigger the initial

dispute". The IEP process, from the initial construction to re-evaluation, constitutes

steps five through ten of the ten steps of the SPED process (Kupper & Kohanek, 2000).

Despite the standards within IDEA, Turnbull et al. (2006) found that parents often take

the role of passive recipients rather than active participants, which adds to the element of potential conflict.

Wagner et al. (2012) completed a study analyzing two prospective longitudinal studies of nationally representative samples of students with disabilities, the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) and National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) and found that 70 percent of parents reported satisfaction with the level of involvement within the IEP and transition planning goals process, with 27.8 percent wanting more involvement in planning decisions. Specific to disability, they found that the odds of parents of students with ASD attending IEP/ transition meetings was more than three times the odds of parents with LDs attending. Interestingly, parents' satisfaction with their involvement was positively related to the child's social skills. Finally, parents with higher incomes, parents of Caucasian students, and parents with better educated heads of household all indicated higher levels of satisfaction and higher levels of attendance at meetings (Wagner et al., 2012). Of importance to SPED satisfaction for parents of children with NVD, Wagner et al. found that students suspended or expelled due to behavior complaints was negatively related to parents' satisfaction with their involvement in IEP/ transition meetings, but grade retention was not statistically significant.

Fish (2008) conducted a survey to investigate how parents of children who receive special education services perceive IEP meetings and their value during the process. In the study, 51 parents participated by completing the survey, utilizing a

sample consisting of majority middle-to upper middle-class socioeconomically, with most having elementary school-aged children receiving services in self-contained classroom settings. Most parents indicated a level of satisfaction with the IEP experience, with the lowest scored area as "felt comfortable," however, the small sample size makes it difficult to generalize the results. While the survey sample was small, there were open-ended questions that provided information about the IEP process that helps to understand the experience for parents. Parents suggested honesty from educators, predetermining objectives in parents' absence before meeting, be more proactive parents by not being afraid to ask questions or make suggestions, and carefully prepare through self-education of special education law and IEP process as ways both the IEP school team and the parents could improve IEP processes.

Fish indicated the emphasis on parental persistence with becoming knowledgeable on special education law as a method to improve IEP process aligned with the results obtained in his study of mothers of students with ASD in 2006 (2008, p. 13). In the study, Fish reported that one parent reported that school personnel asked her if she had done drugs when she was pregnant, causing her to feel "intimidated" (Fish, 2008). Leiter & Krauss (2004) identified power differential barriers to parent participation in educational decisions within special education, despite safeguards built into IDEA. Rios et al. (2020) reported that families indicate challenges accessing disability services, which can lead to stress (Burke et al., 2019; Burke & Hodapp, 2014) as well as decreased progress of student achievement (Wagner et al., 2005). Despite

these challenges, Fish concluded that relations between parents and school have

strengthened over time through acquired knowledge by parents regarding the IEP

process and educators regarding student disabilities (2008).

The involvement of independent evaluators and advocates to assist with the

"gray areas of disagreements" over various areas of services within special education is a

method parents use to improve access to services (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; p. 245).

Parents emphasized a school's inability to validate and answer questions about services,

emphasis on the need for external services, lack of program options, shortsightedness

in the planning of programs and not recognizing the child's needs when the services are

needed also influence disputes regarding service delivery. Leiter & Krauss (2004)

identified reported problems with the small number of parents who request additional

related services (occupational therapy, speech language therapy, physical therapy) and

were thus more likely to report dissatisfaction with the child's educational services. They

connected the challenges to the experience of encountering resistance as the driver

toward dissatisfaction, not the experience of asking for services.

The IEP process creates stress for families despite mandated collaboration with

parents.  Tucker & Schwartz (2013) utilized a mixed-methods survey study with 135

parents of students with ASD exploring their perceptions of collaboration within the IEP

process. They identified common barriers to collaboration, including opportunities to

provide input, communication barriers with school team, and negative perceptions of

school personnel. Facilitators of collaborative participation perceived by parents

included school administrator actions such as attendance at IEP meetings, assistance with acquiring resources and quick responses to phone calls (p. 3). Overall, parents of children with ASD reported difficulty and/or not being included in the SPED collaborative process.

Beyond IEP development and implementation, parents also face conflict related to delivery of services related to behavior interventions, particularly for students with invisible disabilities such as ADHD and emotional behavior disorders. Harrison et al. (2013) conducted a systematic review of educational accommodations for students with behavior challenges and found 149 strategies designed to address academic, emotional, and behavioral problems of elementary and secondary school students with disabilities. Upon inclusion, exclusion, and various hierarchical elimination processes, they reviewed 18 studies that met their final criteria for inclusion. They refined definitions for modifications (practices in schools that alter, lower or reduce expectations to compensate for a disability), accommodations (changes to practices that hold a student to same standard as students without disabilities but provide a differential boost to mediate impact of disability/ provide access), and interventions (changes made through systematic process to develop or improve knowledge, skills, behaviors, cognitions, or emotions) (Harrison et al., 2013, p. 556). They found that teacher availability was the only strategy with evidence of a "differential boost;" children with and without hyperactivity benefited from adding structure to tasks, and children without ADHD benefited more from extended time than those with ADHD. Their final conclusions

emphasized use of evidence-based practices and indicated concern that some

accommodations were being used without evidence for effectiveness (Harrison et al.,

2013, p. 587).

Another element of service delivery involves seeking professional services

external to the school, spanning from evaluation services (psychology, eligibility, related

services) to tutoring to professional advocates. Trainor (2010b) conducted an

ethnographic qualitative study, interviewing 27 parents of children with diverse racial-

ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and disability backgrounds through individual and

focus group approaches. Parents from her study sought disability identification for

special education services externally after repeated findings by school psychologists of

ineligibility (Trainor, 2010b). One parent spoke of a preference for labeling autism over

emotional disturbance (ED), as she felt that "...teachers would be less hopeful and

attentive if her son was served as ED rather than autism" (p. 253).

**Relationship Issues**

Parent involvement in the educational process is not only critical for success, but

also mandated for parents of students within SPED. IDEA (2004) specifies that parents

must be members of the IEP team decision-making process and have opportunities for

meaningful, active participation.  Schools must also obtain consents for the initiation of

an evaluation and must inform parents of procedural safeguards. Positive relationships

between schools and parents are associated with improved academic performance for all

students, including students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 2010; Dallmer, 2004;

McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009). Researchers found that characteristics of

students, as well as their households (e.g., demographics, type of disability), along with

what has occurred in the past (e.g., being held back a grade), and the fluid changing

elements (e.g., parents' expectations for their child's future) shape school experiences,

including those involving IEP and transition planning for students with SPED (Wagner et

al., 2012). Multiple research studies have also shown that teacher-initiated

encouragement of parent participation significantly develops and sustains collaborative

home-school relationships (Ferrara & Ferrar, 2005; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey

et al., 2005). The need for parent involvement is clear, unfortunately, the research

shows that parent involvement at IEP meetings is low, despite the IDEA mandate

(Epstein, 2005; Forlin & Hopewell, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Martin et al.,

2006; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). Additionally, there is a lack of research on best

practices for training teachers in effective strategies for initiating and cultivating parent

participation (Seitsinger et al., 2008). Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified specific

themes related to this relationship between parents and schools, including how the

school views the child, reciprocal power, communication, and trust.

Specific to ASD, an NVD, researchers have found significant challenges within the

parent-school relationship. Stoner & Angell (2006) conducted an exploratory qualitative

study with eight parents of four children with ASD, focusing on the parental roles. They

found that parent participants, particularly mothers, consistently engaged in four roles:

negotiator, monitor, supporter, and advocate. More information related to the roles of

mothers will be discussed below.

**Discrepant Views of the Child and His/ Her Needs**

The most prevalent driver of conflict, according to Lake & Billingsley (2000),

*discrepant views of the child and his/ her needs,* was found to initiate or escalate

conflict in 90% of their participants' experiences. Participants identified two ways the

school could view a child differently: the first perception involved the school not viewing

the child as an individual with unique strengths and abilities, while the second

perception was that the school described a child from a deficit-model perspective (p.

244). This difference in the "lenses" in which schools and parents view the child

(student) becomes essential as it "…determines what is seen as problematic and what

receives attention through school programming" (p. 244), leading to disputes related to

program offerings. Interestingly, the school viewing a child from the deficit perspective

added another layer to the dispute process related to "feelings of frustration and

sadness when the school described in detail what their children could not do" (p. 244).

Starr and Foy (2012, p. 210) completed a survey with 144 parents of children

with ASD and found that "many parents in the sample indicated that they and/ or their

children with ASD had experienced fear, resentment, or prejudice toward their children

from either school personnel or other parents". Resentment or prejudice, the most cited

negative views experienced by parents, included situations such as worrying that the

child takes up too much time of the teacher, issues related to the child's behavior and

assumption that the behavior was result of lack of discipline in the home, ignorance of the disability, and/ or fear of the child.  This type of disablement, or ableism serves as a driver with the conflict experience, like how Lake & Billingsley found discrepant views of the child to be the most significant driver of conflict.

## Valuation

Defined as "…who and what people care for and about", valuation in special education relationships concerns not only the parent-school relationship (both parents and school personnel), but also the valuation of the children from the parents' perspective (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 246). The more devaluation noted in both relationships, the more conflict escalated. Devaluation exists in the form of feeling lied to, feeling that important information is being withheld, and being treated in a condescending manner. Studies identified that positive relationships between parents and schools have not been "adequately forged" (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Lovitt & Cushing, 1999; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997; Vaughn et al, 1988).

Stoner et al. (2008) found that authentic caring was one of the prime teacher characteristics that created trust in the relationship. When the teachers' caring and acceptance of their child related to the child's worth, strengths, and perceived value, parents received that as authentic caring. Valuation also mattered with team interactions, when parents felt "ostracized, unwelcome, or excluded during team meetings or IEP meetings, trust was negatively affected" (p. 171). Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen completed a telephone survey with 45 families of children with autism who

were part of a parent support group focusing on SPED placement, communication,

parent knowledge, and parent priorities and satisfaction with SPED services. The parents

indicated concerns such as "the teachers forget that my child is a human being", but

also expressed positive perceptions such as "the school does a nice job at treating him

like all other students" (2003, p. 234).

Valuation also becomes important when considering the teachers' attitudes

toward inclusive education. Perrin, Jury, & Descombre (2021) referred to the valuation of

inclusive SPED by teachers as a professional dilemma; teachers, aware of the potential

benefits of inclusion, have valid concerns pertaining to what is being requested of them,

what is morally worth, and what is conceivable within the teaching context. Thus, while

they might agree with the philosophy of inclusive special education, they might exhibit

reluctance toward including SPED students in their classroom. This can lead to negative

attitudes toward inclusion and SPED students. They found three categories of factors

that influence these attitudes: context, students' characteristics, and teacher's

characteristics (Perrin et al., 2021, p. 1087). Context included cultural and historical

influences; the community will handle inclusive education in the same strain as the

practices it inherits (Moberg et al., 2019; Savolainen et al., 2012). Student characteristics

primarily involve the type of disability as cognitive disabilities or ASD are perceived as

being more difficult (Jury et al., 2021). Teacher characteristics include gender (women

have more positive attitudes, Alghazo & Naagar Gaad, 2004; Avrimidis, et al., 2000),

age, teaching experience (younger and less experience are more positive, Avramidis et

al., 2000), and self-efficacy (confidence equates to more positive attitude, Desombre et al., 2019).

### Reciprocal Power

Power serves as a currency that both parents and school use in ways to resolve disputes, revealed as tactical maneuvers, that exist in a dance of reciprocity (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).  Sometimes parents correlate tenacity with turning conflicts to their favor, while others indicate tenacity as providing the fuel to getting services desired. However, there is a cost to the use of power within conflict, particularly in the form of emotional expense (p. 248).

Power differentials exist within the IEP meetings through linguistic power moves, knowledge regarding the SPED laws and district policies, and the disproportionate power of the school having the decision-making powers. A barrier toward equitable parent-school participation in special education involves professionalization of language (Cole, 2011; Harry, 1992; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Valle & Aponte, 2002). Within a qualitative study, Bacon & Causton-Theoharis (2013, p.685) identified *professionalized discourse* as a theme related to how parents advocate for their children in "an attempt to mitigate the effects of the bureaucratic processes they encounter". Specifically, parents stressed how school personnel often discussed the deficits of the child when describing them within IEP meetings. They then "juxtaposed the response with an unrelated sentiment about the child's temperament", perceived by the parents that the negative comments seemed to be the main emphasis of the statements, while the positive comments were

unsubstantial (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013, p. 689). The parents offered that the comments, while seemingly positive at face value, were in fact included to serve as a buffer to the deficit discourse, "as a way to sugar coat the true deficit conceptions of the student that prevail" (p. 689). To mitigate the power differentials experienced, particularly within professionalized discourse, parents use various strategies, including bringing an advocate, networking to create relationships with people who hold high positions in the school district, and self-educating on legal issues (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013).

### Communication

Patterns of communication, specifically frequency, lack of communication, lack of follow up, misunderstood communications, and timing of clarifying were found to escalate conflict (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Additionally, withholding communications served as a tactic to distance themselves from conflict while simultaneously escalating the conflict when the other side utilized the tactic. Another challenge identified was the large number of meeting participants by the school, as parents find it "intimidating", creating a barrier to discussing or communicating feelings (p. 248). Finally, not being heard serves as another escalating element of conflict.

Spann et al. obtained multiple positive communications with parents of children in SPED regarding their perceptions of services. Comments such as, "the school has done very well at keeping open lines of communication with me" and "the teacher has been willing to listen and is open to my suggestions" (2003, p. 234).  On the flip side,

they obtained comments indicating a deficit, "the school needs to be better at giving parents information and support" (p. 234). They found that home-school communication occurred on a regular basis, typically through the teacher (typically SPED teacher) or paraprofessional, but there seemed to be less communication from the general education teacher. They indicated that the most common communication focus involved conveying the child's needs and performance, with brainstorming to solve problems additionally referenced. Families also indicated conflicts, typically on how to address a behavior problem, and complained that communication was at times a "one way street", or that the parent had to initiate the communication. Another emphasis was that they only received communications when "there was a problem", or that they only communicated with the teacher at quarterly IEP meetings (Spann et al., 2003, p. 235).

## Trust

Trust serves as an anchor; if intact, parents feel they can tolerate "negative events periodically", as they "…appeared willing to give school personnel the benefit of the doubt…" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 248). However, broken trust results in significant consequences. "When trust was broken, parents felt they could not continue to work with or try to understand school officials' positions" (p. 249). Parents have identified how trust can be damaged within parent-school relationships, including a lack of respect toward the parent(s), focus on child deficits (instead of strengths), lack of input in the IEP process, and difficulty with timely diagnosis and identification (Green, Darling, & Wilbers, 2013; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lake, Billingsley, & Stewart, 2018;

Stoner et al., 2005). Interestingly, school personnel sometimes are unaware of this trust

bankruptcy, and how it influenced conflict.

Building trust relies on relationships, influenced by personal and professional

attributes and actions of the individuals involved. Trust can be built through shared

decision-making that focuses on meeting the needs of the student (Lake et al., 2018).

Through a qualitative collective case study approach, Shelden, Angell, Stoner, &

Roseland (2010) interviewed 16 mothers of children with varying disabilities and ages in

special education on trust with their school's principal. Within the sample, 14 of the 16

had children with invisible disabilities. Through cross-case analysis involving constant

comparative method, they found themes related to approachability, authentic caring,

warmth, and respectful personal attributes (Shelden et al., 2010). Professional attributes

included accessibility and knowledge of disabilities, however, they noted that a "lack of

knowledge of the disability was not viewed as an inhibitor to trust unless it was

accompanied by a lack of desire to learn" (p. 165). Involvement with students had a

positive influence on establishment of trust with educational professionals overall, while

nonaction was perceived negatively and inhibited formation of trust. Specific actions

that built trust included active listening and offering advice or assistance when needed,

while disrespect or not acknowledging parent perspectives negatively influenced trust

building. Principal actions, "spoke loudly to the participants" (p. 166); these actions

included those within the system, with the children, and with the families. Lack of action

had significant barriers toward trust building.

Trust is also a concern for parents with children with ASD (Stoner et al., 2005; Angell, Stoner, & Sheldon, 2008), which can be considered an NVD in many instances. Angell et al., (2008) conducted a qualitative study investigating the family-school relationships, interviewing 16 mothers of children with various disabilities at all levels within the P (preschool)-12 educational system. They identified three primary categories that influence trust, including family characteristics, teacher characteristics, and school characteristics.

## Knowledge

With respect to the category of knowledge, Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified various themes related to knowledge, including problem solving strategies and special education system knowledge. The context of knowledge related to problem-solving and strategies for communication, which were classified as lacking with both school officials and parents.  Regarding school system processes, particularly special education programming, parents identified that the special education directors and school personnel have a responsibility to educate parents, particularly because parents will seek it elsewhere if not readily available. Parents highlighted the imbalance of knowledge as a source of frustration, particularly in the context of advocacy.  The concept of "judgmental knowledge", the amount of knowledge a parent needs to make a good judgment about evaluations or areas of service delivery, was of particular importance (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 245).

Multiple studies link lack of teacher knowledge about the child's condition or NVD, as well as lack of knowledge regarding effective interventions with parent dissatisfaction. Batten et al. (2006) discovered that only 30 percent of parents with ASD in inclusive classroom settings were satisfied with the teacher's knowledge about ASD. When investigating what parents recommend for countering educator lack of knowledge, multiple studies highlight the need for specialized training and knowledge within the NVD of autism (Batten et al., 2006; Brewin, Renwick, & Fudge-Schormans, 2008; Starr et al., 2006; Whitaker, 2007), and effective management of behaviors (Starr et al., 2006; Whitaker, 2007). Starr and Foy (2012) found that parents identify a lack of knowledge about ASD among school staff and administrators, likely due to a lack of training and professional development. Tucker & Schwartz (2013) found that parents of children with ASD reported low levels of perceived ASD knowledge for school professionals.

Another area of knowledge gaps includes understanding the aspects of special education laws (i.e., IDEA/ IDEIA and Section 504) (O'Connor, Yasik, & Horner, 2016). Because special education students were primarily educated within contained classrooms by specialized special education teachers, the awareness of the laws was delegated to the SPED providers. Currently, 57 percent of students with disabilities spend over 80 percent of their educational day in general education classrooms (Blanton, Pugach, & Floridan, 2011). Despite this switch toward inclusion and education within the general education classroom, teachers report they lack the skills they need to provide effective instruction to diverse learners and students with disabilities (Blanton et

al., 2011, p. 4). Regarding teacher legal knowledge, research indicates that teachers typically learn this information from peers and principals (Leschied, Dickinson, & Lewis, 2000; Schimmel & Militello, 2007). O'Connor et al. (2016) found that not only teachers, but education professors and support personnel lacked knowledge on special education laws (e.g., psychologist, related service providers, administrators). Researchers provided surveys to the entire faculty and administration of a southwestern university to identify familiarity with disability laws and found they were only slightly aware of legal right s of students with disabilities (Thompson, Bethea & Turner, 1997), which aligns with findings from another study indicating minimal coursework related to special education laws for teachers (O'Connor et al., 2016). Specifically, 21 percent of teachers reported having coursework related to IDEIA, while eight percent reporting having coursework related to Section 504. Qualitative responses further highlighted the gaps of knowledge, "the main benefits of the 504 are to help students who are not classified special ed" and "I believe 504 is for children with mild disabilities where IDEA is for more severe cases" (pp. 14-15).

### Constraints

Resources, particularly lack thereof, serve as a driver of conflict. With special education services, time, money, personnel, and materials make up the resources that appear limited. Financial resources are paramount to escalating conflicts; because school officials serve as gatekeepers of this resource, it adds additional strain (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).  Trainor (2010a, p. 35) contends that "because teachers,

administrators, and social service providers must respond to both the needs of the

organization they represent and the needs of individuals, conflicts of interest may arise,

relegating the responsibility of advocacy to parents".

Phillips (2007) contended that there are "dangerous assumptions" related to IDEA

and it creates a context in which schools and parents fail. She cited IDEA compliance

challenges that burden public schools as a barrier to success. The latitude provided

local educational agencies within IDEA allows for flexibility related to the substance of

special education programs, but children must rely on parents and school officials to

recognize their needs and provide appropriate evaluation and services. Phillips

highlighted how Congress has repeatedly awarded final decision-making power to

parents, but parents often delegate that decision-making power to public schools in the

interest of efficiency. When a school fails to implement appropriate programming,

parents then "reclaim their decision-making authority" (p. 1924). Inadequate state and

federal funding for special education, difficulty of implementing highly individualized

programs, and the burdens of paperwork related to IDEA/ IDEIA create systemic

challenges within SPED (Phillips, 2007).

## System Challenges for NVD

Social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in school have significant

consequences. They are linked with lower academic achievement as well as reduced

participation in secondary education, employment, and independent living; increased

rates of suspension or expulsion and increased rates of dropping out of school early

(Wagner et al., 2005). Policies such as zero tolerance, which have risen over the past years, disproportionately target students with disabilities, creating a means to criminalize misbehavior at school (Cannon, Gregory, & Waterstone, 2014). Interestingly, students with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities have been found to have more difficulty with the transition to adulthood than students with learning or intellectual disabilities (Wagner et al, 2005). Cannon et al., 2014, p. 408) contended that the "great irony" of the statistics related to poor outcomes for children with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, consistent with those associated with NVD, is that a "robust system of substantive and procedural entitlements already exists to help these students avoid poor outcomes". These procedures include FAPE, the IEP process that outlines specialized instruction, related services, and accommodations with measurable annual goals to monitor progress, and procedural safeguards for disputes. Although public policy ignored this population until 1975, IDEA and its previous iterations provided specific practices to support students with disabilities. However, there are critiques associated with IDEA: confusion regarding determinations of eligibility; disappointment with changes made in the 2004 reauthorization; difficulties with enforcement; over-representation of minority students; unequal access to SPED and enforcement mechanism for low-income students and families; and failure of IDEA to keep students with disabilities out of the juvenile justice system (Connor et al., 2014, pp. 409-410).

Connor et al. (2014) mapped multiple areas of the IDEA that work against

children with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, typical of those in NVD.

Namely, implementation of failures of: a) the Child Find and evaluation provisions and

implementation, b) IEP process, c) related services, and d) behavior-related provisions.

Child Find serves as the first step in the IDEA process and is the obligation placed on

states and schools to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who

require SPED. The burden of Child Find falls to teachers and administrators to identify

students who have signs regarding academic or social emotional difficulties. IDEA

includes specific requirements for evaluations, with a focus on thorough and effective

implementation. The courts have held school districts accountable for failing to evaluate

students in a comprehensive manner and parents who disagree with a school's

evaluation can receive a private evaluation paid for by the district. The evaluation

process involves comprehensive safeguards related to comprehensibility, involvement of

parent input, accommodation for language needs, and emphasis on including all

elements of suspected disability.  The implementation failures of Child Find and

evaluation mapped by Connor et al. include the following:

- Many students with disabilities, particularly those with social, emotional, and

  behavioral issues, do not get flagged by educators, which can lead to

  academic difficulties and criminalization mentioned earlier. Forness et al.,

  (2011, p. 4) identified significant service gaps between prevalence estimates

  of children with emotional and behavioral disabilities and special education

identification, resulting in misidentification, underservice, with special education identification restricted to "less than the bottom tenth of all children in need".

- Schools violate legal requirements for evaluation, including discouragement from schools to proceed with SPED process after parental concerns, encouragement of parents to utilize external intervention services or "lower level" school-based interventions short of necessary special education services," or delay or violate timelines prescribed by the state for initiating the evaluation process (p. 443).

- Students are initially evaluated using inadequate tools and measurements, particularly students with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Evaluations typically focus on the child's cognitive capacities and current academic functioning tests. The authors correlated this to school officials' failure to recognize emotional and behavioral difficulties as related to disability. They also identified failure to include neurological, auditory, vision, speech/language, physical therapy, or occupational therapy evaluations necessary to identify possible needs. Re-evaluation failures were also noted, as well as exclusion of parent involvement, or use of native language (pp. 444–445).

- Evaluations also violate the law and regulations by failing to make any recommendations as to a child's eligibility for specific diagnoses, SPED

disability classifications, or educational needs, impeding the ability to create

an appropriate SPED plan. This can include solely referring the child to

external services outside of the school, and/ or suggesting medication as an

intervention or requiring medications, which is in violation of IDEA (pp. 445–

446).

O'Dell & Schaefer (2005) determined that school district personnel felt frustrated

by the amount of paperwork they had to complete within a certain timeframe to

implement the law, which could explain some of these challenges. Referred to as street-

level bureaucracy (SLB), the challenges faced by school personnel to meet the demands

of SPED identification and eligibility creates conflict both with families and

professionally. Summers & Semrud-Clikeman (2000) found that school psychologists

experience professional conflict when implementing IDEA and resort to changing the law

to fit the circumstances as a coping strategy. O'Connor et al. (2016, p. 13) used a true/

false questionnaire to identify teacher knowledge gaps with IDEA laws. They found that

36 percent of teachers "did not know that the qualifications of teachers providing

instruction are considered in making a specific learning disability determination". Other

gaps in understanding IDEA included: 26 percent of teachers indicated an IEP only

includes information about the student's short- and long-term goals (incorrect), only 22

percent correctly identified that children do not need to have a specific diagnosis to

receive services under Section 504. Additionally, 76 percent of teachers incorrectly

identified that an IEP was provided under Section 504, with 84 percent incorrectly

identifying that Section 504 provides federal funding to schools to provide SPED

services.

Violations or difficulties in the IEP process include challenges with attending

meetings, communication in the meetings, informational asymmetries, lack of providing

reports prior to meetings, pre-meetings conducted by the school without the parents to

create a draft IEP not shared with parents prior, myopic plans not shared with the

teacher implementing plan. Connor et al. (2016) highlighted deficits related to

institutional failures for students with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities: poor

understanding of learning disabilities like dyslexia and poor awareness and sharing of

information related to nonacademic difficulties of the student. They also indicated poor

inclusion of related services necessary for the student, including psychological services.

Finally, behavior-related provisions include manifestation determination reviews (review

of exclusionary practices to ensure behavior is not disability related), functional

behavioral analysis (FBA) to assess the function of behavior through data collection to

propose functional intervention, and implementation of positive behavioral interventions

to increase positive behaviors and reduce negative ones (e.g., reward systems), with the

end goal of self-monitoring of behavior to eliminate behavior plans altogether.

Implementation failures include failure to include behavioral supports in the IEP, lack of

FBA, or punitive and exclusionary practices such as suspension or expulsion. There are

positive outcomes related to school adherence to manifestation determination reviews,

effective positive behavior intervention plans, implementation of positive behavioral

supports, and avoidance of punitive and exclusionary practices.

## Mothers and SPED Conflict: Feminism Influences

Another compelling aspect of the disputes within special education involves the

dynamics surrounding the interactions with the mothers of the students. Historically,

parents, particularly mothers, exist at the forefront of disability activism, resisting

pressure to institutionalize their children (Panitch, 2008). Parents eventually became

engaged in grassroots activism, protesting at schools and lobbying for change in

legislation, shaping both policy and practice for individuals with disabilities over the

years (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996). Considering the feminist views of motherhood, the

notion of intensive mothering, idealized in American society, relies on the assumptions

that mothers are the preferred caretakers of children (who are sacred), and that expert-

guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive child rearing is best (Hays, 1996). Gross

(1998) speaks to how this shift from punitive parenting was significant, it is also

important to acknowledge personal cost to the mother. This notion of fit moral mothers

on one side and vilification of others through mother blame on the other side creates a

binary description of mothers. This bifurcated perception holds them accountable in

that the selfless, devoted "good mothers" are "policed and police themselves through

fear of mother-blame and being judged inadequate, unnatural, or selfish" (Blum, 2007,

page 202).

Blum considers the context of a child with disabilities, "while all mothers are

potentially unfit, mothers raising children with disabilities present important 'deviant

case' that defies easy class classification" (p. 203). Adding to this notion, evidence

shows that mothers, not the fathers, bear the stigma of impairment (McKeever & Miller,

2004). The scrutiny revolves around mothers as the child experiences difficulties in their

functioning (Litt, 2004; Williams, 2006; Moses, 2010). Specific to NVD, "current

diagnoses of invisible disability and the use of psychoactive drug treatment signal a

cultural, discursive shift away from such mother-blame to biological psychiatry and its

focus on the child's nature, particularly in the brain" (Conrad, as cited by Blum, p. 204).

Biological explanations are deemed incomplete by parents as they seek understanding

of their child's ADHD or depression to develop some sense of control (Marshal et al.,

2003). This can result in self-blame; they are somehow to blame for causing,

contributing to, or exacerbating their child's mental disorder from a genetic perspective,

failing to identify concerns earlier, or secure services sooner, as well as their emotional

reactions to their child (Blum, 2007). Moses found that mothers, often blamed

themselves for being "insufficiently devoted, self-sacrificing, and attentive to their

child", worrying they have let their child down (2010, p. 109).

Blum (2007) explored the experience of 45 mothers of children with invisible

diagnoses and identified "three arguments" related to society's perception of mother-

blame: a) mothers are not necessarily blamed for causing the child's issues with

increased blame focused on diverse brains, but tend to be blamed if they do not make

"unrelenting efforts" or "concerted cultivation" to resolve them; b) these mothers tend to exceed concerted cultivation, resulting in vigilante seizure of authority and expanded medical treatments; and c) the "maternal speedup holds mothers accountable for feminizing ties to sons", eventually "policing gender boundaries while policing their own feminine care" (p. 202). This study focused on the overall experience of mothers raising children with NVD from a feminist perspective, rather than investigating the dynamics of school-based conflict experiences for the mothers, as this study seeks to obtain.

Not only do mothers blame themselves or feel blamed by others, either directly or as a secondary element related to their response to disability, they also experience discrimination. Through a literature review of disability studies, Ryan & Runswick-Cole (2008) contend that mothers of disabled children can experience disablism despite not necessarily being disabled.  Despite working toward affecting change on behalf of their children, and disabled people, their role can be undervalued. In a qualitative study by Khanlou et al., (2017), using narrative analysis focused on the scrutiny on mothers, "…mothers of children with developmental disabilities (DDs), which include many NVDs, this gaze and level of expectation for mothering is greater because of their constant involvement with professionals and perceived needs of the child(ren)" (p. 615). Therefore, the experience for mothers navigating the SPED process encounter unique challenges.

As stated earlier, parent involvement is not only acknowledged as a critical aspect of the SPED process, but also mandated by IDEA. Additionally, the concept of

trust serves a significant predictor of discourse between parents and school personnel within the SPED process. Burke & Hodapp (2014) completed a study investigating stress of 965 mothers of children with disabilities and family-school partnerships using a survey methodology. They found that mothers with lower stress levels correlated with reports of better parent-school relationships and low levels of parent advocacy, and mothers who had not enacted procedural safeguards mandated by IDEA. Lower maternal stress also linked with mothers of children with fewer behavioral problems, Down syndrome, or those that did not have autism (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). Mothers who rated themselves lower on neuroticism, higher on extroversion, dependable, and open to new experiences also linked to lower maternal stress levels. Thus, mothers with students with NVD who have behavioral issues, mothers who have instituted procedural safeguards, and mothers with students with autism (an NVD), are at risk for higher levels of maternal stress. Thus, mothers endure challenges related to societal views on motherhood, internal judgment on role competence, and maternal stress from both self-blame and very experience of having a child within SPED.

## Mothers as Advocates

Earlier discussions on trust, communication, and other conflict elements within SPED highlight the important role of mothers as advocates, the risk of stress serving as an advocate, and the challenges related to both the interpersonal and system related interactions within the SPED experience. Lalvani & Hale (2015), through an analytical essay, examined advocacy for inclusive education. They categorized advocacy in SPED

for mothers as a "battle" and identified narratives of the mothers, including "mothers from hell," "squeaky wheels," "in denial," "CEOs [Chief Executive Officer] of the IEP," as they are "fighting the fight." The CEO of the IEP perception revealed that some parents indicated leading the process for educational planning for their children. They expressed "they are no longer invested in 'equal partnerships'" due to resulting disillusionment and mistrust of the system overall. Lalvani & Hale specified that these parents are typically White and middle class and express high levels of agency; they perceive they are the drivers of action and as a result, their advocacy is crucial toward inclusivity decision making. Lalvani (2012, p. 482) first provided this idea of the IEP CEO, with a quote from a mother, "I am the CEO of Max's IEP...I am the single most important person at that meeting. Bar none."  These narratives exist because of the experiences of these mothers and parents who "negotiate access to inclusive learning environments...as situated in institutionalized ableism and enacted within the constraints of power differentials in society" (p. 29).

Through a qualitative study of 36 mothers of children on the autism spectrum, researchers found that mothers also relied on social support for their advocacy (Ryan & Cole, 2008).  Most mothers adopted an enhanced advocacy role acting either independently or collectively through involvement with support groups. In both cases, some mothers demonstrated an activist role and extended their efforts towards campaigning for change outside of their families. Mothers' experiences do not sit comfortably within existing articulations of activism but suggest that advocacy and

activism may be experienced on a continuum. For many mothers, advocacy and activism are a major part of the experience of mothering a disabled child yet this remains a largely unrecognized role. (Ryan & Cole, 2008).

**Habitus and Cultural Capital.** Parents with greater economic resources and "elite cultural capital appear to be more involved in the special education decision-making process", consistent with research that shows social class influences home-school relations (Ong-Dean et al., 2011). Highly educated, professional parents experience multiple advantages for involvement in their child's education, including comfort with technical and legal language used by school professionals; seeing themselves as social equals or superiors to their children's teachers, thus increasing their comfort in questioning teaching practices or challenging school decisions (Reay, 1998; Lareau, 2000; Ong-Dean et al., 2011). The individualized system in the United States exists through collective action of parents through class-action lawsuits, leading to the creation of the EAHCA, which benefitted all children through combined parent resources in a public manner (Ong-Dean et al., 2011). Parents of privilege utilize their cultural capital to advocate within the system, creating more tolerant and equitable special education services. However, the limitations are apparent:

> The limitations of that system are now apparent to many, though certainly not all, parents. Disadvantaged parents might see these limitations most directly, but so do many privileged parents, who may be privileged advocates without relishing that role.  Some of these parents…recognize quite clearly that if it is

difficult for them to act as effective advocates for their children, it is nearly impossible for parents without the same resources (Ong-Dean et al, 2011, p. 403).

Trainor (2010) identified that parent advocacy and parent participant in special education processes differ, but the distinction provides some challenges. Within IDEA, the term participation related to parents exists, but the term advocate (as verb, noun, or other form) does not. Trainor specifies that the outcome of parent advocacy involves "ensuring that the educational rights of youth with disabilities are being met" (2010a, p. 36). Using a lens of habitus and cultural/ social capital, Trainor (2010a) utilized focus groups and interviews to examine parent perceptions regarding participation (to be consistent with IDEA) in SPED. The findings point to several types of advocates: the intuitive advocate, the disability expert, the strategist, and the change agent. The intuitive advocate utilizes perceptive insights developed through strong relationships with the child (i.e., knowing my child) to successfully interact with educators, however, this was not always a successful approach. Disability experts incorporated knowledge about disabilities in their advocacy efforts, gaining expertise from resources, organizations, and external experts. This approach is limited in its success, due to teachers' deficit views of disability. The strategists combined understanding and sense of disability, along with their child's strengths and needs with knowledge about SPED. Parents who were strategists often identified that they needed to connect advocacy for their children with changing the educational system. Parents discussed concerns about

advocacy demands related to the level of complex knowledge and social networking required; thus, activating systems change became a motivator. This type of change agent advocacy requires considerable time to establish relationships and significant access to economic resources, linking to the privilege described by Ong-Dean et al., (2011). Trainor (2010a) highlighted successful challenges by parents that stem from a combination of specialized cultural capital and social capital through relationships between key players.

**Special Education Advocates.**  Special education advocates assist parents with the goal of securing appropriate educational services for their child (Burke, 2013).  Goldman et al. (2020) conducted structured interviews with 36 families who had sought special education advocates for support. Findings included that families were more likely to request an advocate: if their child had ASD, was in elementary school, and they lived in urban or suburban areas. Family requests were most often for advocate attendance at IEP meetings; help to resolve disagreements with the school concerning supports and services; and information about school services and parental rights. Better outcomes related to longer duration process, the advocate attending meetings, and more intensive advocate assistance, however, most advocate assistance was for a short duration. Despite significant utilization of special education advocates, the field remains unsupervised (Wheeler & marshal, 2008), but most families indicate satisfaction with results (Goldman et al., 2020).

## Invisible Disability and Conflict in Special Education

ADHD is a unique situation in special education because it involves an "invisible disability." Disability refers to an ongoing physical or mental challenge that affects activities of daily living and social roles, however, invisible disability refers specifically to disability resulting from debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, brain injuries, learning differences and mental health disorders (Invisible Disabilities Association, 2019). Additional invisible disabilities within the school system include diagnoses such as learning disabilities, mental health disorders, sensory processing disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and visual or hearing disorders. These diagnoses can appear more behavioral in nature, thus creating a unique context of potential conflict influence.

Through a Department of Education complaint investigation (of a Midwestern state with population of approximately 6.5 million) analysis of the years 2004-2009, White (2010) identified 449 investigations involving children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The complaint issues included IEP content and implementation, parental participation, evaluation and case conference committee, staff qualifications, behavior and disciplinary procedures, service provision and placement, medication issues, privacy and confidentiality, and noncompliance with orders of previous complaint investigations/ hearings (White, 2010, p. 82).  White's conclusion was that the findings were "consistent with those of other researchers who identified issues with IEP content and implementation" (p. 84). The unique context of conflicts within special education of

children with invisible disability involves a paucity of studies; the systematic review

regarding ADHD only found six articles eligible for the study (Gwernan-Jones et al.,

2015). Therefore, this is an area of inquiry that lacks investigation, despite previous

research highlighting that behavioral issues can influence, and potentially drive conflict,

supporting the pursuit of this researcher to explore the experience of conflict from

mothers of children with invisible disability in special education.

## ADR In Special Education/Conflict Management

There are five primary methods of dispute resolution with SPED: (1) an informal

meeting, (2) a facilitated IEP meeting, (3) a complaint with the Department of Education,

(4) mediation, and (5) a due process hearing. Parents and districts are not required to go

through these methods in a sequential manner; they are able to skip levels and utilize

the method of their choice at any time (Cope-Kasten, 2013). Through an investigation of

209 special education disputes in Wisconsin and Minnesota between 2000 and 2011,

Cope-Kasten (2013, p. 502) found two commonalities: communication and cooperation

failures led parents and school districts to seek a third party ruling on their conflict and

the parties could not reach an agreement without resorting to the final and most

legalized form of dispute resolution available in special education conflicts, the due

process hearing. Mueller & Carranza (2011) investigated 575 due process hearings from

41 states in 2005 to 2006, specific to cases primarily involving children with SLD,

autism, and OHI. They found the most common sources of disputes leading to due

process were placement (25%), IEP and program appropriateness (24%). Regarding due

process hearings, researchers emphasized the adversarial nature, due to the courtroom

setup with parties sitting across from each other. Attorneys are typically more involved

in this stage; they can contribute positively through helping the hearing proceed

smoothly, but they can also create delays and heighten adversarial tensions (Cope-

Kasten, 2013).

Cope-Kasten identified three types of fairness within the due process hearings:

subjective fairness (hollow victories, unintended outcomes damaged relationships from

due process); outcome fairness (compensatory education, reversed manifestation

determination, change of placement, specific course of action), and objective fairness.

Objective fairness indicated significant disadvantages for families, particularly when an

attorney was not representing them. The district prevailed 98 percent when the parents

did not have an attorney, decreasing to 64 percent when the parents had an attorney

present, with parents prevailing only 13 percent of the time. Split decisions resulted two

percent of the time when there was no lawyer, and 23 percent when parents had a

lawyer. Mueller & Carranza (2011) found that while parents initiated 85 percent of the

hearings, school districts prevailed in 59 percent of the hearings.

ADR processes include options such as facilitated IEPs and mediation, to avoid

due process litigation. Mediation, while more formal, focuses on a mediator working

with the parties to enter into a binding agreement that may be or may not be enforced

by a court (CADRE, 2017; Mueller, 2008). Mediation serves as an alternative to due

process, but also has limitations. Mueller (2008) contends that mediation can be offered

too late in the conflict process to make a difference, participants might perceive

mediation as a procedural delay, and lawyers are permitted at mediations, creating

increased potential for arguments. Due process, mediation, and resolution sessions

differ from facilitated IEP because they are reactive forms of conflict resolution.

Facilitated IEP utilizes a facilitator to assist with organizing and conducting the IEP

meeting. While the IEP meeting is still "run by parents and school officials", the facilitator

objectively maintains order and focuses on the process, instead of personal or issues-

related disputes (Mueller, 2008). The process involves ground rules, an environment

that fosters collaboration, and communication strategies to eliminate power imbalance;

thus, facilitated IEPs have been deemed promising as a form of ADR within special

education disputes (Mueller, 2008).

<p align="center">**COVID-19 Pandemic**</p>

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in altering school from in person learning to

virtual learning during March 2020, overlapping with the data collection for this study.

The shift from schools abruptly to remote learning lasted for most public schools until

April 2021. According to the United States Department of Education Office for Civil

Rights (USED OCR, 2021), there were eight observations for K-12 education supported

by the evidence. Three of the observations could impact the children of the mothers in

this study:

- "Emerging evidence shows that the pandemic has negatively affected

  academic growth, widening pre-existing disparities. In core subjects like

math and reading, there are worrisome signs that in some grades students

might be falling even further behind pre-pandemic expectations."

- "For many elementary and secondary school students with disabilities,

  COVID-19 has significantly disrupted the education and related aids and

  services needed to support their academic progress and prevent regression.

  And there are signs that those disruptions may be exacerbating longstanding

  disability-based disparities in academic achievement."

- "Nearly all students have experienced some challenges to their mental health

  and well-being during the pandemic and m any have lost access to school-

  based services and supports, with early research showing disparities based

  on rase, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, and other factors." (pp. Iii-iv).

Specific to students with disabilities, access gaps prior to COVID-19 included 4,300

complaints alleging more than 7,000 violations of student's rights, primarily related to

FAPE, in the United States in the school year 2018-2019. The three primary complaints

included lack of implementation for services within the IEP, inappropriate placement into

restrictive environments, and inappropriately "...restrained, secluded, or wrongly

disciplined due to behavior related to their disability" (USED OCR, 2021, pp. 22-23).

Noted were significant disparities related to math and reading, as well as graduation

rates. The report included data regarding disrupted learning during the pandemic, with

20 percent of respondents in a survey indicating their child was receiving services within

the IEP and 39 percent reporting receiving no services at all (pp. 25-26). There were also

reported spikes in the number of students with disabilities failing classes and receiving

Ds on report cards. Additionally, the NCLD emphasized how COVID-19 has had

extensive consequences on students, teachers, schools, and educational systems

overall, particularly teacher shortages and stress (2017b, para. 7).

     Averett (2021) interviewed 31 parents of children with disabilities to identify

challenges with remote learning. The findings included unique needs related to remote

learning, with examples of delayed feedback preventing learning connections for a child

with ADHD. Asynchronous learning was particularly challenging for children with autism

and language disorders, and synchronous learning through Zoom proved challenging

for children with attentional needs, with one story including the teacher kicking the child

out of virtual class. Averett (2021) also found a lack of services and accommodations

and remote learning as marked by struggle. Interestingly, the researcher also identified

positive experiences with remote learning, particularly for children with NVD such as

ADHD and dyslexia, and anxiety-related disabilities. Positives included decreased

distractions, virtual learning benefiting some children, increased time with parents,

helpful teachers, and decreased anxiety. Also noted were parents who expressed

appreciation for teachers and other personnel who were going above and beyond and

other parents who expressed challenges with the demands of keeping the child on task

with remote learning.

## Summary

This chapter provided a theoretical framework including constructs for conflict and context. Conflict constructs included interpersonal conflict, process conflict, and systems analysis of conflict, and contextual constructs of feminism, habitus, and the Kawa Model. The literature review provided evidence on conflict in special education, conflict and invisible disability, and mothers as advocates. Information related to the COVID-19 pandemic was included as the interviews took place during the pandemic and remote learning. The next chapter focuses on the case study methodology for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

## Qualitative Case Study

As previously discussed, the researcher utilized a qualitative case study

methodology for this study to explore the problem related to the lack of understanding

of how invisible disability influences conflict in special education and how parents

navigate the conflict process. Qualitative case study methodology, based upon a

constructivist paradigm, hypothesizes that truth is relative and dependent upon one's

perspective (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Constructivism is based upon social construction

of reality, involving close collaboration of researcher and participant, with researcher

understanding participants' actions through obtaining the participant's story and views

of reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: a) the

focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" (or "what" questions); b) the behavior of

the participants in the study cannot be manipulated; c) the researcher is interested in

obtaining contextual information relevant to the phenomenon being studied; or d)

boundaries are unclear between phenomenon and context. Specific to this study, the

case study involves the conflict and the personal experience of mothers within special

education service provision for a child with invisible disability. In this case study, the

unit of analysis will be the conflict that transpires during the ten-step process of special

education for each family interviewed. It is important to note that the Case (noted by

upper case "C") refers to the Case of the case study, while the case (lower case "c") refers

to each individual conflict case described by each separate participant, which will be analyzed collectively to create the Case. Next, the boundaries of the Case, which prevents the Case from being too broad, includes delimitation: a) by time and activity (Stake, 1995), b) by time and place (Creswell, 2013), or c) by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).  For this case, the Miles & Huberman approach will support bounding the Case, which includes the definition of conflict by Deutsch Model (1973), the structural layers of the Nested Model of Conflict (Dugan, 1996) and the conflict elements of Barki and Harwick.

Creswell (2013, p. 97) categorizes a case study as a methodology that "explores a real-life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases), through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes." Unlike quantitative case study approaches where the parameters of the case are clearly defined prior to the study process, parameters continue to emerge and become defined through the duration of the study in qualitative approaches (Muvingi & Duckworth, 2014). Since a researcher does not have control over special education implementation in public schools in the United States, a case study would be an appropriate methodology. Yin (2003, p.14) emphasizes that case study is an "all-encompassing method", including the logic of the research design, the data collection techniques, and the data analysis approach. For this study, the cases came from different environments to inform the larger Case. Because there is

limited information known about this specific topic, an exploratory approach was emphasized. For this study, the following served as the research question and sub-questions:

- What are the dynamics of conflict within special education practices for mothers of children with invisible disability?
    - What are unique elements of invisible disability in the conflict process?
    - How does an invisible disability affect the conflict process?
    - How do parents/caregivers of children with invisible disability describe the evolution of the conflict within the various steps of the special education process?
    - What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-escalation of conflict?

## Researcher as Co-Constructor

Charmaz emphasizes the interpretist role of the researcher's perspective, co-constructing the findings with the participants. The researcher for this study sought out this topic due to her background as an occupational therapist, working with children and families with invisible diagnoses for over 19 years. Occupational therapy is a health care field that promotes health and wellness through a focus on *occupations*, which are the activities that are meaningful and purposeful to everyday life. Occupations include seven areas: self-care (activities of daily living), instrumental activities of daily living (chores, errands), productivity/ employment, education, social participation, play/

leisure, and functional mobility (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

Occupational therapists work in a variety of settings, ranging from hospitals (acute,

inpatient, outpatient, mental health), home health, freestanding outpatient clinics, early

intervention, schools, mental health centers, skilled nursing facilities, and community-

based settings (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

Specifically, this researcher has attended over 30 IEP sessions and one

mediation, thus witnessing multiple conflict episodes, as well as hearing conflict

perspectives from families, teachers, family advocates, lawyers, and administrators, all

for children with invisible diagnoses, through over 13 years serving as a consultant in

special education. These experiences served as the impetus for the exploration of this

research topic and eventual formulation of the research question. The researcher seeks

answers to observed discourse within these meetings outside of anecdotal experiences.

### Data Collection in Case Study Approach

For data collection, multiple data sources were collected and incorporated to

ensure triangulation (Creswell, 2008). One data set was obtained through a semi-

structured intensive interview process of mothers of children with invisible disability

who have experienced conflict during special education process (one of the 10 steps).

Another source of data included archival data such as email records and formal

documentation records related to the case (IEP documents, emails, and audio recordings

of IEP meetings). This data provided the nuanced information related to the conflict

dynamics and perspectives of parents as to how invisible disability influences conflict

during special education process, from identification through IEP process, through re-evaluation process.

The next data source utilized a follow-up interview with the same case parents who completed the semi-structured interview, using the Kawa Model River (Iwama, 2006) drawings for contextual mapping. The river drawings delivered deeper contextual information from two drawings, a cross-sectional riverbed drawing and a longitudinal river drawing. The cross-sectional drawing provides contextual information specific to contextual influences (riverbed), boulders (contextual and personal barriers), driftwood (personal and social supports), which ultimately affect river flow (function). For this study and the case being investigated, the river flow represents the special education process staying within non-conflictive states, or stages I or II on the CADRE Continuum (prevention, disagreement). The longitudinal Kawa River drawing required the parent participants to plot steps and experiences of their special education process and indicate the "flow" of the river to represent conflict evolution through the process. These drawings included semi-structured interview questions for additional probing of the drawings to obtain the contextual information and longitudinal perspective.

Yin (2013) included the suggestions of creating a case study base for organizing data collected for case studies, maintaining a chain of evidence, and exercising care with data from social media sources. For this study, the researcher preserved the collected data in a retrievable form into two separate collections, an evidentiary base and a researcher's report (Yin, 2014, pp. 130-131). The evidentiary base included

recorded videos of interviews, interview transcripts, researcher memos and reflexive

journaling, Kawa drawings, and archival records separated into folders for each case

(participant). To increase the construct validity (Yin, 2018, p. 135), the chain of evidence

process included case study questions; the protocol linked to the case study questions;

citations to specific evidentiary sources in the case study database; the case study

database; and the case study findings.

## Sampling

Purposive sampling, which involves researchers purposively selecting

participants and other data sources that can answer the research question (El Hussein,

Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014; Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019), was used for this study. The

mothers of children with invisible diagnoses who experienced conflict under IDEA part B

were invited to become participants in the study through recruitment using an IRB

approved flyer (Appendix A) provided through social media and email. Snowball

sampling enhanced the purposive sampling with one participant recruiting one

additional participant.

To gain entry to these specific participants, multiple access points were

necessary. To access the mother participants, flyers were sent out to mothers of

children with invisible diagnoses on Family Network on Disabilities of Florida Facebook

group (FND of Florida), Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System Facebook group

(FDLRS), Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Facebook

group (CHADD), Learning Disabilities Association of America Facebook group (LDA) and

Special Needs Parent Support Group of Central Florida Facebook group, specifying for

parents who are interested to contact researcher expressing interest. Additionally,

special education advocates (individuals who support families in special education

processes) were contacted to invite families to contact the researcher with the IRB

approved recruitment flyer (Appendix A).

For sample size, it was not clearly indicated how many participants should be in

the sample. Stebbins (2001) indicates that sample size is determined by data saturation,

which is the point when no additional information results from additional cases, which

depends on how homogenous the sample. The more heterogenous the sample, the

more respondents are needed. Jette, Grover & Keck (2003) suggested that expertise in

the topic of the study reduces the size of the sample, which is consistent with this

researcher. Additionally, Lee, Woo, & Mackenzie (2002) suggest that studies that utilize

more than one method require fewer participants, also consistent with this study. Guest,

Bunce, & Johnson (2006) concluded that six participants would be sufficient for studies

with a high level of homogeneity among the sample population, like this study's

population. The sample, homogenous with respect to backgrounds (six of seven

participants are professionals), race (all seven were Caucasian women), socioeconomic

status (all seven would be considered middle class with respect to socioeconomic

classifications), and marriage status (six out of seven were married). All but two

participants each came from different states: New York, California, Florida, Pennsylvania,

and (one de-identified). Two participants came from the same state of Missouri.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria.** With the purposive sampling, the researcher

sought parents of children with invisible disability who have experienced conflict in

SPED. To be included in the study, the key criteria for inclusion involved the following

for the parent/ caregiver sample:

- The participant must be a parent (or legal guardian) of a child with a

  diagnosis that fits the criteria for invisible diagnosis who has experienced

  conflict within the IEP or IEP with 504 processes.

For the parent/ caregiver participant sample the following criteria must be met for

inclusion:

- The participant must be 18 years of age.

- The participant needs to speak English.

- The child must have received special education services under IDEA part B.

- The child has an invisible disability such as ADHD, LD, autism, or other

  disability that is not visible to others.

- The conflict experience needs to fit the definition provided by Deutsch's

  Model of conflict; the conflict involves incompatible goals or a perceived

  divergence of interest.

- The participant's child will have completed at least steps one through eight

  of the ten steps of the special education process.

No exclusion criteria were needed for the study. To ensure inclusion criteria were

met for the purposive sample, all participants completed a brief questionnaire

(Appendix B) during the consent process to ensure they met the stated eligibility. All

seven participants completed the questionnaire online and consented to the interview

process and Kawa River Drawing from November 2020 through June 2021 on the form

as well as when asked again prior to commencing the interview process.

Correspondence took place through a private google email (Gmail) dedicated only to this

research study and all documents were shared through the Gmail platform. There were

three additional mothers who did not meet the inclusion criteria (one was private school,

one had not moved through the stages of SPED, and one was still in preschool), and

were not included in the study. One male participant completed the questionnaire and

consented to participate, but the email address used to complete the study (as well as

what he provided in the questionnaire) came back as a non-working email address.

Before the interview, Kawa instructions were sent to the participants (Appendix D).

### Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the seven mothers using semi-

structured interviews and a case study process. These interviews provided individual

cases of the entire IEP or 504 process and identified the temporal context, conflict

evolution, and perceptions of those involved as to the potential causes of the conflict

and their emotional states, allowing for identification of the meaning of those

experiences for the individual. The data collected included the nuances related to the

contextual aspects of the conflict evolution, as well as the interconnections between the

contexts and constructs. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured

interview process, along with the Kawa Model River metaphor process within the interview. The Kawa Model River metaphor served to derive meaning from the interview process and serves to deepen the interview process and address gaps that exist after the first analyses with instruction of how to complete the Kawa River provided prior to the interview. The participants were asked to create both a cross-sectional and longitudinal Kawa River representation of the conflict to identify the dynamics from a metaphorical perspective as well as the temporal course of the conflict process. The metaphorical data resulted from the visual representation of the process utilizing the Kawa Model, as described below.

**Intensive Interviewing.** Intensive interviewing, a gently guided, one-sided conversation exploring an individual's substantial experience with the research topic, is a way to generate data for qualitative research. As recommended by Charmaz (2014, pp. 85-86), participants were selected who have first-hand experience of conflict in special education as the mother of a student with NVD; the researcher's objective was to obtain detailed responses; the interview questions utilized open-ended questions with an emphasis on understanding the participant's experience, perspective, and meanings.

Participants were asked to create a visual demonstration of the Kawa River to represent their experience with respect to a conflict in the special education process. The representations included two visuals, one that represents the longitudinal river flow (or course of the conflict), and a second cross section that examined the riverbed, driftwood, and boulders. The Kawa drawings provided data identifying constructs and

the interconnections between them that serve as drivers to the conflict process. The Kawa defined meaning through its river metaphors, which align with constructivist qualitative approaches.

## Interview Questions

According to Charmaz (2014, p. 62) an interview guide not only allows for IRB approval, constructing an interview guide serves to "learn how to obtain data and how to ask questions". Charmaz refers to the interview process as intensive, focusing on open ended questions that evolve from: 1) *initial* questions, 2) to more *intermediate* questions, and 3) *ending* questions. Specifically, she states that intensive interviewing is a perfect fit for qualitative methods because both are "open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85). The interview guides for this study can be found in Appendices E and F for the mother participants.

## Archival Data

Archival documents provided included email threads between school personnel and the mother, emails from the mother to the school showing evidence of requesting SPED processes, instances of emails from teacher or school administrator providing information not previously shared (e.g., retention of child, academic difficulties, reduction of services), audio recording of IEP meeting, and IEPs for multiple children. The emails were provided by Participant One and Participant Four upon request by the researcher during the interview process. The five emails chosen were those that were either referenced in the interview or were direct evidence of the themes identified. An

additional set of emails obtained from Participant Four were also utilized to support a

specific conflict regarding safety concerns with busing. These emails were used only as

evidentiary support for the interview information.

Additional archival data included a recording of an entire IEP meeting for

Participant Three, which she had alluded to within the interview process. The recording

obtained evidence to support the conflict detailed in her interview and communication

about the pending due process litigation. Participant One also provided IEP documents

to confirm information about the dates of eligibility.

Finally, Participant Four also provided the daily behavior notes, which she

referenced in the interview process. The daily behavior notes included over 45 samples,

which were analyzed to first confirm her interview quotes related to the topic and then

provided as Figure 11 to convey the information provided in these daily reports.

## Data Analysis in Case Study Approach

For this study, working "your" data from the "ground up" and case description

(Yin, 2018) encompassed the methods of data analysis approach. The "ground up"

approach involved pouring through the data (playing with the data), identifying patterns

and useful concepts that led to revelations of additional relationships. This inductive

form of analysis involved assigning various kinds of codes to the data, "with each code

representing a concept or abstraction of potential interest" (Yin, 2014, p. 169). For the

case description approach, the Kawa longitudinal drawings, the ten steps of the special

education process, and conflict analyses were used to analyze the interviews. Using

direct interpretation of the themes and patterns allowed for a naturalistic generalization

of what was learned from the case analysis (Creswell, 2013). The aim of this exploratory

study was to obtain themes related to the experience of mothers of children with NVD

who have experienced conflict in special education.

To analyze data gathered from the interviews for each case, multiple strategies

were utilized to answer the research questions and identify themes for the overall Case.

Immediately after each interview, initial researcher memo writing commenced (Appendix

G), with specific focus on immediate thoughts and insight into potential bias.

Participants three, six, and seven completed their interviews during one single interview,

with the Kawa River questions provided during the final third of the interview. The

transcripts for the participants with two sessions were then combined to create one

transcript for analysis.

The transcriptions were copied from the Zoom transcripts into Microsoft Word

and read multiple times. The researcher reviewed the videos to ensure accurate

transcription and names of the participants, children, and other individuals in the

transcript were de-identified into "PARTICIPANT #", "MY CHILD", "GEN ED TEACHER", etc.

Member checks, sending the transcript back to the participant for review, were

conducted to ensure the transcriptions were accurate to the interview for each

participant. Pre-coding, recommended by Saldaña (2016) to bring attention to what is

important for initial organization, through changing colors for descriptive and narrative

passages, quotations were highlighted in green, and researcher comments and memoing were added in with italics (Saldaña, 2016, p. 21).

The archival data were obtained after the interviews, upon request during interview processes to all participants. Three participants followed up with emails including attachments of IEP reports, emails, recorded IEP meeting, and daily behavior charts. The recordings were transcribed using Zoom and coded after thematic analysis using deductive coding processes. The five emails obtained were also coded using a deductive coding process to support thematic analysis. Figure 7 provides a visual schematic representing the data collection and analyses for this study.

**Figure 7**

*Data Analysis Schematic with Thematic Analysis Results*

**Data Collection**
- Intensive Interviews
- Kawa River Drawings: Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional
- Artifacts: Emails, IEP, Recorded IEP Meetings, Daily Beahvior Charts

**Data Analysis: Initial Coding (Inductive)**
- Case description: Determining conflict points at 10 SPED steps
- Memo writing after interview
- Color coding: conflict, advocacy, system, emotions, collaboration/ compromise
- Process coding with gerunds
- Conflict coding: Deutsch and Nested Model

**Data Analysis: Second Cycle Coding**
- Gerunds organized into categories (Nested Model: Intrapersonal, Issues, Relational, Subsystem, System)
- Categories condensed using pattern coding with metaphors (idioms)
- Idioms: roots identified to match context with color coding/ conflict coding/ process coding (memo writing)

**Cross-Case Analysis and Post Coding**
- Creating narrative to fit puzzle together
- Code Charting: color chart with theme and subthemes with descriptions and quotes
- Categorizing with Barki-Hartwick and Rahim conflict analysis
- Discussed codeweaving and code charting with content experts (3)

| Square Peg In a Round Hole | Bear the Brunt | Sea Change | Game Changer | Adding Insult to Injury |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nonconforming Student | School Lacking Power | Initiating Advocacy | Partnering | Blaming |
| School Lacking | School Compelling | Draining | Valuing | Gaslighting |
| | Diverging Approaches | Shifting | Altering the Environment | Discriminating |
| | | Drawing the Line | | |

## Analytic Memos

"Analytic memo writing documents reflections on your coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories, and sub-categories, themes and concepts in your data – all possibly leading toward theory" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44). Concurrent with data analysis, the memo writing served as a prompt for the researcher to engage in reflexive critical thinking on the data engaged with by the researcher.  Analytic memo writing was used throughout the coding and theming processes; for all the processes within the thematic analysis. The researcher utilized analytic memo process within the researcher report portion of the database, including:

- how the researcher personally related to the participants and/ or the phenomenon;

- the participants' roles, rules, rituals, routines, and relationships;

- the researcher reflecting on operational definitions and code choices;

- emergent patterns, categories, themes, concepts, and assertions;

- regarding possible networks and processes among the codes, categories, themes, concepts, and assertions;

- emergent or related existing theory;

- problems with the study;

- personal or ethical dilemmas with the study;

- future direction for the study

- analytic memos generated at present (referred to as meta-memos for their more abstract elements);

- tentative answers to research questions; and

- final report for the study (Saldaña (2016, pp. 46-52).

These various reflexive activities continued through the evolution of the analysis of the study.

### Coding

Considering research question alignment, exploratory nature of this case study, and the epistemological nature of this study, the first cycle coding of the intensive interview for both stages utilized *process coding*. Saldaña (2016, p. 296) describes *process coding* as a process using gerunds to describe conceptual action from the data. Specifically, processes imply "…actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or become strategically

implemented." This type of coding aligned with the research question that sought to identify the dynamics of conflict in special education for families of children with invisible disability and the change elements involved. Due to the multiple types of data used in this study and the nature of case study methodology, Saldaña (2016) also recommends *eclectic coding*; this refers to using a second coding type to gain rich coding information. Figure 8 provides examples of color coding for child description (pink for female), yellow for systems barriers, green for quotations, and gray for services. Lines for coding were numbered with a superscript and the comments provided the number and code example and memos were also included in comments.

**Figure 8**

*Initial Coding with Color Codes/ Memo*
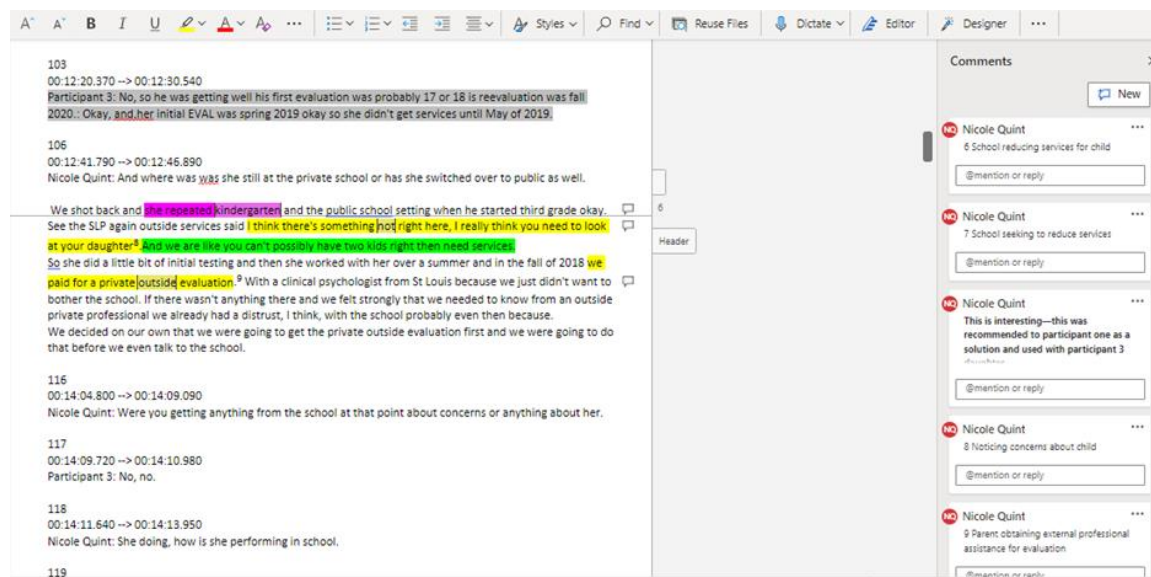


For this study, code mapping was used to organize codes prior to second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2016). The first iteration provided a list of the codes identified using process coding. The second iteration resulted in the initial categorization of the coding,

which involved the color coding the codes into various categories: conflict codes, advocacy codes, system/ subsystem barriers, emotions, child descriptions, and collaboration/ compromise codes. Conflict codes includes examples such as "teacher violating HIPAA/FERPA", "school refuting needs of student", and "school seeking to reduce services". Advocacy codes included "mother pushing for IEP data", "mother educating self on laws". Systems barriers included codes such as "school/teacher lacking training" and "school refuting concept of neurodiversity". Emotional codes included "feeling scared to go to IEP", "crying after meetings", and "feeling devalued as parent". Child descriptions (which were coded pink for female and blue for male) included codes such as "child having meltdowns", "child struggling socially", and "mother identifying learning gaps". Codes that emphasized collaboration or compromised included "mother feeling supported by teacher", "teacher trying to learn about daughter", and "teacher going above and beyond".

Another iteration involved categorizing the gerunds into distinct groups based upon the nested layer of conflict proposed by Dugan (1996). This involved identifying the code categories as intrapersonal conflict, issues conflict, relational conflict, or systems conflict. For example, "child having meltdowns" is an issues conflict, but upon reading the transcript, could also be relational in the context, if it became an issue directly with a teacher. "School lacking training" was labeled as a systems related conflict. Finally, the fourth iteration condensed the categories into concepts using the gerunds and organized the colors and the type of conflict element: issue, relations,

resource, values, preferences/ nuisances (e.g., *discriminating, excluding, advocating*).

For example, for one participant, "evading" was used as a gerund to group the following

codes for one participant: *school refuting needs of student, school evading providing*

*services, school avoiding concerns about child, school evading conversations about*

*concerns, and school rejecting learning concerns for student.* This process was

completed for each individual case and then for a global, cross-case analysis. See Table

3 related to thematic findings, to see the categories related to this level of analyses.

The goal of second cycle coding methods (Appendix H) was to develop

categories leading to thematic, conceptual organization from the codes obtained in the

first cycle of coding. The second cycle of coding of the interview data for the cases used

*pattern coding*, a way of grouping the summaries from the first cycle of coding into a

"smaller number of categories, themes or concepts" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). *Pattern*

*coding* both organizes and attributes meaning to the organization of the data codes

(Saldaña, 2016). Specifically, *pattern coding* groups the summaries of the first cycle

coding into fewer categories, themes, or concepts, providing emergent themes,

configurations, or explanations. For this case, the *pattern coding* pulled together the

information from the first cycle coding into the groundwork for cross-case analysis by

generating common themes and directional processes (p. 236).

Metaphors were used for the *pattern coding* process, recommended by Miles

because they can "synthesize large blocks of data in a single trope" (Miles et al., 2014,

p. 333). This eclectic approach for second cycle coding served as a post-coding

transition and was the selected choice for the exploratory method and its alignment with

the research question's focus on obtaining more contextual information. For the

metaphors, idioms were used; idioms are "an expression that cannot be understood

from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own"

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This process allowed the researcher to investigate the origins

of the idioms to analyze meaning for the process coding categories. This analytic

process provided more contextual analysis and contextual memo writing to discern the

decision-making process of choosing the appropriate fit of the chosen idiom. *Weather*

*the storm, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink,* and *grease the*

*wheels* are examples of idioms chosen for this cycle. Themes were then created through

cross-case analyses. For the earlier example of "evading", which included the codes:

*school refuting needs of student, school evading providing services, school avoiding*

*concerns about child, school evading conversations about concerns, and school*

*rejecting learning concerns for student*, it involved categories as systems-level, systems

barriers, and conflicts at the level of resources. It was coded during second cycle under

"you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him/ her drink", which also included

the categories of "disregarding", "impeding/obstructing".

Post-coding, which results after several applications of first cycle coding and

several second coding applications, as well as diligent adherence to analytical memo

writing, resulted in several themes. Saldaña (2016) recommends focusing strategies to

transition to the writing phase of the study. For this study, *codeweaving*, "placing key

code words and phrases into a narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together",

proved a crucial step toward thematic emergence, with focus on answering the research

question and sub-questions.

Code charting provided means with which to organize the data for an audit trail

and served as a summary table for the researcher (Saldaña, 2016). The participants,

placed into a Microsoft Word table, were cross analyzed using the following table

columns: Deutsch conflict process, Dugan nested layer specifics, primary codes and

secondary categories. The color codes were included, with the use of the Microsoft

review pane comments to indicate quotes that aligned with the color codes. This served

as "findings at a glance" proposed by Saldaña to visually represent the code or theme,

datum supporting code or theme, and an interpretive summary (through idiom,

gerunds, and memos) to identify themes, with diagrammatic mapping to finalize the

thematic emergence process. The themes were then validated with the information

supported by the archival data and the online survey data. A portion of the code

charting, specifically related to the theme of, Adding Insult to Injury, is provided in

Figure 9. The codes are primarily coded as "conflict" in red.

**Figure 9**

*Data Analysis: Coding Charting*



| | |
|---|---|
| Stigmatizing daughter | |
| Utilizing excess resources (behaviors) | **\|** |
| School reporting negatives about child<br>School branding her with reputation-helps at school<br>Parents hearing school blames parents from lawyer<br>School accusing of abuse<br>Teacher communicating negative only<br>Lacking problem solving approach | Blaming Labelling<br>perverting<br><br>Beliefs info<br>Preferences/<br>nuisances |
| Feeling like the school emphasizing that she wants her in gifted when asking for help or making suggestions | Layer: Relational |
| Contradicting communications/ actions regarding challenges with student (9)<br>Feeling tricked or shocked (3)<br>Receiving surprising news from school (2)<br>School reporting negatives about child<br>Mother feeling daughter tricked by teacher<br>School placating her<br>Feeling paranoid so always asking teacher about concerns<br>mother feeling like the school gaslighting her on the identified needs of child<br>Administrator admitting dishonesty<br>School building wall of protection and acting<br>20 Parent feeling annoyed and frustrated at impasse<br>SPED: gaslighting relucting, resistant, minimalist, ableist | Gaslighting<br><br>Layer: Relational<br>Value |
| School using inappropriate intervention (ex: punitive, too easy or hard work—commensurate with level of invisibility) (6)<br>services misaligning with needs (2)<br>Hearing Gifted teachers refusing children with IEP<br>1 mother identifying disparities between son's SPED experience vs. daughter's experience<br>3 Mother hearing that delays in eligibility are related to gender of student (female)<br>Teacher stalling due to discomfort with student<br>Invisibility of disability creating lack of acknowledgement by school—school | Discriminating<br><br>Beliefs<br>Layer: Structural and Relational |

**Visual data.** According to Saldaña (2016, p. 57), "…the best approach to

analyzing visual data is a holistic, interpretive lens guided by intuitive inquiry and

strategic questions." The visual data, the two Kawa Model River drawings, were followed

by strategic questions in the second or latter part of the interview process. It is

emphasized to do repeated viewings and analytic memo writing about the visual data

first, reversing the coding process for narrative data, which was completed. After the

analytic memo process, the data was analyzed using process coding of active gerunds

and the metaphoric categories. The Kawa Model approach informed interpretation, as

the researcher also created a Case Kawa Model River, including a comprehensive lens of

all the cases from the standpoint of context (riverbed), boulders (barriers), driftwood

(personal characteristics), which were also analyzed using Dugan's Nested Layer of

Conflict (1996), and longitudinal flow to examine from the Deutsch Model of Conflict

(1973). This approach involved the use of an eclectic approach of *structural coding* or

codes related to answering specific research questions.

      **Archival documents.** Coding for these documents involved a different process

than the interviews, utilizing a deductive coding process initially, serving as a means to

triangulate the interview findings (Yin, 2016).

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**Ethical considerations**

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      This study involved the public education system, with respect to utilizing parents

of special education students as study participants, therefore there were additional

ethical considerations to address beyond confidentiality. First, with all human research

studies, specific action to protect participants required approval from the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) of the educational institution of the student researcher. An IRB

approval was obtained through Nova Southeastern University's College of Arts,

Humanities & Social Sciences online portal. Once approved, data collection commenced,

with each participant completing with an IRB approved consent form prior to partaking

in the interview process. Since the data collection process in this study utilized

interviews, the participants were informed about the use of Zoom recordings, and

consent was obtained to record the interviews. The interview recordings were saved in a

file that was double password protected on a laptop computer. Requirements for

confidentiality protections apply to protected personally identifiable information (PPII),

which can be breached during preliminary research search and eligibility access; data

collection, analysis and dispensation; and after study closure (if there is retention of

PPII). To protect data confidentiality (University of Nevada, Reno, n.d.), routine

precautions included the following actions:

- Replacing PPII with research identification codes (participant one through

  participant seven).

- Limiting access to master code list (placed on portable drive and double

  password protected), thus stored separately from the data and will be

  destroyed as soon as possible upon completion.

- Contact lists, recruitment records and other documents that contain PPII will

  be destroyed when no longer required for research.

- Electronic data placed under double password protected computers or files;

  the passwords were changed routinely throughout the study.

- Files containing electronic data are closed when computers are left

  unattended; and

- Consent forms are stored securely in locked cabinets or password protected

  files, separate from other files or stored material (University of Nevada, Reno,

  n.d., para. 5).

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the dissertation was completed in the home

environment of the student, reducing chances for access to the laptop beyond the

researcher. In addition to protecting participant confidentiality, an emphasis on the

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), was adhered, which includes

confidentiality related to student educational records. This could include anything from

graded papers, notes from a conversation with a student, to emails containing

information about a student (Indiana University, n.d.). Therefore, additional attention to

any information derived from the interview process about a particular student was

classified as student information, thus FERPA protected. To ensure compliance with

FERPA, that information was de-identified upon transcription of interviews. Any

reference to an individual's name, whether it was the child, mother, father, or school

personnel, was changed to the following terms: *my child, participant, participant*

*husband,* or *role of school personnel* (e.g., gen ed teacher, SPED teacher,

paraprofessional, principal). The recorded interviews were kept under double password

protected file on a separate hard drive, separated from transcription files.

Because children with disabilities are part of the topic of the study focus, HIPAA

was also followed. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (United

States, 2004; HIPAA) ensures confidentiality of health care information. To protect

confidentiality during data collection, the child's name was changed to "my child", but in cases where the participant had two children, it was changed to "my son" or "my daughter", as each case involved children of different genders. Additionally, specific information that would indicate revelation of identity should not be included as a direct quote (East Tennessee State University, 2020), so those were removed and replaced with de-identifiers. Separation of interviews and transcription storage for FERPA also complied with HIPAA requirements.

## Trustworthiness

Hatch (2007, p. 34) describes trustworthiness as a concept within qualitative research to "establish criteria for judging the adequacy" of scholarly inquiries. Guba supplied four criteria for researchers to establish a trustworthy study, including:

- credibility through internal validity (peer debriefing, triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement;

- transferability through external validity/ generalizability (thick descriptive data, purposive sampling);

- dependability through reliability/ (audit trail, overlap methods, stepwise replication); and

- confirmability through objectivity/ (triangulation, audit trail and reflexivity) (1981, p. 83).

Shenton (2004) proposed that Guba's constructs "have been accepted by many" and added provisions to allow a qualitative researcher to better meet the guidelines

proposed. Credibility, sought through internal validity of the study, ensures that the study measures what was intended, and is one of the most crucial factors to establish trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

For this study, the adoption of a case study methodology approach, in depth interview approach, and use of data analyses processes that are well established meets the goal of *adoption of research methods well established*. For the second provision, because the case study did not involve *in situ* observations in the field, the approach of "prolonged engagement" was instead adopted; five of the participants had multiple interview sessions, there were two member checks, and interactions with clarifications and sharing of archival records allowed for more of a prolonged interaction with the participants. While the sample for the study was homogenous, one strength is that the participants come from different states throughout the United States, with only two cases involved the same school district (but different schools).

Triangulation afforded more opportunity for trustworthiness. The methodology involved individual interviews and the Kawa River Drawing process, which provided separate opportunities for discourse, observation and data gathering. There was only one investigator, as this is a dissertation process, but there is peer review embedded within that process through dissertation chair and committee. Theory triangulation involved using two conflict theories to analyze the conflict cases and the Kawa Model for both data collection and analysis. Triangulation through data sources involved using the data from the interviews, two separate Kawa River Drawings with one showing the

cross-sectional view and the second with a longitudinal view, archival records such as emails, IEPs, behavior charts, formal requests and letters from and to the school, and audio recordings of IEP meetings. To ensure honesty in informants, each participant was given an opportunity to refuse to participate, rapport was attempted through dialogue and shared confidentiality approaches, that there is no right or wrong answer, and the researcher emphasized independent status (Shenton, 2004).

Iterative questioning was included into the interview process, including probes to elicit detailed data, rephrased questions on previously shared data, and addressing any contradictions through additional questioning or follow up. The member check with the case review provided only a few corrections requested by participants, including change of time when incident occurred (month or time of year), one correction regarding IEP status, one request to remove information that might identify participant, and one change from the name of the classroom placement. The background of the researcher, which involves extensive experience within SPED services, IEP meetings, and working with children and families with NVD, provided additional validity. A thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny was met through detailed descriptions in the conflict cases provided for each participant and theme information. Examination of previous research findings involved the literature review process, and information obtained also guided organization of the literature reviewed.

External validity, or transferability, speaks to the extent the findings of the study can be applied to other situations. Quantitative, positivist studies focus on how the

results of the study can be applied at large; qualitative projects involve a small number

of environments and individuals, making it "impossible to demonstrate that the findings

and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations" (Shenton, 2004).

However, others offer a contrasting view, suggesting that through each unique case, it is

also an example within a broader group, preventing immediate rejection of

transferability (Stake, 1994; Denscombe, 2017). Shenton emphasizes that the researcher

knows only the "sending context", therefore, cannot make transferability inferences.

Instead, readers "must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other

situations the results and conclusions presented," emphasizing the need for thick

description (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Recommended information includes the following:

number of organizations in study and where they are based (six public school conflict

cases and one charter school conflict case from six different states); any restrictions in

type of people who contributed data (no restrictions noted); number of participants

(seven); data collection methods employed (intensive, in depth interviews, Kawa River

drawings, archival data); number and length of data collection sessions (interviews were

either one or two sessions with typical total time of 1.5 hours to 3 hours); time period

over which data was collected (interviews and Kawa drawings were conducted November

2020 through June, 2021; archival records obtained March 2021 through October,

2021).

Dependability relies on research design and implementation, operational detail

of data gathering, and reflective appraisal of the project. This information, provided in

the Data Collection and Data Analyses sections in Chapter III, supports dependability for

the project. Confirmability, the objectivity within the study, relies on the "qualitative

investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Triangulation

provided a process to reduce effects of investigator bias; the crux of confirmability

relies on the extent the researcher admits his or her predispositions, acknowledged

within the research report. The researcher also completed three sessions with experts in

the field of special education to corroborate the themes. These discussions provided the

researcher the opportunity to defend the themes and to confirm analysis for

consistency.

## Summary

This chapter provided the rationale for the use of qualitative case study

methodology, the sampling method of purposive and snowball approaches, data

collection approaches and data analysis processes. The next chapter provides

demographic information of the participations and the findings obtained from the

interview data and Kawa Model River drawings, specifically the themes identified and the

answers to the research sub-questions and overall question.

Chapter 4: Findings

Through exploratory qualitative case study design, seven participants completed

in-depth interviews, Kawa River drawings of both the contextual influences of their

special education experiences and the temporal context of the special education

experience from a longitudinal representation.  The seven participants, all mothers with

children with invisible disabilities who have received special education services, provided

this information with the intent of providing data to answer the following research

questions:

- What are the dynamics of conflict within special education practices for

  mothers of children with invisible disability?

  o   What are unique elements of invisible disability in the conflict process?

  o   How does an invisible disability affect the conflict process from

      identification through re-evaluation?

  o   How do mothers of children with invisible disability describe the

      evolution of the conflict within the various steps of the special education

      process?

  o   What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-

      escalation of conflict?

Data analysis utilized constant comparison and classical content approaches to

identify themes to provide answers to the research questions.  Additionally, individual

conflict cases were analyzed using the conflict theories presented earlier, Deutsch Model

of Conflict, the Nested Model of Conflict, and temporally through the CADRE conflict steps.

This chapter provides demographic information about the seven participants, the thematic analyses, and the resulting findings (themes) from the data analysis and how they answer the research questions for the study. The data sources for the findings included the intensive interviews of each participant, the Kawa River Drawings (cross-sectional and longitudinal) from each participant, and archival data of emails, and IEP review, and an audio recording of an IEP meeting.

## Demographics

This study utilized purposive sampling, supplemented by snowball sampling to expand sample size (Creswell, 2016) adding two participants to the sample. The resulting homogenous sample consisted entirely of mothers, White women, with six of the seven working in professional roles. Of the professional backgrounds, one participant had a professional role as an attorney, four participants had backgrounds as therapists, one as an elementary teacher who was also finishing graduate school to become a therapist, and two of the four therapists were also university professors. One participant had a background working in an insurance company. Regarding the children of the participants, 5 were female students and 4 male students. The children ranged in grades from elementary to high school, with one student recently graduating. Two participants were from Central Missouri, and one each from the following areas: Southern California, Southern Florida, New York City, Central Pennsylvania, and one

undisclosed. Six of the participants were married, while one was a single mother. One

participant had a child in charter school, while the other six participants had students

enrolled in public school. Eligibility was primarily other health impairment (OHI), autism,

or specific learning disability (SLD) (Table). One participant adopted her child and two

participants had two children receiving special education services. The demographic

information is provided in Table 1, specific to gender of participants and children, and

Table 2, which provides information about each participant's child(ren), location, and

eligibility category for SPED.

**Table 1**

*Gender of Participants and Children Eligible for Special Education Services*

| Sample | N | M | F |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participants | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Children | 9 | 4 | 5 |

**Table 2**

*Participants' Children: Special Education Students and Demographics*

| Participant | Current Level in School | No. Children in SPED | State of SPED Conflict | Type of School (SPED) | Eligibility Category |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Elementary | 1 | New York | Public School | Speech and Language Impairment |
| 2 | Elementary | 1 | Florida | Public School | Other Health Impairment |
| 3 | Middle | 2 | Missouri | Public School | Other Health Impairment/ (son) Specific Learning Disability (daughter) |
| 4 | Elementary | 1 | Pennsylvania | Public School | Autism |
| 5 | Graduated | 1 | Deidentified | Public School | De-identified |
| 6 | High | 1 | California | Charter School | Specific Learning Disability* Other Health Impairment |
| 7 | Middle | 2 | Missouri | Public School | Autism (son) Emotional Disturbance/ Autism (daughter) |

*Note.* The asterisk (*) denotes that there was disrupted eligibility with this diagnosis.

## Data and Analysis

This study utilized a qualitative case study design through intensive interviews and use of the Kawa Model drawings to collect data on conflict in special education for mothers of children with NVD. The sample consisted of seven women from throughout the United States. Data analysis consisted of cycles of coding, including process and

idiom-based coding, case analysis, and cross-case comparisons for thematic analysis. The following section provides answers to the research question and sub-questions using the themes resulting from thematic analysis.

## Thematic Analysis

This section presents the themes identified through data analysis processes. The themes are explored later below at depth to provide full exploration of the constructs involved. The thematic analysis process involved multiple stages:

- reading and re-reading transcripts of the interviews for each of the participants (Creswell, 2016; Saldana, 2016);

- line by line organic coding using gerunds to capture the "doing" involved for the first cycle coding (Saldana, 2016);

- Code mapping and color coding the first cycle codes into groups (Saldana, 2016) based upon conflict codes, advocacy codes, system/ subsystem barriers, emotions, Kawa elements, and collaboration/ compromise codes;

- post-first cycle code mapping using conflict analysis coding identifying nested layer of conflict (Dugan, 1996) and origin of perceived incompatible goals (values, beliefs, resources, preferences/ nuisances) as described by Deutsch (1973);

- second cycle coding using idioms to emphasize context of the codes (Saldana, 2016);

- categorizing using findings "at a glance" approach with code, datum supporting code or theme, and interpretive summary; and

- recategorizing using color coding and mapping to create resulting themes with research questions guiding process (Saldaña, 2016).

The findings of this study reflect comprehensive answers to the following research question and sub-questions:

- What are the dynamics of conflict within special education practices for mothers of children with NVD?

  o What are unique elements of NVD in the conflict process?

  o How does an NVD affect the conflict process from identification through re-evaluation?

  o How do mothers of children with NVD describe the evolution of the conflict within the various steps of the special education process?

  o What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-escalation of conflict?

To answer this question and sub-questions, the themes resulting from the data included Square Peg in a Round Hole, Bear the Brunt, Sea Change, Game Changer, and Adding Insult to Injury. Square Peg in a Round Hold serves as the idiom to describe the nature of invisible disability and some of the manifestations of learning disabilities and neurobehavioral symptoms that create a unique context to the students who have NVD and are learning within a larger school system. Bear the Brunt refers to the systemic

elements of power and first experiences of conflict that are borne primarily by the

mothers. Sea Change refers to the experiences of the mothers that create a power shift,

the emotional and structural challenges they seek to manage or overcome through

advocacy efforts, external supports, and social supports. Game Changer refers to the

specific de-escalating elements of conflict, particularly collaborative and compromising

behaviors of the educators who work with their child, while Adding Insult to Injury refers

to the escalating elements of conflict, the behaviors of the school personnel or district

level administrators that create a perception of a personal attack to the view of their

child or direct conflict with the mother. Each theme provides an answer to one of the

research sub-questions, while the overall research question collectively by all five

themes. Table 3 provides the thematic findings obtained through data analysis, the

corresponding subthemes, the conflict element analyses, the Kawa elements identified,

and the corresponding research sub-question that the theme answers.

**Table 3**

*Thematic Findings*

| Theme | Research Question Sub-question | Subthemes | Conflict Elements | Kawa Elements |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Square Peg in a Round Hole | Sub-question 1: What are unique elements of NVD in the conflict process? | Nonconforming student School Lacking | Nested layer: Structural system Deutsch: Competition context due to resource provisions | Boulders: lack of training for teachers, anxiety regarding behaviors, fear of family history of NVD, meltdowns, shame and guilt |

| | | | Barki & Hartwick: Conflict lies in disagreement for task/ negative emotion for task and interpersonal | Riverbed: School culture, judgment from others, family divergence, eligibility issues, general education |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bear the Brunt | Sub-question 2: How does an invisible disability affect the conflict process from identification through re-evaluation? | School exacting power School compelling Diverging approaches | Nested layer: Structural system  Deutsch: Competition and use of power  Barki & Hartwick: Disagreement for task/ behavior for task and interpersonal/ negative emotion task and interpersonal Deustch: Collaboration and intrapersonal conflict focus | Narrowing riverbed and reduced flow  Riverbed elements: refusing services, IEP, SLD not eligible, repeating grade, Title I, Financial resources, Covid-19, time and resources of the school lacking  Boulder: Covid-19, medications |
| Sea Change | Sub-questions 3: How do mothers of children with | Initiating Advocacy Draining Shifting | Rahim: Mother moving away from obliging or avoiding | Driftwood: determination, resilience, husband, knowledge, attitude, |

| | NVD describe the evolution of their conflict experience within various steps of the special education process? | Drawing the line | style to dominating, integrating, and/ or compromising style | marriage, honesty, respect, learning about self, family, persistent, resourceful, educated |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Game Changer | Sub-question 4: What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-escalation of conflict? | Partnering Valuing Altering | Nested Layer: Relational<br><br>Deutsch: De-escalating<br><br>Rahim: Mother and educators engaged in Integrating style, compromising style | Riverbed/ boulder: external supports Widening riverbed and flow: eligibility, supportive teacher/ staff, ongoing support |
| Adding Insult to Injury | Sub-question 4: What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-escalation of conflict? | Blaming Gaslighting Discriminating | Nested Layer: Structural Subsystem<br><br>Deutsch: Escalating<br><br>Barki & Hartwick: D, I, N overlap focused on relational<br><br>Rahim: School engaged in dominating style | Riverbed can turn and open with new teacher/classroom (and vice versa) Boulders: negative past experiences, resistance, ableism, gaslighting, treatment of family, 504 or SPED director, treatment of family, anger |

*Note.* Each theme is analyzed using the theoretical framework for conflict that is applicable to that theme. Kawa analyses is based upon the riverbed (context), boulders (barriers), driftwood (attributes) and the narrowing of flow (increased conflict and reduced satisfaction with education services) and widening of riverbed and increasing river flow (decreased conflict and increased satisfaction with education for child).

The following sections will provide the answers to those questions, starting with the overarching research question, followed by the four sub-questions, which will provide more in-depth explanation of findings.

## Research Question

The research question for this study asked, what are the dynamics of conflict for mothers of students with NVD in special education? The answer serves as a hypothesis that can be tested out through additional research. The student with invisible disability is a square peg in a round hole, a nonconforming student in a system that is not designed for them, with educators and administrators who lack training and knowledge on NVD. This results in mothers having to bear the brunt of the system, through diverging approaches to intervention for their student (some of which is a consequence of the lack of training and knowledge), particularly related to identification and eligibility, the school exacting power to budget resources and control service provision, and the school compelling, again to budget resources and transfer interventions externally. The evolution of conflict experienced by the mother involves intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural conflict experiences, that result in a sea change in their advocacy approaches. They initially often experience conflict once they start to notice their child experiencing academic or behavioral challenges in school, thus starting their

challenges with advocacy and revelation of the learning curve related to navigating the system. The draining experience of advocating, emotionally, temporally, resource-related, and task-related, is significant and facilitates the sea change toward resilience and shifting toward knowledge and power. They use external resources, social support systems, and self-education to become more effective advocates. Their power shift results in drawing a line, whether it is related to service provision, interactions with school personnel, or moving toward higher levels of conflict (due process, litigation). The escalating drivers of conflict add insult to injury, with the mothers experiencing blaming, discrimination, and gaslighting, which add to the draining they experience. There are also game changers, which include the de-escalating elements of partnering with teachers and teachers/ school personnel valuing their child as part of the learning community. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how altering learning environments can serve as a game changer, and potentially more de-escalating than what has been experienced for other populations.

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**Research Sub-question 1:**

**What are unique elements of NVD in the conflict process?**

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The first sub-question of this case study examined how mothers believe NVD uniquely influences conflict within SPED. The results were organized to reflect a collective response based upon how mothers: a) described their children's unique qualities, b) related their child's unique qualities to challenges in the school system; c) indicated the level of invisibility of their child's disabilities; and d) how their child's NVD

differs from one that is visible to others, particularly educators and school personnel.

The resulting theme and sub-themes were delineated by the relationship of Deutsch

(1973) elements of the conflict (values, beliefs, preferences/ nuisances, resources) and

Dugan (1996) layers of conflict (issues, relational, structural). The theme that emerged

from the responses to this question is *Square Peg in a Round Hole,* which includes

subthemes of *nonconforming student*, *lacking (school personnel lacking training/*

*knowledge/ or time/ effort),* and *diverging (approaches to intervention).* Each theme and

subtheme will be detailed below.

**Theme: Square Peg in a Round Hole**

The theme of *Square Peg in a Round Hole* includes the subthemes of *School*

*Personnel Lacking Training/ Knowledge and Diverging Approaches to Intervention,*

which emerged from the sub-question regarding the unique elements of NVD in the

conflict process. *Square Peg in a Round Hole*, an idiomatic phrase, is defined as

"someone who does not fit in a particular place or situation" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.);

with additional definitions including, "someone who is unsuited to a certain task,

position, situation, or group of people" (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). This phrase imparts

context to understand how NVD creates unique challenges within the public school

system, particular to understanding that these children do not necessarily fit the

categories and services designed within the special education system. Initial coding

specific to this theme is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

*Domains regarding Mother's Beliefs on Unique Elements of NVD on Conflict Experiences in SPED*

| Theme: Square Peg in a Round Hole | | |
|---|---|---|
| Included Codes | Conflict Relationship/ Color Codes | Subtheme |
| Child having meltdowns (4) Child reacting to school environment Internalizing, thus hidden (2) Identifying learning gaps Child struggling socially Rubber banding (school vs. home) | Beliefs, Preferences/ Nuisances, Resources Color(s): Barriers/ Child traits | Nonconforming Student (learning and emotional diversity) |
| School/ teachers lacking training/ knowledge/ understanding (6) School lacking time and resources (4) Teacher expressing feeling overwhelmed/ incompetence (3) School/ teachers misunderstanding needs of mildly involved children (too easy/hard) (2) Teaching methods lacking repetition Teacher focusing narrowly on anxiety Teachers lacking organization ("old school") | Resources, Beliefs Structural Color(s): System/subsystem barriers, conflict | Lacking (School personnel lacking training/ knowledge/ or time/ effort) |

**Subtheme: Nonconforming Student (Theme: Square Peg in a Round Hole).** The subtheme of nonconforming student involves the specific child qualities that create a context of the square peg (student) and the school system (round hole), namely learning and emotional diversity. The codes that informed this subtheme include *child having meltdowns; child reacting to school environment; internalizing, thus hidden; identifying learning gaps; child struggling socially;* and *rubber banding (school vs. home).* Meltdowns are the specific sensory and emotional fight, flight, or freeze episodes that

happen without warning, while *reacting to the school environment* specifically applied to

scenarios where the environment at the school directly related to a behavior or

meltdown that was unique to school, such as the instances of one child jumping out the

window to escape a stressful classroom situation (P5, personal communication, May 20,

2021), an episode involving a child leaving the bus unnoticed at school (P4, personal

email communication, October 1, 2021), or instances where the child is "cussing" at the

teachers or acting in an inappropriate interaction with teachers (P4, personal

communication, May 10, 2021; P2, personal communication, March 3, 2021; P3,

personal communication, April 14, 2021; P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021;

P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021). These scenarios also created contexts of

emotional stress for parents and educators, as well as the student, with the so-called

"invisible" factor opening a channel for unique and consequential responses to the child

and parents that influence the SPED process from multiple directions. A shared

conversation with another adult about the differences between her child and a relative

with Down Syndrome, a visible disability, emphasizes the notion that the dots are not

always connected linearly for children who have a NVD due to the invisibility factor:

> I was having a day, where you know, of course, the kids had melted down all day
>
> and I said to her 'I'm, like... why it's so different because if you're in a store and
>
> some sensory thing happens that throws [my son or daughter] into these
>
> meltdowns. To the world that looks just like this kid having a fit, even though
>
> they're in like the sensory overload' and I said, 'but you know if it was [child with

Down Syndrome] people would be like, "oh, he's got Down Syndrome" so yeah,

you know, normal'. And I feel bad saying that but, at the same time, I also felt

like that was totally true (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

Social emotional development diversity created challenges for multiple

participants, particularly the challenges with delineating the line between developmental

diversity within typical parameters and deviation from the norm. The emotional

meltdowns, often categorized as behavioral and intentional rather than a physiological

phenomenon, are a visible element of NVD highlighted consistently within the data,

particularly when the child has additional behavioral challenges. Specific instances

included data such as, "she's really struggling, this is what's happening at home, even

though she looks like she's doing very well you know she just flips out" (P6, personal

communication, May 28, 2021). This behavioral continuum creates confusion regarding

identifying what type of behavior is occurring, difficulty in managing the meltdowns,

confusion from other adults in the family or working with the child, and perceived

judgment from others, including those in the family or working with the child. As one

participant put it:

You know there's going to be more people are more willing to be like, 'Oh, you

know that things pass' and I've even gotten to it and my son had a lot of

meltdowns when he was younger and then my daughter also would have

sometimes, where you know I would have these little cards that would be like

about autism, and I just give it to them, yeah" (P7, personal communication, June

10, 2021).

Due to the invisible nature of these disabilities, interactions with family, friends,

and neighbors can be impacted. The consistent judgment, lack of understanding or

awareness, and omnipresent confusion creates a situation in which mothers often feel

as though they are under a microscope of scrutiny. "…A lot of things are seen as

behaviors or intentional when actually they're not" (P6, personal communication, May

28, 2020). This expanded to awkward interactions with others:

> Or, there's just denial, right, because, even on early on, on playdates I would
>
> kind of give the parents some warnings, you know, like, 'Hey, could you not let
>
> them play outside where there's a street unless you're really there because I
>
> don't know what this one will run into it, you know, like or some certain kinds of
>
> and they'd be like, 'She's nine', I was like, 'I know you know, like it's not the
>
> same', and then even parents kind of look at you funny (P6, personal
>
> communication, May 28, 2021).

The behavioral continuum not only creates misunderstanding for laypeople, parents,

and educators, but also the physicians working with the child:

> She's [small] in stature. Um, I don't know if that's kind of where the physician
>
> was coming from too; he was more worried about that. He was sending us to,
>
> like, endocrinology and things like that for the fact that she wasn't really
>
> growing as opposed to, like these emotional overreactions that she was having

every day" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020).

Kawa river drawing elements included boulders (barriers) regarding the anxiety associated with child's behavior, but interestingly, the only other visual representation of the NVD was another boulder regarding fear related to family history of NVD, represented in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

*Participant One Cross-sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
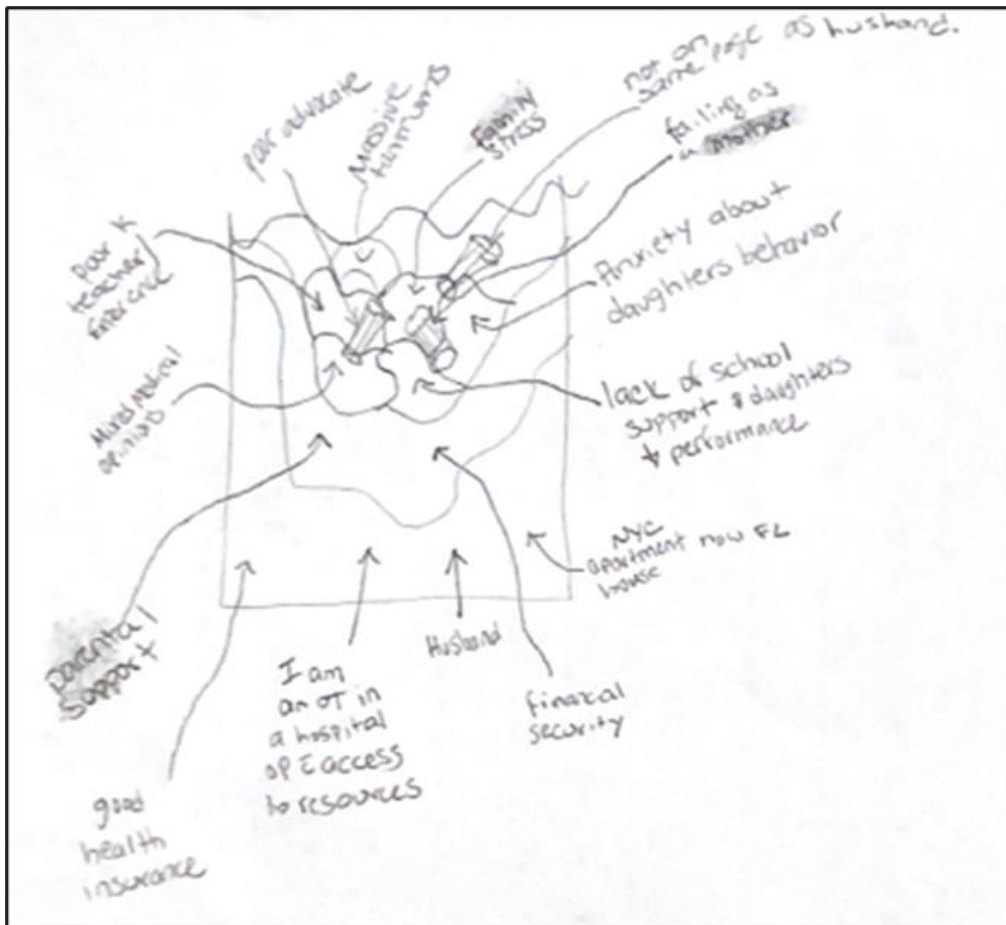


*Note.* Participant One used two layers of riverbed context and then provided boulders and driftwood. Her river flow is limited as there are significant barriers toward flow. Participant One, personal communication, November 23, 2021.

Seeking out medical expertise is a consistent narrative with the participants, particular to the difficulty in diagnosing children with neurobehavioral disabilities, as Participant Five shared as she paraphrased an expert in the field, "he said, 'you know, even the experts don't know where one ends and one begins…because it's this continuum and maybe in the future we'll find that this is just a brain continuum…of symptoms that show up'" (personal communication, May 20, 2021).

The unique qualities of a child with invisible disabilities include behaviors along a continuum from those related to communication delays to those including severe emotional or sensory related meltdowns. They can be exacerbated by the learning challenges such as disorders of reading or processing, "I don't think he understands the fictional stories because he doesn't understand the social undertones" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021), or the anxiety highlighted as creating various safety issues within the school environment (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021; P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021). The concept of *Square Peg in a Round Hole* becomes visible under the lens of the expected behaviors of children within the school system. The school day involves routines of drop off, going into the classroom, sitting for classroom work, and transitions throughout the day, until it is time to go home. This involves following rules and expectations of the school and classroom on a consistent basis. Therefore, this environment creates an interface for the unique qualities of the child to become visible, but not necessarily that it is related to disability. Although there were differences noted related to when the mothers first noticed concerns about their

child's behaviors or learning diversity, multiple mothers identified the school

environment as creating a situation that either initiated the concerns or punctuated

them:

> So, the first...it was kind of first notice that there might be some sort of a
>
> concern in pre-kindergarten. And it was, like, if she was at the cubbies to take
>
> off her were in New York, so, like. The winter gear and stuff. It could take
>
> forever, and they also wanted all the kids to take their shoes off and switch them
>
> to, like, slippers for the classroom. So, all the kids would kind of go over at once
>
> and she would just have a meltdown and, like, it was just too much for her.
>
> There are a lot of people– she's tiny, they were kind of pushing her– and instead
>
> of just kind of waiting or communicating or problem solving in any way she
>
> would just melt down and cry in the corner and it could take her a good, like,
>
> hour to come out (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020).

The sensory challenges indicated by the noise, crowds, smells, and visual stimuli

become compounded by demands of the tasks involved within the school day. Learning

activities such as reading, writing, math, and other topics present the child's differences

or challenges, as evidenced by P6's daughter, "...and so I kept saying like even the

second grade like she can tell you the words, but she can't tell you what that sentence

means, like, she's just read that to you and walked away and has like zero" (personal

communication, May 28, 2021). The invisibility continuum includes multiple variances,

creating a situation of significant neurodiversity. These differences become evident

within one family,

> His disability was a little more visible, you know, and you see walking around
>
> and he's very stiff and he's very ritualistic like people pick up on it, whereas with
>
> her, she was an internalizer and she would just zone out in a way that maybe
>
> wouldn't be as obvious (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021).

This variance, within a set of disabilities that run along a continuum of variance,

complexing the way students with NVD interact with their school environment, including

the social landscape of educators and personnel, as well as peers. Therefore, the

structural layer becomes an important conflict element, including the nested layers of

relations and issues.  Beliefs, preferences/ nuisances, and resources were influential

within this subtheme, as the structural layer results in resource utilization, relations are

affected by the resource utilization, beliefs about the student's behavior (issues), and

challenging elements of it create potential preferences and nuisances. One anecdote

provides a way to understand these students:

> The special ed chair...he also deals a lot with the kids that he says, 'are like
>
> ducks...you see them swimming on the water and they look beautiful and
>
> graceful, but you don't realize that under the water they're paddling their little
>
> hearts out' (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

NVD presents challenges initially to the identification and diagnostic processes,

as indicated earlier within the participant cases. Some participants had children who

were identified and diagnosed early, receiving early intervention services under IDEA

Part C until age three and then transitioning to IDEA Part B coverage for preschool after

age three. Exemplified in this narrative, "he was diagnosed with autism right around his

second birthday, and he started receiving early intervention services when he was about

seven months old" by Participant Four, and the additional, "we were made aware very

early on that there were red flags and…took, I think, about 10 months to get in for an

initial evaluation" (P4, May 10, 2021).  The red flags can include various developmental

milestone delays, "…he was demonstrating, like, motor delays" (P4, personal

communication, May 10, 2021), or "because there's an eligibility for preschoolers called

developmental delay", which enabled services for P6's daughter (personal

communication, May 28, 2021). Other red flags or concerns involve more of an

emotional component that might not become evident until the child enters kindergarten.

When describing her daughter, P3 shared how learning gaps became obvious to her:

> Okay, she had an older teacher that was retiring, and she had a good teacher.
>
> But what we were seeing at home was maybe a kid that wasn't progressing the
>
> way that she should have been. Like, she would look at her books, instead of
>
> actually read them. She would line her books up in a row, but she never actually
>
> tried to look at them or read them or sound out words and she had a hyperactive
>
> component, with the ADHD that we definitely noticed, we could see the
>
> hyperactivity. But she just wasn't engaging with letters and sounds the way we

thought she should have been because she was repeating kindergarten (P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021).

The visible signs that the child was struggling within the school environment during various learning activities were sometimes initially noted by parents:

She avoided her first year of kindergarten in her private school setting…so she had friends and when we would go into the school, you could see her not really engaging and you could see her, like, playing with a friend, not focusing on what the teacher was teaching…But at home…she wasn't picking up on things the way that she should have been, for her age and for her grade (P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021).

Some of the parents noticed concerns at an earlier age but weren't sure that it was something related to a diagnosis or tangible learning, neurobehavioral issue, and the school environment proved the opportunity for those concerns to be confirmed by an educator or school professional.  "…starting at age three the behavior started happening and I thought it was because I had a second child" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).  She added, "…he would be very oppositional all of a sudden and he was a very good toddler."  She correlated the behavioral concerns with the recent birth of his baby brother, but the oppositional behaviors continued, and he started exhibiting anxiety. One of the teachers in first grade eventually confirmed the concerns, "…the teacher sort of stepped out and said, 'I think [your son] has ADHD'" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Some of the concerns were related to the social emotional elements of school performance, particularly the ability to fit in with peers and maintain friendships, highlighted with this statement, "if you can't maintain a friendship…and finally, one of our teachers stood up for us a little bit and said, 'there's something going on here, and she needs to be evaluated'" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021). *Nonconforming student* emphasizes the unique qualities of students with NVD, students who have disparate development; they can have significant strengths or typical development in many areas and then have gaps or delayed areas in development that can go from somewhat visible (motor delays and language delays), to confusing (meltdowns, behaviors, social communication), to virtually hidden (reading comprehension, dyslexia, executive functions). Their developmental splintered skills, at times compounded by school system processes, culture, testing processes, and/ or personal beliefs, can delay the process for identification, diagnosis, and eligibility. Furthermore, differences in SPED approaches from one district to another, as well as public versus charter school, foster additional opportunities for delays or disparate momentum through the initial steps of the SPED ten step process.

**Subtheme: School Lacking Training/ Knowledge/ Time/ Effort/ Resources (Theme: Square Peg in a Round Hole).** The subtheme, *school lacking training/ knowledge, understanding/ time/ effort*, emerged from codes specific to *school/ teachers lacking training and knowledge, misunderstanding needs of student, school methods lacking repetition, and school expressing incompetence/ feeling overwhelmed*

*by student.* These codes were primarily color coded under system barriers and include resource-based elements of the system as well as influence under beliefs regarding information and facts (Deutsch, 1973). The codes within this subtheme did not include any codes identified as specific conflict codes but serve more as contextual influences toward creating context for conflict. This context of lacking resources related to training and knowledge resulted in delayed identification and eligibility, reflected in confusion regarding the concerns observed, "I feel like they felt like she just wasn't capable of learning in the beginning…when they realized that her IQ was so high that there was something maybe that was causing this not just that 'she's a baby'" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020), or that the teacher "…doesn't know what to do with him" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).  Further speculation came from Participant Seven, "I don't know if they just haven't done a lot of training with the teachers, but you can find those teachers who understand…that go to bat for the kids instead of the ones that have been trained by, 'oh, this is just the way our district does it'" (personal communication, June 10, 2021).

Perceptions regarding general education teachers, those who educate the student in inclusive environments and often through most of the day, involved questioning their training for special education and specific needs of the child, as well as the supporting educators and administrators, "I think that we know that sometimes, like, general ed teachers don't know, or administrators, or paraprofessionals, is that autism is a huge spectrum" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).  The training

and resources connected to the funding by Participant Three, "some of them don't have enough training for sure" and when asked what the biggest barriers toward successful SPED for her son, she provided "lack of education and training on the part of the school…lack of resources and money", personal communication, March 25, 2021). The lack of resources or funding for the schools was represented both as contextual elements within the riverbed of the Kawa Model river drawings, "limited time and money" (P6, personal communication, May 29, 2021), "school lacks resources" (P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021), and "Title I School" (P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021), referring to that school's designation as a low-income school, with at least 40 percent of enrollment eligible for Title I funds. Participant Six indicated "public charter school limited skill and resources for alternative learners" as a contextual riverbed element in the cross-sectional Kawa Model River drawing. The lack of resources was also identified as a boulder, "lack of resources", indicating it served as a barrier to services and education (P4, May 12, 2021). Participant Three provided data that shared a more global view of the lack of knowledge related to specific invisible disabilities, "I don't think they understood what dyslexia really means" (personal communication, April 14, 2021). The lack of training was represented by boulders (barriers) in four the Kawa cross-sectional river drawings.

Within this subtheme, structural elements of doing just enough for the student emphasize the belief, values, and preferences/ nuisance issues that create a divergence between the school and the mother. This is represented by statements such as, "…and

the amount of repetition that's required is just more than they're [school personnel] capable of doing but they can't put them [student] in a separate class...and change the curriculum because they're [student] capable of passing it, sorta" (P6, personal communication, May 29, 2021). This references the "mild" students who tend to test around the cut off scores within standardized testing in the schools and the challenges they present to the school because of their need for methods of repetition to be successful in school, "people don't really know how to help the mild kids...the classes are so easy to where they don't learn anything" (P6, personal communication, May 28, 2021). There were also scenarios when students received services, but they weren't on par with what was needed, based upon the mothers' perception of the school misunderstanding the student's true needs related to their disability, "but that was pretty typical that they didn't quite get what he needs, but he at least they were getting him 'support'" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021). In addition, teachers who didn't implement organization and structure, something helpful for all students, but particularly children with NVD, further suggested some of the teachers might not have that knowledge or training, "I think part of it is...she wasn't very, like, organized and, like, methodical like the kindergarten teacher was," which resulted in a less successful year as compared to the previous year (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Participant Seven shared how this lack of knowledge or training resulted in a situation with the fourth-grade teacher, "...she felt because she had anxiety that she knew everything about anxiety and that my daughter just would deal with it and...she

would fill out [forms] as if she was a perfectly neurotypical student who had no issues"

(personal communication, June 10, 2021). More consistently noted by mothers were

experiences of teachers sharing with them their feelings of being overwhelmed by the

child or relaying difficulties related to competence in teaching a child within the

spectrum of NVD. Typically, these feelings were conveyed directly to the mother,

including the stress felt by the teacher. Sometimes conversations shared with the

mother included the teacher speaking about other members of the team:

> She's [gen ed teacher] like… 'we are doing everything we can, on our end and it's
>
> creating a lot of internal conversations…about whose responsibility it is when a
>
> child falls off in learning support. It's identified some areas where maybe some
>
> of the teachers are not comfortable and not knowing what to do' (P4, personal
>
> communication, May 10, 2021).

Temporal demands, compounded by the number of children being educated by

teachers and served by special education relates to the phenomenon of the system

lacking, evidenced by an interaction involving a learning specialist sharing her despair

directly with the mother, "the learning specialist was almost in tears, and she was

saying, 'I don't have time, I don't have time… I can't provide the minutes that you

wanted'" (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021). The participant explained the

context further, "…she had too many kids and she was overworked, and I absolutely

believe that she is overworked but she was basically saying 'I can't help…she might have

dyslexia, but I can't provide more minutes because I don't have the time, I have too

many other kids to serve'".

<div align="center">**Research Sub-Question 2:**</div>

**How does an NVD affect the conflict process from identification through re-evaluation?**

**Theme: Bear the Brunt**

*Bear the brunt* is an idiom that includes the word brunt, defined as "the principal

force, shock, or stress (as of an attack)" and "the greater part, burden" (Merriam

Webster, n.d., para. 1). The phrase, *bear the brunt,* means to put up with the worst of

some bad circumstance, and to take the brunt of the force of the "attack", which is an

important context. Because mothers are typically the parent or caregiver who both

advocates and manages the education of the child, they also bear the force of the power

of the system they are working within. The "attack" described in this idiom has

flexibility, in this case it can implicate the competitive nature involved in conflict. This

research sub-question focuses on the conflict process, thus the codes, subthemes, and

themes emergent from the responses to this sub-question involve competition and

conflict. This theme includes multiple layers of conflict, structural power imbalance and

relational interpersonal conflict. The layers, as perceived and experienced by the

mothers, include *diverging approaches to intervention*, s*chool exacting power, and

school compelling. Diverging approaches to intervention* highlights the bifurcation

between the mothers and the school's approaches to identifying, including, and

supporting within SPED. *School exacting power* includes the structural power utilized by

the school that the mothers identified as a state of conflict. This category of codes involved more color coding for conflict, indicating the competitive element involved, as the emphasis of power differentials became apparent. Within s*chool compelling*, mothers perceived being compelled by the school, to medicate their child or implement programming from external professionals the school referred to them, also involving structural layers of conflict. *Bear the brunt* relates to sub-question two, as it focuses on the conflict related to the issues of NVD, that starts with the identification process and moves through eligibility, IEP, and implementation of services, the steps of the SPED process. Table 5 provides the specific coding for this theme and subthemes.

**Table 5**

*Domains Regarding Mother's Perceptions on how NVD Affects Conflict Process within SPED: Theme Bear the Brunt*

| Theme: Bear the Brunt | | |
|---|---|---|
| Included Codes | Conflict Relationship/ Color Codes | Subtheme |
| School refuting concept of neurodiversity Learning to learn (mother) vs. learning content (school) School proposing/ implementing incompatible option Differing approaches (mom vs. school) Diverging views on supportive services Values differing from school School refuting needs (reading, support, related services) School upholding alternative explanation | Beliefs, Values, Issues, Structural  Color(s): System/Subsystem, Barriers  Idiom: Actions speak louder than words | Diverging Approaches to Intervention |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| School refusing approach from cultural perspective<br>School placing burden on parents | | |
| Mother feeling confronted by school (2)<br>Mother utilizing advocate with warning: contentious<br>Mother emphasizing power imbalance of IEP meetings<br>School finding out request of school change<br>Teacher feeling pressured to accuse parents<br>Families keeping quiet allowing abuse of power<br>School reacting to discrepancy identification<br>School not responding to advocacy efforts<br>School backing teachers – feeling colluded against<br>School building wall of protection<br>Teacher violating HIPAA / FERPA (laws) (3)<br>School violating IEP (2)<br>School violating policy (2)<br>School not keeping up with disability laws | Preferences/ Nuisances, Values, Structural<br><br>Color(s): System/ Subsystem, Barriers, Conflict<br><br>Kawa: Riverbed, boulders; narrowing flow<br><br>Idiom(s): Bear the brunt, Actions speak louder than words | School Exacting Power |
| Mother feeling pressured to put child on medication by school (2)<br>Parent implementing suggested external programs (4)<br>School retaining child<br>School placing student in non-agreed to placement | Beliefs, Values, Structural<br><br>Color(s): System/Subsystem, Conflict<br><br>Idiom(s): Bear the brunt, Actions speak louder than words | School Compelling |

**Subtheme: Diverging Approaches to Intervention (Theme: Bear the Brunt).** Within the theme, *bear the brunt*, the subtheme, *diverging approaches to intervention,* includes codes such as *differing approaches (school versus mother), diverging views, school refuting diagnosis, school refusing approach, school refuting concept of neurodiversity, differing values,* and *school proposing incompatible option*. This subtheme includes codes categorized as system barriers, with elements related to beliefs over information and facts, as well as values. The diverging views are informed by beliefs over information and facts related to neurodiversity, how to intervene for the student, and the resulting diagnosis for the student. Cultural notations labeled one school's stance, "because they will just refuse to acknowledge that's a real thing [dyslexia]. They don't acknowledge it" (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021).

In addition to refusing to acknowledge dyslexia, this subtheme included information on how the school or teacher denied specific concerns provided by the parent, resulting in utilization of an approach that differed from one proposed by or expected by the parent, coinciding with the need indicated. This type of event is exemplified by the following:

> Everyone kept saying they didn't really think it was an academic issue, that it was just her behavior and that she's emotionally immature and when she grows up a little bit, she'll catch up academically. So, when I met with a teacher, that's when I found out that she was actually spending at least half, if not three quarters of her day in this area, they called the 'peace corner.' So, they had come up with

this method that if she were distressed, they would immediately tell her to go to

this peace corner where she could just color on a piece of paper, lay down, sit

with a book. Sometimes they would even do something like put a friend in there

to just pet her, which was very weird (P1, personal communication, November

19, 2020).

This experience exemplifies how the school focused on behaviors and simultaneously

refuted the academic concerns proposed by the mother, intensifying the issue by also

providing a differing behavioral approach than what was proposed by the external

psychologist hired by the mother, after being referred to psychology services by the

school. This subtheme is also supported by data related to the school defaulting to the

approach of repeating a grade, "Yeah, I felt like in kindergarten their goal was just to

hold her back and that she was, like, a nuisance" (P1, personal communication,

November 19, 2020). In email communications, the use of this time out method was

referred to as "peace corners" but lacked any justification for the approach (P1 personal

email, March 8, 2019).

Because this subtheme involves issues related to beliefs, values, and

preferences/ nuisances, the divergence between the parties results in the opposing

views on intervention approaches, and mothers questioning the displaced

shortsightedness, "…there's only so much you can do if you're going to get upset he

misspelled hexagon and he wouldn't fix it, I can't die on the cross for that for you, like I

just cannot" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021). Other scenarios further

evidenced questioning this myopic approach, "…is it worth the argument if he's just

sitting there playing with putty and he's listening? It shouldn't have even been an

argument" (P4, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

Situations in which the perceived divergence existed within the need for reading,

academic support, or related services, was exemplified by the subsequent excerpt:

So, I think even in even in first grade they really missed the boat with what was

happening there. They supported her well academically, but they really missed

the boat on the social communication piece. The speech therapist was lovely, but

focused only on articulation, which is not, I mean, she has a few things, but, like,

her issue is pragmatic…social pragmatics. And they didn't address that at all,

(P1, personal communication, November 19, 2021).

The divergence in the acceptance of reading related NVD, such as dyslexia,

affected eligibility for services as well, as it then results in issues related to resource-

driven conflict, "…with our daughter, there was a conflict from the get-go because they

initially denied eligibility and they told us that she just needed to be in a reading

recovery program" (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021).

In addition to the "missing the boat" scenario, data related to divergence based

upon incompatible interventions emerged, a situation in which the intervention is

perceived as inappropriate for the student, based upon his or her disability. The

following experience underscores what happens when the system creates

incompatibility through exacerbation of symptoms it is attempting to alleviate:

He was having a lot of behavior problems when he came to kindergarten and

when he left for the day so, then I start diving into this...'what is happening here,

what's going on?' and questioning. I learned that when [my son] gets off the van

in the morning he has to go to autistic support because his designated aide is

part time, nine to three. And so, he can't go to aide until she gets there and, in

the afternoon, he has to leave, so, for a kid that's overly social, overly chatty,

when he's transitioning to the kindergarten classroom, it's time to work. And

everyone else has already had that time to, like, put their bookbags away and,

'hey, what's going on?' and 'what are you eating for lunch?' and he was doing

that up in autistic support...and then he was coming down and was like, 'yeah,

I'm here' and, like all of this, I mean very disruptive and having a hard time

settling.  And all that took was a very simple least restrictive environment

comment, and that it wasn't his fault that the aide was on her schedule, should it

be keeping him up there, right? And that's all that took to transition. Was that

position changed to a full-time position? Yeah, with no conflict and, um, and he

started doing his full day in there and that kind of...he was having the time to

settle down and get into his work (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).

While an eventual solution resulted, the underscore of the child being deemed disruptive

and seemingly set up for failure and waiting for a reactive solution rather than

implementing a proactive approach, symbolizes the divergence of what the mothers

wanted from the schools.

The incompatible approach of the interventions also applied when the intervention is effective, but housed within an inappropriate delivery system:

Twenty minutes into English, they would come and pull her out of class and 20 minutes into history, they can't pull her out of class and then they said, 'Sorry honey you can't go to your electives, you have to go to this reading group that we have.' So, here's this poor eighth grade kid who's just trying to be a normal eighth grade girl who's being pulled out with fifth grade boys to do reading phonics, reading intervention, which she needed and helped a lot, but... (P6, personal communication, May 29, 2021).

**Subtheme: School Exacting Power (Theme: Bear the Brunt).** Within this subtheme, codes identified range from mother *feeling confronted by school*, to *utilizing advocate with warning: contentious,* to *emphasizing power imbalance of IEP meetings.* Other codes indicate school actions, ranging from *violating laws, IEPs,* and *policy, not keeping up with disability laws, building wall of protection, not responding to mother's advocacy efforts,* and *backing teachers (creating feeling of collusion).* Finally, codes emerged related to more intense conflicts, including *teacher feeling pressured to accuse parents* and *families keeping quiet.* This subtheme includes the transition into more intense conflict, beyond just diverging or differing perspectives, but into perceived incompatible goals. Structural in nature, this subtheme focuses on how the subsystem can seem insurmountable to parents as they navigate disputes. The issues within the conflict stem from diverging values: violating the contracted agreement over services (IEP) and

privacy, being accused of abuse, and then exonerated and hearing that the school

intentionally sought out the accusation, and then hearing from other administrators that

they lied during meetings. These values-related conflicts were significant in their ability

to erode trust between the mother and the school.

Data from the interviews, as well as the Kawa Model River drawings, indicated

how the power imbalance takes shape within IEP meetings. Participants shared how they

are outnumbered significantly by school personnel, the meetings take place in the

school or district, and how the information shared happens quickly, making it difficult to

process and react within the meeting. Most mothers took an advocate with them to the

meetings, as well as their husbands (if married), but still, "we're always outnumbered"

(P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021). Although the first IEP meeting made her

feel "hopeful" because her son was getting services, the experience shifted, "I made a

plan for the worst thing I thought could happen and I talked to the advocate about it…I

don't even know if I have hope anymore, I plan for the worst" (P3, personal

communication, April 14, 2021). Another described the meetings, which are supposed

to involve the parents and be collaborative as "a checklist" (P6, personal communication,

May 28, 2021). The very context of the meetings, that involve hearing about the child's

deficits can be painful. "When they have a disability it's really hard to talk about what

your kid can't do–that's what makes these IEP meetings so difficult. You're going into a

meeting to talk about everything that your child cannot do" (P3, personal

communication, April 14, 2021). The intense emotional nature led to the following

sentiment, "I was scared, I told my husband, 'You better come on, I need somebody else there with me'" (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021). Additional challenges beyond the emotional context involve the quantity of information and the time constraints of how it is shared. "...It was very fast, for Me, because I need slower time to ingest and slower time to read and process, so, like, it wasn't even taking into the fact that...I can't process this much, this fast" (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Another example of the power imbalance of the IEP meeting involved the treatment of the husband/ father, who has the same NVD as the daughter receiving services:

You know, in our daughter's initial eligibility meeting my husband is dyslexic and he also has ADHD. And he got really upset whenever they were denying services and he just said to them, 'you don't understand, I can't sit here and take notes. I can't type on my laptop in the middle of this meeting, like all of you are doing. I can't do two things at once, and you don't understand that, how this disability impacts her and how it will impact her as an adult if she doesn't get the help she needs now', and they just stared at him. It was terrible' they just stared at him. He was trying to explain, like, because he struggled in school himself and didn't get services. So, here we are, as adults and he knows what it's like for her and he's trying to advocate for her and they're just, it's kind of like, blank expression, like they've been trained to not look at us or say anything bad, not

acknowledging what we were saying, wow (P3, personal communication, April

14, 2021).

The IEP meetings invoked feelings of frustration, being devalued, and anger

expressed by the mothers, not only because of the emotional context, but because of

the perceived power plays. "…you know, it's like they wanted to kind of put me down a

few notches, and that's the sense that I got every time I get an IEP" (P5, personal

communication, May 20, 2021). A similar sentiment was shared about the state's overall

approach, "Missouri is very much like a state that really does not give the parents any

power even to the point where I don't even feel like I have meaningful participation in

my daughter's IEP meetings" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021). The tense

interactions are audible in the recorded meeting provided by Participant Three,

requested by the parents because their son had been enrolled into the wrong English

class, with the call to meeting introduction stating the following, "[P3] requested that we

come together as a team to review his ISP partially…there was a scheduling error for

[child] supposed to be enrolled in [course] and he was enrolled into the regular ed

section of [course] (IEP meeting recording, November 12,2021). Later in the meeting,

Participant Three is heard saying to the team,

You're discounting what we're telling you as parents…what you're saying is what

I'm telling you doesn't matter. So, as a parent, I'm a valuable member of the IEP

team. And when I show up, and I tell you that he's had a tremendous amount of

outside help, because of your mistake [regarding placement violation], and then

you tell me that you don't have to follow the agreement that you've signed…it's

offensive tome to come to a meeting like this (P3, IEP meeting recording,

November 12, 2021).

Later in the meeting, the school team member leading the meeting can be heard saying,

"Well, I think we did say we have the writing, as well as the writing samples, I think those

can be emailed to you immediately". Confirmation of the barrier of culture of the school

being one of "deny" with respect to services, service need, and acknowledgement of

dyslexia and how that culture conflicts with her personal values of honesty and respect,

shown as driftwood attributes (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

*Participant Three Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
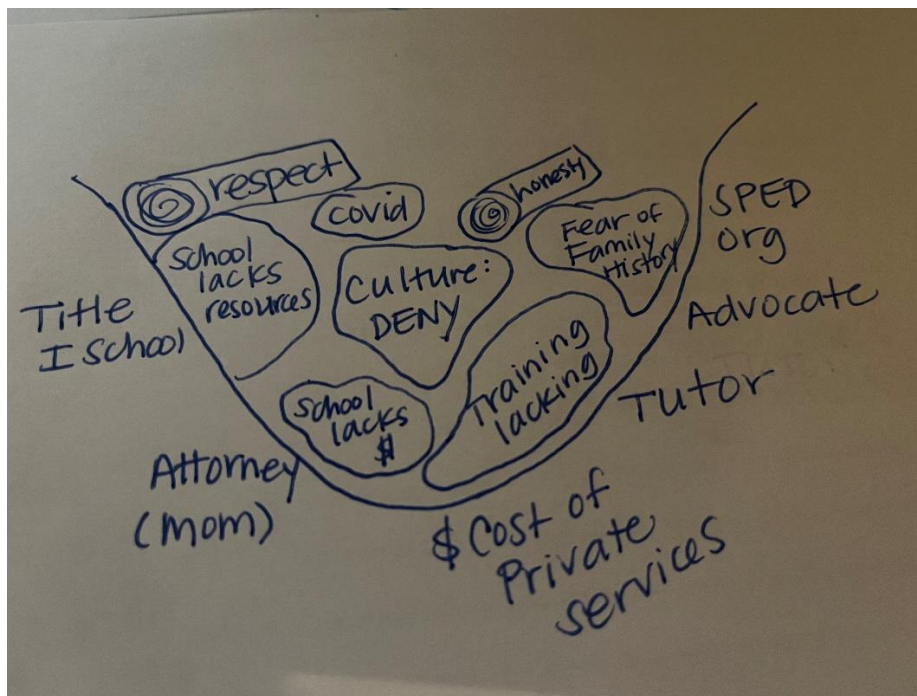


*Note.* This version of the Kawa was redrawn to match the original, as the original was light and difficult to read. The boulder of "culture: deny" is significantly blocking river flow, thus creating conflict.

The *school exacting power* also includes experiences of the school or team

members of the school violating laws such as FERPA or HIPAA, the IEPs, or SPED policy

was identified by multiple participants. Participant One shared how one teacher would

share information about other students, stating, "…so I knew she was doing the same

thing with other parents with my child", but wasn't sure if this was cultural or just this

singular teacher's behavior (personal communication, November 24, 2020. An incident

regarding FERPA/ HIPAA violations involved the general ed teacher taking a child, who

was "bothered by" Participant Four's son, out into the hallway and told him, "'[child] has

autism, and you need to be nice to him, because he has autism'…I mean I guess she

really never took responsibility for it– in her mind what she did worked" (P4, personal

communication, May 10, 2021). Not only had the teacher violated two federal laws and,

according to the parent, never took responsibility or received any reprimand, it resulted

in the family being forced to explain to their son what autism was and how he had it;

their right to determining when to have that conversation was taken away from them.

"…she didn't see any issues with it, and we really had no communication with her for the

rest of the year…never had another meeting where she attended…never had any other

email exchanges with her, it was definitely…distant".  She followed with:

> That first grade year was the year of the "autism conversation" and kind of
>
> dealing with that and trying to get them to understand why that would be, you
>
> know, hurtful or inappropriate, you know, he doesn't even identify himself in

that way, I mean now he does, sure, but at that point in time, he did not (P4,

personal communication, May 10, 2021).

The Information about IEP meetings being difficult for the mothers deepened when they

experienced violations related to implementation of the IEP for their child. "The only

planning that would happen would be at the beginning of a school year…that didn't

help because we did that planning and they did, whatever they wanted, right, um and

then, as far as during the school year" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021). In

the recorded IEP with Participant Three, she questioned the team, "do you know why the

progress monitoring or the data to back that up [regarding goal] hasn't been provided

to me before this meeting", alluding to the fact that she was not receiving the required

communications or being treated as a part of the process (P3, recorded IEP meeting,

November 12, 2021). The school team member responded about how and when they do

the progress monitoring and how it is different in middle school. P3 then countered,

"I'm just having a hard time with these goals when I've never seen any data".  She

reviewed another violation with the team toward the end of the meeting, "So, I've already

reiterated that my first concern is that he has improperly been placed in an ISP, instead

of an IEP…" (recorded IEP meeting, November 12, 2021).

Other violations included not following laws related to specific disability

processes, such as dyslexia.

They're supposed to be telling you, giving you progress updates and supposed

to have a journal, and so we actually created what the law said, they were

supposed to be doing and gave it to them, because they just were not aware of

what some of the new laws were with respect to dyslexia...they hadn't seen it

and I don't think they cared, okay? I don't think they care (P3, personal

communication, April 14, 2021).

Her explanation for how she knew they didn't care focused on beliefs and the overall

culture of the school, supported by her inclusion as the large blocking boulder in the

Kawa (Figure 12), "because they will just refuse to acknowledge that's [dyslexia] a real

thing", and then connected that to the school culture and subsequent training deficits.

Participant Six also struggled with appropriate services for her daughter's dyslexia,

stating "how is she going to go to high school, she has a fourth grade reading level and

I've been asking for this and you haven't done this, but now I have this evaluation that

says dyslexia and you should have been doing this all along" (personal communication,

May 28, 2021).

**Figure 12**

*Participant Three Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
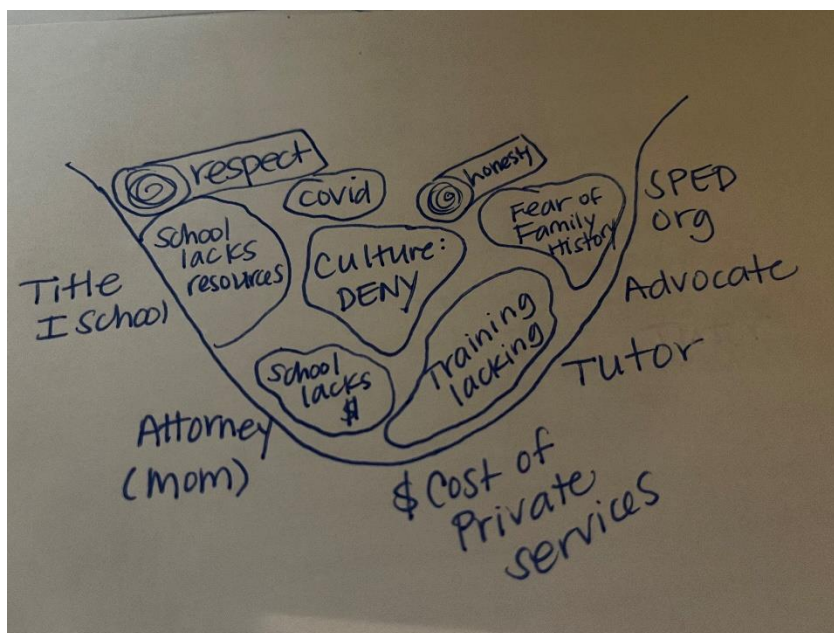


*Note.* "SPED org" refers to the special education organization she helped to create that supports other parents in special education. This drawing was redrawn to scale of original with darker ink to ensure readability.

Beyond violations, there was an account of a school accusing the family of child abuse. This accusation came during a compelled repeat of fifth grade:

To this day, just infuriates me, I mean we never abused our child and they said they saw [mark on body] and he couldn't say where it was from, and so the special ED teacher, who we had developed a close relationship with, went to the principal and said, 'there's a mark'. (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

In this account, the mother (and family) had to bear the brunt of this accusation, which ended up being unfounded. "I mean, it was several months until we finally got the letter

saying, 'oh, it was unfounded', but we…got our own lawyer, we spent all this money on lawyers". She connected this accusation to the school "trying to blame us for his behaviors". The lawyer representing her, and her husband later told them, "'Don't worry, you're not the first, you're one of many, especially in this IEP community that gets blamed for it'", that it was a pattern of the district at large.  She shared how the relationship became conflictual and their lawyer told the school, "'…you know this family has been accused of something that they didn't do, and they can never trust you again'". After the case was over and deemed 'unfounded', the teacher who had turned them in shared that he felt compelled to do so by the school, "he told us privately, 'look, it was me…I didn't want to. I felt like I had to because I felt fearful of my job, and I never thought that you did it'". Experiencing this structural infliction of power left the mother with a sobering thought, "I then kind of knew what we were up against, and he also told us that they had been watching for this for a long time, so it was like a witch hunt" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

The Kawa Model longitudinal drawings captured examples of school exacting power through how elements related to this subtheme influenced conflict, through the visual portrayal of narrowing river flow, which indicates reduced satisfaction with the child's education. Participant Six provided "school says no reading intervention every year" under her child's elementary years at a charter school, and then indicated a sharp turn and river narrowing with "school refuses reading intervention" during the start of the 8th grade year (personal communication, May 28, 2021). This is represented in

Figure 13 below, with the sharp turn indicating change of direction and conflict as the

river narrows. As the river narrows, that indicates movement toward conflict, as her

daughter continued to fall behind in school as the school refuted the specific learning

disability (SLD). The narrow, conflict area with the turn relates to the denial of reading

interventions, and Participant Six placed more boulders (barriers) within the river,

indicating significant blockage of flow, indicating conflict escalation. This was related to

the structural conflicts of finally identifying the SLD, refusing services, but then

providing services after advocacy, only to provide inappropriate context of services and

eventual movement toward the mother obtaining legal representation, which resulted in

obtaining some services, but being silenced by the non-disclosure agreement. The

riverbed starts to open, allowing flow, thus indicating reduced conflict, mainly due to

the mother reducing expectations (P6, personal communication, May 28, 2021).

**Figure 13**

*Participant Six Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
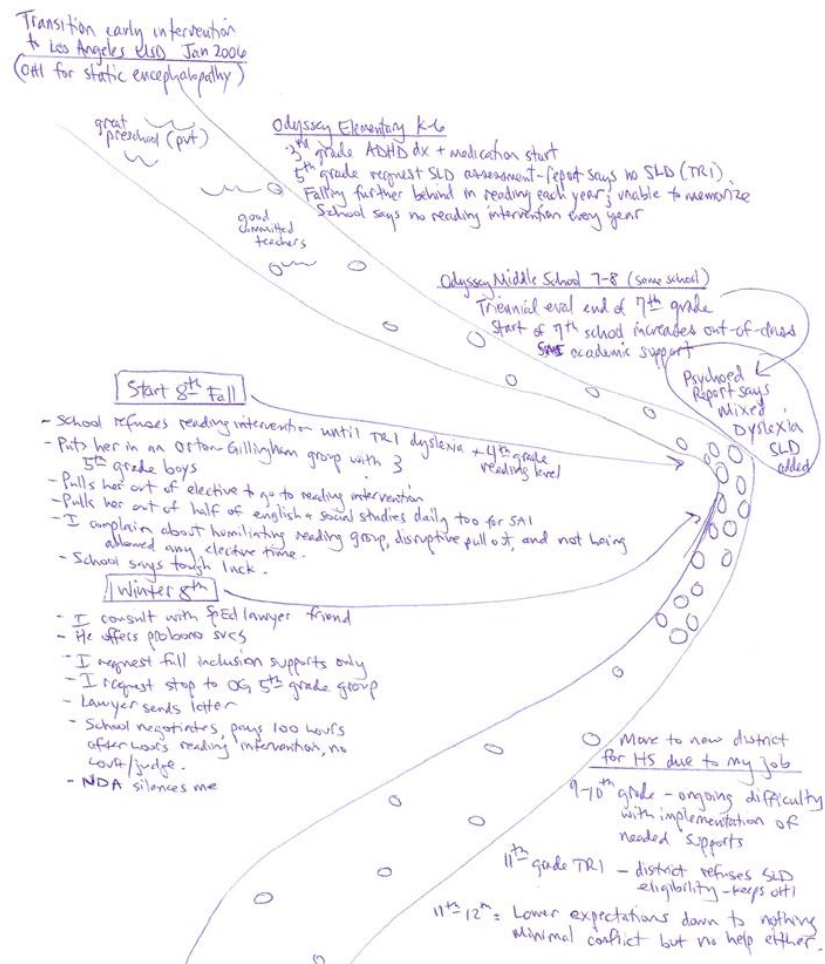


**Subtheme: School Compelling Mother (Theme: Bear the Brunt).** The concept of

compelling emphasizes the power of suggestion from the school onto mothers of

students with NVD.  This became particularly tied to medications to control symptoms

of ADHD, whether it be hyperactivity or difficulty with attention.  "…the school was

pushing the facts that meds were like, would be helpful, and then I tried it, I did, I tried

it, you know" (P2, personal communication, March 3, 2021). Despite feeling compelled

to try the meds, she discontinued them due to the side effects, "I tried five different

medications and all, each medication was making her a zombie, suppresses your appetite, her personality was just completely flat, and I was just like, 'this is not my daughter' was like, about". Another incident involved compelling medication for behaviors,

> "...in third grade when we started her on the medication, it was because she had a really uptight teacher who was like sending her out to other classrooms every single day and couldn't figure out how to manager her and I had cancer that year, so, I was, like, 'fine, I'll put her on medication'" (P6, personal communication, May 28, 2021).

Compelling also refers to the mothers feeling urged by the school to seek external professionals for either an evaluation, behavior intervention, or psychological support. "...And they did recommend something like psychological support outside of the school" (P1, personal communication, November 29, 2021). The power of suggestion from the school resulted in a delay of a request for the initial evaluation, "I even actually went as far as I put it in writing that I wanted it [evaluation for SPED]. And they said, 'we recommend you speak to a psychologist first and we'll hold off on submitting this for you.' So, which I kicked myself because I feel like I should have known better, but I followed what they wanted" (P1, personal communication, November 29, 2021). This differs from the mothers advocating through an external professional, but there were instances that the initial push toward external support evolved into advocacy approaches, thus included in another theme, as the mothers moved toward

driving that process. Participant One provided further evidence of this situation and the conflict that it created in the email to the school, indicating that she had "...done everything that was asked of me outside the school (neuropsychology, OT, SLP evals, social skills groups etc.) and each time the specialist have relayed to me that the issue is within the classroom" (personal email, June 5, 2019).

The intervention of retaining the students, particularly in kindergarten, not only aligned with an inappropriate intervention to some of the parents (while others felt it was appropriate and one advocated for it), but there were also expressions of feeling compelled to go along with the recommendation, even if they didn't agree with it.

I did, I mean at the end of the day we just... it's hard in a room of nine professionals who are telling you this is not going to work, that this is what they do, so that's what we ended up doing. I don't know if at the end of the day that made much of a difference or not (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).

Although Participant Four indicated that they went along with the retention, she also labelled "find out repeating K [kindergarten]" on the longitudinal Kawa drawing at the narrowing part of the riverbed, indicating moving toward conflict (P4, personal communication, May 12, 2021, Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

*Participant Four Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
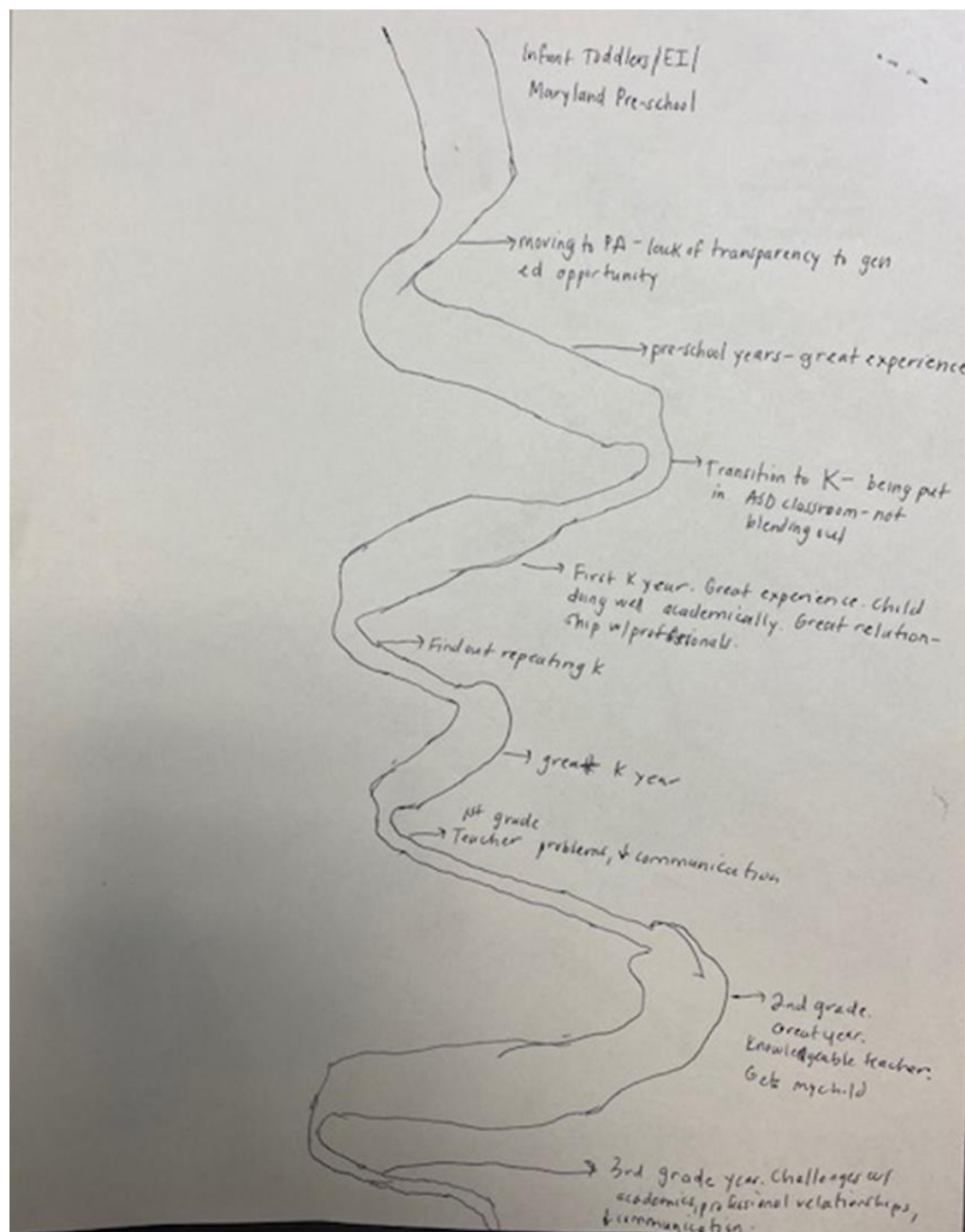


*Note.* Flow of this Kawa River starts at the top of the page and moves down toward the bottom, indicating "3rd grade".

Because the mothers felt compelled within this power asymmetry, the conflict

elements became exposed as involving beliefs. With reference to the medications, some

of the parents expressed hesitation, but the school believed it was a solution. This was

also an underlying element with the retention scenario; the beliefs were divergent but

the power differential compelled compliance. While there was not a divergence in the

beliefs regarding referrals to psychological professionals, it was the power of the

suggestion from the school that drove the feelings for the mothers to follow through.

This was not necessarily a conflict scenario, however, because the beliefs were similar

for both parties. In another instance of compelling, Participant Six was required to sign a

nondisclosure agreement after settling her legal case, which also forced her to switch

her daughter's school, which she only agreed to because it was the end of the school

year and eighth grade and she would be leaving anyway (P6, personal communication,

May 28, 2021). She added, "I didn't sign an NDA for the high school, but then there was

the whole exposure retaliation".

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**Research Sub-Question 3:**

**How do mothers of children with NVD describe the evolution of their conflict experience**

**within the various steps of the special education process?**

</div>

**Theme: Sea Change**

Sea change, a "complete change" is synonymous with "metamorphosis"

(Cambridge Dictionary, 22, para. 1). This theme included idioms within second cycle

coding such as you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him/her drink,

weather the storm, and pick your battles. These idioms informed the overall theme of

sea change, as they indicate the contextual elements related to the overall experience of

advocating for a child with NVD in the school system. Finally, the idiom *drawing a line in the sand* informed the subtheme of *drawing the line*. The choice to house these four idioms into one theme resulted and they all referred to the overall experience of advocating for the child and spoke to sub-question three, as the experience of conflict for the mothers, while emotional, also resulted in changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Additionally, combining the idioms provided a means to show the different elements related to this experience, as one single idiom could not sufficiently describe the paradoxical experiences of advocating as a mother of a child with NVD.

　　*Sea change* involves primarily elements related to the situation or person-based contradictory, but also includes statements provided by the school that indicate relational and structural level contradictions. Additionally, the "full definition" of paradox includes "a tenet contrary to received opinion" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 4), "a self-contradictory statement that at first seems true" (para. 5), "an argument that apparently derives self-contradictory conclusions by valid deduction from acceptable premises" (para. 6), and "one (such as person, situation, or action) having seemingly contradictory qualities or phrases" (para. 7). Advocacy, defined as "the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), based upon definitions for advocate, which include "one who please the cause of another; one who defends or maintains a cause or proposal; one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1-3).

These definitions capture the contextual enigma related to the experiences the mothers shared with respect to the nature of being a mother of a child with NVD who receives special education services in the school; one must be both mother and advocate simultaneously, while navigating an epic system comprised of subsystems and relational elements with the professionals providing those services. *Sea change* focuses on straddling the roles of mother and advocate and shifting identities, as well as navigating the system and the emotional hurdles that accompany advocating for one's child, including various stages of the process that are indicated as subthemes of *initiating advocacy, draining experience, shifting toward power,* and *drawing the line.* The conflict relationships involved in this theme include the expanse of beliefs, preferences/nuisances, resources, values, and the layers include everything from structural to relations and the issues level of conflict, with coding for the theme provided in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Domains Regarding Mother's Perceptions on how NVD Affects Conflict Process within*

*SPED*

| | Theme: Sea Change | |
|---|---|---|
| Included Codes | Conflict Relationship/ Color Code(s)/ Idiom(s) Subtheme | |
| Mother requesting IEP instead of 504 Noticing concerns about child Mother formally requesting evaluation Mother offering strategies Mother having difficulty navigating system Initiating request for SPED | Beliefs, Preferences/ Nuisances Structural  Color(s): Advocacy  Idiom(s): You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him/ her drink/ Setting Wheels in Motion | Initiating Advocacy |
| Becoming emotional and ineffective Emphasizing needing support Begging school to work with her Butting heads with school while advocating Taking time off other responsibilities Receiving daily behavioral notes | Values, Relational, Structural, Intrapersonal  Color(s): emotional, conflict  Idiom: Weather the storm | Draining Experience |
| Connecting the dots of child's needs Wishing she knew what she knows now Missing opportunity(s) Coaching self Mother educating self on laws and rules Hiring an advocate Seeking external services Bringing in support | Resources, Values Color: Advocacy  Kawa: Driftwood (attributes), Riverbed | Shifting toward Power |

| | Idiom: Setting Wheels in Motion | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | Drawing the Line |
| Mother stopping meeting because of aggression from SPED director and her resulting anger | | |
| Lawyer involvement creating tense interactions with school | Values, Resources, Structural | |
| Initiating due process (3) | Color: advocacy, conflict | |
| Demanding safety | | |
| Initiating litigation | | |
| Requesting resolution meeting and indicating due process file if not addressed | | |
| Warning school | | |
| Asserting for identified services (5) | | |

**Subtheme: Initiating Advocacy (Theme: Sea Change).** This subtheme refers to the experiences related to the pattern of efforts made by the mothers initiating advocacy efforts. Codes within this subtheme include *mother requesting IEP instead of 504, noticing concerns about child, formally requesting evaluation*, and were then bracketed under the idiom of *you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him/her drink*. According to BBC (2013, para. 1), this "proverb…means that you can give someone an opportunity but not force them to take it". Initiating advocacy involves the actions of the mothers providing resources, strategies, and other advocacy efforts that may or may not been acted upon by the school. These codes relate to the initial eligibility related advocacy efforts, the actions that mothers took to initiate the special education process, whether it was their goal, or they were simply advocating for their child without realizing a need for special education.

Within *initiating advocacy*, some of the mothers started their advocacy unbeknownst to them, often through their first realization that their child was having difficulty in school.  Participant Three indicated how she noticed, but had some hesitancy, "…she had an older teacher that was retiring, and I think she had a good teacher, but what we were seeing at home was maybe a kid what wasn't progressing the way that she should have been" (personal communication, April 14, 2021). Participant Four emphasized the discrepancy between when she noticed a need versus the school, "You know, we're noticing a problem here in reading comprehension, let's do some more evaluations, to really find out what's going on here…does he have a learning disability? We should be identifying. She then emphasized how she must initiate any actions on behalf of her child, "…that all has to come, I feel like, from me to them and I wish it was the other way, so you're the quality control end" (personal communication, May 10, 2021). *Initiating advocacy* often focused on pursuing eligibility, "I did file for the IP" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020) and "…never did I find out anything like there was no communication with 'Well, this is how it's going, this is what was doing, this is what was working' (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021). She added, "…and that's why I kept on pushing for an IEP because I knew the 504 wasn't going to get anywhere, and so, I had to do an additional file for a meeting."  In the Kawa longitudinal drawing, P6 included "5th grade request SLD assessment" as part of her initiating advocacy, coinciding with a slight narrowing of the river flow (personal communication, May 29, 2021).

Whether it involved offering options to the teacher, "and at that point I did ask

the teacher [when notified that the child refused to nap]…'Is there a way that she could

just sit at the table with a book or puzzle?'…and the teacher wasn't the most receptive"

(P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020) or having mother's intuition, "… my

gut just told me he needs more support he's not getting in the general and so let's get

them in the self-contained with a good teacher (P5, personal communication, May 20,

2021), *initiating advocacy* took many forms.  Participant Four preemptively advocated

for the appropriate placement for her son, even moving to another state and setting up

meetings with a district representative:

> You know…notifying the school district that we're here giving them
>
> opportunities to get to know, him see him in person and have, like, this perfect
>
> placement take place, instead of trying to transition, the year of kindergarten
>
> and, like, trying to get those things in place at that time.  And I was in contact
>
> with them, they knew we were coming, and I was sending reports and everything
>
> before we moved, we came up for a tour of a classroom (personal
>
> communication, May 10, 2021).

*Initiating advocacy* also involved the advocacy efforts related to sharing

strategies or information from the external professionals to the school team, "I brought

the behavior plan to the school. We met with the teacher and then I met with the teacher

again to try and explain it the way it was explained to me from the psychologist…" (P1,

personal communication, November 19. 2020). Her frustration with her efforts related

to initiating advocacy were indicated as a boulder within the Kawa cross-sectional

drawing "poor advocate" and in the longitudinal representation as "teacher not following

recommendations of private psych eval" and "advocacy not working" and "got private

evaluations", with the latter associated with narrowed river flow, which indicates conflict

experiences, depicted in Figure 15 (November 21, 2021). The indication of "poor

advocate" as a liability driftwood speaks to the intrapersonal (internal) conflict

experienced, while the "teacher not following recommendations" indicates relational

interpersonal conflict.

**Figure 15**

*Participant One Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
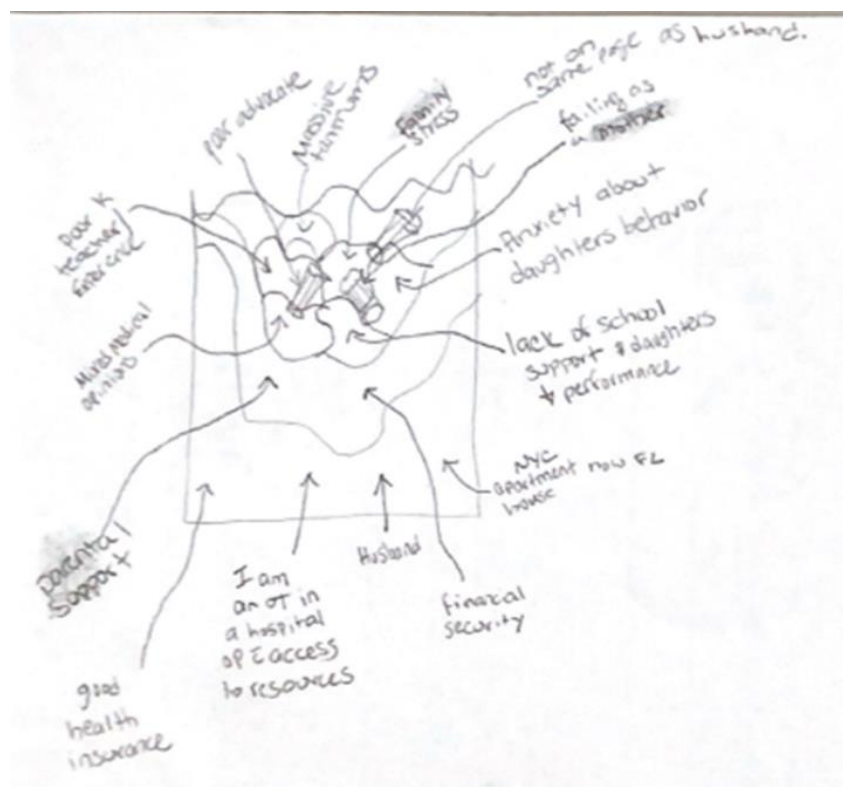


*Note.* Participant One used two layers of riverbed context and then provided boulders
and driftwood. Her river flow is limited as there are significant barriers toward flow.
Participant One, personal communication, November 23, 2021.

To access the external professionals to initiate advocacy, and the times when the school compelled them (see Bear the Brunt theme), the mothers indicated the need for personal financial resources within their Kawa drawings. Participant One placed "financial security", "good health insurance" as contextual elements of the riverbed (Figure 15, November 21, 2020). Similarly, Participant Three indicated "finances for private services" as part of her contextual riverbed, along with "tutor" and "advocate", indicating the support needed, which also required personal financing, indicated in Figure 16 (personal communication, April 27, 2021). "Financial/ ability to provide additional support" was also part of the contextual riverbed for Participant Four in Figure 17 (personal communication, May 12, 2021) and Participant Seven, who labeled "financial resources" as driftwood (personal attributes), shown in Figure 18. Finally, Participant Six emphasized how difficult the resources are for a single parent, indicated both time and financial resources as a challenge in her contextual riverbed representation (Figure 19, personal communication, May 28, 2021).

**Figure 16**

*Participant Three Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
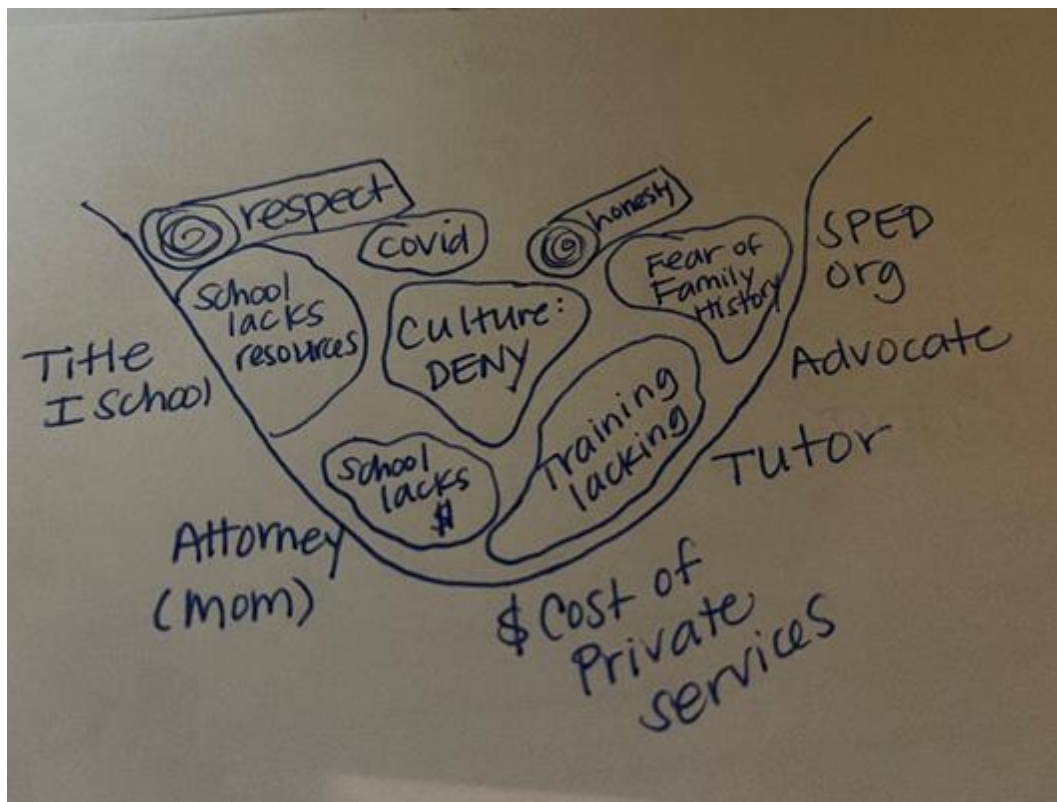


*Note.* "SPED org" refers to the special education organization she helped to create that supports other parents in special education. This drawing was redrawn to scale of original with darker ink to ensure readability.

**Figure 17**

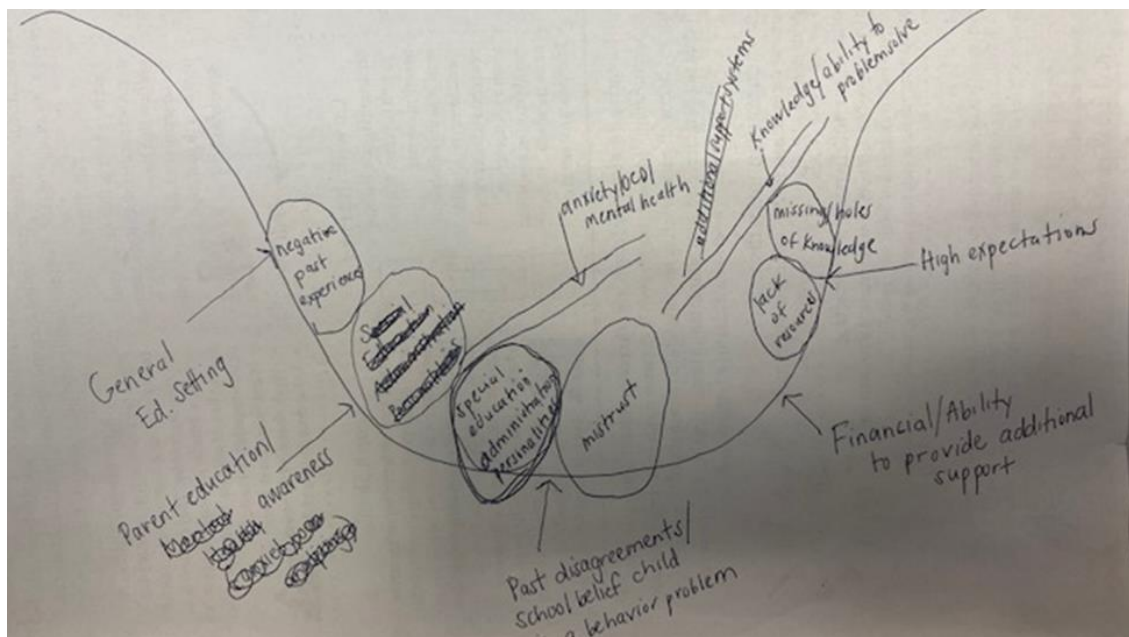*Participant Four Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*



**Figure 18**

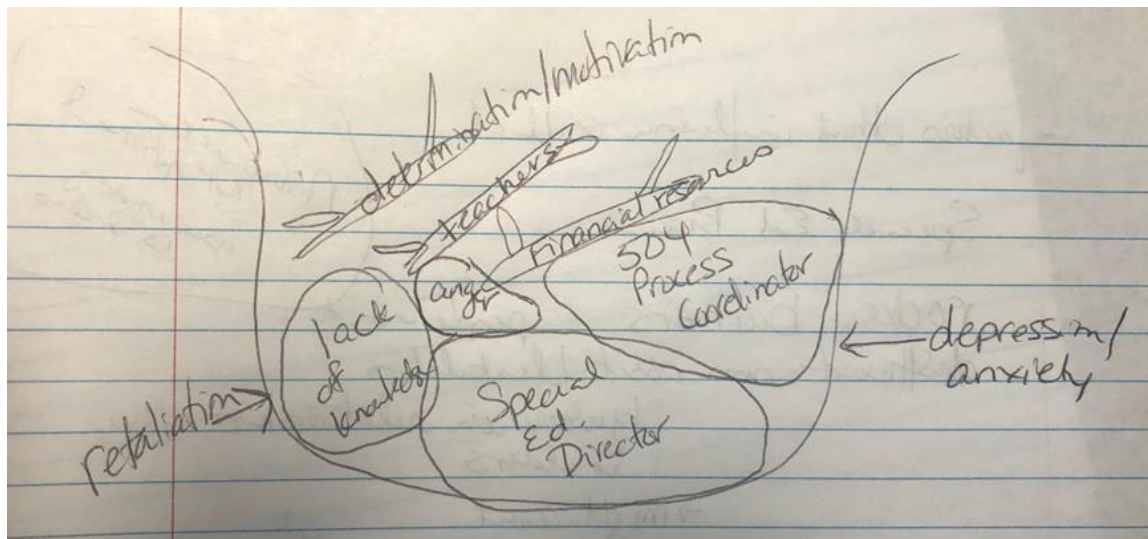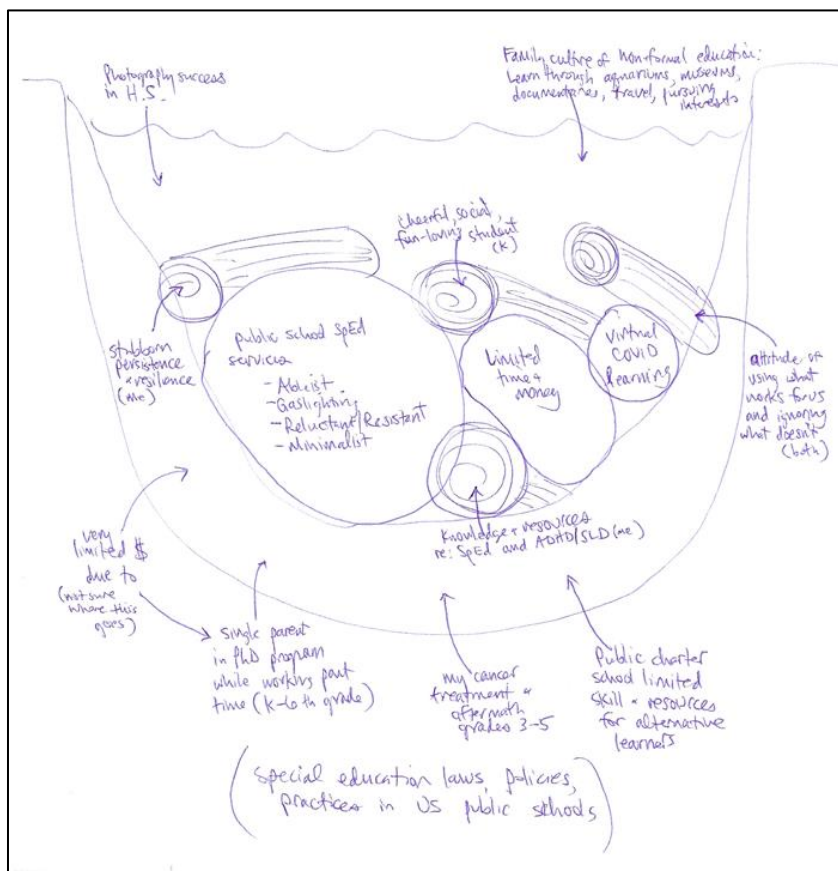*Participant Seven Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*

**Figure 19**

*Participant Six Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*



*Note.* Participant Six provided the most significant barrier as represented by the largest boulder related to school behaviors related to ableism, gaslighting, and resistant toward providing services. Participant Six, personal communication, May 28, 2021).

**Subtheme: Draining Experience (Theme: Sea Change).** *Draining* experience refers

to the *weather the storm* element of advocating for a child with NVD in the school

system.  According to Merriam-Webster, weather the storm refers to deal[ing] with a

difficult situation without being damaged significantly (n.d., para. 1). The Cambridge

Dictionary (2021) defines the idiom as twofold: a) "successfully" dealing with a difficult

problem and b) the ability to continue doing something despite serious problems (para.

1, 3). These definitions describe the subtheme of *draining*, which addresses these three

definitions, particularly how the mothers continue to advocate for their child within a powerful system, navigating the emotional tolls, financial hurdles, and time-consuming aspects of their efforts in the effort to support their child's educational pursuits. The codes used within this subtheme included *becoming emotional and ineffective, emphasizing needing support, begging school to work with her, butting heads with school while advocating,* and *taking time off other responsibilities.* The context of this subtheme utilized codes that emerged inductively as emotional experiences and included more codes that involved conflict.

The mothers expressed the emotional toll related to the *draining* elements of mothering a child with NVD and the experiences of dealing with disagreements with the school over an extended period of time, " …really frustrated, I think, very frustrated", adding, "there's definitely a sense of hopelessness, when you feel like you can't get the help that your kids need for them, because the reading and the writing is just critical to any job graduating from high school, so I think there's a sense of hopelessness and just incredibly frustrated" (P3, personal communication, May 10, 2021). The practice of the school providing negative feedback about their child on a consistent or daily basis, which often also affected the child, was Ir point of emotional draining, "she would get the list of transgressions every day…as soon as she got home from school she had this like pressure valve release where she would just flip out, then we get the list of all the terrible things that everyone in her class did that day" (P7, Personal communication, June 10, 2021).  Participant Two shared, "I never got anything positive coming home"

which caused "…a lot of frustration" (personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Participant One shared the emotional strain from her consistent negative feedback, "It would get to the point where just walking in the school. I felt like I couldn't breathe because I didn't know who was going to be the next person to tell me something that she did or said or didn't do the right way" (personal communication, November 17, 2021). Participant Four shared the temporal and emotional context of draining with respect to receiving consistent negative feedback from the school:

> It's every day I get this whole paper, I can show them to you, that shows all the
> terrible things my kid does every day, playing with this swings, inappropriately
> talking about horses, he called his teacher a hamster on the hamster wheel, he
> told his aide to do his work for him, he was talking about his imaginary friend,
> he was talking about what he was going to do on this or that…it's pages and
> pages and every single day of all the bad things that he does during the day (P4,
> personal communication, May 10, 2021).

When asked if her son had seen the notes, she replied, "I would hope not. So, I get one of these every day, like always, and then sometimes on the back there will be, like, additional, like feedback. Her response to the question, "When did these [notes] start?", she replied, "Oh, for his whole life" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021). She also emphasized the emotional tax she experienced with the daily note, "So, yeah there's a lot of emotions about this paper that comes home" (personal communication, May 10, 2021). Participant Four shared 50 of these daily behavior chart forms, which

included a chart for each day. Each form included three columns and 13 rows, with the first column titled "Activity", the middle column titled "How did I do", which included 4 faces from happy to sad, and the third labeled "Comments". The faces were color coded for each day, blue for happy ("Above and beyond"), green for smile ("Did what I was supposed to"), yellow for straight face ("Needed some reminders, but did okay"), and red for sad face ("Didn't do what I was supposed to"). At the bottom, there is a section to indicate the ratio of smiley faces from the total, and then the teacher indicates a handwritten percentile and then additional comments like "red day" or "yellow day" as an overall daily summation. As indicated in Figure 20, in the comments section of "red" days, the following comments were provided: "arguing", "refusal to do work", "not following directions", "talking back", "being unkind", and "off topic" (P4 Personal Sample Daily Behavior Charts, September 30, 2021). In the sample of 14 Daily Behavior Charts for her son, there were a total of 20 red faces, and the earlier stated comments were provided 35 times. On March 29, 2021, the form changed to a two-page form, with the same row of comments filled, but then a second page with more room for comments about her son, including negative comments.

**Figure 20**

*Participant Four Child's Daily Behavior Chart from School*



Participant One also expressed the toll with the daily negative communications, "It would get to the point where just walking in the school, I felt like I couldn't breathe because I didn't know who was going to be the next person to tell me something that she did or said or didn't do the right way" (personal communication, November 24, 2020). She explained how the emotional draining spreads beyond the daily

communication fears and concerns about how she was perceived as a mother of a child having behavioral outbursts, "anytime I walked into the school, I would either start crying and have to leave or just, like, I couldn't breathe…".  She added, "even if I wasn't there to directly talk about her behavior or her academically, I just couldn't be physically there, even if it was like, at a PTA meeting, I would feel like people were looking at me" (P1, personal communication, November 24, 2020).

Additional emotional experiences related receiving negative feedback were conveyed, such as "Oh, it was devastating, I mean there was…I was an emotional wreck. I was frustrated, I was angry" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).  Participant Two shared how she cried in the principal's office after a meeting, and the emotional toll experienced, "it was very draining on me" (personal communication, March 1, 2021). Participant Four shared how trust becomes violated, another form of *draining*, "You almost become like paranoid about it, like was it a good day? Are they just saying it's a good day–are they trying to skew their data to show that he's making progress when he's clearly not? (Personal communication, May 10, 2021). The emotional burden came not only from daily feedback, but also when the parent felt ghosted, or ignored, by school personnel. "I cried a lot. Every time a report card came, every time I got a nasty email from the teacher, every time the principal wouldn't respond to an email" (P1, personal communication, November 24, 2020). Another example involved an email dialog between Participant Four and her son's educator titled "Big deal or little deal…", which addressed her son's class book project. The email expressed concern about the

photograph used of her son in the book, which was taken by the team at the school. The

picture was shared and it's of a distressed looking child. Participant Four stated in the

email, "I was looking through [my son's] bag...he brough home his all about me class

book, and I was a little taken aback by his picture." She added, "There has to be a better

picture of [my son] to put in the book. I feel absolutely confident that a photo like this of

another child would have been retaken and not circulated" (P4 teacher email exchange,

September 23, 2021).

Another emotionally difficult element of advocating and mothering a child with

NVD in SPED involves participation in the IEP meetings with the school, where parents

are typically outnumbered. Participant Four expressed the feelings of intimidation with

meetings, "I mean, at the end of the day we just...it's hard in a room of nine

professionals who are telling you this is not going to work, that this is what they do so

that's what we ended up doing (personal communication, May 10, 2021). Participant

Seven shared her frustration with the system and the process, the structural conflict

elements:

> You get along great with the teachers with the SLPs, OTs, all that in the school
>
> that you're in, but then the district people come into your meeting and then
>
> suddenly it's a crap show, you know, it's like they're mean...they're, 'well, that's
>
> not how we do it,' and they have come up with procedures and policies that
>
> are...or the school doesn't necessarily follow the law. Then, when you pointed it
>
> out, they're like 'Well, no, this is just how we do it, that's how we've always done

it.' But you have no recourse, because unless you're going to you file a

complaint, you know either they investigate and say, 'Okay you're out of

compliance fix it', or, you have to go to due process or mediation or something

like that that costs money, you know, and it's, I don't have the time or the money

to do that (personal communication, June 10, 2021).

The IEP meetings conjured many emotions from the mothers, including "And again,

anytime they said, 'Let's reconvene and go to the IEP', my stomach would drop because I

just did not want to be, I mean it was such a negative experience every single time…"

(P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021), while another emphasized the power

imbalance, "We're always outnumbered, sometimes between four to seven" (P3, personal

communication April 14, 2021).

*Draining experiences* includes the internal turmoil and intrapersonal conflict the

mothers experienced through second guessing their advocacy efforts and various

emotions involved, "Yeah, I mean, I already felt bad inside for so many years, you know,

because there was a time that I thought, maybe his behavior was because we weren't

supportive enough or we weren't doing the right thing, or you know, like I believed their

B. S." (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021). This concept was continued by

Participant Four:

I feel like, insecurity. Because I do feel a sense of like you know…should I have

sent him back right away, was that a mistake? Did that, you know, should I have

known more? Am I doing something wrong on my end that's, you know, creating

this behavior problem, you know, at school?... I definitely feel insecure, I feel

frustrated (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).

These internal struggles sometimes involved questioning their role competence, "...I

would internalize that, like, maybe I'm doing something, maybe, maybe I'm just not

designed to be this parent to a child that has these needs...you know I just I felt like

shit, you know, and that, and that just made it worse (P5, personal communication, May

20, 2021). "What it did feel like, I was failing as an advocate", (P1, personal

communication, November 24, 2020).

Participant Four expressed how challenging the relationship element of

advocating for a child can be, how mothers straddle the challenge of fighting for their

child's needs and dealing with the relationships and internal drive to be liked, "All of a

sudden, this, like, I've seen this, or this closed off and I took it really personal for a long

time, which is probably why I wasn't being very persistent with some things.  She added

that she questioned feeling conflicted, "...at first I thought it was me and I was just

being rude, and I was asking too much, 'Am I demanding too much? Is it me, am I, one

of those parents?  Have I become one of those parents that like no one wants to work

with?'"  She added, after speaking with a parent advocate, who told her, "...you're not

that parent, you're onto something, and when you're onto something, all the doors are

going to start closing" (personal communication, May 10, 2021). The need to be liked

and how that influences advocacy and adds to the draining elements of the experience

is evident in this passage:

So anyway, from that moment on, it was a very, very not nice relationship with us

and, until then… I was trying to be friendly with them, I was always trying to kind

of be liked, please them, trying to please everybody because that's kind of my

personality and that was, I guess, my biggest lesson honestly in my life

about…that everybody's not your friend (P5 personal communication, May 20,

2021).

She emphasized that challenge with identifying these concepts on the cross-sectional

Kawa drawing, shown in Figure 21, labeling driftwood as "liability" personal attributes,

including "letting others define me" and looking to others to validate" (P5 personal

communication, June 27, 2021).

**Figure 21**

*Participant Five Cross-Sectional Kawa Model River Drawing*
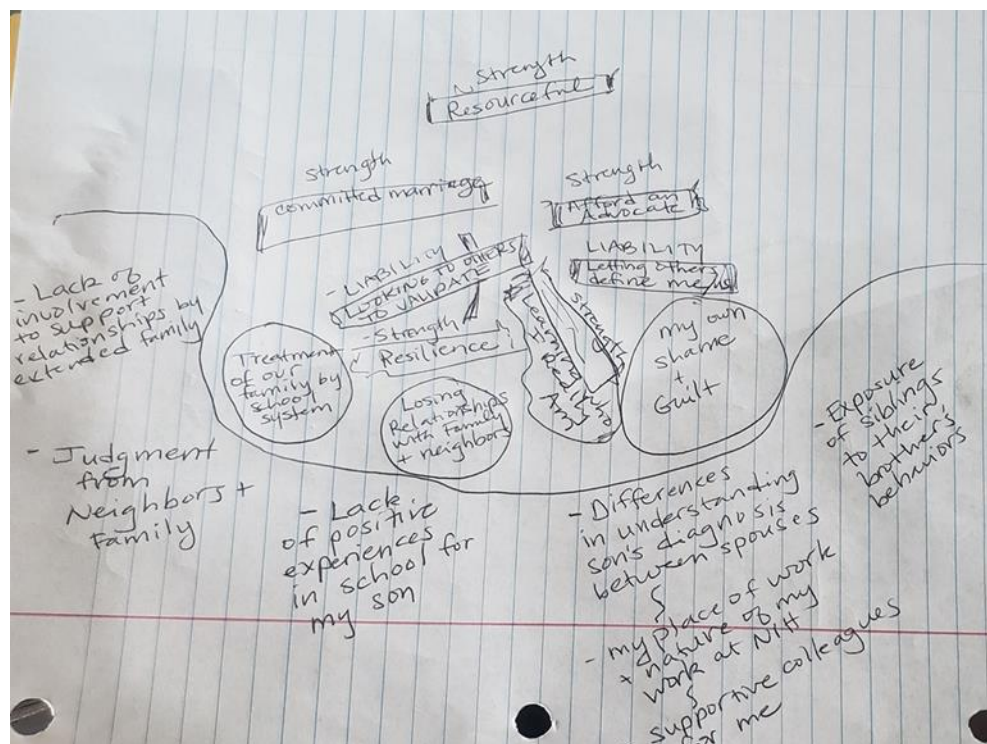
The *draining* experience elements were often structural, as with the IEP meetings, with the relationships with the teachers and personnel working directly with the child differing from the interactions with the district or administrative personnel. Participant Seven expressed the emotional strain after dealing with the challenges over time, "There was still a good relationship with the teacher, but everything else, I just became so jaded. I wanted nothing to do with the school because I felt like anyone above this district, the school level, like, even the principal... was not very helpful" (personal communication, June 10, 2021). Another example included the emotional outcome for Participant Four, differing from her experiences for her other child (who does not have NVD or enrolled in SPED):

> Yeah, I mean I there, there is like, a sadness, there you know? Like, to have to go through this process, I think...I, like, see my other son...I don't even know his principal, I mean, I don't even, you know what I mean? It's just, they just, it's like the one week I spent like seven hours on this and it's just like, 'Wow, listen...you know this is crazy, you know, to be...have to be so invested in it, there's a sadness, you know?' (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).

Finally, within the subtheme of *draining*, the paradoxical experience related to the professional mother was revealed. This paradox of the professional mother involved the school treating the professional mother differently, typically in more conflictive means (competitive or avoiding), due to the particular profession or professional relationship to the school of the mother. In the case of the mother who worked at the

school as a therapist, "…knowing too much but not enough…got me into trouble, but it mostly helped", but also how she felt that her "…knowledge and resources did help me leverage the public school stuff…so I feel like there could be some torque on that driftwood [referring to Kawa]…like I knew to ask for things" (P6, personal communication May 28, 2021). Another mother echoed the challenges of being a therapist and how that influenced treatment by the school when she was helping the school understand his extreme anxiety from the psychiatrist's information, "they didn't like that answer" and thus, "seemed like they treated me worse" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021). This treatment continued to get worse, with P5 adding, "you know, it's like they wanted to kind of put me down a few notches", (personal communication, June 27, 2021). Other mothers spoke to how their professional background added guilt to their performance as an advocate; it increased their expectation of success, whether that expectation was realistic or not. Participant One expressed how she felt like she was failing as an advocate, "I feel, like, that was actually really hard for me because I felt like being an OT [occupational therapist], I should have been able to navigate this system well before first grade, okay, and it that it took me literally two years to get her any help." She added, "I felt like I really failed" (personal communication, November 24, 2020). This was also expressed on her Kawa Model River drawing a boulder (barrier) labelled "poor advocate" and a driftwood (attribute) labelled "failing as a mother" (P1 personal communication, November 23, 2020). Finally, a mother who was a lawyer also indicated both challenges, as her professional

background helped her to notice when the school was violating laws and felt she was

being treated differently because perhaps the school sees her as an attorney first over

seeing her as 'mom'.

One of the other parts of the river [Kawa] is just that I'm an attorney and so,

that's a positive and negative, because I think it's probably hard for them as teachers to

be like, 'oh my gosh, we have to deal with this parent who's an attorney'...the positive

part is being an attorney, I've been able to research an awful lot and be like, 'I'm not

really sure that's what the law says'...(P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021).

**Subtheme: Shifting Toward Power (Theme: Sea Change).** *Shifting toward power*

includes the mothers' actions related to learning and reflecting within advocacy efforts,

coded as *connecting the dots of child's needs, wishing she knew what she knows now,*

*missing opportunity(s), coaching self*, and *mother educating self on laws and rules.* The

mothers noted how when they were the first to notice their child's needs, they moved to

advocate for confirmation, support, and at times, services through eligibility.

*Shifting* also includes the actions that result from the learning and reflecting,

including advocacy behaviors ranging from building a team to support the advocacy

efforts, seeking external professionals, bringing family to support, and hiring

professional educational advocates.  The codes within this action pattern include *hiring*

*an advocate, seeking external services, bringing in support,* and *connecting the dots of*

*child's needs.* This element of advocacy emphasizes how the mothers started to realize

they needed to recruit additional support to validate their identification that the student

had needs, trying to even out the power imbalance as an individual advocating within a system, and appeasing the requests of the school when referred externally. Another revelation involved the concept of peer mentoring. This phenomenon became evident as Participant Four reflected on her peer network of support:

Well, yeah, I mean I use all of my friends…so I'm always utilizing, like, my peer circle…I also am friends with a lot of other moms, um that their kids…and we're just like a little trio, you know and it's nice to have people that have to deal with the same characters (personal communication, May 10, 2021).

Participant Seven also utilized peer support, but in a more formalized manner, creating a special education community of mothers devoted to special education.

…like that advocate and another advocate kind of brought us all together and then we've created a special PTA we've started working with her a little bit and then just started finding some other moms to kind of had the same mindset that it's been having trouble… 'Okay, let's get you through the first Ips, let's get you through', or even somebody who's been denied or whatever, 'let's get you through that point' and then we can get to a certain level, and then, when it gets over our heads, we have some advocates that we know that that we can bring up, a paid advocate in, and so, it's just been all this kind of banding together and learning together (personal communication, June 10, 2021).

She expressed her role as being a lay advocate for other mothers, "but I can at least help parents in the very beginning and understand what's happening".  She added, "So we've

kind of got this group of women that we've all kind of come together, we're kind of, there's several of us that are just kind of that very entry level. She explained that Wright's Law trainings were helpful, "Like there's a lay advocacy training just Wright's, you know Wright's Law, you know, I did, I just basically did a bunch of research, and so I in no way am I professional" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

  **Subtheme: Drawing the line (Theme: Sea Change).** The subtheme of drawing the line represents the point at which the mothers, typically after longstanding discord and advocacy efforts, draw a line in the sand regarding their willingness to engage in collaborations. Codes included mother stopping meeting because of aggression from SPED director, requesting resolution meeting/ indicating due process if not addressed, initiating due process, demanding safety, and initiating litigation. They are no longer seeking acceptance, worrying about being liked, or waiting for the school to provide an answer. They have stepped into their assertive power and state what they are willing or not willing to do and then leave it at that, "Oh I'd already written a letter to the school like in the winter break saying I officially request that you do not pull her out of any classes for any interventions whatsoever" (P6, personal communication, May 28, 2021). Participant Three advocated for recording IEP sessions and then ensured meetings were recorded (personal communication, April 14, 202I; recorded IEP meeting, November 12, 2021). In another instance, Participant Six also informed the school what was need for her child, "So, so they said we'll give you 30 hours of reading intervention I said we need like 100 hours of reading intervention needs to be private off campus after school and

she can't be pulled out" (personal communication, May 28, 2021). Participant Three

stated, "...then I made a plan for the worst thing I thought could happen and I talked to

the advocate about it, and I said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do if they go this

direction" (personal communication, April 25, 2021). Her plan for the worst was to

mentally prepare to be disappointed, "I have to plan for the worst and I have to just

mentally prepare, like, 'don't lose your cool, you can do this' [coaching self] (P3,

personal communication, April 25, 2021). In a recorded IEP meeting, she can be heard

drawing the line with the school, "you know, I'm just telling you at least so that you

know what the evidence will be in court. That that's fine. I'm just letting you know".  She

later added, "...with respect to compensatory services, I've never seen any data from

December 2019 to date, and so I'm requesting today, compensatory services back to

[date]. I have not seen any data that supports where he was with his goals in spring of

2020 and I haven't seen any data as we sit here at this moment to know where he is

with his goals as we speak" (November 12, 2021).

Participant Four provided email documentation related to multiple incidents

regarding transportation services, which the school contracted out to a private company

(personal email, September 18, 2015). In the letter she provided to the school, she

outlined nine separate incidents with dates regarding being "dissatisfied" with the

transportation company stating she was "kindly requesting alternative transportation for

my son". Within the stated incidents, she included situations in which the van driver did

not know her son's name or the correct places for pick up or drop off (August 12), a

time when the service called about pick up the following day despite her son not

starting school for another week (August 18), the driver arriving without a mandated

booster seat (August 25), a day when she arrived at daycare at 4:15pm and her son was

not dropped off yet and when the van arrived, and the day her son was in the back of

the van without air conditioning in 86 degree weather. Most concerning was an incident

in which Participant Four went to observe pick up for her son because of her safety

concerns. She observed the driver opened the back hatch and then speak with other

drivers for 40 minutes, during which her son "jumped out of the van and ran across the

parking lot" to where his mother was, without the driver noticing. She indicated

witnesses and times, drawing the line with the school over this unsafe situation (P4

personal email, September 18, 2015).

Participant Five spoke about the evolution toward involving a lawyer, "we're not

litigious people, and we would have never had a lawyer, if it wasn't for the fact that we

had to protect our family" (personal communication, May 20, 2021). Participant Six

reiterated the intent toward resolution rather than going to court, "to have a case, I

mean, what do I do here? I don't want a case. I don't want court, I want...I want to work

it out, but we've hit a dead end...I quit, actually, I was done" (personal communication,

May 28, 2021). And sometimes, drawing the line meant giving up on SPED,

There was nothing they can help me with there's nothing they can help my child

with my child's going to college that's great you know but it's not anything that they

have done and I, I know that if he needs accommodations, I know what to do, I don't

need anything from them. So even this year, or they try to do an IEP meeting and I said

no, we don't need to do an IEP meeting we're done (P5, personal communication, May

20, 2021).

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**Research Sub-question 4:**

**What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and**

**de-escalation of conflict?**

</div>

**Theme: Game Changer**

The theme *game changer* refers to elements that served as de-escalating

influences on conflict between the mothers and the school personnel related to SPED.

*Game changer* includes subthemes of *partnering, valuing, and altering.* The subthemes

partnering and valuing emphasize the relational layer: relationships with school

personnel in which there was less competition and more collaborative or compromise

involved in the problem solving or negotiations on behalf of the child or when the

educator went above and beyond to support the child's educational performance.

Altering refers to the influence of COVID-19 on special education services. Collins

defines game changer as "…a big and important effect on something, usually making

the difference between one thing happening and another" (2022, para. 1).  Adding, "a

person or thing that significantly affects the outcome of something" (para.2),

emphasizing that de-escalating effect on conflict. Table 7 includes the codes related to

Game Changer and its subthemes.

**Table 7**

*Domains Regarding Mother's Perceptions on how NVD Affects Conflict Process within*

*SPED*: *Game Changer*

| Included Codes | Conflict Relationship/ Color Code(s)/ Idiom(s) | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme: Game Changer** | | |
| Teacher communicating concerns<br>Collaborating with problem solving<br>Mother compromising<br>IEP process running smoothly | Beliefs, Values, Preferences, Relational<br><br>Color(s): Collaborating, Compromising<br><br>Kawa: Opens flow | Partnering |
| Emphasizing teacher matters<br>Feeling supported by teacher<br>Teacher understanding child<br>Teacher going above and beyond | Values, Relational, Structural, Intrapersonal<br><br>Color(s): emotional, conflict<br><br>Kawa: Opens flow | Valuing |
| Altering creating benefits (Covid)<br>Limiting distractions online (Covid) (5)<br>Learning about child's learning (Covid/ virtual learning) (5)<br>Supporting child's learning (virtual learning) (3)<br>Catching child up (virtual learning) (3) | Values, Resources, Structural<br><br>Color: advocacy, conflict<br><br>Kawa: boulder | Altering the environment |

**Subtheme: Partnering.**  This subtheme includes codes such as teacher communicating concerns, collaborating with problem solving, mother compromising, and IEP process running smoothly. Participant One shared the significant impact of *partnering*, which she indicated on the Kawa Model River drawing (longitudinal) as opening river flow (Figure 22), "with the support of the IP with this amazing support system, the support service people were amazing. And the teacher was great, then it was just like this breath of fresh air. It was like I can take a breath for the first time. I could walk into the school", (P1, personal communication, November 24, 2020). She explained the consequences of this partnering, "…like I would enjoy being there. I went once a month on Fridays. They would invite all the parents in…I started going like, I started getting involved in the PTA like I was, I just had more faith in the school, and I wanted to be more involved". Benefits also resulted in reduced service provision due to progress, "he even had…a behavior improvement plan that eventually was able to get rid of…I feel like we have such a great relationship with his team that it just works" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

**Figure 22**

*Participant One Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
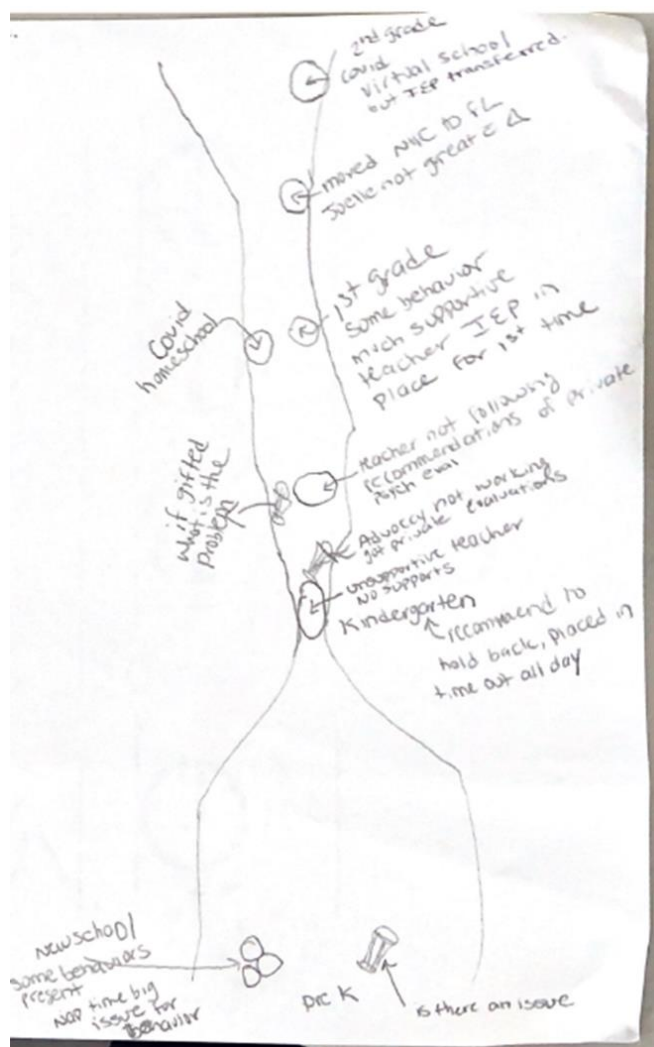


*Note.* River flow moves from the bottom of the page (origin of river) and ends at the top of the page, "2nd grade".

Partnering, particularly when it involved collaboration, correlated with parent responses of positive river flow and often a "good year". ...It was a good year, like, I felt like we were able to accomplish some things and they never made me feel bad about his behavior. I thought they were always, like, complimentary of me, you know, like, 'he'd be a mess if it wasn't for you, like, he would be 100 times worse if he didn't have you'"

(P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021). "[teacher] was wonderful, yeah, wonderful. We had a wonderful year last year" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021). "In fact, kindergarten was wonderful. The teacher was amazing. I was always communicating" (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021). *Partnering* could change year to year, or even be more prevalent in different phases of education. "I think it varies depending on where we were in the process of elementary through high school, but I would say elementary we would try to do a lot of phone calls… 'let us help you problem solve…'" (P5, May 20, 2021). On the Kawa River drawings, each year could change with reference to the teacher changes.

Within *partnering*, the teacher and the relationship with the mother influenced de-escalation and escalation of conflict. The negative experiences created emotional toll indicated within draining, but positive experiences created positive feelings. Additionally, *partnering* involved communication that influenced progress. Some teachers effectively supported the mothers by communicating concerns about the student possibly having an NVD and others recommending external professionals to provide additional support (instead of in lieu of school services). Description of open lines of communication and collaboration would result in the mothers using "we" instead of "I" or "they" when speaking of the team or teacher(s) when partnering, and a completely different affect when describing the interactions, "occasionally…we'd have to dial back [freedoms for her son]…and then we just work together and follow it up at home or vice versa, if there was something we were seeing at home that we needed kind

of reinforced that's cool, just let them know" (P7, personal communication, June 10,

2021). The Kawa Model drawings, particularly the longitudinal representations, provided

additional evidence of partnering and how it serves as a de-escalator for conflict. Labels

regarding collaborations, problem solving, and increased communication with teachers

opened the river flow (P1, P4, P7), indicating a de-escalation of conflict.

**Figure 23**

*Participant One Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*

209
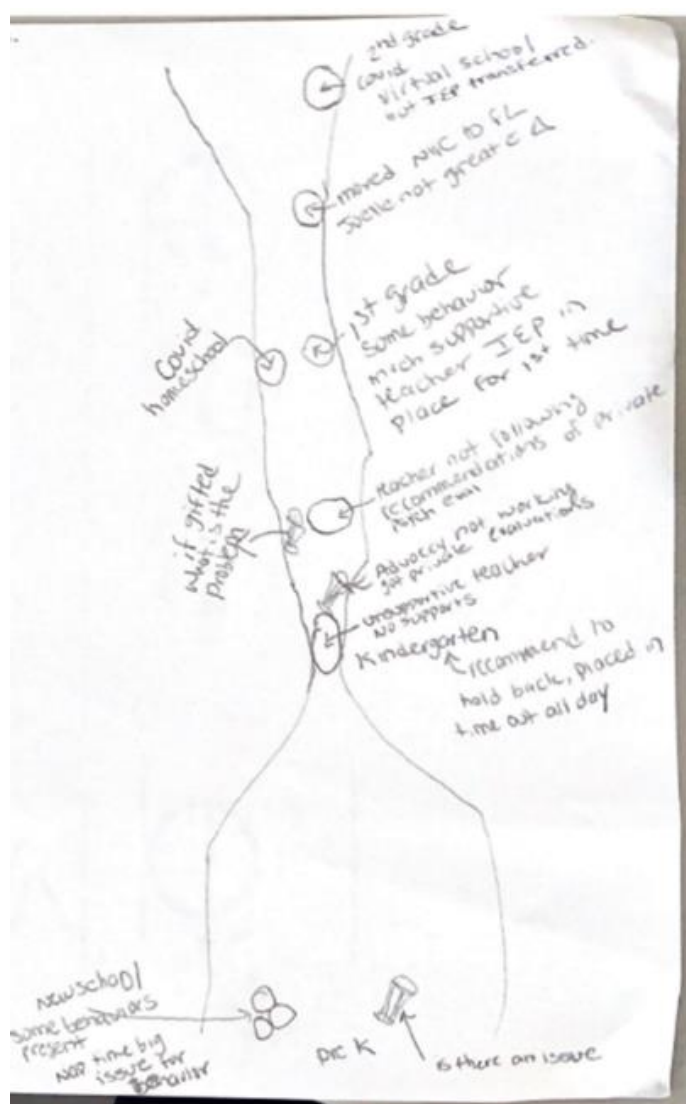
Figure 24

*Participant Four Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
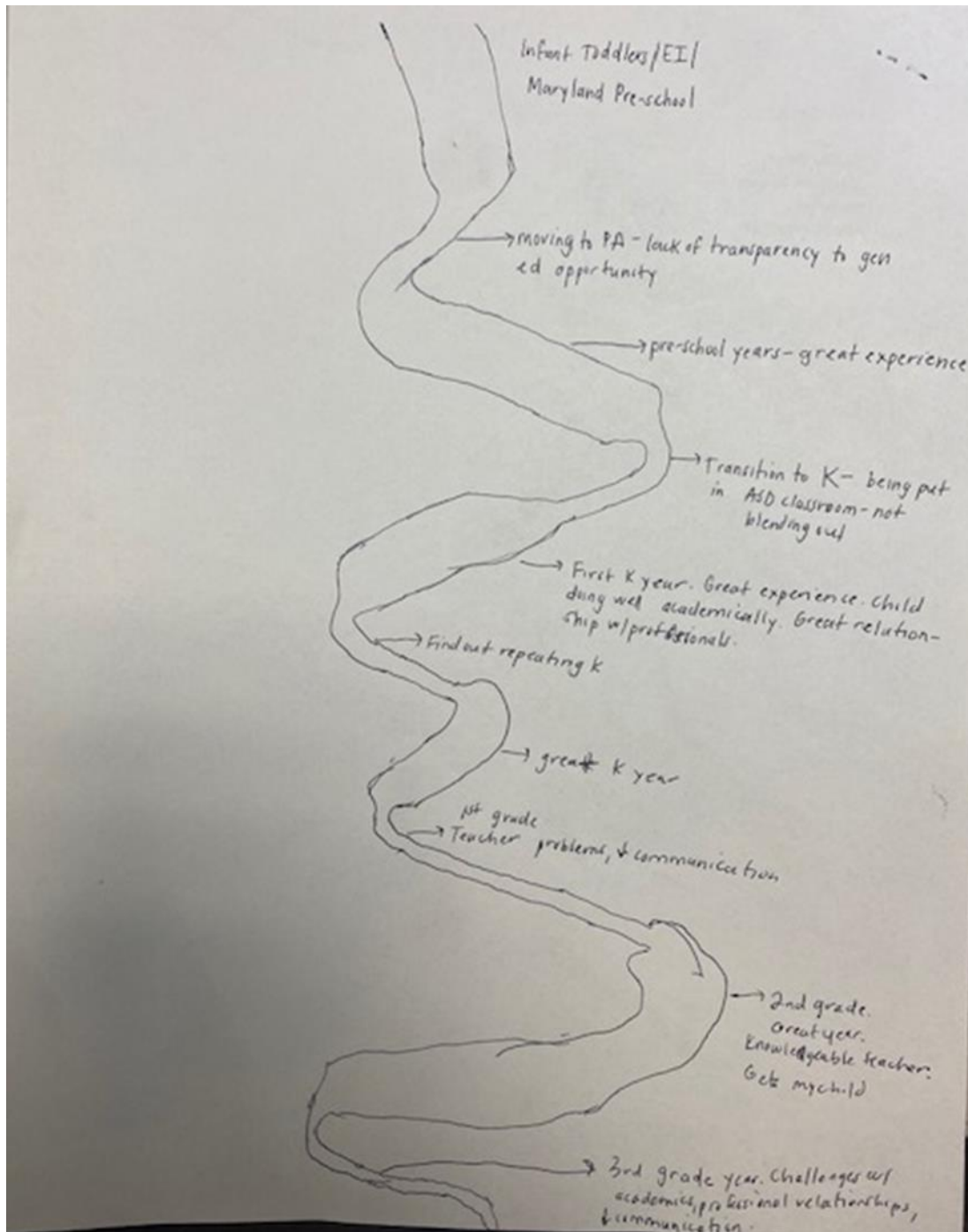
**Figure 25**

*Participant Seven Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
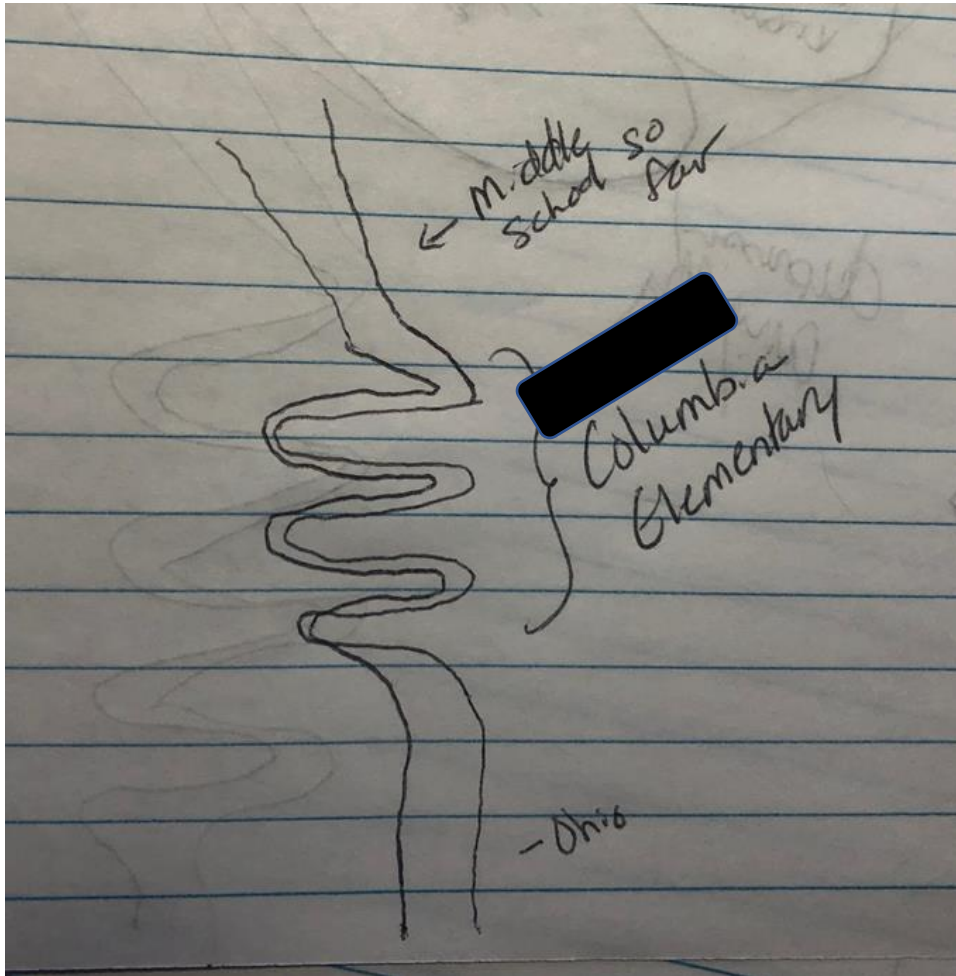


*Note.* The name of the elementary school has been de-identified to protect confidentiality. The flow of this river starts at the bottom ("Ohio") and the current flow is at the top of the diagram. The narrowing riverbed and conflict indicators are represented by the narrow, curved lines of elementary school experiences.

**Subtheme: Valuing.** This subtheme emphasizes the de-escalating actions related to educators exceeding expectations in their support of the student's educational pursuits. Codes include *emphasizing teacher matters, feeling supported by teacher*.

[The teacher] was everything. She's an older woman…she uses like, really

embraces social emotional curriculum…she treasures her whole classroom, they

are her treasures and their classroom family. And, you know, sometimes we're

upset with someone in our family but they're still our family and really pushes

that classroom bond and that we're not mean to people in our family. She will

tell you [son] was never a behavior problem for her" (P4, personal

communication, May 10, 2021).

Participant Four spoke of the difference a teacher valuing her child and his education

made, as she taught him how to meet classroom and behavioral expectations and would

even eat lunch with him. She "built a connection with him and he worked for her, he

wanted her to be proud of him" (personal communication, May 10, 2021). She also

included this information on the longitudinal Kawa Model drawing, figure 25, showing

significant widening of the riverbed and thus river flow, indicating de-escalation of

conflict (P4, personal communication, May 12, 2021). The special relationships had

lasting influences, "...she had the same teacher for first and second grade who was

really wonderful, like this really lovely, like 'the best thing that ever happened to you

teacher'...she just like, just loved her, I mean love...like, we're going to send this

teacher a graduation announcement loved her (P6, personal graduation, May 28, 2021).

**Figure 26**

*Participant Four Longitudinal Kawa Model River Drawing*
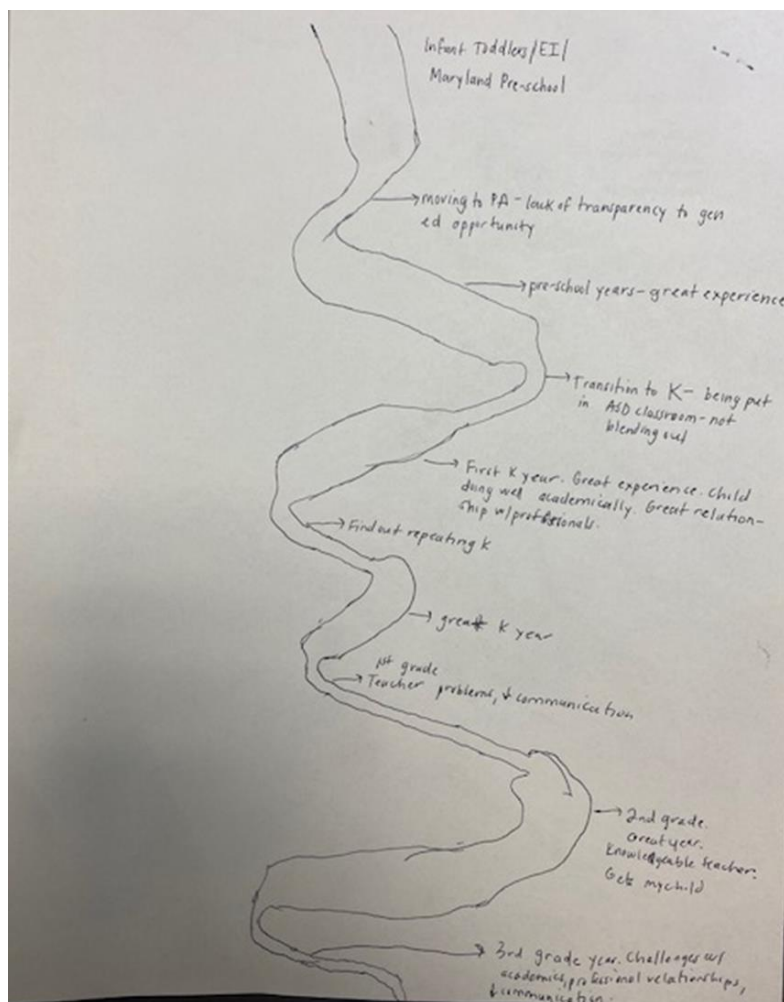


*Note.* This river flow starts at the top and moves to the bottom ("3rd grade").

**Subtheme: Altering learning.** This subtheme refers to the experience of altering

the school environment from in person to online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Coding

in this subtheme included *altering resulting in benefits (Covid), limiting distractions*

*online (Covid), learning about child's learning (Covid/ virtual learning), supporting*

*child's learning (virtual learning),* and *catching child up (virtual learning).*

The Covid-19 lockdown in March of 2020 resulted in children moving to remote learning. Despite the challenges with this abrupt change and the learning curve involved for parents, some of the mothers identified benefits to this experience. The hands-on experience of supervising and assisting daily school proved fruitful for some. "You know, so that I can kind of, you know, keep my daughter organized and like prepare her and like help" (P2, personal communication, March 1, 2021). Participant Six shared an upside of remote learning for her daughter was switching from memorization tests, which were challenging for her, to online tests that did not require memorization (personal communication, May 28, 2021). "…I think honestly that was like the biggest relief for me, because we went virtual…virtual was a great relief, because she did fabulous" (P2, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

While some parents felt that there were benefits to remote learning, others identified significant challenges. Sitting one on one with her son during the virtual school because of the pandemic, Participant Three expressed frustration, "…so I kept saying, like, 'this isn't working. This isn't working. It just…it doesn't matter what I say, like, if I report it,'" (personal communication, April 25, 2021). Similarly, Participant Five shared, "the most peaceful part of our school with him has been during COVID, when we didn't' really have anything to do. There's nothing, IEP, they didn't support them in any way, shape or form" (personal communication, May 20, 2021). The pandemic also created additional delays, "all this COVID stuff happens, so she got put on hold for a while…there was like a delay [eligibility]" (P7, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

In one case, the school sent a chart of learning activities for remote learning that, "…my son did not participate in because we couldn't keep him on the computer…and I was just so mad" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021).

Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was represented in all but two of the participants' Kawa Model drawings. Some included it within the longitudinal drawing as affecting river flow in time, with Participant Three labelling it "log jam during pandemic" with "no water flowing" (P3, personal communication, April 27, 2021) and Participant Two indicating that it widened the riverbed significantly and opened flow, namely due to her learning how to support her daughter's learning (P2, personal communication, March 3, 2021). Participants Six, Three, and Two labeled a boulder within their cross-sectional schematic with a reference to COVID-19, thus noting it did serve as a barrier. Participant Two, who had it opening flow but also listed as a boulder, she identified that it was challenging for her to have to be home to do the virtual school with her daughter, but after she learned how to support her and that it removed her from a negative teacher situation, it de-escalated conflict (March 3, 2021). Participant One indicated it as not only switching her daughter to virtual school, but also that it created a work transition for her and a move for the family to Florida, requiring her to transition the IEP and her special education to a new school district (November 21, 2020).

Research Sub-question 4:

What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and

de-escalation of conflict?

**Theme: Adding Insult to Injury**

The conflict process for mothers of children with NVD receiving SPED services

not only involved power differentials from the structural layer, but also within the

relational layer.  This theme involves actions that proved most significant in dismantling

trust and leading to distrustful relationships between mother and the school, thus

serving as escalators of conflict. In Table 8, the coding informing this theme is provided.

**Table 8**

*Domains Regarding Mother's Perceptions on how NVD Affects Conflict Process within*

*SPED: Adding Insult to Injury*

| Theme: Adding Insult to Injury | | |
|---|---|---|
| Included Codes | Conflict Relationship/ Color Codes | Subtheme |
| School/ teachers blaming parents (6) | Beliefs, Preferences/ | Blaming |
| school framing concerns as behavioral (3) | Nuisances | |
| School blaming child (4) | Structural, relational | |
| School framing parents as difficult (2) | | |
| School attributing poor performance to | Color: conflict, | |
| resource demands of child (2) | system/subsystem | |
| Mother feeling disrespected and | barriers | |
| mistreated (2) | | |
| SPED director labelling mother as | Kawa: boulders, | |
| misbehaving | riverbed; narrowing | |
| Stigmatizing daughter | flow | |
| School reporting negatives about child | Idiom: Salt in the | |
| Parents hearing school blames parents | wound | |
| School accusing parents of abuse | | |

Teacher communicating negatives only

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Contradicting communications/ actions regarding challenges with student (9)<br>Feeling tricked or shocked (3)<br>Receiving surprising news from school (2)<br>Mother feeling daughter tricked by teacher<br>Mother feeling paranoid (hypervigilance)<br>Mother perceiving gaslighting<br>Administrator admitting dishonesty<br>Mother accusing SPED of gaslighting, resistant, minimalist, ableist | Values<br>Relational<br><br>Color(s): conflict, emotions<br><br>Kawa: riverbed, boulders; narrowing flow<br><br>Idiom: Salt in the wound | Gaslighting |
| School using inappropriate intervention (ex: punitive, too easy or hard work—commensurate with level of invisibility) (6)<br>Services misaligning with needs (2)<br>Hearing gifted teachers refusing children with IEP<br>Mother identifying disparities between son/ daughter's SPED experiences<br>Mother hearing that delays in eligibility are gender-based<br>Discriminating severe vs. mild needs<br>School refusing gifted eligibility due to element of disability<br>School providing alternate explanations for student's performance (environmental)<br>Teachers correlating NVD with mother drinking alcohol | Beliefs, resources<br>Relational, Structural<br><br>Colors: emotions, conflict, system barriers<br><br>Kawa: boulders, riverbed; narrowing flow<br><br>Idiom: Salt in the wound; Adding insult to injury | Discriminating |

**Subtheme: Blaming (Theme: Adding Insult to Injury).** Some of the most prevalent

codes in this subtheme included *school/ teachers blaming parents, school framing*

*concerns as behavioral school blaming child, school framing parents as difficult, school*

*attributing poor performance to resource demands of child,* and *mother feeling*

*disrespected and mistreated.* The blame perceived by the parents, always linked to the

NVD, involved the behaviors of the student, thus aligning with beliefs,

preferences/nuisances within the conflict relationship. This structural level of conflict is

reflected within the following statement from Participant Five, "It's interesting because

now, looking back, I thought to myself, 'I started to see their [school personnel's]

behaviors along the way, and I started to see that they were trying to blame us for his

[student's] behaviors'" (personal communication, May 20, 2021). Another mother

reiterated the blame associated with behaviors, "Special ed people kind of like,

'I've identified him as a behavior problem,' (P4, personal communication, May 10,

2021). Finally, one mother identified the direct link between disability related behaviors

and blaming by the school team, "...and so we're like, 'Wait a second. He jumped out of

the window, because he has symptoms of a disability, he's not jumping out of the

window to be bad'" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Mothers felt that there was a discrepancy between children with visible

disabilities versus children with NVD and the different attitudes from school

personnel, [with visible disabilities, there they have a] "...greater propensity to try and

understand what's happening. And when it's invisible they jump right to behavior and

immaturity and parenting bad parenting" (P1, personal communication, November 29,

2021. The blaming was also linked to stigma related to NVD, "I think there's a whole lot

of stigmas about invisible disabilities, I think, with invisible disabilities it's much easier

for them to say, this could be caused by the family" (P5, personal communication, May

20, 2021). Other mothers felt the blame directly, "I think they just consider us to be the

difficult parents" (P3, personal communication, April 25, 2021), heightened when there

are two children in one family "...I think they view us as the difficult parents, because we

have the son that also has the services," (P3, personal communication, April 14,

2021). Other mothers felt the blame was more passive aggressive, "It was, they always

tried to defend themselves, they were always into a 'We are doing this, and this is

the...here's the best that we can offer' and then they would turn it right back on us and

tell us, 'Mr., Mrs. [Participant 5] what are you doing at home?'" (P5, personal

communication, May 20, 2021). Mistrust, which results from conflict experiences, was

indicated as a large boulder in Participant Four's Kawa drawing, adjacent to the riverbed

contextual label of past disagreements/ school belief child a behavior problem"

(personal communication, May 12, 2021).

 **Subtheme: Discriminating (Theme: Adding Insult to Injury).** Like *blaming*, this

subtheme indicates beliefs that result in biased attitudes and behaviors. It happens at

the structural level in terms of the most outward level of conflict, however, there are

significant relational elements to the conflict that results. Mothers described the

discrimination they perceived with emotional tones and related it to either initiating or

advancing conflict:

  And...you had teachers in there, that weren't trained to do that so you're

  suspending my child because he jumped out of the window to escape the

chaos.  You know, so that was just, I mean, that was the whole beginning of it

all. I just couldn't believe it and that kept happening, so he kept getting

suspended (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Mothers also likened the discrimination directly to the specific NVD diagnosis,

"…I'm not going to let them know that I think they're discriminating against him

because of his autism, and they are wanting him to change differences about himself

that I don't think he's doing just intentionally" (P4, personal communication, May 10,

2021).  Dyslexia, as well as autism, seemed to invoke bias from educators in the eyes of

the mothers,

Okay, and so we knew a little bit about their curriculum with the reading

recovery…she's [daughter] dyslexic.  Everything they were saying conflicted with

what we were, like, doing our own independent research and with what outside

professionals were saying. They were saying you don't use reading recovery for a

student who's dyslexic" (P5, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

The perceived *discrimination* translated beyond specific NVD bias to the

interventions provided for the students with NVD.  Mothers identified inappropriate

interventions (like the suspensions previously noted), including the provided reading

support received after years of advocacy, but delivered in a way that might do more

harm than good, "So, here's this poor eighth grade kid who's just trying to be a normal

eighth grade girl, who's being pulled out with fifth grade boys to do reading phonics

reading intervention which she needed and helped a lot but…" (P6, personal

communication, May 28, 2021). Participant One experienced the recommendation that her child be held back, despite scoring in the gifted range on a psychological examination as well as her daughter being placed in time out consistently throughout the day, which only reinforced her daughter's avoidance of school activities (personal communication, November 19, 2020). She represented both events as escalating experiences, as they narrowed the riverbed and decreased river flow on the Kawa drawing.

The *discrimination* also included gender, "It was they just really did not want to believe anything, and it wasn't until finally, we got one teacher, because the teacher could say, 'Well, you know, she's a girl, she's a girl, she's a girl. And then, finally, one teacher, we finally got her to be like, 'Okay'. She can't maintain friends– you can't tell me that that is a normal typical thing for it, you know, yes, girls have drama but…" (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021).

The *discrimination* identified by the mothers was also revealed in a situation by Participant Five, who shared an experience where she attended an event organized by the school system that featured a physician expert on children with anxiety, sharing research and the etiology regarding anxiety in children. She shared that the participants, mainly educators, confirmed her concerns related to the culture of blame and discrimination toward NVD in the school:

> And at the end of it, several people in the audience raise their hands, and I was
>
> like, 'Great, we're going to have a good discussion' and we didn't…because the

questions that were asked, and I realized later that they were teachers and other

administrators in the school system that were there...here's their questions, 'So I

think that the reason why the kids are like that is because it seems to be that

mothers have a huge drinking problem is this, this must be due to alcohol.' And,

of course, this doctor never mentioned anything, and he goes, 'Oh no, no, no,

no, this has nothing to do with alcohol, this is nothing that the mother has done

during pregnancy, I want to assure you of that. These kids are born this way

without the mother doing anything to these kids' (P5, personal communication,

May 20, 2021).

She added that after the physician refuted this belief, another educator then asked him,

"'It seems that parents are just too permissive with everything, and they just let their

kids do whatever. Isn't that what these behaviors are about?'" (P5, personal

communication, May 20, 2021). Participant Five then added, "You know, and so I

thought, 'I am doomed...like this is what our school system thinks".

  **Subtheme: Gaslighting (Theme: Adding Insult to Injury).** The subtheme of

*gaslighting* represented losing trust with the school. Some of the codes included the

most prevalent in this subtheme, *contradicting communications/ actions regarding*

*challenges with student,* and other repeated codes such as *feeling tricked or*

*shocked*, *receiving surprising news from school*, *mother suspecting delay tactics by*

*school,* and s*chool reporting negatives about child.* Gaslighting refers to a specific type

of manipulation of someone by psychological means into questioning their own reality,

memory, or perceptions (DiGiulio, 2018, para. 4). This type of manipulation usually

involves a power dynamic and relational conflict. The gaslighter holds enough power

that creates a threat of either losing the relationship or creates a threat that the receiver

will be seen as less than he or she wants to be seen (DiGiulio, 2018). It is important to

note that the gaslighter is not always acting with malicious intent, nor does he/she need

to know that he/she is gaslighting another for it to happen.  According to Digiulio,

gaslighting can involve withholding, countering, blocking/diverting, trivializing, and

forgetting or denying.  Thus, this subtheme, which can involve the structural subsystem

layer, also involves significant emphasis on the relational layer, and includes nuisances

and resources.

The *gaslighting* related to the subsystem structural level includes conflicts

related to resources and beliefs. While there is the element of the issue NVD and

resource worthiness, this subtheme emphasizes another belief element, the mothers

perceive the school feels their children are not worthy of the limited resources available

that their child's needs are not the result of disability, resulting in perceived avoidance

strategies of the school. This withholding pattern includes communications about or

confirmation of stated maternal concerns about child, negating stated needs of child by

mother, with end goal of postponing or avoiding initiation of eligibility for SPED process

for the child. The mothers emphasized these tactics were grounded in limitation of

resource provision, coupled with a belief that these children are not in need of special

education services. Denial tactics confirmed by the mothers included, "they will just

refuse to acknowledge that that's a real thing they don't acknowledge it okay" (P3,

personal communication, April 14, 2021). She related this tactic to resource provision, "I

think it's a school culture issue, and I think they're afraid of it, because they think that

means that every kid who's dyslexic then they have to provide services to". Even after

written formal requests for services, after contradictions and refuting needs and a

referral to external professionals, delay tactics were experienced, "So, for the remainder

of that year, nothing really changed. I did file for the IEP. They did not test her within the

60-day window…and so they pushed it to the summer to get her assessed in the

summer" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020). The mother experienced

violation of time requirements as a tactic of withholding, "I felt kind of tricked almost

because by the time they had, they kind of stop arguing with me. I'm filing it. It was very

close to the end of school anyway so like that 68th day was like the last day of

school (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2021).

> Delay tactics also involved a push toward a 504 plan in lieu of SPED evaluation:
>
> The teacher's, like, 'Well, why don't you try for 504 first?' And she said, 'I'll put
>
> that in,' so she put in the request for the 504, well, what I didn't realize at the
>
> time was that I should have just written a formal request saying, 'I would like her
>
> evaluated and then they would have had to address it, but instead they kept kind
>
> of pushing it off, and no one ever told me, like, for us to actually consider it (P7,
>
> personal communication, June 10, 2021).

The use of a 504 instead of initiating the SPED evaluation process for eligibility provided

hope for some mothers, but they conveyed they eventually saw it as an obstacle or

unhelpful, "…it's [504 plan] a start somewhere, but to me it's like a joke, because it

doesn't do anything, it, like, starts this process, but it really doesn't help, it doesn't help

in my perspective at all" (P2, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

The mothers felt their communicated concerns were met with skepticism, but

then those concerns would come to fruition, evidenced by, "…what I sometimes

will, like, say, 'Hey, this is going to happen' and they're, like, 'Okay, okay, and

then, like, six months or a year later they're, like, 'Hey, this is happening'. I'm

like, 'Yeah, I told you it was going to happen' (P5, personal communication, May 20,

2021). Beyond delays, the denials of services are difficult for the mothers.  This can be

exacerbated by how the denials are communicated, which can feel manipulative:

> They don't want people to know that, and so they you're just denied sometimes
>
> they don't even give like a prior written notice or notice of action, denying
>
> it. They'll just send an email saying, 'We don't suspect the disability'. But parents
>
> don't know that you're supposed to get a very formal thing, right, so it's very
>
> much like trying to slide under the rug at the district level, (P7, personal
>
> communication, June 10, 2021).

This serves to confirm the skepticism and trust concerns and reinforces the belief

conflict over the concerns related to disability.

Once the children received eligibility and started SPED services, an additional

tactic of reducing services emerged. One mother experienced this tactic almost

immediately, "…within the first quarter they had already wanted to meet with me to

reduce services" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2020), with others

experiencing a push toward reducing services targeted in specific support areas, "They

cut his reading. And so, he still had writing services, but they cut his reading services,

and we were concerned that, because he was going to transition to middle school" (P3,

personal communication, April 14, 2021). She associated this tactic to resource

provision through a cost-cutting lens, with a global reduction of services as students

transition into middle school:

> …they were going to try to cut him completely from services because we knew
>
> we heard from other families that there was this huge push to get rid of kids as
>
> they transition to middle school, because it costs the district more money to
>
> provide those services and it's harder to provide them at the middle school
>
> level, okay.

Another example highlighted how the school seeks to reduce interventions that

are deemed effective by the mothers, "The special ED chair…was trying to reduce social

skills classes…she's finally doing well in school, finally has friends, it's because of her

supports…so, let's not start pulling them away, yet…let her have some more time" (P7,

personal communication, June 10, 2021). The struggle of dealing with withholding

services deemed necessary by the parents takes a toll, with one mom explaining how it made her feel:

> Really frustrated, I think, very frustrated and there's definitely a sense of
> hopelessness, when you feel like you can't get the help that your kids need for
> them, because the reading and the writing is just critical to any job graduating
> from high school, so I think there's a sense of hopelessness…and just incredibly
> frustrated.

Similarly, another mother expressed how the protracted element of withholding services created this experience of gaslighting, "So, it was more like she's gonna be leaving the school, like, how is she going to go to high school- she has a fourth grade reading level, and you know I've been asking for this and you haven't done this…" (P6, personal communication, May 28, 2021). Participant Six felt the gaslighting was so significant, she labelled the largest boulder in the Kawa cross sectional drawing "public school SPED services–ableist, gaslighting…" (personal communication, May 28, 2021).

Experiences within SPED, when it is noticed that the child needs more support than he or she is receiving, results in the school refuting the needs or avoiding solutions proposed by mothers. Participant Four shared how her son, after receiving SPED services for years, was still having reading difficulties. The reading specialist informed her, and she informed the school to request a change in approach, because what they were doing was insufficient and was met with, "'…No, no, no, Mrs. [P4], we can't test him now, all kids will have a delay, now we can't test it now…we need to get him…back

into a routine'…and all of this nonsense" (P4, personal communication, May 10,

2021). She emphasized the reactive nature of their actions, delaying action until there is

concrete evidence that cannot be denied, such as poor grades on a report card. Then

the process involves meetings and data collection, which further delays action, "Yeah,

now they see we're in a big stir pot of this issue now, but they start probably, like, in

November, they're going to take data" (P4, personal communication, May 10, 2021). In

the recorded IEP revision meeting provided by Participant Three, an exchange between

P3 and the school personnel focused on their measurement of progress and what P3

had observed during virtual school (due to COVID-19). In the recording, the mother is

heard questioning their measurement of a goal, as well as who was measuring the goal.

The school personnel indicated the child was meeting the goal, but P3 questioned why

"independently" was no longer indicated on the goal. There is an exchange back and

forth regarding writing samples the school says were provided to P3, although she

states she had not received them. Regarding the measurement of her child being able to

complete the skill as they indicated, she replied, "well, all of the work that he has

completed in the regular English class was completed one on one with either one of his

tutors or with me, and he didn't independently do any of the writing in that regular

English class" (P3, IEP recorded meeting, November 12, 2021). She then added, "in my

memory…I thought we had discussed that we would add the word independently". The

school replied, "these were the goals that we agreed on when we met in September".

After the school member stated she was pulling up the record to show, P3 then

responded, "I don't think that's going to match up with the recording from that meeting. I have the recording…" (P3, IEP recorded meeting, November 12, 2021).

At the relational level, gaslighting involved the trivializing element of addressing behavioral concerns layered within perceived passive aggressive statements created emotional frustration and initiated distrust. One narrative revolved around how, because of her NVD, her daughter refused naptime, which disrupted the class and frustrated the teacher. "The one thing that was kind of a little bit frustrating, though, is they would give like updates when I would pick her up every day. 'Oh, tomorrow will be a better day.' And then what I would ask 'What, what happened?'. It was always related to that naptime situation" (P1, personal communication, November 19, 2021). She added, "…but nobody kind of like consulted any of the services in the school at that point."

The mothers indicated how when there were certain concerns raised, even when told by another member of the school team, that they were often gaslighted in the response. Participant One had a situation in which the school therapist told her that another support provider had not been seeing her child for multiple sessions. When she followed up in an email to the service provider in question, the response first included an excuse for not sending a response email sooner because it was "in Drafts" and then she stated "I have been pushing into [teacher's] classroom on Thursday afternoons" and then went into describing the purpose of her sessions, instead of addressing the

concern that the mother had expressed that she had not been seeing her child the past

weeks (P1 personal emails, June 5, 2019).

Another experience emphasized how it felt when the school made a

significant error but did not resolve it with the mother. "It was like the trust was

broken, right, because they didn't evaluate appropriately. They acknowledged it but they

never, we never had a reconciliation with the school psych who did the evaluation

inappropriately (P3, personal communication, April 14, 2021). One mother labelled her

experience as gaslighting, "And the teacher's, like, 'Oh yeah, you know, like, it would be

some horrible thing for us to say that', like it says something bad about her Or

something [re: NVD], like, there's no neuro diversity mindset at all. So, it felt like

gaslighting, right? Like, 'Oh no you're wrong and you're just overreacting...you just

accept what's there now'. It's like I was kind of right all along (P6, personal

communication, May 28, 2021).

## Conclusion

The findings in this chapter answered the overall research question, what are the

dynamics of conflict for mothers of students with NVD in special education? Through

intensive interviews, Kawa Model River drawings (cross-sectional and longitudinal), and

archival data with seven participants from throughout the United States, answers to this

question, and the four sub-questions indicated that invisible disability has dynamics

that influence conflict experiences from both an escalating and de-escalating

experience. The unique elements of NVD include the invisibility and confusing

behavioral and learning challenges that create opportunity, at the issue level, for

misunderstanding and conflict within the multiple layers of a system like public

education. At the systems level, the power asymmetry between the school and the

mother creates competition, primarily for resources, but also violations of the policies

within the system, that result in conflict at the structural level. Relationally, mothers

experience conflict through blaming, discrimination, and gaslighting, that escalates the

conflict through the negative emotional experience and violation of trust. Through these

conflict experiences, mothers undergo their own evolution, as they learn the system,

utilize their support systems, through professional resources, community-building, and

familial, to balance the power differential and assert their values to advocate for their

child(ren). They also experience de-escalation of conflict, through collaborations and

compromise with teachers and the sub-system. Finally, the unique confluence of NVD

with COVID-19 remote learning, provided both escalating and de-escalating conflict

experiences, depending on the child and the school.

In Chapter 5, I will be discussing the theoretical framework application to the key

findings and the answers to the research question and sub-questions. The themes

obtained in the study will be discussed in their agreement or divergence to the

literature. Finally, trustworthiness, applications to theory, and applications to practice

will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the specific dynamics that influence or drive this conflict in special education for children with NVD from the perspective of mothers, answering the question, what are the perceived dynamics of conflict interactions within special education services in public schools for mothers of children with invisible disability?

## Key Findings

The themes identified from this study consist of *square peg in a round hole* (*nonconforming student, school personnel lacking training/ knowledge/ time/ effort*); *bear the brunt* (*diverging approaches to support/ intervention, school exacting power, school compelling*); *sea change* (*initiating, draining, shifting, drawing the line*); *adding insult to injury* (*blaming, discriminating, gaslighting*); and *game changer* (*partnering, exceeding, altering learning*). The themes provide answers to the research question and sub-questions.

## Research Question:

## What are the dynamics of conflict within special education practices for

## mothers of children with NVD?

*Sub-question One: What are unique elements of invisible disability in the conflict process?*

The answer to this sub-question lies within *square peg in a round hole*, as the *nonconforming student*'s characteristics, behaviors, and the invisibility of their disability

creates a context of barriers, that require training, knowledge, and time, which the

*school personnel are lacking* in. This creates a context of discrepant views of the child,

which serves to set a context for conflict between the parties.

**Sub-question Two: How does an invisible disability affect the conflict process from**

**identification through re-evaluation?**

The above stated challenges from NVD influence the steps of SPED, particularly

identification, eligibility, and implementation of services process, outlined by *diverging*

*approaches to support/ intervention,* influenced by culture and the system, which then

diverges more into systemic conflict *within school exacting power* and *school*

*compelling.*

**Sub-question Three: How do mothers of children with invisible disability describe the**

**evolution of the conflict within the various steps of the special education process?**

The answer to this sub-question focuses on the process shifts related to the

mothers and advocacy efforts, as well as the emotional and time constraints that

accompany the role of being a mother and advocate for a child with NVD in SPED.

Specifically, *sea change* speaks to this transformation, which includes *initiating services,*

*draining, shifting, and drawing the line.* Initiating services was met with challenges for

the mothers, not only initiating SPED identification and eligibility, but initiating their role

as advocate in the system, but also bringing emotional and temporal *draining* with it.

The eventual shifting as they gain assertiveness and power leads to *drawing the line*,

moving away from asking for what they want and setting an expectation instead, while others simply accept the situation and move away from it.

### *Sub-question Four: What dimensions of the conflict experience influence escalation and de-escalation?*

*Adding insult to injury*, the relational and systems level actions of *blaming, discriminating,* and *gaslighting* escalate conflict, and are seen as tactics used by the school that create distrust, weaken communication and collaboration, moving away from benevolent misperception, as the differences become enhanced, and perception of goodwill is dampened. The conflict moves away from the resulting cause of the conflict, driving conflict through negative emotional experiences. *Game changer*, on the other hand, serves to de-escalate conflict by encouraging collaboration and compromise through *partnering*, and by school personnel *exceeding*, minimizing the discrepant views of the child and increasing trust.

### Interpretation of Findings

### Research Question and Sub-questions

The following sections will provide interpretations to the findings aligned with the research question and sub-questions, which were briefly summarized above, utilizing the theoretical framework for conflict.

### *Research Sub-question 1: What are unique elements of NVD in the conflict process?*

The unique qualities of the students leading to challenges in the school system were primarily related to the behaviors at school, the targeted learning approaches

needed, the demands on the teachers, and anxiety-related needs. Behaviors at school

included comments deemed inappropriate by the school, elopement, and meltdowns.

Targeted learning approaches required reading interventions, behavioral interventions,

implementation of IEP and accommodations, and organization skills. These targeted

approaches required increased demands of the teachers, leading to communicated

feelings of incompetence, burden, and/ or futility by the educators to meet the child's

needs within the existing system. When the student with NVD has anxiety, this seemed

to create unique concerns of educators minimalizing, being confused by, or missing the

symptoms and impact on learning or the resulting behaviors (such as elopement or

meltdown) that occur.

These unique elements related to students with NVD were identified as either

riverbed or boulders in the Kawa River drawings, indicating these as contextual elements

that influence river flow through constriction or opening flow, and barriers, which serve

to block flow. Associated feelings of shame, guilt, family stress, stigma are the negative

emotions that coincide, and the conflict experienced is twofold, both *personal* and *latent*

(with respect to interpersonal conflict). The personal (intrapersonal) level of conflict

involves those emotions, creating an emotionally challenging landscape to navigate.

Additionally, the fear related to NVD that there is a family history and how that adds to

fear and the concerns over the child's scholastic future as well as sometimes it created a

situation in which the mother denied there was an issue. Furthermore, if the teachers

are lacking in their ability to meet a student's needs, which is associated with their

professional role competence, that could create elements of personal conflict due to the

negative emotions experienced (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). Personal conflict, according to

Deutsch (1990), is the first level of his five levels of conflict. This level of conflict occurs

at the micro-level and involves psychological experiences of conflict. The latent conflict

involves competition for scarce resources, drives for autonomy and control or

divergence of goals (Pondy, 1967), and is referred to as a conflict that should be a

conflict but is not yet realized between the two parties (Deutsch, 1973).

Latent conflict, which is potential conflict, involves environmental effects (Pondy,

1967), supported with the placement on the riverbed within the Kawa River drawings.

Within the Deutsch Model, the conflict is not yet realized, as the parties are at the stage

of interacting and perceiving incompatible differences between or threats to resources

(services), needs (trust, communication, knowledge) and values (discrepant views of the

child). Latent conflict, according to Deutsch (1973), is conflict that can be activated by

"changing circumstances that either increase aspirations or worsen current realities" (p.

95). He adds, "discontent and the sense of injustice may be latent rather than manifest

in a subordinated group" (p. 397). Therefore, NVD creates contextual potential, through

negative emotions for the parties involved, for conflict, with the mothers being the

subordinated group.

*Research Sub-Question 2: How does an NVD affect the conflict process from*

*identification through re-evaluation?*

The findings on this sub-question relate to the specific elements of NVD associated to the confusion about behaviors, difficulty pinpointing the specific disability, and discrepancies about how to best intervene to address NVD play a role in informing the conflict process. Pondy (1967) proposes that the second stage of conflict involves *perceived conflict*, which is cognitive in nature, while the third stage, *feeling conflict,* involves affective experience. Beliefs, values, preferences/ nuisances (Deutsch, 1973) become the issues driving the conflict process, resulting in divergent thoughts on if concerns were related to disability or not, if the concerns were only behavioral or also academic in nature, and disrupted educational processes because of ineffective SPED interventions. In addition, there is a temporal delay that arises, particularly related to the identification of concerns and the evaluation for eligibility, supporting Davis' (2005) contention that individuals with invisible disability must often "bear the burden" of obtaining the assistance needed to address needs related to their disability.

Delayed, avoided, or missed identification and eligibility were consistent with those reported by Kupper & Kohanek (2000), and Whittaker & Burns (2021). These situations, represented as riverbed components (contextual) and boulders (barriers) within the Kawa River drawings, support the challenges with identification and eligibility and are significant for students with NVD (Kupper & Kohanek, 2000; Muller & Carranza, 2011; USED OSEP, 2015; Lhamon, 2016; USED, 2016; DuPaul et al., 2019; NCLD, 2017a; NCLD, 2017b). This progresses to the "point of conflict," as the behavior of the school includes refusal, avoidance, or delays in providing the resource of service provision

(Deutsch, 1973, pp. 5-8, 350-353). Because of the emotional experience in the latent

phase of the conflict, the roller-coaster nature of the challenges with identification,

evaluation processes, eligibility consideration and determination, service provision and

progress reported and IEP meetings (initial, revisions, re-evaluations), the mothers

appear to move between the *perceived* and *feeling* conflict stages concurrently, as they

perceive the conflicts related to each step of the SPED process, or in a back and forth

process, alternating between the states as if in a holding pattern of conflict (Pondy,

1967). The affective element (those behavioral aspects of the school and the behaviors

of the mother) overlap with the negative emotions, and the disagreement(s) over SPED

eligibility or support creates that dynamic system of conflict (Barki & Hartwick, 2004).

The mothers' approaches of collaboration, perceived as competing or demanding by the

school, result in conflict as the system responds with competing behaviors. As they

experience delays and obstacles at the structural layer, as well as the underlayers of

relations, to the core of the issues related to NVD, this experience can become

protracted.

While Pondy (1976) states how conflict can skip over perceived conflict to feeling

conflict, or vice versa, the mothers' experiences involve more of an oscillation with

times of overlap. Additionally, the conflict can evolve into manifest conflict (observable)

during IEP meetings, service provision, or the re-evaluation process. Specifically, the

interpersonal conflicts focused on the task level, how the task should be, can exist

cognitively (disagreement, perceived), behaviorally (interference, perceived, manifest by

preventing other from doing what or how they think the task should be done), or

affectively (negative emotion, feeling) (Barki & Hartwick, 2004).  Deutsch explains how

conflict transforms:

> Repressed, latent conflict occurs when one of the conflicting parties is
>
> sufficiently dominant to make the weaker party forego any overt, conflicting
>
> behavior in pursuit of its objectives. The common result of such repression is the
>
> build-up of malaise in the subordinate party, which takes on such various forms
>
> as depression, listlessness, passive aggressiveness, and psychosomatic
>
> ailments—all accompanied by an underlying pent-up rage (Deutsch, 1973, p.
>
> 373).

This explains the behavioral manifestations the mothers explained, particularly related

to IEP meetings, where upon reflection, they expressed either regret or justified their

behavior but wished it had not come to that. The justification came more from a point of

empathy toward self rather than solely indignation toward the other party involved. This

will also be discussed within the findings on sub-question three.

*Research Sub-Question 3: How do mothers of children with NVD describe the evolution*

*of their conflict experience within the various steps of the special education process?*

Deutsch (1973) stated that individuals in low power groups lack control over

resources, which creates a sense of injustice and discontent. He explained how conflict

can become productive, creating a situation like that of creative thinking by way of a

strong motivation that promotes arousal to solve the problem, setting the conditions

that allow for reformulation of the problem once in a gridlock, and recruitment of diverse ideas conveyed into new and assorted patterns. He proposed that interpersonal conflict creates potential situations for personal (intrapersonal) conflict (Deutsch, 1973), evidenced within the mothers' experience with the emotional toll of advocating, the second guessing while advocating, navigating the role competence and identity interplay between role of mother and role of advocate, and experiencing the paradox of being a professional, yet feeling incompetent advocating in a challenging system.

The mothers identified creative thinking, resulting from their strong motivation related to their roles and values, strengthened by their identified driftwood characteristics (persistence, resilience, supportive husbands/ marriage, educational background) and contextual supports (financials, health insurance, family, and ability to utilize external professionals for support) as elements that provided transformational momentum. These various Kawa elements they identified resulted in transforming the conflict from perceived, feeling conflicts to enabling their strategic considerations or conflict resolution mechanisms (due process, legal system) and creating a shift toward using their professional and educational strengths to self-educate, band with other mothers and parents, educate other parents, or move toward drawing a line of their specific terms of service for their child's education. Within this evolution, the mothers conveyed the significant emotional toll, energy, financial resources, and education to advocate for their child within SPED. However, the shift toward advocacy and role

adoption, corroborates the concept of the "CEO of the IEP", mothers advocating and

"fighting the fight", proposed by Lalvani & Hale (2015).

Within this evolution, the mothers experience a significant shift in the elements

of negative emotion and interference (Barki & Hartwick, 2004), which influences their

response level and perceptions within Deutsch's model, which then creates either de-

escalation or escalation of conflict. In this scenario, some of response shifts within

drawing the line, involved moving to litigation, thus indicating escalation. Other

responses included asserting their needs as stipulations rather than requests, while

others simply decided to minimize their interactions and work with their child, which

was supported by virtual school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Research Sub-Question 4: What dimensions do mothers of children with NVD identify*

*within the conflict experience as escalation and de-escalation influencers of conflict?*

The identified escalators of conflict, either creating potential conflict or moving

toward manifest conflict, included negative past experiences, difficult personalities of

the school personnel involved in the child's special education services or decision-

making, the culture of the school engaging in ableist behaviors, gaslighting,

discriminating, blaming (Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015), resistant or denial of disability/

services (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002; Mueller, Singer, &

Draper, 2008; Mueller & Carranza, 2011; NCLD, 2017a/b), feelings of mistrust (Lalvani &

Hale, 2015), which influence systems level power moves involving compelling or

disempowering the mother and drive conflict (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013;

Broomhead, 2013; Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015). These conflict drivers, represented by

riverbed or boulders in the Kawa Model, align with Barki & Hartwick's antecedents of

interpersonal conflict, including cultural elements, system characteristics, history

including previous conflicts/ tactics/ outcomes, personality, and needs, interests, and

goals (2001, p. 197). The disagreements, interference, and negative emotions are all

existence? And all the elements, and the interactions move away from cooperation and

collaboration toward competition and avoidance, which increase conflict (Deutsch, 1973;

Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Rahim (1992, P. 42-45) explains conflict handling styles

associated with escalating conflict as a) competing (high concern for self and low for others,

seeks to win or force behavior to win one's positions, and b) avoiding (low concern for self

and other, suppressing, buckpassing, sidestepping).

The mothers also conveyed how obliging (accommodating, playing down the

differences and showing low concern for self and high for others) also served as a

negative emotion experience cognitively revealed to be a strong component of

intrapersonal conflict; if the mother engaged in reflection and revealed this tendency

toward pleasing others, it could be transformed into a de-escalator through evolution

toward assertiveness. According to Rahim (2002), situations in which dominating

(competing) would be inappropriate include when an issue is: complex, not important to

you, both parties are equally powerful, decision does not have to be made quickly, or

subordinates possess high degree of competence. This behavior of competing from the

school or school personnel then violates what is deemed an acceptable context for competing approaches.

The de-escalating elements of conflict involved collaborative elements, high concern for self and others or even compromise (give and take, making a mutual acceptable decision through splitting the difference) (Rahim, 1992). Elements that reduced conflict included teachers and school personnel who problem solved with the mothers, teachers who went above and beyond to meet the needs of the child, feelings of trust, and empowering the self through self-educating on the special education laws. The emphasis on trust and collaboration with teachers, supports the notion of *benevolent misperception*, the experience when the party minimizes the differences and experiences enhanced perception of the other's goodwill, which dampens the effect on conflict (Deutsch, 1973).

Situations regarded appropriate for collaborative styles of handling interpersonal conflict included the following situations, including, issues are complex, need for synthesis of ideas for solutions, commitment needed from other parties for successful implementation, time is available for problem solving, one party cannot solve problem alone, and resources possessed by different parties are needed to solve common problems (Rahim, 1992). Furthermore, Deutsch emphasizes how collaboration moves parties away from conflict. Compromise, not necessarily identified by Deutsch as a de-escalator, is deemed appropriate for a style of handling conflict when a temporary solution to a complex problem is needed, consensus cannot be reached, and the goals

of the parties are mutually exclusive. However, it is deemed inappropriate when one

party is more powerful, or the problem is complex and requires a problem-solving

approach (Rahim, 2002). In this case, at times the compromise was effective because of

the temporal context or mutually exclusive goals, but primarily it seemed to decrease

conflict because it moved toward communication and served as a small win in some

cases to the parents. Deutsch (1973) refers to this as consequences of conflict to each

party, the gains and losses, precedence established, and short-term versus long-term

effects.

*Research Question: What are the Dynamics of Conflict within SPED for mothers of*

*Children with NVD?*

The primary research question seeks to identify the dynamics of conflict within

SPED for mothers of children with NVD. The Kawa Model River drawings conveyed the

dynamics, both longitudinally and cross-section schematics. The experience is one that

is emotionally charged, and has variations in the type of conflict, escalators and de-

escalators of conflict, and movement through conflict stages throughout the protracted

experience. The invisibility of the disabilities involved creates a unique and challenging

burden to both parties, not only to meet the educational needs

The dynamics include the riverbed contextual features, the culture of the school/

district, context of the power differential between the school system and the mothers,

the resources available to the mothers (financial, external professionals), and family

support. The riverbed has more open flow when the power differential is not

manipulated by the school and there is compromise or collaboration, and when the

mothers expand their family support toward social support through advocacy coalitions.

The riverbed narrows when the school manipulates the power differential through

competing approaches, a manifestation of a perceived culture of denial, ableism,

blaming or gaslighting, refusal of NVD and resistance toward interventions. River flow,

indicating special education services, is blocked by boulders consisting of difficult

personalities, negative past experiences, negative emotions, lack of training, resources,

and time, and gaps in knowledge about NVD for both the school and mothers.

Additionally, the influence the teacher has was significant. There were instances where the

teacher each year changed the flow of the river by constricting or opening flow. Mothers

identified teachers as boulders (barriers) and as driftwood (characteristics, resources), and

highlighted the influence of the teachers by placing them on the longitudinal river flow as

the flow was constricted or opened. This reinforces the relational level of conflict and its

influence on conflict. Correlated characteristics that influenced flow were communication by

the teacher, level of support, willingness to follow strategies or programs, and valuation of

the child.

  The river flow, symbolizes special education processes, and is affected by the

driftwood (personal attributes and liabilities), which can be supported through

professional backgrounds, education, values, persistence, and resilience. Some

attributes alluded to liabilities as well as strengths, including challenges related to

seeking validation from others or perceived failing as a mother or as advocate, as well

as mental health and anxiety. Interestingly many of the driftwood (personal attributes

and liabilities) were represented by elements that aligned with the thematic constructs

of Sea Change as resulting from the constructs of Bear the Brunt and Adding Insult to

Injury; those related to the personal attributes that enabled parents to overcome the

challenges of the conflicts they encountered through their personal traits, abilities,

values, and experiences. These "strengths" as indicated by Iwama (2006) regarding the

driftwood attributes, greatly outweighed the liabilities labelled by the mothers.

  The elements previously discussed could exist within any special education

situation, however, this question was specifically about NVD. The unique elements of

NVD involve beliefs and values. According to Deutsch, "many conflicts are over what 'is':

over facts, information, knowledge, or beliefs about reality" (1973, p. 16).  Additionally,

value conflicts create a situation where value systems are put in opposition to each

other. Deutsch states that it's not the differences in values that lead to conflict, it is the

claim that one value should dominate or be applied that creates conflict. He proposes

that value conflict occurs in legal or political action. Finally, preferences and nuisances

refer to the activities or tastes of one person or group that impinge upon another, thus

affecting their sensitivities or sensibilities (Deutsch, 1973, p. 15). Deutsch emphasizes,

"the issue is not the abstract right of the other to his preferences and activities but

whether he can exercise his right if by so doing he creates a nuisance or disturbance for

you" (p. 15). The result of this type of conflict is typically avoidance and segregation,

thus limiting the nuisance for that individual.

Utilizing the theoretical framework, the dynamics include the following analysis:

- Issues related to NVD align with beliefs related to legitimacy of disability, creating issues-driven perceptions of incompatible differences and threats to resources (services), needs (training and knowledge, communication, and trust), and values (discrepant views of the child), that lead to latent conflict with presence of negative emotions

- NVD influences the conflict process through the steps of SPED, because of cultural and systemic confusion and illegitimacy of disability, through responses by the school personnel and system by refuting, denying, avoiding, or delaying SPED services (resources) from identification through re-evaluation, with emphasis on delayed or hindered identification, eligibility, and IEP implementation, moving conflict into perceived and feeling conflict, the actual point of conflict

- Mothers of children with NVD describe the evolution of conflict as starting with initiating services, which was often met with the aforementioned barriers, starting a divergence of goals, and creating negative feelings as their values, resources, and needs are threatened. Their response level starts to evolve through personal strengths and creative thinking, and focuses on the goal of supporting their child, navigating the role of full-time mother and advocate within a challenging system and power differential.

- Escalating components of conflict come relational and structural levels, particularly interference from the school that results in threats to values and trust, that enhance the element of negative emotion. De-escalating influencers of conflict include mostly relational level interference, namely collaborative approaches by school personnel and instances when school personnel exceed expectations and demonstrate valuation of the child.

As part of the theoretical framework, Figure 27 provides an overall Kawa Model River drawing, from the cross-sectional perspective, of the Case that represents the riverbed (contextual elements) of the mothers, the boulders (barriers) identified by the mothers that they experience with schools as part of the conflict, and their driftwood (personal attributes and liabilities), that can open the spaces of the river flow, which represents overall special education services. The more the river flows, the better the SPED services; the more the river flow is impeded, through narrowing of the bed or through boulders, the more conflict experienced within SPED services. Figure 27 provides the symbolic representation of the combined findings of the disparate cases, drawn as a cross-sectional Kawa Model schematic.

**Figure 27**

*Kawa Model Cross-Sectional Representation of Case*
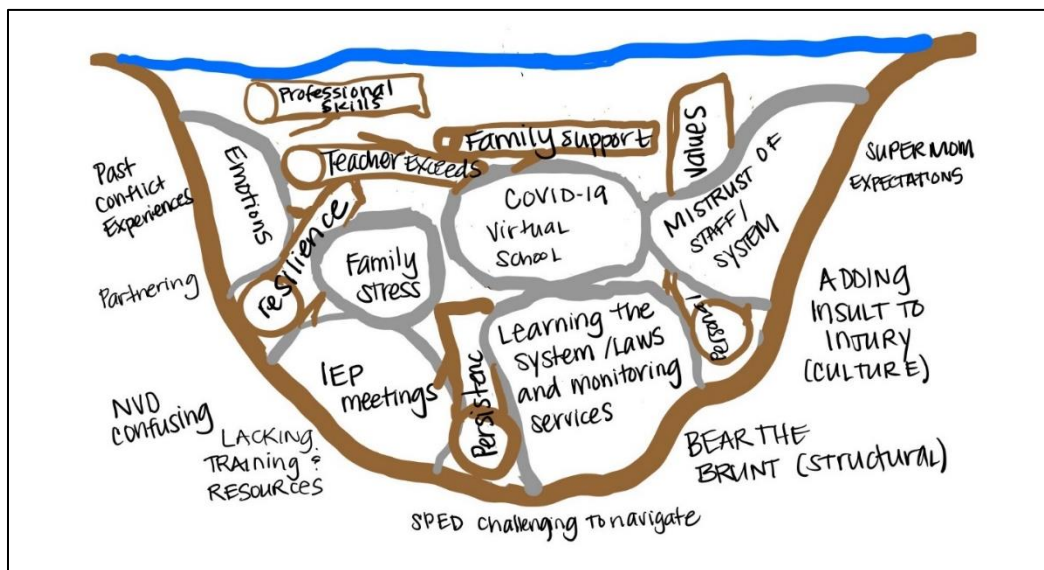


*Note.* The riverbed represents context, focusing on the structural and cultural elements, particularly the Square Peg in a Round Hole, Adding Insult to Injury, the challenges with the SPED system, collaborative efforts of educators, and the societal expectations of mothers. The boulders are related to the experiences of Bear the Brunt, Adding Insult to Injury and the barriers related. The driftwood, personal attributes, relate to the Sea Change elements and Game Changer. Note the spaces between the boulders allow for the attributes to reduce the barriers. Also note that the Square Peg in a Round Hole aspect of NVD being confusing, narrows the riverbed, creating a situation in which the river flow is narrowed more easily.

The longitudinal Kawa Model River drawing, Figure 28, indicates river flow (special education conflict evolution) over time. The narrowing of the river flow indicates conflict experienced, highlighting the annual change experienced, which can escalate or de-escalate conflict. The overall Case representation through the longitudinal drawing, emphasizes the zig zag conflict experience of mothering a child in special education.

**Figure 28**

*Kawa Model Longitudinal Representation of Case*
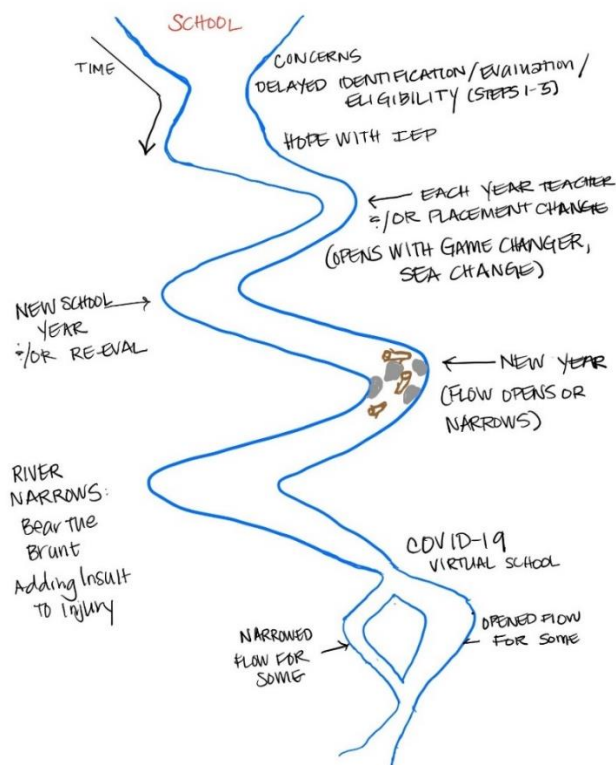


*Note.* Mothers with NVD typically experience conflict within the first three stages of the SPED process, namely identification, evaluation, and eligibility. Once they have eligibility and an IEP, their riverbed opens up, but then it can close once conflict starts, whether it is structural or relational. There is a shift each year as the teacher changes (and/ or placement), creating opportunity for the riverbed and flow opening or narrowing as they encounter conflict.

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**Interpretation of Themes**

</div>

**Theme: Square Peg in a Round Hole**

The inherent nature of NVD, its invisibility, creates reactive interference for the

parties involved due to the high amount of emotionality and difficulty, the situation that

those involved might not know what they need or suspect there is a need but do not

know how to address it (Center on Disability Studies, 2007). *Square peg in a round hole*

provides insight into how NVD involves unique student qualities that create challenges

in the school system, differing from disabilities that are visible to others.

### Nonconforming Student

The *nonconforming student* refers to the social, emotional, behavioral, and

learning challenges students with NVD experience as part of their disability, interfering

with daily functioning but lacking a visible, physical manifestation (CDS, 2007). Students

in the study demonstrated confusing behaviors such as meltdowns, used inappropriate

language or seemed to not follow school rules, would go unnoticed because they were

able to hide or have internalizing behaviors. While some of the students were identified

as disruptive, others were not, and those students went unrecognized by the school as

having an issue (Bravender, 2008). These unique characteristics and behaviors have

identified myths and stigma that is pervasive in society, including with educators (NCLD,

2017b; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2021; LDA/ IDA (2010), which the

mothers identified.

Through the lens of critical disability studies, *nonconforming students*

experience fundamental inequalities resulting from inaccessible contexts and ableist

beliefs (Linton, 1998; Shapiro & Baglieri, 2012), as evidenced by schools not recognizing

the disability and the stigmas related to preconceived myths and stigmas related to NVD

(LDA/ IDA, 2010; NCLD, 2021; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2021). There

is inherent conflict within invisible disability: the disability is present but unable to be

seen, those who have it do not necessarily know it, know what they need, or suspect

something is wrong but are unsure how to address it (CDS, 2007). This leads to

misunderstanding for the individual with the NVD and the parents of children with NVD

(CDS, 2007). Therefore, it is not necessarily surprising that school personnel also

misunderstand NVD.

The response by the system and those within it to the nonconforming student

not only creates potential misunderstanding but creates potential for conflict in the

system. This can result from the potential for control over resources, as special

education resources, including time of the educators, are finite. If educators or the

administrators within the system misunderstand or underestimate the needs of the

student as related to disability rather than a trait or behavior, that could further lead to

increased potential for conflict related to resource provision, one of the significant

escalators identified by Lake & Billingsley (2000).

### School Personnel Lacking Training/ Knowledge/Time/ Effort

This subtheme emphasizes the lack of training/ knowledge/ time/ effort for the

school personnel, either as identified by the mother through observation or

communicated to the mother by the school personnel, typically a teacher. The subtheme

of *lacking* is consistent with identified concerns conveyed by parents that there is

ignorance of disability for a child with ASD for various school professionals (Starr & Foy,

2012; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), lack of teacher training (Lasater, 2016), lack of

knowledge regarding the disability needs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000), and lack of effective

behavior management (Starr et al., 2006; Whitaker, 2007). The "differential boost"

phenomenon (Harrison et al., 2013), the effective strategy of adding structure to tasks

for children with and without hyperactivity was identified as either lacking in

implementation by the mothers.

Some of the *lacking* with respect to training, knowledge, time, effort identified

by the mothers aligns with disability-specific *lacking* related to specific NVDs. Specific

lack of understanding of dyslexia was identified (Connor et al. 2016), decreased

satisfaction with teacher knowledge about ASD (Batten et al., 2006), identified need for

specialized training and knowledge of autism (Starr et al., 2006; Whitaker, 2007; Brewin

et al., 2008). Tucker & Schwartz (2013) connected the lack of knowledge with ASD to

lack of professional training, also identified within this study.

*Lacking* was also conveyed by the school professionals, specific to NVD.

Teachers communicated directly or indirectly to the mothers that they lacked the skills

to provide effective instruction to diverse learners (Blanton et al., 2011) and had

decreased training and knowledge related to the legal elements of special education

laws (Leschied, Dickinson, & Lewis, 2000; Schimmel & Militello, 2007; O'Connor et al.,

2016).  Students were identified as requiring increased assistance or demonstrating

increased dependence on teachers (Prino, Pasta, Gastaldi, & Longobardi, 2016),

increasing time demands on the educators, for which the teachers communicated they

could not meet.

The resulting question becomes, why is there a lack of knowledge and training

for educators and school personnel with respect to NVD? Consistently highlighted as

boulders (barriers) in the Kawa, the lack of teacher knowledge and training was

consistent with Batten et al.'s (2006) finding that only 30 percent of parents with ASD

were satisfied with teacher's knowledge about ASD. Although behaviors are a hallmark

of multiple NVD, there is evidence that teachers lack effective management of behaviors

(Starr et al., 2006; Whitaker, 2007), also identified in this study. Most of the studies

identified lack of training and knowledge or parent-perceived low levels of knowledge

by teachers or administrators of ASD, specifically (Starr et al., 2006; Starr and Foy, 2012;

Brewin et al., 2008; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Lack of preparation can result in a

decreased level of confidence, thus directly influencing an educator's perspective of

inclusion and having children with disabilities within the classroom (Garriott et al, 2003).

Teacher education and continuing professional development significantly influence skills

toward building inclusive education for special education (Forlin, 2010, Forlin, 2012,

Vickerman, 2007; Floridan & Rouse, 2009). However, current teacher education has been

identified as insufficient by educators (OECD, 2010; Robinson, 2017)

### Theme: Bear the Brunt

*Bear the brunt*, which includes subthemes of *diverging approaches/*

*interventions*, *school exacting power* and *school compelling mother*, emphasizes

structural conflict processes through power exerted by the structural system layers.

### Diverging Approaches to Intervention

This subtheme explains the bifurcation between the mothers and school

personnel on how to support the student with NVD through the steps of service delivery.

The contention that parents report decreased decision making within educational services in SPED (Leiter & Krauss, 2004) was supported by the mothers in this study. Specifically, implementation failures related to behavioral supports, lack of a functional behavioral analysis were also supported, as were exclusionary practices (Connor et al., 2016). Ineffective approaches such as grade retention and school expulsion (Connor et al., 2016; DuPaul et al., 2019) were also identified by the mothers as interventions used by the schools. The finding that related services were also an issue initially seems inconsistent with the findings of this study, as the mothers didn't focus on a lack of related services, specifically. However, the mothers did report that related services were often the first ones that would be reduced or cut after installation. Upon further analysis, it seemed it was not an initial issue as it was provided with the IEP upon eligibility and the mothers seemed to focus more on the conflict related to identification and eligibility. However, the fact that they were some of the first services to be cut was identified by the mothers. Another influencing factor could be that many of the mothers were from the therapy field, which compromises related services, so they might be more effective at advocating for those types of services than mothers who do not have that knowledge or expertise.

Many of the disability specific patterns identified in the research were evident in the study. Placement as the primary dispute element for families with ASD (Mueller & Carranza) was also identified by the mothers in the study who had children with ASD, one of which led to due process litigation. The mothers of children with ASD also

experienced conflict related to behavioral interventions (Connor et al., 2014) and during

IEP meetings (Wagner et al., 2012). Disputes related to program appropriateness,

eligibility, and behavior for students with OHI, and SLD, as well as assessment and

evaluation difficulties with SLD were found (Mueller & Carranza). The difficulty with

assessment and evaluation with SLD was indicated for all the students with that

diagnosis, supporting the "perplexing trends" with SLD and SPED reported by Whittaker

& Burns (2021). The students were reclassified with SLD, supporting the notion that the

sharp increase in numbers of SLD at age 10 is due to delayed identification.

There were also multiple accounts of the struggle with inclusion of dyslexia and

related service provision within SPED (NCLD, 2017a). According to NCLD, California and

Missouri have disability and reading laws regarding dyslexia, however, mothers still

encountered difficulty accessing appropriate services in these states. Additionally, there

were also anecdotal indications for the pattern of incorrectly identifying students who

are twice exceptional (USED OSEP, 2015), however, it is not fully possible to determine

since the children are still not identified as gifted at the time of interview. The mothers

noted divergence regarding delivery of services creating conflict within IEP meetings in

both the interviews and Kawa drawings, which was also evidenced within the recorded

IEP session and alluded to within more than three email records provided by the

mothers to the school (Mueller et al., 2008).

*School Exacting Power*

Connor et al. (2014), that mapped how IDEA works against children with the

social emotional and behavioral challenges of students with NVD, aligned with the

conflicts experienced with the mothers with respect to identification and evaluation and

the IEP process. Consistent with Kupper & Kohanek (2000) that identification is often

delayed or lacking, demonstrating the first elements of the power differential described

by Lake & Billingsley (2000). Another source of conflict is the eligibility process,

particularly related to categorization, and in the instance of SLD, this was the most

delayed or contested (NCLD, 2021a).

There was also evidence of ineligibility due to the school psychologist's

evaluations, resulting in denied eligibility (Trainor, 2010b), reported by the mothers as

being an issue. The IEP meetings created a context of power asymmetry, intimidation,

and adversarial positioning, similar to findings by Tucker & Schwartz (2013), and the

feelings of intimidation found by Fish (2008). Interestingly, the high rates of discord

with IEPs by parents of children with ASD was also supported (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

According to Mueller et al. (2008, p.194), "the majority of conflict between parents and

school officials takes place during IEP meetings", and these meetings "often trigger the

initial dispute".  This is interesting, as the conflicts escalated during IEP meetings and

the mothers described tense meetings, however, there were differences about the initial

dispute. It is difficult to define what "dispute" refers to, but with the mothers, the initial

dispute was typically regarding identification or eligibility, which takes place prior to IEP

meetings. However, the IEP meetings often involved the first recorded disputes, the instance when the mothers experienced perceived conflict. Additionally, the IEP meetings have more of an adversarial feeling, supporting the notion that the conflict experienced is a feeling conflict, thus more pronounced as a conflict experience. The need for parent involvement is clear, unfortunately, the research shows that parent involvement at IEP meetings is low, despite the IDEA mandate (Epstein, 2005; Forlin & Hopewell, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2008). Within this study, the mothers identified identification and eligibility as a conflict in retrospect, but it is possible that it might have been less perceived at the time.

The IEP meetings were significant in their perceived and feeling conflict, at times turning to manifest conflict (conflict observed and understood, Pondy, 1967) or perceived (Deutsch, 1973). At this level, the emphasis of the structural level (Dugan, 1996) becomes important. Consistent with Wagner et al. (2012), the mothers, all Caucasian, indicated high levels of attendance at meetings. The notion that differences with how states run services was also identified by the participants, which affected the conflict, depending on the relationship with the district or the school and who the meetings were with. Most of the mothers indicated initially taking the role of passive recipients, adding to the element of driving conflict (Turnbull, 2006). The requests for additional related services influenced dissatisfaction with SPED services, as found by Leiter & Krauss. Reported low perceived collaboration during IEPs, as identified by Tucker & Schwartz (2013), despite being legally mandated, added to the perceived and

feeling levels of conflict, with Kawa manifestations as boulders and riverbed elements, identified as cultural (denying services, denying disability) and personalities of personnel as driving conflict in the meetings.

There were also instances where the power tactics were identified by the mothers, despite safeguards built into IDEA. Situations in which the mothers felt the power differentials (Leiter & Krauss, 2004) were noted and supported by written documentation in email interactions and written requests within the archival data. The power move of linguistic power moves (Lake & Billingsley, 2000), also referred to as professionalization of language as barrier (Cole, 2007, Harry, 1992; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; and Valle & Aponte, 2002) was found to hamper communication and parent participation in IEP meetings. Tactics used by the school to delay or avoid identification were indicated, despite the action taken by the USED reminding states to not utilize these tactics (Lhamon, 2016).

### *School Compelling*

The power differentials identified by Leiter & Krauss (2004) resulted in an emphasis by the school to compel mothers to seek external services (Lake & Billingsley 2000). According to Forness et al. (2011), schools use their power to violate the law and regulations by failing to make recommendations for the student, and often solely resort to referring to external services outside of school or suggesting medication as an intervention. Similarly, the mothers in this study felt compelled to seek external services

after suggestions from the school, while others felt compelled to medicate their

child(ren) (White, 2010).

### Theme: Sea Change

This theme describes the experience of conflict in SPED for mothers and involves

a process of evolution for them. The subthemes show there are some temporal and

experiential consistencies related to this progression. Stoner & Angell (2006) found that

parent participants, particularly mothers, consistently engaged in four roles: negotiator,

monitor, supporter, and advocate (Stoner & Angell, 2006). In this study, all four roles

were emphasized, aligning with the assumptions about child-rearing that it is

emotionally absorbing and labor-intensive (Hays, 1996).

### *Initiating Services and Advocacy*

*Initiating* refers to the initiation of seeking services as well as initiating the role

of advocate for their child's educational needs, in the vein of the definition provided by

Trainor, that the goal is for the educational rights of the student with a disability be met

(2010b). The mothers would initially notice some concerns related to their child,

typically related to academics or behavior in school, and would initiate communication

with the school regarding the concerns. These initial concerns were often met with

dismissal or a wait and see attitude toward implementation of the identification process

(Connor et al., 2014).

The initiating process proved time consuming for many, as mothers dealt with

delayed identification and eligibility, but continued with advocacy efforts (Lalvani & Hale,

2015). Interestingly, initiating initially had elements of advocacy that were awkward, apprehensive, or indicated hesitation. Many utilized the intuitive advocate approach, who uses perceptive insights into the child to work with the educators but has been found to not necessarily be a successful advocacy approach (Trainor, 2010a). At this point, the mothers are not necessarily an expert in disability, or proficient in strategizing, nor are they focusing on being an agent of change. They use their expertise in their child to advocate instead, thus creating scenarios of inertia or impasse. The unique element of NVD plays a part, because many were not the "disability expert" advocate proposed by Trainor (2010a), as opposed to a mother who has a child with a congenital disability, who is proficient in the awareness of that disability. Because of the nature of NVD, many of the mothers initiated through noticing concerns, rather than coming with a diagnosis or awareness of the disability.

### Draining Experiences

Advocacy, as well as simply mothering a child with NVD in special education, comes with a cost. Mothers emphasized the range of emotions experienced, from anxiousness to sadness to anger, compounded by the fact that this is their child involved in the conflict. The findings indicated the stress of dealing with the challenges with accessing special education services (Burke, et al, 2019; Burke & Hodapp, 2014; Rios et al., 2020) is particularly draining to the mothers of children with NVD. The findings also corroborated previous findings that mothers with students with NVD who have behavioral issues, mothers who have instituted procedural safeguards, and

mothers with students with autism, are at risk for higher levels of maternal stress (Burke

& Hodapp, 2014). This was evidenced by mothers who received daily behavioral notes

that felt critical and/ or negative in tone, a particularly draining experience. Additionally,

mothers who had students who were expelled or who experienced unsafe situations due

to behaviors also experienced significant stress, as they felt their child was being

punished for his or her disability, which can feel like a betrayal of the system that is

supposed to be supporting the student. Evidence supporting this experience was also

evident in the email archives, with terms such as "embarrassing", "hurtful", "aghast",

"concerned", 'uncomfortable", "heartbroken", and "detrimental" within the email

communications from mothers to school personnel.

The concept of trust was significant in the context of draining and partnering,

with mistrust identified as boulder (barrier) and many instances highlighted as both a

systems-based lack of trust as well as relations-based element. This supports Lake &

Billingsley's (2000) theme of trust in their study; trust influenced relationship issues in

special education, however, it was focused on the relationship level. The findings in this

study showed there was mistrust identified for the relations with school personnel, but

also the system that also served to tax the mothers as they advocated and supported

their child's SPED services. Trust eroders included difficulty with timely diagnosis and

identification, feelings of disrespect toward the parent(s), focusing on the child's

deficits, lack of problem-solving and input within IEP process, as found by other

researchers (Green, Darling, & Wilbers, 2013; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lake, Billingsley,

& Stewart, 2018; Stoner et al., 2005; Stoner et al., 2008). Contrarily, trust also creates

the game changing contexts of partnering and de-escalating conflict. So, while

consistent with those findings, the taxonomy related to conflict using the Nested Model

of Conflict, delineates relational conflict to decay of trust specific to relationships with

individuals within the SPED team, while the steps of the process, diagnosis and

identification, IEP partnering, would be categorized as structural in nature. The

importance of that delineation relates to how the trust can be repaired; when the

mothers experienced relational distrust, it was a less finite experience (draining in

nature, but repairable), while structural distrust was communicated as more protracted

in nature. This aligned with Lake & Billingsley (2000, p. 248), who noted that parents felt

they could tolerate "negative events periodically" due their willingness to give school

personnel "the benefit of the doubt…". This "benefit of the doubt" did not exist with

respect to distrust at the structural level.

Frustration regarding the system also served as a draining factor, particularly

related to the power differentials and difficulty with navigation. Lacking knowledge of

the laws and feeling that imbalance of knowledge served as a source of frustration (Lake

& Billingsley, 2000). The findings also supported Lake & Billingsley's (2000) emphasized

cost related to the use of power within conflict in form of emotional expense. The

strong emotional costs of conflict became evident with the experiences involving

litigation and legal representation. The additional financial toll, coupled with stress and

emotional turmoil, served as significant draining elements experienced.

The emotional experiences related to blaming, gaslighting, and discrimination elements described in adding insult to injury, were also significant. Identified as both riverbed contextual elements and boulders within the river drawings and conveyed with emotional distress during the interviews, these elements within adding insult to injury serve as the extreme emotionally draining elements the mothers experienced during all conflicts experienced. Blaming was also placed inward, indirectly, through questioning their own abilities to serve the needs of their child, (Marshal et al., 2003), supporting Moses' (2010) findings that mothers often blame themselves and worry that they have let their child down.

An interesting finding of the study supports the feminist approach of discrimination toward mothers found by Khanlou et al. (2017). Khanlou et al. found that mothers of children with developmental disabilities experienced disablement, undervalued role competence, and increased scrutiny. This study found that the mothers with professional backgrounds, also experienced additional scrutiny from both the school as well as from themselves; their expectations and thus self-blame resulted from increased competency demands on their abilities to advocate and successfully navigate the system. This is supported the notion that mothers who endure additional scrutiny or judgment related to societal views on motherhood experience internal judgement on role competence and not only experience maternal stress from having a child within SPED, but also from self-blame (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). This paradox of

the professional mother creates additional draining experiences for the mother of a

child with NVD.

### Shifting to Power

Although draining elements exist throughout the experience, the subtheme of

*shifting* emphasizes the evolution of advocacy for the mothers. Aligning with the notion

of professionalized discourse, speaks to how parents advocate for their child to

counteract the effects of dealing with the bureaucracy of the special education system

(Bacon & Causton-Theoharis (2013). The evolution involves self-educating, reflection,

strategizing, and working with other mothers to enhance agency. Self-educating on the

system and laws regarding special education, as found by Fish (2008) and Bacon-

Causton-Theoharris (2013) was often an initial step in the shifting process. Another

initial step of shifting involves the use of an advocate. While most used them specifically

for IEP meetings, the advocate not only helped to navigate the system and increase

chances to meet goals within the IEP meeting, but the mothers would also learn from the

advocates about the system. The professional discourse shift also involved strategizing,

with specific tactics such as only using emails to communicate. There was also evidence

of grassroots activism, as described by Turnbull & Turnbull (1996), as the mothers

worked with other mothers and parents and even created PTA groups. The mothers

gained power and confidence through helping other mothers, serving as change agents

beyond just serving their own child.

The theory of habitus explains how mothers move to action and demonstrate

agency, simultaneously revealing social structure (Bourdieu, 1977). Their cultural capital

related to their skills, intellect, credentials became an economy of practice and system

of exchange, through their advocacy (Barker, 2004). A consistent riverbed element of

economic capital provided a means to access external services (Trainor, 2010a).

Additionally, personal resiliency, social support, and professional capital also provided

cultural capital that influenced their ability to evolve toward *shifting*; the shift involves

both an internal and external shift to collectively use their capital and agency to

decrease the power differential with the system they are working within. Within shifting,

the mothers move away from more singular forms of advocacy, and move toward being

a strategist and change agent, the more effective modes of advocacy described by

Trainor, 2010a), and thus away from the intuitive advocate that was evidenced within

*initiating*. The privileged backgrounds of the mothers and their ability to shift toward

these more effective modes of advocacy, supports the findings of Ong-Dean et al.

(2011), with one mother wondering how mothers who do not have the resources she

has, could even begin to successfully navigate the system for their child.

### Drawing the Line

Finally, the monitoring role that mothers of children in special education, being

the squeaky wheel as they are "fighting the fight", results in serving as the "CEOs of the

IEP", as coined by Lalvani & Hale (2015). This evolves from the experiences within

*draining*, largely due to previous conflict, it is also *shifting* that results in this role

competency. With the resulting power shift that results, the "disillusionment and mistrust" of the system, coupled with their high levels of agency, results in the perception that they are the drivers of action and therefore must be included in the decision-making process (Lalvani, 2012; Lalvani & Hale, 2015). For example, Participant One wrote in her email to the school regarding her formal request for an IEP, "I am heartbroken at how detrimental this year has been…please update me with progress towards setting up an IEP meeting", which connects the emotional draining with the drawing the line management of the process (personal email, June 5, 2019).

Additionally, drawing the line involves the point at which the mothers identify they are moving toward Stage IV (procedural safeguards) of written state complaints, due process hearing, or Stage V (legal review), toward litigation and legislation (CADRE, 2017). The mothers also engage in legal advocacy, advocating for changes in the laws and rules within special education, including getting the IEP meetings recorded, thus engaging in legislative legal review as a result of their conflict experiences.

### Theme: Adding Insult to Injury

*Adding insult to injury* comprises the relational conflict processes, specifically the subthemes of *discriminating, blaming,* and *gaslighting*, and the experience of the mothers, which results from both structural and relational conflict layer experiences.

Supports the notion of the discrepant views of the child and his/her needs, proposed by Lake & Billingsley (2000), as being the most prevalent driver of conflict within special education; they found it initiates or escalates conflict in 90% of the

participants' experiences. The two discrepant views identified, not viewing the child as

an individual with unique strengths and abilities and the second, describing the child

from a deficit-model perspective, creates different "lenses" with which the child is

viewed. They proposed the idea that the child becomes viewed as "problematic",

creating potential energy for conflict, which aligns with the results from this study. Lake

& Billingsley (2000) found the most prevalent driver of conflict to be discrepant views of

the child and his/her needs, the school not identifying the child as an individual with

unique strengths/ abilities OR deficit-model perspective. This was evident in discussion

about negative comments at IEP meetings, student performance communications, or

behavior reports, as well as the emails regarding photos of the child in a disparaging

light and the intense scrutiny on behaviors as shown in Figure 19. A barrier to parent-

teacher partnerships (i.e., the perception of being identified as challenging parents)

(Lasater, 2016), was confirmed by multiple mothers, but particularly when there was

more than one child who received services in SPED for NVD.

### Blaming

Blaming adds insult to injury through creating negative feelings by the mothers

that they are being criticized by the school for their child's behaviors and needs. This

conflict experience was not unique to mothers of children with ADHD, as found by

Rogers & Ford (2015), as mothers of children with other NVD felt criticized and

identified as being different by the school. Supporting findings by Starr & Foy (2012),

that parents felt resentment from school personnel who conveyed that the child's

behavior needs were the result of disciplinary deficits in the home (Gwernan-Jones et al.,

2015). The mothers, again experiencing the notion of the unfit mother, bear the stigma

of impairment (McKeever & Miller, 2004), reinforcing the high numbers of educators

placing blame on the home environment for causing learning disabilities (LDA/ IDA,

2010). The experience of *blaming* adds to the *draining* experience explained earlier and

adds to the experience of self-blaming that the mothers also experience.

### Discriminating

The *discriminating* identified by the mothers involved conflicts that not only

involved discriminating against the disability, but also discrimination against gender of

the student and how many students the mother had in special education. With respect to

disability-specific discrimination, the findings supported those found by other

researchers related to learning disabilities and dyslexia (Trainor, 2010b; NCLD, 2017b),

even when disability laws were in place (NCLD, 2017b). Additionally, children with ASD

experienced prejudice from school personnel (Starr & Foy, 2010), whether related to

behaviors or through violating the need for privacy with respect to their diagnosis. The

discrimination toward students who have an NVD and were identified as potentially

being twice exceptional, eligible for gifted services as well as special education services

(Perrin, Jury, & Descombre 2021), thus refuting gifted eligibility.

The experiences of *discriminating* results from ableism, the negative or

discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities, which can result in devaluing

people with disabilities (Smith, 2010; Shapiro & Baglieri, 2012). This conflict centers on

beliefs and is influenced by context, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics

(Perrin et al., 2021). The findings supported contextual notions of medical model

alignment and cultural elements of refuting particular diagnoses, blaming families, and

judgment toward behavior-related elements of disabilities, as these elements were

placed in riverbed and pervasive across the cases.

### Gaslighting

Consistent with what Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified as an escalator of

conflict, devaluation includes feeling lied to, feeling important information is being

withheld, being treated in a condescending manner, or *gaslighting*. Like *blaming* and

*discriminating*, this escalates the conflict and ramps up the emotional toll experienced

as *draining*. The mothers feel their suggestions and expertise on their child is

dismissed, consistent with findings by Hodge & Runswick-Cole (2007). Interestingly,

there is limited evidence regarding gaslighting experiences in the literature, however, it

is a significant theme among advocacy groups, advocate blogs, and educational law

groups (cite). Examples of gaslighting, such as using buffers to the deficit discourse,

were acknowledged (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). The concept earlier identified,

"door number two", serves as the trust that the system is not being up front about

resources, aligning with the escalating factor of limited program options, particularly

when the parent feels they are being hidden. Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified a

school's inability to validate and answer questions about services as being a driver of

conflict, creating fragility to building trust.

**Theme: Game Changer**

*Partnering*

Multiple research studies have shown that teacher-initiated encouragement of parent participation significantly develops and sustains collaborative home-school relationships (Ferrara & Ferrar, 2005; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The subtheme of partnering, deemed essential to special education processes and thus has procedural safeguards within IDEA (including due process), includes collaboration of the parents and the school team for the design of services, delivery of services, to promote the relationship between the parent and school personnel (IDEA, 2004). This study identified how open lines of communication and having a teacher or team member who was willing to listen and be open to suggestions corroborated evidence that this can lead to positive perceptions of services and build relationships (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Spann et al., 2003). The shared decision making that builds trust also forged relationships for partnering (Lake et al., 2018; Shelden et al., 2010). Interestingly, a significant element within partnering involved the temporal elements on how it can change from year to year or from elementary to middle to high school, and the implications of language, how mothers utilized verbiage related to "we", indicated a hallmark of partnering with the teacher and other team members, were new contextual elements identified that influence partnering.

*Valuing*

Valuation was a theme identified previously as important to de-escalating

conflict in special education (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). This study found that teachers

and school personnel who viewed the child with authentic, caring and viewing him or

her from their strengths served to de-escalate conflict and increase river flow, as found

in other studies (Spann et al., 2003; Stoner et al, 2008). As found by Perrin et al.,

(2021), teacher characteristics and context, influence attitudes that lead toward valuing.

However, this study showed that the teacher characteristics weren't necessarily female

(Alghazo & Naagar Gaad, 2004), younger, or less experienced teachers who had more

inclusive attitudes, (Avrimidis et al., 2000) but did support that the teachers who had

more self-efficacy on how to work with the students mattered (Descombre et al., 2019).

There was not necessarily evidence to support that students with cognitive disabilities or

ASD were perceived as more difficult and less valued (Jury et al, 2021); the evidence

instead suggested that if the teacher or professional knew how to work with the

student's needs or attempted to forge a relationship with him or her, the valuing

exhibited de-escalated the conflict. Valuing had long term consequences that showed

that the mothers sought to continue the relationship and gratitude for the teachers who

demonstrated valuing of their child.

*Altering the Learning Environment*

Another element that influenced conflict included altering the learning

environment. This game changing element, which more often led to de-escalation or

moved the mother toward drawing the line actions, included changing the learning environment due to multiple reasons. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the students had to move to remote learning in the home, using virtual schooling, and many benefitted due to decreased distractions and increased time with parents, as found by Averett (2021). Perhaps unique or especially supportive to students with NVD was the increased time with parents involved in educational activities, which allowed the mothers to learn more about what their child needed, how the child learned, and learning more about their assignments. Additionally, some students experienced altered learning environments due to switching classrooms or placements, which at times proved effective, even if it resulted from an error by the school that initially created discord. Because the teacher becomes such an important element in de-escalating conflict and opening river flow in the Kawa drawings, the option of switching teachers was more prevalent with the mothers of children with NVD than what was identified in the literature.

## Limitations

### Limitations of Design

While the strengths of case study approach include providing rich, detailed qualitative information, insight for future research, and allowing for the investigation of impractical or difficult research contexts, there are also limitations that need to be addressed.

Yin (2013) refers to more significant challenges with validity within explanatory approaches rather than exploratory (like this study) but recommends the use of qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin, 1987, 2009) used to capture within-case patterns (configurations). This approach was used in this study even as an exploratory approach. Triangulation addressed validity, specifically data source triangulation. In this study, there are three forms of data that were collected and analyzed, which improves the validity of the results (Yin, 2013). Finally, to generalize results, Yin (2013) recommends limiting generalization of the case results because of the small sample size and instead focusing on the in-depth knowledge gained. To address researcher bias, member checking was conducted after transcriptions are obtained to address the potential bias and inaccuracies. Participants were provided with transcripts for approval for the first member check and additionally offered the written "case" for their approval of accuracy. One participant declined to review the written conflict case due to emotional concerns related to reading it. Finally, memo taking tracked the researcher's analysis process to reduce bias (Creswell, 2013).

**Limitations of Sample**

Another limitation involves the sample size and the heterogeneity of the sample. The sample consisted of middle-class, professional, White women who have cultural capital as a result of their educational background, socioeconomic status, and professional experience. Their experiences, particularly with advocacy, cultural capital, and access to services likely differ from women who have different educational

backgrounds, less socioeconomic capital, and women who do not have professional experiences or expertise. Additionally, access to services could differ from this sample, as there is evidence of discrepancies to services depending on race, socioeconomics, and the theme of *Sea Change* might be different, as the cultural capital involved would be different. Additionally, there is evidence that Black children, particularly Black male children, are overrepresented in special education (Morgan et al., 2015); however, there is a counterargument that Black children are actually underrepresented in special education (Ford & Russo, 2016). This would also affect the results of the study and the cases involved.

## Implications for Theory and Research

This study provided the distinctive perspective of the dynamics of conflict for mothers of children with NVD who receive special education services. The unique features of invisible disability, the social emotional challenges, behavioral manifestations, large spectrum of learning and behavioral needs, along with the invisibility of the disability, create a context for all levels of conflict to the parties involved. Lake & Billingsley (2000) identified eight factors that escalate or de-escalate parent–school conflict, and these factors were identified with the mothers of children with NVD in this study, but there were findings that differed due to the focus on invisible disability. First, the escalating factors included within adding insult to injury, including discrimination, blaming, and gaslighting had notable relationship to invisible disability. Second, the process of advocacy that the mothers experience, the role and

identity shifting that occurs either concurrently or after the significant emotional, temporal, and task-related draining experiences of mothering a child with NVD, result in a leveling of power that results in attitude and behavioral challenges. This is akin to a shift in the intrapersonal conflict that serves to de-escalate interpersonal conflict. Third, valuing has some differences that are distinct from previous findings, particularly how the teacher makes a significant difference, and that can change year to year. This is the result of students with NVD receiving inclusive services due to LRE, coupled with the pervasive beliefs specific to NVD that result in the conflicts noted in adding insult to injury. Fourth, while other studies identified placement as the most significant step of special education that influences conflict, this study found that identification and eligibility were the most noted areas of conflict, specifically due to the nature of NVD. Finally, the unique experience of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the subtheme of altering the learning environment, with students of NVD potentially having more benefits from remote learning than what has been identified for both the general education and special education populations without NVD.

The Kawa Model proved to be an effective research tool to investigate conflict; it served as a means for both data collection and analysis. For data collection, it provided a way for participants to consider the contextual elements of conflict in a more organized and comprehensive manner. For data analysis, it afforded the researcher a way to examine the factors related to the conflict and how they influence each other.

Finally, completing this study with a sample of women who have less cultural capital, particularly minority population, women who have lower socioeconomic status, and women who have less education or professional careers would be important to study. Completing the study with a more diverse sample would provide more insight into similarities and differences between different populations, providing more insight into particular needs of a larger swath of mothers of children with NVD, which is important when considering policy and practice recommendations.

## Implications for Practice

This study highlighted how there are some different considerations related to conflict experiences for mothers of children with NVD in special education. First, training teachers and other school personnel on NVD and effective treatments is indicated by this study, as well as previous research. With the significant increases in children with NVD in special education and the majority receiving inclusive instruction within general education, evidence-based education on NVD needs to be part of education programming in higher education and continuing education for school personnel. Training could also decrease the conflict experienced during identification and eligibility, however, that is also influenced by resource limitations.

Additionally, the use of facilitated IEPs, identified as a promising form of ADR (Mueller, 2008), could benefit mothers of children with NVD to reduce personal or issues-related disputes, which are the crux of the conflict identified. Finally, special education system trainings that are accessible to all mothers and caregivers would be

beneficial as a preventative approach to conflict, but also to reduce the conflict that

emerges during initiating due to bear the brunt elements (school exacting power and

diverging approaches) as well as decrease the temporal constraints during initiating

advocacy.

An additional practice implication is the use of the Kawa Model within ADR

processes such as mediation services. It could be used by the parties to come to

mutually identified solutions to benefit the child.

The prevalence of the medical model view of disability for both policy makers

and the pervasiveness in special education and general education cultures creates

conflict. Working to change this view, for policymakers and school administrators, as

well as educators, could serve to shift away from serving as a foundation for conflict.

The strength of the collective advocacy for the mothers in this study could also

serve mothers who have less cultural capital and could be an approach facilitated by

special education consultants and related service providers, including occupational

therapists. Promoting cultural navigation of special education services, effective

advocacy approaches, and ways to collaborate and form teacher-parent partnerships in

a proactive manner would benefit all parties.

Finally, as an occupational therapist, it behooves me to address how

occupational therapists can address supporting not only the student with NVD, but the

mothers and educators who work with them. As previously mentioned, occupational

therapists work to address occupational participation and performance issues of their

clients, but they also work at the organizational and population levels as well (American

Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). Occupational areas include education,

productivity (work), play and leisure, activities of daily living, social participation, and

instrumental activities of daily living (American Therapy Association, 2020). For students

with NVD, occupations related to education, social participation, and the transition

toward productivity are essential to the domain of occupational therapy. For the

educators and school personnel who work with students with NVD, occupations of

productivity related to occupational performance should be addressed. Finally, for the

mothers, the occupation of mothering, as well as serving as a parent advocate are

occupations and role areas that occupational therapy practitioners can intervene.

Additionally, a domain of occupational therapy involves advocacy as both an

intervention approach and a means toward meeting occupational justice. Occupational

justice refers to the "right of every individual to be able to meet basic needs and to have

equal opportunities and life chances to reach toward her or his potential but specific to

the individual's engagement in diverse and meaningful occupation" (Wilcock &

Townsend, 2009, p. 193). According to the American Occupational Therapy Association,

"occupational therapy practitioners recognize areas of occupational injustice and work

to support policies, actions, and laws that allow people to engage in occupations that

provide purpose and meaning in their lives," (2020, p.12). Occupational therapy

practitioners are encouraged to provide advocacy not only at the individual level, but

also organizational and population levels. Education and training are also intervention

approaches, and can also be carried out at group, organizational, and population levels.

Role competence is an outcome targeted in occupational therapy, thus mothering and

advocacy role competence, teaching and other school-related role competence, and

student competence would all be within the domain of occupational therapy.

Occupational justice is both an aspect of "contexts and an outcome of intervention,

involving respect, fairness, and impartiality" along with "equitable opportunities";

therefore, the context of conflict within special education is fertile ground for expanded

occupational therapy services. This study informs that process when working with

students, educators, and mothers of children in this arena who have invisible disability.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

*Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Conflict in Special Education*

**NSU**
Florida

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**

Are you the parent of a child with invisible disability (ADHD, ADD, Autism, sensory processing disorder, learning disability, or other disability that is "invisible" to others?)  Did you experience conflict in public school special education services during K-12 experience? You may be eligible for a research study that seeks to identify dynamics related to conflict in special education.

## You may be eligible if:

- You are 18 years or older
- You speak and read English
- You have a child who is a student in public school in the United States and receives special education services
- You have experienced conflict with school personnel during the special education process that felt as though it was "us" vs. "them"

If you are interested in being a parent participant in this study, please fill out the brief screening found at this link:

**https://forms.gle/rtZchxvJp43 kVPKJA**

## Participation Involves:

- Completing a diagram that illustrates your conflict
- Completing two 45- 60-minute interviews about the conflict experience via Zoom
- Reading a transcript of the interview
- Your information will be kept confidential

## Location: Online Format

(3301 College Ave., Fort Lauderdale, 33314)

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Quint at OTadvocacyresearch@gmail.com

Appendix B: Prescreen for Eligibility: Google Form

## Volunteer Participation Pre-Screening Form

This is the pre-screen for the research study entitled:Conflict within Special Education for Families (Mothers) with Invisible Diagnoses: A Retrospective Case Study

If you are eligible to volunteer, you will receive an email from Nicole Quint from OTadvocacyresearch@gmail.com.  Thank you.

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails.  Change settings

What is your name (First and Last)? *

Short answer text

Are you fluent in English (read/ write/ speak)? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

After section 1    Continue to next section

## Age eligibility

You must be 18 or over to participate.

Are you 18 years of age or older? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

After section 2    Continue to next section

## Eligibility

Description (optional)

Please answer the following:  *

◯ Are you the parent of a student with invisible disability (autism, sensory processing disorder, learning disa...

◯ Are you a teacher, administrator, special education director, or related services provider in public school (or...

◯ Neither of these options pertains to me

Have you experienced conflict during the special education process (IEP, 504, accommodations, etc) for a student with an invisible disability (autism, sensory processing disorder, learning disability, ADHD) in national public schools as a parent that felt as though it was "us" vs. "them"? *

◯ yes

◯ No

◯ I'm not sure

# Consent

Please read the following:

Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Conflict within Special Education for Families with Invisible Disability: A Constructivist  Grounded Theory

Who is doing this research study?

College: College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

Principal Investigator: Nicole Quint, Dr.OT, OTR/L

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Ismael Muvingi

Site Information: Nova Southeastern University, 3301 College Ave., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Funding: This study is unfunded.

What is this study about?

This is a research study,

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

This study will include about 25 people.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?
You will be completing an interview, approximately lasting 60 minutes, using an online platform answering questions about your experience with: conflict with school personnel in public school system in United States (if you are a parent), anywhere in the process from obtaining eligibility to IEP meetings to re-evaluation.  Prior to the interview, we will ask you to draw or outline a simple Kawa River to demonstrate your own occupational contexts and experiences related to occupational therapy practice.  The interview will be recorded and used by the researcher for analysis. You will be given a pseudonym to complete the interview for confidentiality.

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

•      First, you will be contacted via email from Nicole Quint, and provided the consent process and option to consent to participate.  You will be provided with a short video and written direction for the Kawa River drawing.
•      You will schedule an online interview session and complete that, sharing your Kawa River drawing and answering questions related to your conflict experience with parents during the special education process in the school.
•      Your eligibility relies on being a school professional (teacher, special education director, administrator, related service provider) of the student with invisible disability, who experienced conflict in the special education process in the Un OR being a parent of a child with invisible disability and you experienced conflict with school personnel team during special education process, in United States, grades k-5.
•      Upon completion of the individual interview, you will be notified that you will receive a transcript of the interview via email. This is called a member check.  You will be asked to approve the transcript for accuracy. Pseudonyms will be used for you (you will be given pseudonym and student).
•      The researcher will be taking the interview data and Kawa River drawings and using that information as data for analysis.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life. However, there is a possible breach in confidentiality through documentation that I collect from you. You may find some questions I ask you during the interview to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can provide you materials to help you with these feelings.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?
You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get.  If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. I hope the information learned from this study will help the researcher define the dynamics involved in conflict in special education, particularly for children with invisible disability so changes can be made in the future.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?
You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information learned about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. The email address provided in this study is only utilized for this research study and exists in a double password protected computer. This data will be available to the researcher, the dissertation chair, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in 1230 Terry at Nova Southeastern University (if paper document). All online materials will be saved in a double password computer. All records will be destroyed after 36 months and research email will be discontinued.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?
This research study involves audio and/or video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any of the people who gave the researcher money to do the study (if applicable). The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?
If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Nicole Quint, Dr.OT, OTR/L can be reached at 954-262-1526.

If primary is not available, contact:
Please email at OTAdvocacyResearch@gmail.com.

Research Participants Rights
For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Tell the researcher you agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights agreeing to this form.

AGREE TO THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:
- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Do you consent to take part in this study? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

After section 4    Continue to next section                                    ▼

Section 5 of 5

Thank you for your consent. You will be contacted shortly by Nicole Quint from OTadvocacyresearch@gmail.com

Appendix C: Consent Form

**Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent: Parent Group**
**NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled**
*Conflict within Special Education for Families with Invisible Disability: A*
*Retrospective Case Study*

**Who is doing this research study?**

College: College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

Principal Investigator: Nicole Quint, Dr.OT, OTR/L

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Ismael Muvingi

Site Information: Nova Southeastern University, 3301 College Ave., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Funding: This study is unfunded.

**What is this study about?**

This is a research study,

**Why are you asking me to be in this research study?**

This study will include about 25 people.

**What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?**
You will be completing two interviews, approximately lasting 45-60 minutes each, using an online platform answering questions about your experience with conflict with school personnel (teachers, administrators, related service providers) in the public school system in the United States specifically the IEP process.  Prior to the second interview, we will ask you to draw or outline a simple Kawa River to demonstrate your own occupational contexts and experiences related to occupational therapy practice.  The interview will be recorded and used by the researcher for analysis. You will be given a pseudonym to complete the interview for confidentiality.


Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:


- First, you will be contacted via email from Nicole Quint, and provided the consent process and option to consent to participate. You will be asked to provide time options for the first interview that work for you.
- During the first interview, you will be provided with time for questions related to consent process.  You will also have option to provide any records related to the conflict, including email communications with the school and/ or the individualized education plan (IEP) document(s) from school.  You will be asked

> to send these documents via email after you have removed names from the document or the researcher will remove the names before the files are saved.  You have option to decline to provide these documents.
> - Prior to second interview, you will be provided with a short video and written direction for the Kawa River drawing.
> - You will schedule an online interview session and complete that, sharing your Kawa River drawing and answering questions related to your conflict experience with parents during the special education process in the school.
> - Your eligibility relies on being a parent or caregiver of the student with invisible disability, who experienced conflict in the special education process in the United States.
> - Upon completion of the individual interviews, you wlll be notified that you will receive a transcript of the interview via email. This is called a member check.  You will be asked to approve the transcript for accuracy.  Pseudonyms will be used for you (you will be given pseudonym and student).
> - The researcher will be taking the interview data and Kawa River drawings and using that information as data for analysis.

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This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life. However, there is a possible breach in confidentiality through documentation that I collect from you. You may find some questions I ask you during the interview to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can provide you materials to help you with these feelings.

## What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?
You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get.  If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

## What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

## Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. I hope the information learned from this study will help the researcher define the dynamics involved in conflict in special education, particularly for children with invisible disability so changes can be made in the future.

**Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?**
You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

**Will it cost me anything?**
There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

**How will you keep my information private?**

Information learned about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. The email address provided in this study is only utilized for this research study and exists in a double password protected computer. This data will be available to the researcher, the dissertation chair, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in 1230 Terry at Nova Southeastern University (if paper document).  All online materials will be saved in a double password computer. All records will be destroyed after 36 months and research email will be discontinued.

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If you have questions now, feel free to ask us.  If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

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If primary is not available, contact:
Please email at OTAdvocacyResearch@gmail.com.

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(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

**All space below was intentionally left blank.**
**Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section**

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study.  In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Tell the researcher you agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights agreeing to this form.

**AGREE TO THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:**
- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Signature: _____

Appendix D: Kawa Instructions

Thank you for your participation.  I am requesting two drawings from you using the Kawa River metaphorical drawing approach.  We will then meet for a second interview to discuss the drawings to learn more about your experience with conflict in special education.

**Drawing one:** Please see following link for instruction and video on how to create your cross-section of your river: https://theotprocess.wordpress.com/2013/07/08/the-kawa-river-model-of-occupational-therapy/

Please use the idea of appropriate special education services (without conflict and meeting your child's needs) as being represented by river flow.  The better your river flows, the more optimal your child's special education services. The boulders (barriers) block river flow and the riverbed (context) also affect how the water runs in the river. Your driftwood becomes part of that dynamic.

**Drawing two:** Please draw an overview longitudinal view of the entire river, with one end the start of your interactions with special education, through your conflict with the school, to the present.  Your river can turn, become narrow, have poor river flow, become wider, have better flow, etc.  This will help the researcher understand the overall experience through time, and how different aspects of your experience changed throughout your interactions with the school.
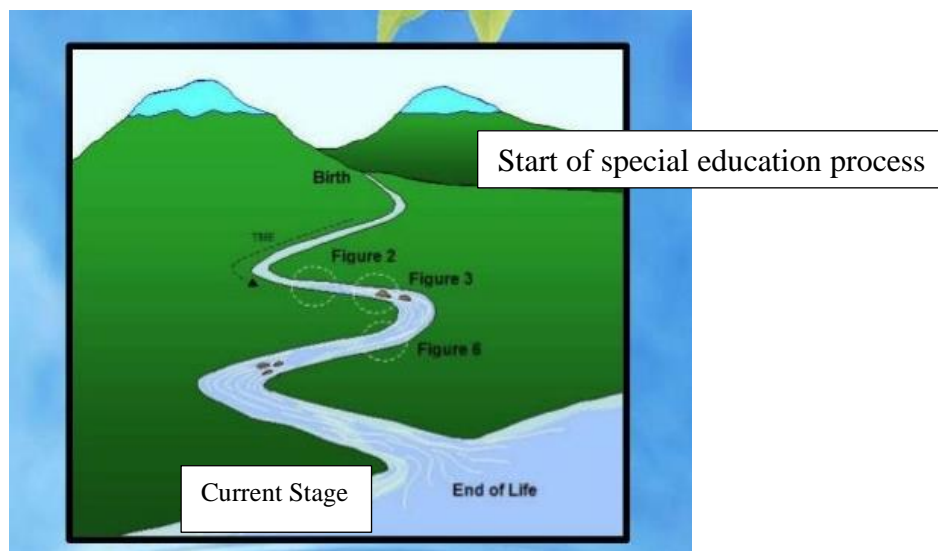


From "Concepts and structure", by Michael Iwama, n.d. figure 1. Retrieved May 10, 2020 from http://www.kawamodel.com.  This material reproduced/ replicated for fair educational purposes in CARD 7900, Summer 2020, Nova Southeastern University.

The turns can represent changes to the process, either formally or due to changes regarding conflict.

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Part I

Interview Guide for Mother Participants (Interview I)

1. Please describe the process of special education services for your child.
2. What was it like to experience conflict with the school regarding special education for your child?
3. What actions did you take as a result? (If the interviewee indicates influence by another person, then follow up with…) Tell me about how that person influenced you?
4. What are the unique aspects of your child needs that make it different or difficult for his / her education (if any)?
5. What were your first thoughts and feelings when you first disagreed with the school or special education process? What happened next? How did that change anything?
   Who was involved? When was that (in the process?) How were they involved?
6. Tell me about the initial phases of the process–how was the referral and eligibility process? Evaluation process? Can you describe any challenges you experienced? What elements ran smoothly?
7. Describe how you handled the disagreements? How did you learn to handle them? How do you view your role in the process? Did your view change over time?
8. As you look back on the challenges you had with the school or special education, are there any other events that stand out that you feel are important? How would you describe it? How did this event affect your interactions with the school?
9. Tell me about your meetings with the school for the IEP or 504 plans? How do you feel prior to entering those meetings? How do you feel during those meetings? After? What elements of your child's hidden disability influenced their responses? How was that reflected in the IEP report?
10. What helps you to manage conflicts with the school? What problems might you encounter? What are the sources of these problems?
11. What do you think are the most important ways to deal with disagreements with the school or special education process?
12. Is there anything else I should know to better understand conflict in special education?
13. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix F: Mother Interview Questions

(Interview II, Kawa)

1.  Looking at your drawing, what does the riverbed signify to you (context)?  Does the riverbed support or hinder your river flow and why? What do the boulders represent in your Kawa?  Why do you put those as barriers?
2.  How does having a child with a hidden disability influence your boulders?  Driftwood?  Riverbed?  River flow?
3.  How would you describe how you viewed the school before you experienced any challenges?  Has your view changed over time, and if so, how?
4.  Please tell me why you chose these elements as your driftwood.  How has your driftwood influenced or been influenced by your involvement with special education services?
5.  During the first interview I asked you, "What are the unique aspects of your child needs that make it different or difficult for his / her education (if any)?"  If you were to place those on the Kawa, what do you think would be an appropriate symbol and why?
6.  What lessons have you learned from this experience?  How have you addressed the boulders in your river flow?  Has your driftwood changed at all?  How?
7.  What are the most important ways to deal with disagreements with the school or special education process?  How would that influence river flow?
8.  Tell me about your river (longitudinal drawing) and the different water flows.  What is happening at each junction that affects flow?  Why did it change here…and here?  How would you describe the river flow currently?  What element has the biggest influence on your river flow as a barrier?  A flow opener?
9.  Who has been most helpful to you currently?  How has this person been helpful?  What might have turned out differently without this person's help?
10. Has any organization or resource been helpful?  What did _____ help you with and how did they help?  How has it been helpful? Do they belong somewhere on your drawing?
11. If you could do things differently, what would you do differently and why?
12. Is there something that you might not have thought about that occurred to you during this interview?
13. Is there anything else I should know to better understand conflict in special education?
14. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix G: Post Interview Memo Example

(Participant Three)

Interesting paradox between the idea of being a lawyer as a strength, but also a hindrance. As a lawyer, one would know the law and policy and be able to advocate effectively, however, the school sees her as a lawyer (perhaps over being "mom") and thus treats her differently. Makes the role of mother, advocate, and lawyer all blend together and challenging.

This case is unique because there are two children involved. Of particular interest is the idea that having two has unique consequences that school sees them as more needy or user of resources because there are two. Mom alluded to how it seems unrealistic to have two kids and yet, they do. How does this affect how the school deals with them or views them? How does this impact being mom/advocate for children? Does this give them more opportunity to become skilled, does this drain them more, does this increase the conflict or provide more contextual enablers? She felt her daughter was treated differently than her son and that there are differences in NVD that add complexity to the conflicts (for example, internalizing behaviors, reading difficulties) and resistance to support children with dyslexia.

P3 was pretty calm throughout the story and very fact based in her recount. She speaks like a lawyer and stayed on topic with the stories and it was the shorted interview yet, despite two children. However, she did emphasize fear, feelings of being overwhelmed and hopeful, put planning for worst thing. She also emphasized "distrust" as a significant element. Again idea of outside professionals and testing being helpful. Also repeating of grades another strategy by school and used by this family.

Curious about how the timelines of both children perhaps influence the overall conflict. This is first case that went to due process. Mom brought up interesting paradox of schools–the money they spend fighting is more than if they had just provided services— especially when they lose and have to provide anyway. What is that in conflict theory? She also has a recorded IEP she said she will share for archival data.

Conflicts seem to be structural in identification and eligibility, IEP meetings, and also provision of services. Covid seems to have added additional conflict dynamics.

# Appendix H: Second Cycle Coding Example

## (Participant Four)

SECOND CYCLE 6.16

**GREASE THE WHEELS**

Preempting/ Establishing/ ~~Proacting~~

- Parent setting up meetings prior to start of school
- Preempting advocacy efforts (add more context here)

~~Devoting~~/ Ameliorating/ ~~Augmenting~~/

- Parent moving to another state for services (parent advocating for appropriate services)
- Parent identifying appropriate environment for child

**WEATHER THE STORM** (successfully deal with difficult problem)

Navigating / ~~Gaming the system~~

- District contradicting previous school options
- School offering basics rather than best choice
- In Baltimore, accessibility a barrier—system creating barriers to access of services

Cultivating

- Strategizing to improve IEP meetings
- Strategizing for effective IEP meetings and advocacy
- Getting advice from external professionals
- Advocating with strategies (emails, bulleted points, etc)
- Parent utilizing advocate for external support
- Parent utilizing support system

~~Picking battles/ Deciding~~ / Prioritizing

- Utilizing strategy of picking battles
- Setting low expectations— picking battles
- Parent compromising with school-being flexible

**Experiencing success/ Attaining/ Gaining**

- Parent advocating with results
- Parent willing to compromise to meet needs of child-being flexible
- Gen ed teacher advocating to parent—secretly advising parent
- Parent advocating despite challenges—identifying role as advocate and quality control
- ~~YOU CANT MAKE AN OMELET WIHTOUT BREAKING SOME EGGS (bad effects)/~~

**FEAR THE BRUNT** (putting up with the worst of a bad situation)

Gainsaying

- Receiving contradictory (surprising) information
- School contradicting information
- Reducing services once child demonstrating improved performance
- IEP misaligning with stated needs
- Qualifying services misaligning with needs

Breaching (Violating?)|

- School denying solutions all or none
- School violating IEP
- Teacher violating HIPAA and FERPA (laws)
- School denying active participation of parents

~~Displacing/ Blaming/ Glitching~~/ Lacking

- School blaming child
- School using inappropriate intervention
- Teacher not communicating
- School lacking knowledge and understanding/training
- School expressing incompetence or feeling overwhelmed

**STAY THE COURSE**

Misgiving/ Doubting

- Feeling insecure and questioning ability to advocate
- Questioning school and self because trust is an issue
- Feeling insecure and questioning ability to advocate

Distressing/

- Receiving constant negative comments about son
- Feeling intimidated or outnumbered at IEP meeting
- Parent feeling hurt so advocacy more passive—walking the line of being liked and collaborating vs advocating
- Feeling tricked or shocked
- draining experience for resilient parents-questioning what it does to those who aren't resilient

Exasperating

- Feeling frustrated at process
- Process/ system requiring patience and compromise

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**NQ** Nicole Quint
Per ~~merriam webster~~, grease the wheels is to improve an essential or functioning part of an organization process or make things run smoothly or per the free dictionary, "to facilitate, expedite, ease or aid something or some process to make or help things run more smoothly or more easily

Looking at this interview and the codes, the preemptive actions were with the intent of trying to help things run more smoothly /to help the SPED process or teacher's ability to work with child be more functional

◀

**NQ** Nicole Quint
Stay the course emphasizes the emotional rollercoaster that you have to put up with as a parent

doubting is about parent feeling doubtful about abilities and advocacy

Distressing speaks to the negative elements of emotional rollercoaster and turmoil because it's child and get a lot of negative feedback

Exasperating is more about the frustration involved

**NQ** Nicole Quint
I went with bear the brunt because it's putting up with a bad situation rather than omelet, which is bad effects....

Gainsaying is really emphasizing contradictions, while breaching indicates the rules are not being followed. Displacing is emphasizing emphasis on wrong thing, while doubting is about parent feeling doubtful about abilities and advocacy

◀

Appendix I: Kawa Color Coding for Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Conflict Analysis

(Participant Four)



Kawa Coding: 1. Special education using inclusion model supportive to academic process

2. Mother experiencing maternal professional paradox of having education and awareness

3. School disagreeing with parent over time believing child is a behavior problem rather than focusing on disability and needs

4. Mother supporting advocacy and involvement through financial availability

5. Mother setting high expectations create situation for disappointment, perception she's difficult or demanding, but also supports advocacy efforts

6. Mother recalling negative past experiences causes her to question her ability to advocate, how to strategize, and creates trust issues (holding back, door number two, violating HIPAA/FERPA, not telling bullying scenario, contradicting information)

7. NONE-mother scratched this out as she was thinking through process

8. Mother attributing conflict with special education administrators to difficult personalities

9. Mother mistrusting SPED administrators, the 1st and 3rd grade teachers, and system (door #2)

10. Mother surmising that the school delayed identification and eligibility, as well as reducing services, to lack of resources

11. Mother postulating that teachers who struggle with her child have missing or holes in knowledge and training-thus feel incompetent

12. Mother's anxiety creating both a barrier with second guessing and confidence but also making her vigilant

13. Mother using support system of friends and other mothers to support the process, as well as an advocate

14. Mother problem solving and using knowledge as an asset to help her navigate system and strategize for meetings drawing the line