

**A Case Study of Behavioral Challenges in Athens: Exploring the Dynamics Between
Teacher Teams and Parents Regarding Classroom Inclusion**

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Abstract

This qualitative case study uses the combination of two theoretical lenses, parents' demands and the communication between the teacher team and parents, exploring how school-family interaction enlarges teachers' challenges regarding the inclusion of students with behavioral problems, and how teachers navigate the challenges. Seven teachers of a private school in Greece participated in the research, sharing their beliefs on integrating students with behavioral problems in a typical classroom, the challenges they experience, the role of parents in integration, and finally, which steps are followed to manage the challenges. The thematic analysis was used showing that 1) Teachers in private schools have various views on the integration of children with behavioral problems; 2) Teachers face challenges in integrating students in different domains, 2a) Parents from high socioeconomic status express various demands employing plenty of communication strategies concerning the integration; 3) Teachers manage the challenges by retrieving personal knowledge and experience, and by sharing with others the problem to make a decision. Future studies could focus on typical private schools to measure teachers' challenges using mixed-method research to make comparisons between experience, contradictions, and navigation. In that way, it could be examined to what extent teachers are independent and their self-efficacy. Lastly, this study might urge policymakers to identify problems and develop policies to support student integration and teachers' well-being.

Keywords: inclusion, behavioral problems, private school, teachers' challenges, teacher decision-making, parents' demands, parents'-teachers' interaction.

A Case Study of Behavioral Challenges in Athens: Exploring the Dynamics Between Teacher Teams and Parents Regarding Classroom Inclusion

Educational settings around the world strive to include all students, offering equal educational opportunities regardless of their age, gender, disabilities, and socioeconomic background (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016). However, including students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms is challenging. Teachers must implement inclusive practices such as differentiation, and personalization to address diverse students' needs (Alnahdi et al., 2022), while managing parents' contradictory expectations. Regarding parents' expectations, previous research showed that parents' expectations vary based on socioeconomic status. Parents from low to middle strata express various demands concerning the integration of students with behavioral problems (Narumanchi & Bhargava, 2011). In addition, research in private schools indicated that parents from high socioeconomic status desire high-quality education showing higher involvement levels, affecting the educational processes (Cetin, 2016). This involvement can complicate the integration, as teachers must navigate the parent's expectations and demands, apart from pedagogical challenges. Despite the existing literature, a gap was identified in understanding how parents from high socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds affect integration. On the one hand, it is known that socioeconomic status impacts decision-making in educational settings. On the other hand, there is a need for a deeper investigation into the challenges and demands posed by high SES families regarding the integration of students with behavioral problems.

Inclusion of Students With Behavioral Problems

In 1994, UNESCO and the government of Spain issued the International Inclusive Framework in Salamanca. The inclusive education framework advocates for an inclusive

classroom that addresses the students as equally important, coping with various forms of separation and exclusion through democratic pedagogical practices (Knight & Tony, 2000). The Salamanca Statement recognizes the varied needs of all learners, encouraging the inclusion of all children regardless of their motor, mental, social, behavioral, linguistic, or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994). Children have the fundamental right to education and must be allowed to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.

Embedding the principles of the Salamanca Statement and UNESCO guidelines, inclusive education is perceived as a dynamic approach to teaching and learning that supports the presence, participation, and achievement of all students, especially those vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (UNESCO, 2009). Teachers are expected to adhere to the inclusive framework supporting active participation in positive classroom interactions (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016). This approach stresses the importance of adapting educational environments to fit the needs of students rather than expecting students to adjust regardless of disability level—mild, moderate, and severe—(Garuba, 2003). This is especially crucial for students with behavioral problems, such as those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), and conduct disorders, because they often face multiple challenges in traditional educational settings due to the nature of their problems that require specific accommodations.

Students with behavioral problems often encounter challenges in social adaptation and academic achievement (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2011). These students exhibit learning difficulties not related to cognitive, sensory, or health problems but are associated with the manifestation of inappropriate behaviors, emotions, pervasive unhappiness, and depression (Kavale, 2005). Behavioral problems include inattention, physical aggression, emotional outbursts, teasing,

yelling, crying, and complaining, which are associated with academic failure and later delinquency (McCormick et al., 2013). Consequently, children with behavioral problems struggle to meet basic behavioral norms, engage in suitable interactions, or succeed in a standard curriculum without adaptations (Simpson, 2004). Despite students' capabilities to learn and form relationships, their inattention and emotional outbursts require additional support from teachers to keep pace with their peers.

Teachers' Beliefs About Inclusion

Generally, teachers show positive attitudes towards inclusion as they believe that all students gain by interacting with one another. A literature review by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) indicated that, in general, teachers express positive views about integrating children with special needs into typical educational settings. Teachers believe that the inclusion of students with disabilities can have positive effects on both the students with disabilities and their typically developing peers, enhancing their social, emotional, and academic development in language, arts, mathematics, sciences, and social sciences (Pappas et al., 2018).

However, the severity and the nature of the problem might influence teachers' beliefs. In the previous research conducted by Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), some teachers expressed the belief that only children with mild special educational needs were suitable for typical education. Students with severe educational needs find it difficult to be included in a typical classroom. Aside from the severity, the nature of behavioral problems also matters. Educators accept integrating children with mobility or visual impairments into typical educational settings more than students with behavioral problems (Hodkinson, 2006). They can integrate them and manage them better when the problem is a physical issue. Also, some teachers in another study showed a favorable attitude toward students with social difficulties but expressed concerns for students

who –specifically– have behavioral and academic issues (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Furthermore, there is a shared belief among teachers that successful integration depends on the availability of adequate resources. This includes access to special education services, professional development opportunities, an inclusive curriculum tailored to managing behavioral problems, and adequate help in the classroom. The lack of these resources can leave teachers feeling underprepared and hesitant about the effectiveness of inclusion practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Behavioral problems in a diverse classroom require, also, extra human support. The potential disruption to classroom dynamics and the increased demands on teacher time and resources stress the need for classroom support to effectively manage the teaching experience (Subban & Sharma, 2005).

Professional development plays a key role in shaping teachers' beliefs toward inclusion. Teachers who have received specialized training in behavior management and inclusive teaching strategies are more likely to hold positive views of inclusion and feel confident in their ability to effectively handle classroom challenges (Cassady, 2011).

Inclusive education requires positive attitudes as they have an impact on effectiveness. Previous research showed that the beliefs impact teaching methods across various domains such as classroom management, supporting students, cognitive stimulation, teaching approaches to evaluation patterns, and the design of lesson plans (Garrote et al., 2020). Namely, teachers who support inclusion might implement more inclusive practices.

Teachers' Challenges Managing an Inclusive Classroom

Teachers encounter challenges in integrating students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms. Previous research found that teachers face challenges referring to the methods used to deliver concepts related to the subjects being taught, highlighting the

instructional techniques (Steinberg et al., 1992). Namely, during the educational design teachers need guidance in planning the courses and implementing inclusive techniques suitable for all students addressing their abilities. In addition, Baker (2005) found challenges related to keeping defiant students involved, reaching the most difficult students, and keeping problems from ruining the class. Moreover, another finding was that teachers face challenges related to individualized reinforcement hierarchy, varying reinforcement schedules and documents for systematic evaluation, and implementing a behavioral intervention plan (Baker, 2005). Nevertheless, teachers' challenges in typical schools expand when parental demands are involved, especially those from high SES, concerning integrating students with behavioral problems due to the level of involvement.

Impact of High SES Parental Involvement on Teachers' Challenges

Ecological perspectives stress the significance of the interactions between parents (students' homes) and school environments in promoting positive outcomes for children's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). These interactions shape the child's development exclusively through the combined influences of both settings (Nokali et al., 2010; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009;). In particular, the interactions between school teams and families play a key role in integrating students with behavioral problems into diverse educational settings. This collaboration (in)directly influences the inclusion process and the teachers' challenges that are connected with parental socioeconomic status.

The influence of a family's socioeconomic status on educational expectations and parent involvement is well-established. Families with higher socioeconomic status spend more attention on education, which not only enhances academic performance in children but also raises parental expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). According to De Boer et al. (2010), parents' attitudes

toward the inclusion of students with behavioral problems are shaped by factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, previous experiences with inclusion, and the nature of the disability. Parents from high socioeconomic status typically engage more actively in the educational process. This involvement includes participation in the decision-making educational processes, interacting with the community and school, volunteering, and fostering educational activities at home (Cetin, 2016; De Boer et al., 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). A student's academic achievement can be greatly enhanced by a wealthy family because they can provide financial support, cultural resources, and educational opportunities (González et al., 2020). Parental involvement differs according to family income, with middle-class parents showing more interest in their children's educational pursuits than working-class parents as Strømme and Helland (2020) found. Results revealed that families who possess greater cultural resources are more likely to be involved in setting future educational goals for their children. Conversely, parents with greater economic resources tend to be more actively involved in children's present education, such as assisting with homework, compared to those with primarily cultural resources (Strømme & Helland, 2020).

Cetin (2016) highlighted that parents play a pivotal role in school-related decisions such as choices for (extra)curricular activities, instructional methods, participation in school boards and committees co-shaping the policies, and choices related to the allocation of school resources, thus affecting educational outcomes. For that reason, families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often prefer private schools, seeking greater opportunities for parental involvement and high-quality education (Cetin, 2016). Research by Crosnoe et al. (2010) indicated that the impact of parental involvement on educational outcomes can vary by socioeconomic status, suggesting that the benefits of such engagement are not equally distributed across different

socioeconomic groups. Socioeconomic status, not only defines the nature of demands and the level of involvement, but also how are expressed and secured. Parental involvement is the primary focus of the theoretical models of teacher-parent communication, school-based involvement, and home-based involvement, all of which have shown a correlation between parental involvement and family income (Li et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2017). The most important measure of parent-teacher communication is parental involvement (Park & Holloway, 2018).

In private schools, parents develop various communication strategies to express their concerns and demands, reflecting their socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents with greater financial means are more likely to be involved in their students' education (You et al., 2015), and the communication between teachers and parents is better (Strømme & Helland, 2020). Higher-income families have more active teacher-parent communication, according to Anthony and Ogg (2019), and good teacher-parent communication can help students do better academically (Anthony & Ogg, 2019). High-income parents have enough time and resources to interact with teachers via email and in-person interactions, among other means. The relationship between parental expectations for education and socioeconomic status is supported by these forms of participation. Smooth communication between the school and the family can positively influence educational processes and outcomes. Frequent communication between educators and parents can improve both the academic achievement of students and the morale of educators and parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In addition to providing parents with information on their children's learning and development, effective teacher-parent communication allows teachers to accurately assess their students' abilities (Powell et al., 2010). There is a causal relationship between the impact of teacher-parent communication on students' education and the academic success of their children (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Strategies used by teachers to navigate challenges

Navigating the challenges associated with including students with behavioral issues in private schools requires teachers to employ a range of strategies. Teachers must manage not only the educational needs of all students but also the expectations of parents. Effective conflict management is important for meeting educational, administrative, and organizational objectives. According to Mukazhanova and Nagymzhanova (2024), teachers by using and cultivating conflict management skills can turn a destructive conflict into constructive conflict fostering collaboration, a tranquil atmosphere within the school, and enhancing the educational experience.

Present Study

The integration of students with behavioral problems into a typical classroom creates challenges for teachers. This qualitative case study focuses on a private school in Athens, Greece, examining how the interaction between parents and teachers influences these challenges. The research investigates teachers' beliefs about inclusion, the nature of challenges teachers experience, and the strategies they employ to manage these challenges. In addition, it stresses the role of parents, particularly those from high strata, as they intervene in the educational processes through their expectations and communication strategies.

This study aims to investigate the dynamics of teacher teams and parents regarding the inclusion of children with behavioral problems in a private school, and strategies related to managing the challenges. To approach the aims of this study three research questions were formulated: 1) What do teachers believe about including children with behavioral problems in typical classrooms in the private school? 2) How does the inclusion of students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms impact teachers' pedagogical practices and communication of

teacher team with parents? 3) What strategies do teachers use to navigate challenges associated with including students with behavioral issues in private schools? To address these research questions a qualitative study case was conducted to investigate the relationship between the teacher team and parents in a private typical school concerning the integration of students with behavioral problems through the combination of the lenses of parents' demands and the communication between the teacher team and parents. The findings of this study will enrich the existing literature about the teachers' varying beliefs regarding the integration of students with behavioral problems. Also, the outcome of this study will contribute to understanding the multilayered role of parents from high SES in the integration process and finally, it will provide practical suggestions for teachers and policymakers to support the effective implementation of inclusive practices in typical classrooms.

Method

Author Positionality

In the spirit of self-reflexivity (Holmes, 2020), I have acknowledged my standpoint as a Greek-certified preschool teacher with knowledge and experience in special education. Having faced various challenges integrating students with behavioral problems in typical private schools in Athens, I recognize that my positionality has influenced this research to some extent; Serving families from high socioeconomic status, I have experienced challenges related to students' performance, assessment, and social integration of the students. Students with BP often struggle to follow the daily routine, adhere to social norms, follow instructions, and engage in group activities with classmates. Moreover, I have faced challenges with the parents of the typically developing students, who have required social limitations of students with behavioral problems. To ensure the quality of my research, I reflect on my own biases, assumptions, and experiences

throughout the research process. I engage in peer reviewing, and looking at the problems as an insider and outsider.

Methodological Approach

I conducted a qualitative explanatory case study through the combination of two theoretical lenses, parents' demands and the communication between the teacher team and parents to understand better the challenges experienced by teachers in a private primary school in Athens when dealing with the integration of students with behavioral problems. The explanatory case studies deepen (our) understanding of the causal paths leading to certain outcomes.

Flyvbjerg (2006) emphasizes that the explanatory case study is crucial for cutting up complex issues where multiple variables interact in dynamic ways, making them ideal for fields such as social sciences, business, and education. Moreover, Berman (2007) outlined four benefits of case studies: their ability to achieve high conceptual validity, their effective procedures for generating new hypotheses, their suitability for closely scrutinizing the proposed role of causal mechanisms within specific cases, and their capability to address complex causal relationships.

Case Study

This case study focuses on the teacher team at a private school located in a residential suburb in the southern region of the city of Athens. The school is known for its support to students and parents offering monthly parental meetings, psychological sessions, and workshops. In addition, the school provides an emotional educational program to students by the school psychologist who monitors the students weekly, and consults and trains the teachers. Despite these specific services, the school belongs to typical schools, –not special needs schools–, implementing the Greek syllabus. The school employs 7 teachers who offer lessons for all grades (1 to 6 grade). The educators know special educational needs (SEN) at different levels,

supporting typical and non-typically developing students. The number of primary students is 110. The majority of the students have Greek nationality and come from middle to high socioeconomic status. In Greece, there are two types of schools, public and private. In public schools, parents educate their children for free, whilst in private they pay fees depending on the school. This school is private, which means that parents pay tuition fees to educate their children. This school has less expensive tuition fees compared to others in the wider region.

The participants correspond to the full teaching team of the school ($N = 7$). All the participants were Greek female certified teachers working full-time. Their educational experience ranged from 1 to 13 years. Regarding their educational background related to SEN, five teachers had masters related to special educational needs, and two teachers had observed a workshop on special education needs (SEN). Generally, all the teachers observe mandatory workshops provided by the school psychologist assigned to students' needs (Appendix A).

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was created to collect teachers' experiences and beliefs regarding the inclusion of students with behavioral problems and the challenges teachers face in a private school. I created a semi-structured interview guide by making a list of open-ended questions to allow teachers to express their thoughts and feelings naturally, leaving space for follow-up questions. Except for open-ended questions, I also used direct questions to clarify some ideas. The semi-structured interview supported my investigation to understand the complex causal relationships. Teachers elaborate on their experiences revealing the causes of their challenges and their relationship with parents.

The interview guide (Appendix B) was organized around two main parts. The first part was introductory. Firstly, I referred to ethical considerations referring to my study. After that, I

clarified to teachers that there is no correct or incorrect answer to motivate them to express their thoughts as they were. Also, I made clear to them what are challenges, and behavioral problems to have the same idea about the concepts. Then, we discussed the demographics in a warm-up form to describe the population referring to experience, education, the characteristics of the class, and grade. The second part was focused on collecting information about teachers' beliefs about the integration of students with BP in typical classrooms, the communication strategies of parents influencing the integration of students with BP, and, how teachers manage challenges. More specifically, during the interviews, the participants shared their beliefs about the inclusivity of students with behavioral problems, challenges, parental involvement, parents' advocacy, and the decision-making process. To help teachers produce more detailed and accurate memories of events, I asked them to recall students who presented patterns of behavioral problems and told them to describe one or more incidents. This technique stems from the psychology field and enhances memory retrieval (Bekerian & Dennett, 1993). The interviews took between 30 to 60 minutes (mean duration 45 minutes). Greek tongue and everyday language were used, accompanied with specific terms to ensure understanding and accessibility for all teachers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009).

This instrument could be applicable for future research related to teachers' challenges and navigating ways of teachers' challenges in other educational settings. It was effective for my purposes as the teachers shared their stories and experiences, providing rich, detailed, and heavily contextualized descriptions from each source about the contradictions faced in this school, including students with behavioral problems, and how they navigate these challenges (Levitt et al., 2018).

Procedure

The current study started in December. In March, I sent an invitation letter (in the Greek language) to the private school and the consent form. The invitation letter invited the teachers of the school to participate voluntarily. The letter, also, included information about the study, the interview (duration, recording, communication application–Kaltura–), the expectations, the requirements to be a candidate, awareness about sensitive topics, privacy, ethics, and my personal information such as my email and phone number if someone wanted to ask specific questions. Additionally, informed consent necessitates that participants consent to their involvement, the recording of their participation, the sharing of personal data, and the processing of personal data, all of which are confirmed with their signature.

After receiving the teachers' consent forms and their availability, I sent them scheduled interviews by email. Due to the distance (Greece-Netherlands), the interviews were held online via Kaltura Classroom. I interviewed the participants once for 30 to 60 minutes, over 3 weeks. The interviews were conducted in the Greek language. After completion, the interviews were initially transcribed in the Greek language and then translated into English.

Analysis

The thematic analysis used involves the organization of data and the identification of recurring and overarching topics. The distribution and prevalence of themes guided the writing process and reflection on the research questions, supported by relevant scientific literature (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To answer the research questions, inductive thematic analysis was adopted. Namely, inductive coding and theme development involved working 'bottom-up' from the data, and developing codes (and ultimately themes) using what was in the data as the starting point. I followed the six-phase analysis framework by Clarke and Braun (2014) by employing a

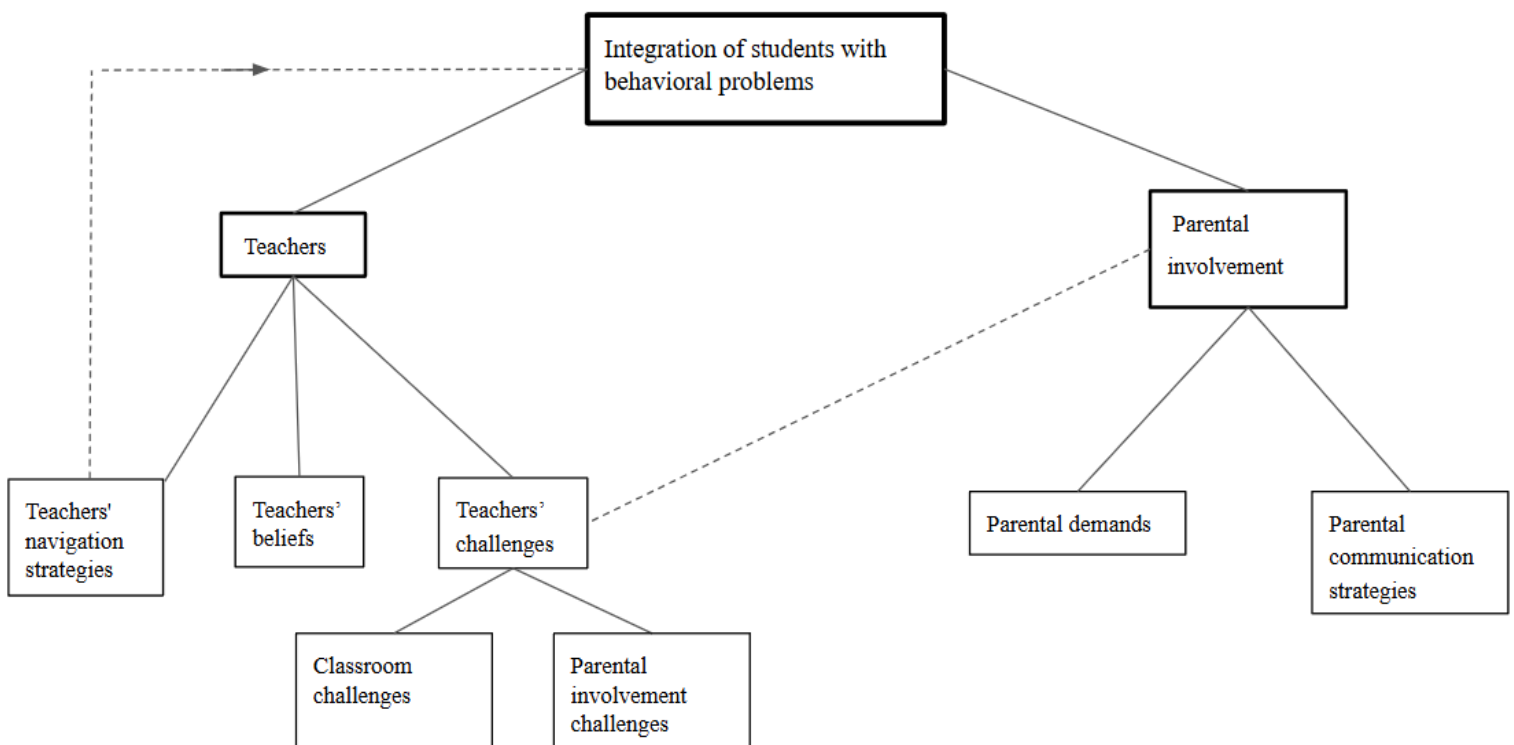
six-phase process in our Thematic Analysis (TA) approach. I moved between phases, starting with becoming familiar with the data during collection. Generating codes came next, followed by identifying themes as draft versions. Reviewing potential themes was then undertaken, leading to the final phase of producing the report, which offered a chance to strengthen the analysis and communicate the researchers' narrative effectively.

Results

The analysis was grouped around 4 overarching themes: teachers' beliefs, teachers' challenges, parental involvement, and teachers' decision paths. A thematic map (Figure 1) was formed to show the intersections between the factors affecting students' integration.

Figure 1

Thematic Map: Intersections Between the Factors Affecting Students' Integration.



Teacher's Beliefs

Regarding the first research question, *What are teachers' beliefs about the inclusion of children with behavioral problems in mainstream classrooms?* there were three main views as teachers express their beliefs: *one school for all, inclusivity if possible, and you can't, severity matters.*

To begin with, under the first view, there are teachers who believe that all students regardless of their characteristics should be in the same school and share the same classroom advocating for *one school for all*. Special Needs schools have no place to exist calling all students to be together. Schools are social communities that represent the society in which people co-exist, live, and interact. For that reason, teachers try to integrate all students and inform them. However, to ensure that schools for all could be functional school teams have to be fully equipped following a proper curriculum to support all students providing them equal opportunities.

The teacher Maria in the following quote expresses her opinion straight forward. She supports that the integration of students with behavioral problems is a difficult task for the teachers, but could be achieved if the school team is trained and qualified to identify, support, and make adaptations such as adjustments to the curriculum. The curriculum has to be responsive to students' needs. A proper curriculum could help the teacher to be prepared and more effective in their responsibilities.

“I am in favor. I want special schools to stop existing. I think it's a great system where there are no special schools, there's inclusion, and all children are integrated everywhere. I believe that with proper planning, with a proper curriculum for teachers, kindergarten teachers, and generally everyone, and for caregivers and nurses, and all the

pieces, at least some basic things must and can happen. I think it's difficult but not impossible” (Maria)

Teacher Ioanna developed the idea of equality by saying that teachers help students with behavioral needs to be integrated by providing them what they need, but simultaneously support the rest classroom to accept and identify the differentiation. This teacher provides the necessary support to each person to maintain balance and all together live and grow.

“I can help that particular child, but also the whole class because obviously, they’re not just units, we’re in a social context, relationships are developing, and one child influences another. So to help the individual child and the class in general and keep the balance” (Ioanna)

Secondly, there is another view of *Inclusion if possible* under which teachers believe that inclusion can happen under certain circumstances such as a specific number of students, the level of severity, and the assistance of parallel support. In addition, most teachers support the integration of students with behavioral problems under certain conditions. They require a smaller number of students per classroom and a specific proportion of students with behavioral problems in the classroom. Those requirements are created from their experience as they can manage and monitor better classroom’ needs. However, the number of students is connected with the severity, as some teachers said that only one student with a severe behavioral problem could need much more attention, effort, and big adaptations to be integrated into the mainstream classroom than a student with a mild behavioral problem. A teacher named Vaso stated referring to several students:

“I fully agree with it happening, but not with the way it happens. That better work can be done with a smaller number of children. Things are more manageable that way. I believe

that, as a ratio, whatever it may be, can be solved” (Vaso)

Furthermore, to better integrate the students in need, some teachers require support from another qualified teacher to share the responsibility of the classroom and monitor the students better. This idea was expressed by Georgia “ *I think if there are two educators in each class, it can happen. Not one, and one in parallel. I simply think there should be two educators”*. Other teachers said that they need experts’ support –*parallel support*– in the classroom to individually support the students with special needs and collaborate with the teacher for the common good of the student. This requirement is crucial, as another teacher said that face many challenges during the course because some students with behavioral problems face difficulties in controlling themselves and their behavior as a result of going out of the classroom without taking permission or disrupting the flow of the teaching that teachers hardly can manage. The following quote stresses the role of the support stated by a teacher:

“It's difficult for this child to be incorporated because the student needs disruptive factors, it's very difficult for him to focus. But I believe that if there was a more supportive framework from the parallel support teacher, like if he said "Look here, we're saying this now, pay attention.." and whispered softly” (Loukia)

This teacher shared that parallel support is needed as it can help the students to participate or to understand the lesson better when there are problems with concentration. The guidance might lead to better cognitive outcomes and ensure an inclusive educational environment for all students. However, teachers are partially satisfied with having parallel support in the classroom to assist the teachers and students. They could be satisfied and integrate the students better if they knew the problems of the students. A quote stated by Anna illustrates the teacher's need to know the problem “*The diagnosis was not disclosed to the school. I didn't see anything. And I was*

pressing quite a bit at that moment. I wanted to see it". It seems that parents are afraid of being open to teachers. The family did not want to show the diagnosis because they were afraid that the students would be treated differently. In contrast, teachers want to have knowledge of the problem, otherwise, teachers face much more difficulties in integrating students in need as they spend more energy understanding the needs and designing a beneficial lesson plan for all.

Finally, under the third view –*You can't, severity matters*– lying teachers who stated that some students could not be in a typical classroom when their behavioral problems were severe as the teacher faced many difficulties in addressing them. They imply that parallel support can't help. The following quotation phrased by teacher Dido expresses this belief "*Um, it depends on the degree. Because I have, let's say, another child in the class who has parallel support, which for me shouldn't be in a regular school*". The teacher supports excluding students with severe problems from typical schools when the problems refer to cognitive and social skills as the children struggle to participate, respond to others, and interact. In that way, teachers do not know how to integrate this child. Moreover, the teacher said that even if the children have parallel support, the problem remains.

Teachers' challenges

Regarding the second research question *How does the inclusion of students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms impact teachers' pedagogical practices and communication of teacher team with parents?* two subthemes were revealed: teachers' challenges concerning integration within the classroom environment and, teachers' challenges cornering the involvement of parents.

Under the theme of teachers' challenges concerning the integration within the classrooms' environment emerged challenges regarding the support of students in all domains, the managing

of teachers' personal feelings, and the challenges connected with the managing of parents' mediators. Teachers supporting students with behavioral problems face daily challenges in the cognitive and social domains. Teachers have to manage situations in which typical classmates complain, are concerned, and share bad incidents. In that case, teachers face various challenges of how to explain the situation, how to resolve the situation, and how to inform the students about these cases. Above there is an example of a challenging social integration by a teacher:

“Yes, I was in a very difficult position, and there were many conflicts because I had to explain to the other children. When he was absent, I had a discussion with them that Aristotelis has difficulty with some things and sometimes misinterprets your behaviors, and that's why he responds that way. When you see him yelling or shouting, he's not doing it to make you laugh but because he's genuinely struggling at that moment or that day in general because he had difficult days. Maybe he had a bad day all day.” (Maria)

This teacher tried to integrate the student in need by explaining to classmates more things about the characteristics of the student with behavior problems to help them understand the situation, and how to manage him with future perspectives. This example showed that the teachers experience difficult times in daily conversations when they have to explain to other students how they should perceive students with behavioral problems. These conversations are very crucial for integration because teachers have to show empathy and understanding to both sides and make decisions on how to manage these situations. Another social challenge, that is connected with academic support, is the understanding of students' needs because in some cases the students are unresponsive, apathetic, and silent:

“doesn't speak, I mean, she doesn't speak at all. I mean, you can address her and she'll look at you and not respond. So, there it becomes difficult. She needs to follow a certain

flow and move because she's fallen quite behind socially, academically, and emotionally.”(Zoi)

This student can not communicate and interact with the environment, making the integration challenging for the teacher. Teachers do not know what they have to do and how they can help, trying different approaches. In addition, teachers face challenges regarding the cognitive support of students. This challenge refers to curriculum adaptations teachers should do to support students with difficulties in the academic domain. However, in this research, teachers referred to slight adaptations as almost all the children with behavioral problems had excellent cognitive performance because their parents offer human support to students who design individualized plans in and out of the school settings:

“I have made individual adjustments. This means he doesn't write the same copy as the other children, he takes a smaller piece and reads less than the others. And there are also some chapters that he does differently. Although academically this child is quite good. He already knows many things that are completely unknown in the first year of primary school. He just struggles a lot because this child has ADHD. So they struggle a lot both physically and behaviorally.” (Sofia)

This teacher said that this student knows more things in comparison to his age but struggles to follow the curriculum as it is due to the behavioral problems that affect his performance. To integrate him, the teacher faces challenges in designing an individualized plan based on his skills, while simultaneously keeping up with his classmates.

Furthermore, teachers face challenges with the human support that accompanies the children in need. Parents from high socioeconomic status to secure and monitor the integration of their children put representatives to monitor and influence the instructional practices in the

classroom. However, according to a teacher, an assistant teacher could be inappropriate for these tasks worsening the teachers' challenges:

“The parallel support teacher is a psychologist. His intervention in the class is not intense. Also, regarding the aspect of parallel support, from what I have experienced, um, there is also a lot of indifference many times. He doesn't intervene. It's quite common for the companion of parallel support to be on their phone during class.” (Georgia)

In this example, the teacher expects the parallel support to intervene, support, and follow the classroom norms. In that case teacher experienced challenges as this person did not assist the student nor respect her teaching as he used his phone to distract and annoy her with his gestures. Finally, some teachers when integrating students with behavioral problems, also, emotional challenges. Many of them have found themselves in a psychological dead end. To better understand this view, quotes are followed below by two teachers:

“I was helpless and if you ask me what I felt after a certain point, I felt desperate not wanting to go to work at all. I was wondering what else I was going to see today. What else am I gonna...” (Loukia)

This teacher due to the challenges experienced in her effort to integrate students with behavioral problems displayed bad feelings about her job expressing her bad emotional challenges. In addition, another teacher faces the same feelings due to the tensions and contradictions:

“There was a terrible tension in the classroom. I couldn't do my work in class. I couldn't get on with the class. It was a very good class that started to go downhill just because I had to go out because this kid was yelling and cursing and leaving the class and I would

go out and chase him down to make sure he didn't do something. Whenever I was outside with this kid, and the rest of the class was in the write..." (Maria)

This teacher shared that a student with behavioral problems affected her teaching and then the outcomes of the classroom (at the academic level) because she couldn't complete the lessons or she had to leave the classroom to protect the student with behavioral problems. She also used the metaphor "downhill" to stress the decreasing effectiveness of her teaching and the outcomes of students.

Following the second theme about *teachers' challenges cornering the involvement of parents*, the analysis revealed that teachers experience challenges when receiving parental demands, and when managing parents' communication strategies concerning the integration. Regarding the challenges stemming from parental demands, teachers have to manage the conflicting direct demands of parents of typically developing students. Parents ask for the exclusion of students depending on the severity of the behavioral problem. For parents, the problem is huge when the students display aggressive, abusive, or oppositional behavior meaning that the typically developing student is in danger of emotional or physical damage. For that reason, parents demand that students with behavioral problems be expelled from school, not socialize, or have different classrooms as a teacher shared: *"They've mostly complained, like saying he bullies our children, or that I don't want my child to hang out with him"*. This example highlights the reasons why teachers face challenges in integrating all students, as parents expect undesirable and conflicting things from the teachers such as social limitations.

On top of that, in some cases, demands are provided indirectly, as parents use mediators to share their thoughts and expectations. Parents of students with BP to support their children in and out of the school setting collaborate with *"speech therapist, occupational therapist,*

psychotherapist, play therapist, and anything related to therapy, and basically, the medical center“ as a teacher shared. Despite the benefits of these services, those mediators might replace the role of the teachers, making the teachers feel underestimated, and neglected or uninvolved in the decision-making processes about the integration as Niki stated:

“I only spoke with the parallel support, with the girl... who had already discussed it with the mother beforehand, and they had talked about it between them and both agreed for me to participate and make observations so I can also listen to the child.” (Niki)

Except for this example, there are cases where the mediators create challenging situations for the teacher as they intervene in educational practices and impose things: *“Of course, this approach is a fixed position of the external institution that offers psychological support and monitors the student”* stresses the high influence of the mediators and parents’ inclination to external actors.

Further, the analysis revealed that parents use the principal as a mediator to communicate their concerns, when they disagree with teachers. In that way, teachers feel ineffective or incorrect, and many times misunderstandings come up.

“.. but she went to the principal and said that ...I felt very, very great sadness and disappointment actually because I didn't expect the principal who has been watching me for so long, who has seen me in the classroom to believe it.....The next day, I was psychologically a mess. And I tell you, I doubted myself, is it possible for them to say this, etc.” (Vaso)

Consequently, this example shows that parents in private schools to ensure the integration of their children in the expected way, except for their communication with teachers, meet with the principal to receive favorable and desirable treatment. Parents might believe that in that way

they will pressure the teacher to comply with them.

Lastly, the challenges concerning parental demands become more difficult when parents collectively reach the teacher team to express their problems. This phenomenon happens when the requirement is very serious such as expelling a child from school. Also, the collective style happens when the students with behavioral problems act dangerously toward the other children as a teacher shared: *“She asked for consent herself from the other moms on Social application, so she decided to take the photos and announce...”*. This mum of a typical student approaches the parents in a group chat to ask them for their permission to take photos of a student with behavioral problems to take legal action against him.

Recapitulating to this point the results, teachers have different beliefs toward the inclusion of students with behavioral problems. Some of them support the idea of inclusion, others believe in inclusion under certain circumstances, and others believe that inclusion is not for all students. Then, parents come next with their various demands that burden existing teachers' challenges. In addition, some of the demands are contrary to teachers' beliefs leading teachers to manage this situation and navigate the challenges. Naturally, the following section refers to navigation strategies for the challenges.

Teachers' Navigation

Regarding the third research question *What strategies do teachers use to navigate challenges associated with including students with behavioral issues in private schools?* the analysis revealed two subthemes: teachers handle the situation alone and/or, teachers share the problem with others. Teachers tackle the challenges by making decisions individually retrieving their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs. They individually respond to challenges associated with the balance of the classroom by implementing adaptations to lesson plans, and activities,

introducing to the classroom the behavioral problems, and informing all students about inclusion by doing activities. This teacher solves the challenges alone using the following strategies:

“Balance situations...how I can help the individual child. I tried to explain it to him, we can discuss it a lot..tried to give it a role..by strengthening the positive elements of the child, possibly weakening the weaknesses...I try to do activities, we read stories to strengthen the relationships between them, we work in groups, we do anything that comes up we discuss, we don't let go, subjects that will be more interesting for the children, and constantly remind of the boundaries and rules” (Niki)

This teacher shared her pedagogical tools, strategies, and techniques concerning the integration of students with oppositional defiant disorder which was used to solve contradictions during the lesson. Furthermore, when a challenge arises, they devote time to thinking of suitable ways to tackle each problem or generate new tools. They also self-reflect asking themselves -what can I do?-Can I do it better? Spending time with themselves. Some of them, devote time at home to reading and finding better strategies to develop their existing pedagogical and instructional tools. Above there are quotes from teachers sharing how they manage challenging situations alone:

“First, I try, based on my experience so far, .. I will try to mix all the ways that I have found most effective in dealing with each situation that I have in front of me...” (Maria)

“I have some new ideas, new tools that I could apply in each case to help the situation, and after I have gathered some ideas and I have in my mind some solutions” (Niki)

These teachers searched for solutions based on their experience and knowledge. They implemented strategies and pedagogical tools that they already knew and tried to help children

who displayed similar characteristics. Following, another teacher shared how she manages parents by putting limits:

"There were interfering mothers who would call and say oh my child, but I set limits. I mean, you know, "The child is here right now, how we handle it concerns me, the school psychologist, and the principal, you made this choice" (Maria)

In that way, the teacher manages contradictions by setting limits for parents. In these cases, the teachers manage the situations alone. On the other hand, teachers can communicate their challenges concerning the integration of students with behavioral problems with the school team, parents, representatives of the family, teachers' significant others, and governmental organizations. In the example, teachers share with the school team possible strategies to take feedback and ask for help.

"...after I have gathered some ideas and I have in my mind some solutions, I will move to the headmaster to inform her about the situation and suggest how I can approach it, and of course to the school psychologist. Those would be my first moves.."(Georgia)

Teachers share their challenges and want to enrich their knowledge by interacting with experienced colleagues, the school psychologist, and the equipped and skillful principal of the school. They discuss different themes such as strategies, tools, adaptations, management of behavior, and problems with the parents. This quote indicates teachers' decision steps:

"..I am constantly learning it and therefore I have to have some solutions in mind, and some suggestions, and then I have to talk to the head teacher, and the psychologist, who will certainly have some suggestions to give me on their part or to embellish mine."

(Niki)

In this case, the teacher devoted time to herself to think about how she could manage a situation, and then, she reached the school principal and psychologist to get their permission. Obviously, within the school, there is a collaboration between teachers and school support, and all the school team is informed about the decisions.

Furthermore, it is very common for the teacher to contact representatives of the student such as parents, parallel support, family psychologists, student psychologists, students' therapists, and external support such as the Interscience center that offers all the specialties and monitors the student simultaneously: *"let's say, talk to special educators on the phone, and I say my target, they say theirs"*.

Moreover, families of students with behavioral problems have private parallel support (hired by the family) for their children. Parallel support is responsible for the integration of the student and the continuous monitor. Consequently, teachers and parallel support often work collaboratively and make informed decisions: *"So during this quarter, I was talking to the parallel support, and she was telling me that his situation is very difficult"*.

Besides, teachers of this school share their challenges with their network, for example, psychologists and family members. The psychologist of the teacher helped her to understand better the situation, whilst the family member was a prior teacher with experience that the teacher could trust. Finally, when the situation is very challenging and parents are not willing to help the teacher to integrate, the teacher team asks for support from the government to take over the situation as in Greece the government offers support referring to child protection.

"I asked the school counselor for help, yes, and the school psychologists. Now they've changed. Uh, I had asked him to come, who had come then, and he met the kid" (Zoi)

In this example, the teacher asked for help from experts because she couldn't manage the

situation due to the severity and the family background. She asked for help from the school psychologist and the school counselor.

Finally, another effective approach employed by teachers to manage conflicts and challenges with parents is reframing and reorienting the situation as a teacher shared: *“No, but I always reframe it with a positive sign”*. In that case, the teachers listen to the parents’ view, and then they say their point of view developing an argument that focuses on the benefits of teachers’ views and ways of reasoning. They express their disagreement diplomatically by sharing their knowledge, experience, and their rationale.

Discussion & Conclusion

The case study set out to reveal challenges concerning the inclusion of students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms in a private primary school in a Southern suburb of Athens, Greece. To approach this issue, a qualitative case study was conducted focusing on three research questions: 1) What do teachers believe about including children with behavioral problems in mainstream classrooms? 2) How does the inclusion of students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms impact teachers' pedagogical practices and communication of teacher team with parents? 3) How do teachers navigate contradictions associated with including students with behavioral issues in private schools?

In this study, teachers expressed various views regarding the inclusion of students with behavioral problems in typical classrooms. Some of them supported that all students have to be in the same classroom, and special needs schools have to stop existing. They support that all students have to co-exist and interact with each other as the school is a social context reflecting the real world. School teams have to be trained to support all students following a proper curriculum. Some other teachers supported the inclusion under specific circumstances such as

the existence of human support, proper curriculum, a specific number of students, and collaboration with the family. Finally, there was a view that supported the exclusion of students with severe behavioral problems even if there is parallel support provided by the family, as the students' problems and challenges remain. Those findings are aligned with the previous findings about teachers' beliefs on the inclusion of students with behavioral problems advocated for the existence of school support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), family support (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009), and stress the factor of severity on teachers' beliefs (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Finally, teachers' views varied as they had different levels of knowledge in SEN and different years of experience. Previous research showed that beliefs are shaped based on personal factors like teacher training, knowledge, and experience (Cassady, 2011; Hegarty, 1994; Meijer, 2003; Norwich, 1994; Batsiou et al., 2008; Vignes et al., 2009).

Regarding teachers' challenges, the analysis revealed that teachers face pedagogical challenges that extend due to parental involvement. Teachers face challenges in discussing difficult events that involve students with behavioral problems and introducing the nature of behavioral problems to students. Teachers address this situation differently due to their different educational backgrounds (Cassady, 2011). Moreover, they face challenges in the academic domain for two reasons. Firstly, teachers face challenges in communicating with the students with BP and afterward understanding students' needs and difficulties, managing disruptive behaviors, designing individual plans, and then because parents get involved in the educational process indirectly. Parents from high socioeconomic status support and monitor students with behavioral problems in and out of school collaborating with various specialties such as psychologists, speech therapists, tutors, and more. On the other hand, the support in the school setting creates challenges for the teachers when the students' individual support is inappropriate

as they do not intervene and disrupt the teachers. On the other hand, teachers face challenges when parents of students with behavioral problems provide indirectly specific demands using mediators. To begin with, parents transfer their demands and monitor the integration of their children using mediators like experts to make decisions and communicate with teachers.

In addition, it is found that parents ignore teachers' opinions or underestimate them. Parents prefer to discuss with external experts or the principal about the integration. The teacher is the final recipient of the message and the decision as family representatives intervene in instructional plans and pedagogical practices without asking for teachers' views. Consequently, teachers face also emotional challenges because they feel insufficient, neglected, and inadequate. The various communicational channels employed by parents to provide their demands and monitor the integration are connected with high socioeconomic status and high expectations. Previous studies showed that parents from high socioeconomic status are getting involved in educational processes and having an active role in student development by providing extra services in and out of the school as research by González et al. (2020), De Boer et al. (2010), Lareau (2018), and Crosnoe et al. (2010). In this school, all students with behavioral problems had parallel support (experts guiding the students) hired and paid by parents to individually support their children. Also, the support of parents from high SES is defined by offering extra services at home such as tutors, psychologists, occupational therapists, and drama therapists. Moreover, the various types of direct and indirect communication show the level of interest of parents in students' academic achievement as previous research by Powell et al. (2010) and Epstein and Salinas (2004) found.

Finally, analysis reveals that teachers experiencing challenges in this private school made decisions alone based on their knowledge or shared their challenges with the school

team–principal, school psychologists, colleagues–, significant others, and students’ representatives–parents, experts, parallel support, tutors– to make a decision together. On the one hand, teachers try to foster collaboration and enhance the educational experience as a previous study by Mukazhanova and Nagymzhanova (2024) found, whilst other teachers who feel more confident in their abilities can handle the classroom challenges alone as Cassady (2011) found. Consequently, teachers in this private typical school despite their knowledge of SEN and and the psychological support, continued to experience contradictions to some level, which were solved alone or with the support of the school and parents of students. All teachers approached the equipped and skillful principal and school psychologist to ask for support that stresses the importance of having professionals in the school environment.

In summary, parents in this private typical school in Greece affect the level of integration of students with behavioral problems and development as they affect to educational process and students’ outcomes. Moreover, parents support their students’ development and integration by providing support to students with behavioral problems in and out of the school such as tutors, experts, and parallel support. While there are benefits to parental involvement, there are drawbacks as the parents getting involved in educational processes by posing conflicting demands to the teachers and by putting other people as mediators to advocate for their demands. These indirect and direct ways to express parents' demands expand teachers’ contradictions. Teachers manage the contradictions based on their experience, knowledge, and readiness either individually or/jointly with colleagues, parents, and experts.

Limitations

This case study relied on teacher-team perspectives without incorporating the experiences of other informative sources such as parents, psychologists, parallel support, external experts, or

the school principal. Including a wider range of stakeholders would provide a deeper understanding of the interactions and challenges involved in integrating students with behavioral problems. Future research should consider a larger-scale study involving various private schools, and incorporate perspectives from parents, school staff, and other school-relevant stakeholders to produce a holistic view of the challenges developing by the human dynamics. Finally, the particular context of this school, including its cultural and socioeconomic environment might limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings where the cultural factors differ.

Implications

This study might inform educational stakeholders about the challenges teachers may face due to parental involvement in the integration process of students with behavioral problems in private schools. It concludes teachers' beliefs in a specific setting, varied challenges, and teacher navigation. Educational policymakers can use the findings to develop policies related to the integration of students in need, teachers can find similarities with their experiences and principals can develop a supportive framework for teachers such as inclusive psychologists, inclusive teacher assistants, proper curriculum, ongoing training, and improved communication strategies with parents.

Future research

In the future, this study could enhance the findings by conducting mixed methods research examining how the internal factors affect the nature of possible contradictions concerning the integration of students with behavioral problems. Moreover, it would be better to conduct this study in private schools that lack training programs and their teachers are not equipped enough to include students with behavioral problems.

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Appendix A

Demographic characteristics of teachers

Participants	Years of experience	Gender	Knowledge in SEN
Teacher 1	3	Female	Workshops at school & Master
Teacher 2	10	Female	Workshops at school
Teacher 3	1	Female	Workshops at school & Master
Teacher 4	1	Female	Workshops at school & Master
Teacher 5	13	Female	Workshops at school & Master
Teacher 6	1	Female	Workshops at school & Seminar in SEN
Teacher 7	3	Female	Workshops at school & Master & seminar in SEN
Range	1-13 years of experience		

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Would you like to talk about your studies? ● How many years have you been working at this school? ● What grade do you teach? ● How many students do you have? ● Would you like to describe your class? ● What is your opinion on including students with behavioral problems in mainstream classrooms? ● How can all students coexist harmoniously in the same class? ● Is there any child in your class who has behavioral issues? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you ever had a student with behavioral peculiarities?

- Can you recall a specific incident or situation where you struggled to handle a child with behavioral challenges? Take your time to remember this period. When you're ready, let me know.
- Would you like to tell me some characteristics about this child?
- Would you like to describe this child to me?
- Do they have any diagnosis?
- How did you integrate this child?
- What contradictions do you experience when integrating this child?
- What difficulties did you encounter in integrating this particular child?
- Apart from these difficulties, what else influenced you?
- What role do parents play in the integration of children?
- Did you receive different demands from other parents?
- How did you feel when other stakeholders became involved in this process?
- How did you feel about the coexistence of your own beliefs and thoughts with the demands of the parents?
- Do you remember how you managed this conflicting situation?
- How did you manage this situation, given that you are responsible for the class and act within it?
- What did you do first?
- Did other people help you?
- Where did this situation lead you?