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**INTEGRATING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE INTO READING LESSONS TO  
HELP STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC SUPPORT  
CREATE DISCUSSIONS**

by

Annamarie Fielding

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

May 24, 2021

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Anthony. You are the reason for the completion of this program. Every time I wanted to give up, all I needed was to look into your eyes and remember the example I was providing. You gave me a laugh when I needed the break, you gave me the time when I needed the focus, and you gave me the patience when I needed to meet the deadline. Without you, I would have never considered returning to higher education. Thank you for being the motivation and push I needed to become a better teacher, mom, friend, and person.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to begin by acknowledging my co-teachers, Debby Wilson and Anne Marie Sweeney. Your unwavering support and flexibility made it possible for me to complete the coursework and research. I appreciate your working with me to rearrange schedules, adjust assessments, and so on to fulfill the requirements. Not only has it been a pleasure to teach with both of you, but I have also enjoyed our growing friendships over the years. Thank you for helping, supporting, and cheering me on.

Next, I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Lee. Without your ability to consistently talk me off the ledge, I would have most likely thrown in the towel, especially at the onset of the pandemic. Not only did you guide me through the challenges of completing a thesis, but you also introduced new mindset towards education. My enthusiasm for teaching was reignited and I obtained a newly discovered motivation to make an impact on the world.

Next, thank you to my mom, friends, and extended family who supported me and cheered me on throughout this process. You showed up with food when I was hungry, and offered your free time with Anthony so I could get quiet time to work. Thank you for your friendships, love, and help. I love you all.

Finally, to my partner and best friend, Tom. You were my shoulder to cry on, my calm in the storm, and my number one cheerleader. Thank you for showing up for me during this time and every day. I love you.

## **Abstract**

Annamarie Fielding

INTEGRATING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE INTO READING LESSONS TO HELP  
STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC SUPPORT TO CREATE  
DISCUSSIONS

2020-2021

Valarie Lee, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to understand how utilizing funds of knowledge (FofK) in reading lessons for students who receive additional academic support would affect their ability to independently engage in discussions. The study investigated how this impacted students' motivation and engagement for students during literacy lessons. Qualitative methods focused on observing students' individual, small group, and whole-group responses to literature. Participants included two students in a fifth grade, inclusion classroom who have been identified with specific learning disabilities and have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Both students come from significantly different backgrounds, as one is a child of a military member and the other a child who lives in the township. Data sources included a teacher's research journal, video recordings, surveys, student interviews, student journal responses, and student virtual responses. The data were analyzed through the use of triangulation and inductive coding to determine their importance. The findings support the themes of connections between self and FofK, emotional responses, creating questions, alternative ways to communicate, and making predictions.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Ok, and what does this tell you about the character?” I asked as four pairs of children’s eyes stared off in multiple directions. *Are any of them even thinking about this book?* I thought to myself as I struggled to pull responses from them.

The first of many book club groups had begun, and I was already frustrated and defeated. I glanced around the room at the other groups, some vigorously reading while others were engrossed in conversation. Even though they were in various stages of meeting, one thing was for certain: they were all participating in book clubs with minimal teacher intervention. My attention turned back to my group. I glanced at each of them, wracking my brain for strategies to get them engaged. *No graphic organizer or picture will motivate this group. It’s the text and text itself that’s boring them to tears.* The unit was historical fiction, and this particular group’s reading levels were so low that the only historical fiction texts at their level were picture books I had selected. How embarrassing can that be for a student still reading pictures in the classroom in 5th grade? Picture books that none of them could relate to, let alone discover an interest in.

I repeated my question in hopes that someone finally dialed into the withering discussion, “What does this tell you about the character?”

“They’re sad....?” someone finally guessed. *Well, one short answer is better than none I guess,* I thought as I accepted their response. *This is going to be a long year.*

As the years passed, I began to make a pact with myself to never have to experience the dread of a book group like that again. I concluded that if *I'm* suffering from boredom, then the students must feel tortured, not to mention most likely not gaining anything from it. As the years progressed, I mixed in worksheets, videos, and drawings. I included additional texts and stories. Yet, something still was not clicking for the readers who struggled the most. Half the group would check out while the other half would attempt to socialize to drive the conversation to just about anything but the text.

Even my district recognized how much students struggled with small reading groups. They devised a plan to put together professional development to “teach” the teachers how to implement another cookie-cutter reading program for guided reading. Instinctually, I knew this was not the best practice. I attended these mandatory training sessions, had the coach demonstrate in our classroom how these groups should run, and was even observed by my administrators to prove I was “doing it.” I did not believe that this was how to engage our most struggling readers, and the data on students was there to prove it.

My drive to improve small group instruction so students would no longer be bored to tears increased, along with my yearning to prove to my colleagues that we have been doing it wrong all this time. In other words, we needed to start caring more and increase our engagement by delving deeper into our own students’ lives.

After consulting with my co-teacher, we decided the best way to support students was to focus on the reader's workshop and book clubs. While we wanted to help improve

students' reading skills, we also wanted to become the teacher models for how to best support our kids. Then, serendipitously, I was assigned to research Sonia Nieto during my capstone experience for my master's program. Researching a theorist while tutoring in a summer clinic, was one of the last tasks of becoming a reading specialist. Sonia Nieto. A first and last name that had never reached my ears in my lifetime. As I began delving into her seminal work, I quickly realized this could become the key to addressing my greatest teaching challenge. Our readers struggled with reading not just because of their skills, but because they had no buy-in. They never got to dictate what and how they learned. They have been spoon-fed sentence starters and graphic organizers and teacher-penned comprehension questions and sat in front of the generic computer program. The school administration maintains, "Studies show...studies show...studies show," but many of these studies are completed by the big box curriculum companies. The further I investigated Nieto's work, the more I realized that I, too, would probably hate reading if 100% of what and how I read was dictated for me rather than allowing me to discover my strengths. It was during this period where I became increasingly motivated to identify, investigate, and describe strategies that could increase student engagement which in turn would assist with closing the learning gaps.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to encourage student engagement during large and small group classroom literature discussions. Students who struggled with comprehension were most apprehensive to participate in class, while every teacher knows students who participate the most also improve the most academically. My biggest challenge over the years as the special education teacher was finding ways to get the most

struggling readers to talk. Colleagues alike would bemoan book clubs due to the lack of student participation and (seemingly) motivation. While at the core of the issue is readers' apprehension to look foolish in front of their peers. My enthusiasm to prove that teachers absolutely can influence learners' motivation by celebrating all students and maintaining high expectations regardless of background became my supreme goal. It is not about how educators and schools act on students, but how students' skills and talents drive schooling. Educators need to consider what students bring and incorporate this into the classroom (Nieto, 1992). To increase participation, using funds of knowledge (FoK) will ensure students can make connections between their background knowledge and text. Hogg (2012) states, "By engaging in inquiry about students and their families, teachers open up information flow and enhance the quality of information which can inform their practice" (p. 62). Hogg also explains how socio-cultural learning theory, critical theory, hybridity theory, systems theory, and difference theory of caring are all key ideas for the practice of funds of knowledge which in turn can contribute to new models of interaction. By incorporating students' FoK into literacy lessons, we remove learning barriers and allow them to access information. Moll et al. (1992) explain "the typical teacher-student relationship seems 'thin' and single-stranded, as the teachers 'knows' the students only from their performance within rather limited classroom contexts" (p. 134). Moll et al. (1992) go on to explain students are essential active contributors in their households while turning passive when tending to their classrooms. Their households are full of cultural knowledge and children's interests and questions, while the classroom is driven by the teachers' ideas (Moll et al., 1992). Empowering students to identify and utilize their unique, cultural backgrounds

assists with driving instruction and increases their understanding of content. Validating students' experiences also help struggling learners to feel accepted in the school community. Therefore, increasing their confidence to participate and increase learning. Kourea et al. (2018) discuss how culturally and linguistically diverse students are often overrepresented in special education (p. 153). By learning to utilize culturally relevant teaching methods, students identified with learning disabilities can show significant academic growth.

### **Statement of Research Problem and Question**

The purpose of this research is to study how integrating funds of knowledge (FoK) into literacy instruction for students who receive additional academic support will help them independently develop their discussion topics and questions. The sub-questions that guided my research were: How can teachers implement FoK to develop culturally responsive literacy instruction? How can the use of students' FoK in reading instruction transfer to additional subjects? How can teachers increase student engagement during literacy instruction, especially for at-risk students?

### **Story of the Question**

When I read how Hogg (2011) described the importance of utilizing funds of knowledge to close the achievement gap, I realized that this could potentially be one solution to the student engagement problem I had. I dug deeper into this theory and related research to find the disparity between multicultural and linguistically diverse learners and majority cultural learners greater than I had once imagined. I always knew there were great differences between both groups; however, I never realized the extent of

the unfairness. Learning and discussing Paris' (2012) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy which describes cultural practices within schools infuriated me. I realized that I had possibly been, at no fault of my own, contributing to the problem all along. I not only neglected the context of culture but also consistently focused on deficits, like learning gaps, rather than focusing on their strengths. Every year, our first in-service days consist of analyzing standardized test data and identifying possible reasons for the various subgroups' failures instead of asking ourselves, "What are they getting right?" Gay (2000) says standardized test scores and grades are not indicative of why students are not performing at higher levels, but are a symptom of a greater issue. I became disturbed as I contemplated my conclusions about past and present students, along with reflecting on various conversations with colleagues where we all came to the assumption the child is just not motivated, or it is not in his or her genetics, or the family is stuck in a cycle of unending failure, and so on and so on. Never had it occurred to me to consider how we as the school support system are failing the children by not honoring their strengths. As I read Kourea et. al. (2018) describe the overrepresentation of English Language Learners (ELLs) in special education, I instantly recalled several former students I felt I had failed. The data from Moll (1992) showing that when teachers know more about their students' home lives and utilize this knowledge in the classroom tremendously increases student success immediately became the inspiration for my study.

I immediately considered the upcoming school year, while also reflecting on past years' literacy instruction. I thought about how far I had come, yet how far I needed to go, feeling pangs of guilt for ignoring the depth of recognizing students' cultures. How can I reach the disenfranchised students? How can I get students involved and excited

about book clubs? How can they take charge of their discussions? Am I enabling students by labeling them? Are my expectations high enough for those who struggle? I thought back to students who I had viewed as being low-learners and essentially gave up on them. I was reminded of my implicit biases when I labeled some students as poor with unsupportive home lives and viewed them as children who will grow into their adult counterparts to continue the cycle. Finally, I recalled the students who I had plain given up on because I blamed them for what I thought was helpless and lacking in motivation. Of course, through the years, I was not conscious of these thoughts until diving into the research and data behind the theories. I had a chance to change, and while I cannot rectify the past, I can save the future.

I decided that learners' literacy struggles are not due to their home life or their lack of motivation, but due to past interactions with like-minded educators like myself. I know if I do not take responsibility for my teaching, as I expect my students to take responsibility for their learning, the cycle will continue. I realized I needed to come to terms with my biases and prejudices to develop a new way of thinking. Nieto (1992) insists teachers are not the problem, but at the will of the systems they grow up in. Educators are also at the mercy of the decision-makers (Nieto, 1992). The research is there that when teachers have lowered expectations of their students, the students will perform at that level of expectation. Ladson-Billings (1995) states,

A next step for positioning effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge

inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. I term this pedagogy, *culturally relevant pedagogy*. (p. 469)

After reading this statement, I realized I needed to make changes to my thinking. Ladson-Billings (1995) continues to discuss how the teachers in her study reframed their expectations of students from believing they would not be able to fulfill classroom expectations to what they were doing to hinder higher student achievement. If I wanted my students to improve in reading, I too had to improve my reading instruction. I recognized I have been the one all along enabling readers during book clubs by spoon-feeding the content to them. I always selected the texts for them. I always created directions for them. I always asked the discussion questions. I always did it, while they just blindly followed. It was no wonder they were so bored. I was holding their hands through the entire process and not allowing them the opportunity to take charge. This all was the result of my low expectations. I had to stop feeling terrible about my past ignorant teaching decisions to learn and grow from them.

This research I completed over several months during literacy instruction allowed me to study these changes. It was time to focus on making students in charge of what they consumed and how they can lead their reading groups. Giving them the helm to navigate their learning would be the ultimate goal. Engagement would increase so students' comprehension skills continue to progress.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The following four chapters are the foundation, analysis, and synthesis of my teacher research. Chapter two consists of literature that supports the strategies used in the

study. Chapter three describes the context of the study, the research design and data, and details the community where the study takes place and the students who participated. Chapter four presents and analyzes the data collected. Finally, chapter five concludes the research, discusses limitations, and next steps for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

Moll et al. (1992) describe funds of knowledge (FofK) as educators drawing on students' household knowledge and skills to utilize in the classroom. This allows educators to see beyond the stereotypes they have created about their students. When identifying and acknowledging students' prior knowledge, teachers are interacting with students' FofK to really "see" them. Some consider incorporating FofK as a practice towards social justice (Hogg, 2012). When students are fully "seen" in the classroom, engagement increases and they are more likely to fully grasp concepts taught. When teachers tailor instruction to individuals rather than tailor instruction to a dominant culture, students feel they are safe to fully be themselves and are ready to take ownership of their learning. Nieto (2011) states, "But children are not 'NE,' or 'ELLs,' or 'SPED,' or 'at risk,' or 'the bilinguals,' or 'AFDC,' or 'culturally deprived,' or any other label that may be in vogue at the moment. They are children, and they each embody both wonderful individuality and the cultural imprint of their families and communities" (p. 37). Children have a chance to reach their full potential when labels are removed. Educators then develop an unlimited amount of resources to increase engagement and assist learners with fully participating in literacy instruction. When educators can identify best the strategies for readers based on their FofK, readers have the opportunity to engage in peer discussion and other classroom activities.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature that proposes FofK as a compilation of theories, how to support students who struggle, and teaching strategies to increase

engagement. In the first section, theories detail how children learn best based on their home experiences and the connections between their households and schools. The second section addresses how these theories support students who struggle in literacy. In the final section, successful teaching strategies from empirical research are detailed.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Over the past decades, studies by several educational theorists have argued for the integration of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) to deliver culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) developed the definition of CRT as “a pedagogy of the opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160). Therefore, students develop the capabilities to understand themselves, others, and the world around them (Ladson-Billings, 1992). When children accomplish these understandings, they develop critical thinking skills to further their knowledge of not only the content they are learning but also how it relates to themselves and the world around them. Ladson-Billings (1995) also asserts that “culturally relevant pedagogy would necessarily propose to do three things - produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (p. 474). Research maintains that when educators employ CRT in their classrooms, student achievement increases. When schools refrain from producing students to fit within a majority culture by allowing students to discover their strengths as individuals, then students have a higher chance of success for placing their mark on the world rather than the world placing its mark on children. To implement CRT, educators must familiarize themselves with the learners they are instructing. To begin, teachers

must acknowledge that schools construct standards of success to force children into society's mold. Educators must also challenge schools' inequitable policies, even defying mandates in the name of acting for what's believed best for their students. Ladson-Billings (1995) described the most effective teachers, regardless of whether they employ a soft or assertive instructional approach, as having a "common thread of caring was their concern for the implications their work had on their students' lives, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements" (p. 474). Teachers must preserve students' culture and identity within their pedagogy with the knowledge that the implications of their instruction transfer into students' communities. Therefore creating the possibility of furthering prejudice towards culturally and linguistically diverse students due to the potential ignorance an educator carries.

To the same effect, Geneva Gay (2000) describes CRP as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). Students are validated through CRP as it uses a plethora of teaching techniques that pair to various learning styles. Additionally, CRP incorporates multicultural books, information, resources, and materials. Not only does the classroom teacher recognize the need to adjust her viewpoints of her culturally and linguistically diverse students, but also insists the school and community follow suit. With CRP, educators must insist on revamping district curricula and related resources to ensure it accommodates all students, not just those from the majority culture. Gay (2000) explains,

Cultural pedagogy focuses on those elements of cultural socialization that most directly affect learning. It helps students clarify their ethnic values while

correcting factual errors about cultural heritages. In the process of accomplishing these goals, students are held accountable for knowing, thinking, questioning, analyzing, feeling, reflecting, sharing, and acting. (p. 32)

When educators tailor and adjust instruction specifically to the students in the classroom and school, students' independence and self-worth increase. Children become empowered to seek out opportunities to question, change, and grow. Additionally, Gay (2000) supports students by encouraging their independence rather than explicitly directing them with what to do. Gay (2000) says learning should be "filled with significance, enjoyment, inquiry, and action" (p. 185). When educators apply these principles in their K-12 classrooms, students take greater ownership of their learning. Not only do learners get to determine the information they consume, but educators' own unconscious biases are also further removed from the content so that learners can apply their points of view.

### **Funds of Knowledge**

Once students' cultures are infused within the classroom and school, and teachers work to remove their biases, students' funds of knowledge (FofK) can come to the forefront of instruction. Many professionals once believed students' lack of ability came from their households, viewing them as less-than compared to the majority culture (Moll et. al., 2005). However, those studying FofK theorize that when educators refuse to acknowledge students' cultures within the context of the classroom, it is then that students struggle to create connections between themselves and the content they are learning. Teachers must acknowledge, learn, and apply students' household cultures within the classroom. Moll et. al. (2005) state, "the validation of the experiences of

students and the lived practices of households is an important aspect of critical pedagogy” (p. 41). When applying FofK within the classroom, educators not only validate students’ lived experiences, they also challenge society’s biases of students who are identified as not being from the majority culture. Moll et. al. (2005) explain,

As parents responded with personal narratives concerning their own unique and singular life courses, a heightened historical consciousness began to emerge. The articulation of the trajectory that brought parents to be where they are now engendered an awareness of the historical character of their experiences. (p. 42)

When teachers obtain a picture of the student and their family as a whole, they can understand how households present greater opportunities for students’ learning in the classroom. Additionally, when teachers bring this knowledge with them into the classroom, the teacher is then capable of applying this information to their pedagogy, enabling increased engagement from the learner.

### ***Critical Pedagogy***

Once educators encompass a full picture of the children in their classrooms, they can utilize this information to create content directly from students’ backgrounds. This allows students to take ownership of their education and have the opportunity to assist the teacher in the classroom pedagogy. Freire (1993) describes a toxic student-teacher relationship when the teacher insists she is the only knowledgeable one who is tasked with presenting all of her information to the student. The student is then expected to take on the information without question or consideration for anything else in existence. When content is created based on students’ most knowledgeable areas, their lives, information flows freely within the classroom where educators and students share

responsibility in learning and teaching. Freire (1993) says, “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (p. 53). Freire (1993) maintains that as long as the banking process is not present in the classroom, the student will have the ability to think critically about the information they are learning. The banking process is defined as the process of the educator presenting information, and learners absorb the content without question. For this to be accomplished, the teacher must not push the majority culture onto students which would end up preventing dialogue between students and teachers. When this is accomplished, Freire (1993) says “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (p. 61). Students can expand their thinking and participate in essential conversations in and outside of the classroom. When engaging in such dialogue, creativity has the chance to flourish along with the act of love. Freire (1993) explains, “Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim their right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression” (p. 69). In other words, it is the students’ inalienable right to have the ability to engage in dialogue.

Freire and Giroux maintain that teachers must allow students the ability to step forward with the teacher in a classroom partnership. However, within critical theory, Giroux describes teachers as the agents of change. Teaching is a political practice where teachers essentially control and form students. Giroux (2001) says,

The explanatory value of such a relationship is to be found in making problematic the specific content of a culture, its relationship to dominant and subordinate

groups, as well as the socio-historical genesis of the ethos and practices of legitimating cultures and their role in constituting relations of domination and resistance. (p. 37)

The relationship cultures have to each other can constitute the social order of each culture. If the teacher from the majority culture teaches to the students of the same culture, then culturally and linguistically diverse students are at the mercy of the majority culture. The teacher has the power to determine how her students learn. For example, if a teacher wants her students to become critical thinkers, then they have the power to make this change. If the teacher decides her learners should be passive agents and practice rote memorization, then the teacher has the power to implement this type of teaching. Giroux (2001) also claims that teachers must commit to assisting with minimizing actions where culturally diverse students experience cultural inequalities in their education. He explains,

Consequently, students get defined in reductionist behavioral terms, and learning is reduced to the transmission of predefined knowledge. Needless to say, schools, like other institutions, appear to exist in these accounts beyond the somewhat questionable imperatives of capital and its underlying logic of class, race, and gender discrimination. (p. 49)

Educators often develop stereotypes of students without understanding the larger picture of students' backgrounds and how it contributes to their education. When schools begin applying labels to children, children are then stuck within these labels by having instruction fitted for the label. Students struggle to break free from these labels during

the entirety of their educational experience, therefore often preventing them from truly developing into the human they deserve to become.

### *Social Constructivism*

Vygotsky developed several theories which support children's learning coming from their interactions with others in their world, aside from the teacher. He claimed that the interactions children had with people in their worlds directly resulted in their knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and values (Morrow & Tracey, 2017). Vygotsky (1934/1986) states,

The development of the processes that eventually lead to the formation of concepts has its roots in the earliest stages of childhood. However, these processes mature only in the transitional age. It is only at this point that the intellectual functions which form the mental basis for the process of concept formation are constituted and developed. (p. 124)

Students' earliest encounters with reading, writing, and mathematics occur at home through cultural tools and develop into their discourse modes (Hogg, 2012). Vygotsky also created the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), a breakthrough in educational practices. He (2011) explains it as,

The ZPD of the child is the distance between the level of his actual development, determined with the help of independently solved tasks, and the level of possible development, defined with the help of tasks solved by the child under the guidance of adults or in cooperation with more intelligent peers. (p. 204)

For students to comprehend the information taught, the teacher must first connect new information to students' previous knowledge. Without this scaffolding, the student

will struggle to interpret new learning to make connections to prior knowledge (Morrow & Tracey, 2017). Additionally, Vygotsky advocates for advanced students to support their peers in the same manner as a teacher. Last, the teacher must translate the social and cultural conditions to turn them into authentic literacy lessons. The connections between students' social and cultural knowledge to the content they are learning will increase their comprehension and allow for a deeper understanding.

### ***Situated Learning***

Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning incorporates communities of practice (CoP). Learning comes through interaction with other more expert members of the community. Through these interactions, discourse is developed and participation increases over time. The greater mastery an individual develops, the more identity develops a great sense of self. When access is denied, motivation can diminish. When teachers model a skill, they are the expert from which students learn. As students begin to understand the skill, they become more and more involved. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain,

To be able to participate in a legitimately peripheral way entails that newcomers have broad access to arenas of mature practice. At the same time, productive peripherality requires less demands on time, effort and responsibility for work than for full participants. (p. 121)

Educators must gradually leave space for children to obtain the skills needed until students are confident enough to practice new information independently. Once students can complete tasks on their own, teachers then become the participant along with their students. Students also develop a deeper sense of belonging and value when they feel as

if they are mastering the content. Lave and Wenger (1991) say, “Such knowledge is of course important; but a deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in *becoming* part of the community” (p. 122). Children begin to feel ownership of and responsibility for their learning when they can witness new knowledge then put it into practice on their own. By becoming the teacher, they have an increased sense of self-awareness and find they are adding value to the classroom community.

### **Supporting Students with Individualized Education Plans**

When educators conceptualize students’ FofK, at-risk students have more opportunities to access the general education content.

### ***Diversity***

Gay (2002) reminds educators to avoid confusing diversity with disability. Gay (2002) explains,

The frequency and intensity with which some African-Americans interact motion, movement, and emotional energy into their thinking, communication, social relations, and variability in the formats of their self-presentations may be misdiagnosed as hyperactivity, attention deficit, irritability, attention-seeking, disruption, and being quarrelsome. (p. 616)

Teachers who are products of the majority culture may end up lacking consideration for other cultures and could potentially view African American students as having learning disabilities or a classroom disruption. Instructional reform is essential for critical cultural consciousness, culturally responsive classroom climates, learning communities, multicultural curriculum content, and culturally congruent instructional strategies (Gay, 2002). Educators need to be equipped with the tools to understand

students' cultures. When adults in the school understand the diversity of cultures within their classroom, they maintain high expectations of all learners. Nieto (1992) explains that students perform to the level of expectations set by the teacher. Teachers' expectations of their students dictate behavior towards the students within the classroom. Nieto (1992) describes the results of a study where white students often gained more attention when teachers were presented with a group of students of like-ability. Additionally, educators often dumbed down content for students from varying social classes (Nieto, 1992). Expectations for all students need to be equitable and maintain consistency from the teacher. Otherwise, children end up receiving the message of "not-enoughness" through teachers' actions and behaviors towards them.

### ***Culture and Community***

Korea et al. (2018) explain teachers must learn about students' families' make-up, traditions, strengths, and difficulties. "Learning about their students' past experiences in and outside of school helps build relationships and increases teachers' use of these experiences during instructional time" (p. 154). Griner (2013) also found including the voices of parents, community members, and other cultural experts and stakeholders benefited students' learning through the use of online surveys and email. Communicating consistent, clear, and same to describe classroom management practices supported all students (Griner, 2013). Additionally, Piazza et al. (2015) instruct that students' strengths are starting points for instruction instead of identifying weaknesses. Educators need to attend to students' identities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and out-of-school literacies. Teachers are then able to incorporate culturally relevant literature and content into lessons for students who are struggling.

### ***Incorporating Relevant Texts***

Kourea et al. (2018) found it essential to use multicultural literature to boost students' self-esteem and pride, especially when they are represented positively in text. Additionally, incorporating multicultural text and content minimizes prejudices against culturally diverse students by highlighting the value of reading culturally diverse stories along with promoting and articulating the benefits of diversity in the classroom (Kourea et. al., 2018). To accomplish this, Kourea et al. (2018) suggest creating culturally responsive curriculum content (What to teach?), following a culturally responsive instructional delivery (How to teach?), and utilizing culturally relevant environmental supports (How to support?) while protecting students' FofK.

Furthermore, educators need to carefully consider their students' cultural backgrounds when it comes to text selection, especially if the educator represents the dominant culture. Educators must select texts that represent their students in addition to encompassing the instructional goals from the curriculum. Michael-Luna's (2008) study exemplified how a European-American educator selected a text about Martin Luther King Jr. to support a lesson on civil rights and equity for his self-contained dual-language (Spanish-English) first-grade classroom. Michael-Luna (2008) describes the discrepancy where the teacher selected a text from within a structured system he was familiar with. Yet, children's diverse backgrounds were not represented in the conversation around civil rights, leading them to develop negative connections to non-Whiteness (Michael-Luna, 2008). To feel adequate and important in the school community, learners must positively see themselves within the curriculum and materials to develop well-rounded instruction.

### ***Clear Expectations and Modeling***

Naraian (2019) found when educators modeled multiple times and gave explicit directions, students were able to fully understand the expectations. For example, students simply did not discern what “being an active member in book clubs” meant. The teacher wrote precise expectations to remove the ambiguity of the directions - speaking at least two times, asking questions about what is read, thinking about the theme and setting, and how it helped them understand the text (Naraian, 2019). Explicitly writing the steps also allowed easy access for students to refer to as needed. Also, breaking down tasks into manageable steps, and repeating steps for each question, even if it felt redundant, helped struggling learners to interact with the content and their peers.

### **Teaching Strategies to Increase Engagement**

When the foundational theories of Fofk are applied in classroom instruction, students can anticipate and conceptualize content.

### ***Engagement***

Naraian’s study within a large urban school supported how the teacher’s literacy instructional methods promoted inclusive pedagogy. Naraian (2019) suggests ensuring students’ voices take precedence over teacher-generated products. This idea is supported by Freire’s theory that students need to take control of the content while educators observe (1993). Teachers also need to create responsive literacy contexts so that students can take risks with the curriculum (Naraian, 2019).

Piazza et al. (2015) found engaging students with instructional goals developed by the learner encourages deep and active processing of words and meanings. Once they create these goals, they set up a system of self-monitoring (Chan et al., 2014). Self-

monitoring is explained as a process where students select a behavior to focus on, identify the daily occurrences and non-occurrences of the behavior, and record it on their own. Students then compare their daily data to previous records of self-monitoring. Chan et al. (2014) also suggest students use self-assessment tools such as rubrics to analyze and reflect on their learning. Children then create new learning goals or determine how to continue to improve on their previous goals. This supports Gay's (2000) theory of students owning their education as opposed to maintaining a teacher-directed classroom atmosphere. By using self-monitoring and self-assessment, students are in control of their progress and learning in class.

### ***Collaboration***

Piazza et al. (2015) also utilized dialogue among peers through collaborative reading strategies, literature circles, reciprocal teacher, peer-tutoring, book discussions, peer-assisted learning strategies, and learning together through inquiry and questioning. Piazza et al. (2015) explain, "More experienced partners, who could be adults or peers, provide scaffolding" (p. 9). When experts, whether that be a classmate or another adult in the school, contribute information to the conversation, students who struggle gain additional resources along with information for increased engagement.

**Varying Technologies.** Piazza et al. (2015) also describe, "Research in the field of new literacies adds to this definition [of collaboration] in that there is increasing value being placed on cooperation and collaboration when students build their understanding and create knowledge online and use multimedia" (p. 9). Utilizing technology to create and discover allows students to develop additional outlets and prepares them for the world for which they will enter. Computer programs and online activities are additional

literacies for readers to engage and interact with. This also gives room for those who struggle with self-esteem for fear of being viewed unfavorably by their classmates. Naraiian (2019) explains, “Whether literature circles or multimodal learning clubs, a view of literacy as social practice emphasizes methods that are grounded in social interaction between participants” (p. 1587). Assistive technology opens the door for multimodal literature experiences as well as promotes reading and writing as a social practice for greater social and intellectual access to mainstream learning experiences. Naraiian also agrees that explicit teaching needs to take place and should be paired with culturally responsive pedagogy. By incorporating a “writer of the week” wall, various pieces of writing are an example for all classmates that being a good writer can take place in many forms.

## **Conclusion**

The literature presented in this chapter describes the positive effects of utilizing students’ FofK within literacy instruction. Applying various strategies suggested by the research for incorporating students’ FofK for whole and small group instruction empowers students to independently construct discussions. Further research needs to be completed to understand how to incorporate FofK within small-group book clubs.

The next chapter focuses on how the study is organized. It also describes the school district, town, and participants. Last, the procedure of the study will be presented along with an explanation of the data sources and analysis.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Setting and Design**

#### **Research Paradigm**

This research employs a qualitative methodology to investigate how the use of students' funds of knowledge (FofK) helps them independently develop their discussion topics and questions. Tisdell and Miriam (2015) explain that qualitative data is most used by researchers to help describe how people interpret their worlds and the meanings derived from their experiences. Qualitative research is most appropriate for this study because it prioritizes investigating student relationships with each other and the curriculum in a natural setting. This will also assist the researcher with collecting data to determine what motivates students and the next steps to take in instruction.

The study investigates how the use of students' FofK impacts their growth in the reading classroom. Family interviews with students and their caretakers provided a greater picture of the student as a whole to understand student motivation, interests, and culture. These provided deeper insight into students' literacy history and value level. This information was used to incorporate students' FofK into literacy instruction, while observing students' engagement during peer collaboration to determine how students are affected by incorporating their FofK in the classroom.

#### **Procedure of the Study**

This study was completed over eight weeks between September and November 2020. Data collection took place during the reader's and writer's workshop as well as the teacher's read aloud. The times ranged from about 45 minutes to 60 minutes a session. The following outlines the procedures of the study:

- Week 1: Introduction to students who qualified for the study. Parental permission was obtained. Students' questionnaires and surveys were administered and collected.
- Week 2: Began the teacher read aloud to model questioning techniques. Initiated whole-class discussions on high-interest texts and collected data on how all students responded to and interacted with the text and each other. Began closely observing students in the study and the personal connections they made to the text. Completed assessments on students' reading levels.
- Week 3: Continued teacher read aloud and integrated students' FoK into reading lessons and discussions. Continued to collect data through the research journal. Began students' responses in their reading notebooks and on a Google slide for them to review their peers' ideas.
- Week 4: Began surveying students on the books they would select for their book clubs. Began analyzing various ways students could safely collaborate through shared documents, video conferencing, and websites designed for students to record themselves and share with the class.
- Week 5: Began book clubs where students meet twice a week to discuss the text and develop ideas and questions about the book they selected.
- Week 6: Made adjustments to increase student engagement based on research done.
- Week 7: Continued to take notes and observe students' interactions during book clubs.

- Week 8: Conducted a post-survey of students' attitudes and feelings towards reading. In-person learning was switched to virtual during this week. Read aloud and virtual book clubs continued.

### **Data Sources**

To fully understand students' use of their FoK during reading and writing, a variety of data sources were used to analyze how students communicated with each other during these times. Data from students who need additional literacy support are analyzed to look for common skill sets and connections between personal background to literacy content. Qualitative data collected include classroom observations, parent and student interviews, teacher-researcher journals, videotapes of student conversations, student work samples, and assessment data. Materials for the study include digital tools such as laptops and video cameras.

The first data source used was a researcher's journal. Either during lessons upon first chance or post-lessons, a variety of observations were recorded into a journal. This included the context of the lesson to determine whether the lesson contributed enough opportunities for students to take lead. Students' responses, ideas, questions, and actions were also incorporated in the notes. Additionally, in the journal was self-reflection and comparisons made between research and strategies used in the classroom. Questions and ideas about the next steps to support students were also considered in the research journal.

A second data source used was video recordings of book club meetings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students and teachers were not able to physically gather in a group. Students were grouped in Zoom meetings which were recorded. This allowed the

researcher to return to the recording to take notes on significant information that may have been missed. Recording the sessions allowed the researcher to focus on assisting the conversation and prompting students with reminders for participation and guidance on expectations. Video recordings were saved on a school-approved device that is password protected.

A third data source used were students' surveys which assisted the research in obtaining additional information about students' attitudes towards literacy. The surveys also gave insight into students' lives outside of school, including their interests and dislikes. The surveys also served to guide material selection for students' choice.

A fourth data source were students' journals. Students wrote ideas, questions, and relevant text citations in notebooks during read alouds and during independent reading. This data is significant to the study to gain insight from students who are apprehensive about sharing ideas within small and large groups.

The fifth source of data included students' responses to read aloud and book clubs which were documented on Google slides. This allowed students an additional mode of communication should they prefer to type their ideas and were apprehensive about verbally sharing them.

Finally, post-surveys were administered to gauge students' attitudes towards literacy after participating in class and book club discussions. Questions included ones about the students' feelings towards reading, how they feel book clubs worked and how they thought they could improve.

## **Data Analysis**

To analyze data collected, the researcher utilized “inductive coding” then “triangulation.” Inductive coding included analyzing the data for common patterns and themes while multiple sources of data were connected through triangulation. According to Thomas (2003), “The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p.2). Multiple readings of the text were completed in order for information to become present. Similar terms or ideas within the piece of data being read were identified and categorized. Highlighting keywords and phrases assisted with identifying categories. Then words and phrases were grouped into these categories. Once essential data was identified, categories were constructed to begin to develop conclusions. However, data was reread in order to refine categories.

Triangulation supported data analysis from video recordings, the researcher’s notes, students’ written and typed responses, and student surveys. Shagourney and Power (2012) define “triangulation” as “the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, or theories (at least three) to confirm findings” (p. 144). Coding across multiple modes of data during this study was essential in order to obtain information.

The themes that were noticed were connections between self and FofK, emotional responses, creating questions, alternative ways to communicate, and making predictions.

## **Context**

### ***District***

The school district is located in a rural community where there are mostly farms spread across the township. There are a few small housing developments that range from trailers to large houses. The township also overlaps the military base, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. The socioeconomics of the town are mixed and ranges from lower earner to high earner families, where 33% of the district's families are considered from the lower earner demographic. There are no after school resources or special programs the town runs in the public schools. The military base has a rec center where many students attend the after-school program. There are a total of three schools in the district, with grades ranging from PreK to 6th grade. One school PreK-4 school is designated for only students who are residents in the township and another PreK-4 school is solely designated for students from military families and is located on the base. A third school consists of 5th and 6th-grade students from both the base and the township. This structure was recently set into place during the 2019-2020 school year.

The following district data is based on the 2018-2019 school year from the New Jersey School Performance Report. A total of 1,069 students were officially enrolled. 49% of students were female and 51% were males. Thirty percent of students were economically disadvantaged, and 16.9% were students with disabilities. 0.4% of students were homeless, and 64.2% were military-connected. 1.8% of students were English Language Learners. 59% were white, 19.4% were Hispanic, 9.7% were black or African American, 1.1% were Asian, 0.7% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 0.6% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 9.5% were of two or more

races. 93.1% of students' primary language at home was English while 5.2% primary home language was Spanish. 1.7% of students' primary home language was listed as Other Languages. According to the 2018-2019 assessment data, the district has met the ELA standard and exceeds the math standard.

### ***School***

The Upper Elementary School is one of three schools within the district. It is composed of fifth and sixth-grade students from both the township and the military base. It is the only school with these grade levels and mixed from both backgrounds in the district. According to data from the 2018-2019 school year, there were a total of 252 students and 34 teachers in the school. The percentage of females and males was split exactly at 50%. Twenty-five percent of students were economically disadvantaged, and 21% identified with learning disabilities. 0.4% were English Language Learners, 1.2% of the students are homeless, and 59.1% were military-connected.

The typical school day begins at 8:00 am and students are dismissed at 2:45 pm. In a typical 5th grade class, the size usually ranges around 22-25 students. A sample schedule for fifth grade goes as follows: Morning Meeting, Word Study/Guided Reading/Read Aloud, Mathematics, Gym/Spanish/Extra Instruction, WIN, Reading, Writing, Lunch, Art/Music/Technology, Science/Social Studies, Dismissal. Physical education takes place three times a week, and Spanish once a week. On days when there is neither subject, students return to the classroom for additional instruction in whatever the teacher deems necessary for the class. Art, Music, and Technology are on a trimester rotation. Science and Social Studies are on a six-week rotation. Last, WIN stands for What I Need where Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) divide students into

groups based on the standard being covered for the week. Three classrooms make up one PLC. In addition to WIN, this is also the time where the intervention teachers work in small groups with struggling students who are identified as below grade level and are not classified with an Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

The Upper School also offers additional programs for students who excel in various areas. Students can voluntarily take an assessment for Gifted and Talented Art, where they complete additional projects and complete the sets for the spring play. Students who are identified as academically gifted are invited to also take an assessment to qualify for the Academic Gifted and Talented program where they complete a project and compete against other G & T programs at local schools. The school also offers chorus and the opportunity to participate in the Spring musical.

Each school in the district has its own Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The school's PTO is very active and organizes various fundraising opportunities. The funds contribute to events and fundraisers such as student dances, Designer Bag Bingo for adults, school assemblies, Book Fairs, a Holiday Shop, and providing food and gifts for families who financially struggle during the holidays. The PTO also purchases teacher supplies and school t-shirts for staff and students to help with school pride.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, however, for the 2020-2021 school year, the district is currently organized by two cohorts, fully in-person students and fully virtual students. For in-person only students, the school day begins at 8:20 am and dismissal starts at 2:20 pm to allow for staggered arrival and departure times. A sample schedule for this year's school day is Arrival/Breakfast (in the classroom), Math, Gym (every other week), Word Study, Reading, Writing, Lunch/Recess (outside, weather

permitting), Science/Social Studies, Art/Music/Technology, Dismissal. WIN has been eliminated for the year. However, during the final weeks of the study, the researcher was exposed to COVID-19 and had to quarantine for two full weeks. The study had to be paused due to the researcher unable to interact with students. Upon the completion of the researcher's quarantine, the entire district was forced to conduct education in a full virtual capacity. The researcher completed the remainder of the study in a virtual classroom.

Each fifth-grade class has about 12-15 students to accommodate social distancing rules. Students are seated six feet apart within the classroom and are not allowed to physically work in small groups at any time of the day. They are also required to wear masks all day, except when outside for lunch and/or recess, and have clear desk shields attached to their desks.

Extracurricular activities have been paused for this school year and will resume when they can safely take place. The PTO continues to attempt virtual fundraisers such as a virtual auction, virtual Book Fair, and for families in need of food and holiday gifts.

### ***Participants***

The methodology being used for this study is a qualitative study using a homogenous sample. Patton (1990) states "the purpose here is to describe some particular subgroup in-depth" (p. 173). More in-depth information about a particular subgroup can be obtained when the program has many different kinds of participants (Patton, 1990).

The inclusion classroom began with a total of twelve students, two of which were identified with an IEP. About two weeks into the study, two more students joined the class, one of whom had an IEP. The study included the three students who had

IEPs. About three weeks before the completion of the study, one of the students moved to a neighboring school district. All three students were asked to participate in the study and all three returned the consent forms. One student was a female and identified as African-American. The other two students were males, and one identified as Hispanic and the other identified as Caucasian. For all three students, English was their first language and the only language spoken at home. All three students have IEPs where they are identified as struggling mostly in reading and writing and receive special education support in the general education classroom. Two teachers in the classroom work with all students, however, the special education teacher is responsible for ensuring accommodations and modifications are administered.

The special education teacher primarily instructs reading and writing while the general education teacher supports. During book club meetings, the teachers determine which groups each one can meet with. For this study, the special education teacher primarily met with the group that included the participants of the study while the general education teacher met with the remaining groups.

## **Conclusion**

The following chapter focuses on the analysis of the data collected within the research study. Common themes were identified that were revealed through the data.

## Chapter 4

### Findings of the Study

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings conducted in the study of how “Integrating funds of knowledge (FofK) into reading lessons to help students who receive additional academic support create discussions” to determine how students’ reading and writing skills improved. Data were collected for seven weeks to analyze how instructional strategies support students’ FofK to create discussions around texts. The chapter is broken into two sections. Each section describes the student-participants’ backgrounds and the common themes found within each individual’s data. The themes founded are connections between self and FofK, emotional responses, creating questions, alternative ways to communicate, and making predictions. Last, the chapter presents a summation of the findings.

#### Student Participants

##### *Tonya*

**Background Information.** Tonya is a ten-year-old, fifth-grade, African American female. She is a student who lives in the township and moved to the district in her third-grade year as a general education student with a 504 plan containing an ADHD diagnosis. She was referred for special education testing due to her learning deficits and qualified for an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) at the end of the school year under the classification Other Health Impaired. Tonya lives with her maternal grandmother, sister, and toddler cousin. She has two other siblings who live in another household with an elderly family member. She moved from a neighboring state to New Jersey after her

mother passed away from a drug overdose. Her father is currently incarcerated. It is unknown if she has regular contact with him. Tonya's family is part of the lower-earner demographic in the township. The district offered annual help for the winter break and holidays where caregivers could request assistance. Tonya's grandmother consistently returned the paperwork to acquire assistance at this time of year. English is the only language spoken at home.

Tonya described her hobbies as playing with makeup, bingeing Netflix shows, participating in karate outside of school, and said she loves watching and playing soccer. She took pride in her clothes and appearance and was outgoing and personable. Tonya enjoyed conversing with the teachers and telling about her family. She made friends easily and loved interacting with them in school. She said she spends her free time at home relaxing and playing outside with friends.

It had been reported by prior teachers that Tonya struggled with conflict resolution and had difficulty with self-control on the bus. She had been written up during the school year for yelling profanities on the bus. In 2019, she received disciplinary action for sitting in the middle of the bus aisle and refusing to return to a seat so the bus driver could drive. During the 2020-2021 school year, Tonya had exhibited self-control when in the general education classroom with her teachers. However, she often engaged in verbal altercations with another male student during unstructured times in the day. It was also reported by the art and music teachers that she would refuse to complete work and comply with their expectations. Tonya struggled to regulate her emotions when she reflected on her behavior with her classroom teachers. While Tonya did struggle with aspects of social-emotional learning, she had been credited by prior teachers and staff for

tremendous improvement in this area since her arrival in the district. She also had a history of excessive absences from school. She had reported that her grandmother did not drive and could not take her to school if she did not wake up in time.

**Attitude Towards Learning.** In the reading survey given before the study, Tonya stated that reading is her favorite subject. Overall she described herself as an “ok reader” and will sometimes read in her free time. However, she thought reading was “a good way to spend time,” and viewed being a good reader as a very important life skill. She believed her friends viewed her as a good reader. Sometimes she would not figure out words she does not know and reported that she understood some of what she read when reading independently. Tonya viewed others who read a lot as interesting and reported a very happy response when she received a book as a present. Once in a while, she worried about how her peers viewed her as a reader but liked to sometimes share books with her friends. When in class, Tonya was able to sometimes think of an answer when her teachers asked her a question about what she had read. She said she almost always talked about her ideas when she was in a group or with a partner talking about what they read; however, she preferred when her teachers read out loud daily. She reported she loved fiction over non-fiction books, more specifically mystery and scary books were her favorite to read. Books by Ann M. Martin were her favorite and explained that she enjoyed longer books. In her opinion, the steps to becoming a better reader involved listening first, then focusing, and finally just reading. When Tonya selected books, first she examined the cover, then read the first page to determine whether the book would be on her reading level and if she was interested in the content.

**Family Response.** Tonya's grandmother had discussed her concern for Tonya and wanted to see her succeed. Her grandmother also explained that she wants Tonya to not take the same paths as her parents. The grandmother said reading is extremely important for her educational priority but did not make it a point to make sure Tonya practices independent reading. She said she just wants Tonya to work hard and improve in school.

**Connections to Self and Funds of Knowledge.** Text comprehension increases the more students can make connections between themselves and the texts they read. Identified areas where Tonya made these connections allowed for the researcher to understand the topics Tonya related to most. Additionally, Tonya's interest in literacy expanded and supported her ability to read increasingly complex texts. Tonya's responses to the pre-reading survey, family background, and general interests were taken into consideration when texts were selected. Since Tonya explained that she enjoyed reading about other's lives in her pre-reading survey, books about fictional characters who encountered numerous challenges were included. Usually, the characters' challenges encompassed family adversity due to Tonya's experience within her own family's hardships. Furthermore, texts that included characters from varying family backgrounds were used as mirrors to assist Tonya in making personal connections to the stories she read so that she could discuss the plot with less teacher interference. Next, it was essential for Tonya to read about characters who overcame obstacles since both her grandmother and herself expressed the need for Tonya to become successful in reading to be successful in life.

To extract connections Tonya made, explicit modeling and instruction took place during whole-class lessons and discussions, in addition to one-to-one guidance with her. While it became apparent that Tonya understood the whole-group lesson, it was during individual discussions with Tonya where she was able to recall her personal connections to instances in the text. While talking with her, she often retold key details from the text but needed prompting to make connections. Prompts included but were not limited to: “Why do you think this?”, “What does this mean?”, “What does it remind you of?” The prompting gave Tonya permission to expand on her thoughts as well as the privacy of the one-to-one guidance. While she is a student who enjoys sharing her life experiences with the group, she is often hesitant and usually asks the teachers privately before opening up to everyone.

To begin the study, the text *Home of the Brave* was read as a whole-class read-aloud and discussed. During this time, questioning the text, making predictions, and connecting ideas to self and world were modeled. Students were instructed to “stop and jot” in their reading notebooks as the text was read out loud. After reading a chunk of sections of the text, students were asked to type responses in a shared Google document. In her typed response, Tonya wrote, “I think Kek is a very caring person because he wanted to help his aunt with the dishes like I help my aunt with the dishes.” Here, Tonya related her home life to the characters’ lives in the text being read out loud to her. Finding personal connections to the text came easily for Tonya. She often used her home experiences to find a way to relate to what was being read in class. Tonya continued to find parallels between her life outside of school and the book in the same response where she related her aunt with whom she lives to the aunt in the

text by writing, “I think the aunt should take some days off so she can get sleep because she can get really sick from not getting enough sleep.” It was at this time Tonya’s aunt was investigating health issues ultimately leading to a stomach cancer diagnosis. Tonya also related her ideologies of friendships to the quality of Kek’s friend, Hannah. She wrote, “Kek made a friend named Hannah. She is really nice and sweet. She gets him things and helps him get places he needs to go. Friends should do these things for each other.” After reading a scene from *Home of the Brave* with racial discrimination, Tonya pointed out that it was really unfair during the classroom discussion. She later related the same scene to what she has witnessed at home by typing, “3 boys are being rude to Kek because of his skin color and tell Kek to get away from Hannah and stop talking to her. My cousins get yelled at by the neighbors when they hang out together outside.”

During the read-aloud of the text, *The Breadwinner*, students wrote responses in their notebooks and were instructed to name their self-connections. When asked to describe the characters during class discussion, Tonya related her family interactions to those in the text by explaining she is bossy to her younger sister and cousin so the eldest sister, Nooria, is also bossy to her siblings in the book. She continued to use her personal background to develop deeper comprehension by writing in her reading notebook, “They are the same because they both lost their dad.” When verbally asked to elaborate on the response, Tonya explained she understood what it is like to not have a parent in their life. Students were instructed to write a personal response to *The Breadwinner* upon completion of the book. They were also instructed to write a suggestion of whether it should be read to next year’s class and why. In her typed response, Tonya recommended reading the book to the next class because “it’s fun to hear about other people’s

lives.” Interpreting her response, she enjoyed finding parallels or contrasts between her life and fictional characters’ lives.

Historical fiction book clubs allowed for groups to select their own books from a small teacher-selected collection at students’ reading levels. Texts gathered for Tonya’s book club selection were based on students’ personal interests. Tonya’s book club selected *I Survived: The Sinking of the Titanic, 1912*, which was also her first choice due to her interest in previous *I Survived* books from the series. After individual initial research of the text’s historical context, groups meet to discuss their findings. Tonya said, “They’re rich because if ships cost a lot then they’re fancy and you have to be rich to go on the ship.” She also explained that rich people have fancy things which exhibit reflections of personal experiences. When prompted to make other connections, Tonya continued to repeat her research questions and the information she found. She had difficulty developing other self-connections as they worked through the text. During the discussions, Tonya was able to make inferences with teacher-prompting and other students’ text-related questions.

**Emotional Response.** Tonya’s emotional reactions to text revealed key moments of diving into her FofK to support greater text comprehension. These indicated where she internalized personal text connections and developed inferences surrounding the text.

While responding to major plot events in the text, *Home of the Brave*, Tonya explained how caring people do things to help others. She made this connection to the main character, Kek, by explaining, “I think Kek is a very caring person because he wanted to help his aunt with the dishes...I think the aunt should take some days off so she can sleep...” Tonya described her feelings when the main character was struggling with

missing out on his tribe's ceremony when a boy is welcomed into becoming a man when a shape is carved into their foreheads. She typed, "I feel it is unfair for Kek to not receive the gaar/scar and he does not have one. If you have one on your head it means you're an adult and brave, but Kek thinks that he will never get one." In response to the end of the book, *Home of the Brave*, Tonya wrote her inference in her notebook, "His mom is back with him, she is back." In addition to her explanation of the plot, she stated, "This is crazy." Tonya continued to write, "Kek got more happy than he was 12 minutes ago. I'm speechless."

While reading *The Breadwinner*, students were asked to explain each character's reaction to the father getting arrested by the Taliban. Tonya typed an explanation about the main character's, Paravana, point of view, "Paravana was so happy her and her dad always went places. Her dad and her are like unstoppable together. That's an incredible life." She also described the sister's, Nooria, reaction to the arrest, "It's sad. She is kind of sad because she missed her dad. I think all the kids but she is being nice. I think because she missed her dad. That's sad but nice to do." When discussing the mother's reaction to the father being gone, she said, "In the beginning, she was most of the time happy with all the kids and dad. It was good. Now she is sad....She cried and sobbed for a long time and just laid on the toshak. The kids have no food to eat and she just will not get up. This is so depressing. I feel bad for them."

During book clubs, Tonya mainly discussed the events related to the plot of the text. The only insight she provided with uncertainty when she said "I don't really know what to say about him but he is bad and being on the titanic can be bad because they are being hurt."

**Creating Questions.** Questions Tonya wrote regarding the text provided additional information to her level of comprehension. It showed the research whether she was processing and thinking about the text as she listened to the read aloud or during independent reading.

Although it was heavily modeled to the entire class, Tonya did not participate in self-questioning strategies during the *Home of the Brave* read-aloud. After one-to-one modeling and providing more feedback, Tonya was enthusiastic about developing text questions during the read-aloud for *The Breadwinner*. Before reading the text, students examined the setting for the book and analyzed Afghanistan's history. This provided context for students to begin writing questions before reading. Tonya wrote in her reading notebook, "Why is the book named *Breadwinner*? Why does it take place in Afghanistan? Why does she have to help her dad? Why is war for 20 years?" Tonya's responses continued to question the text after the first few chapters when she wrote, "How come only men can go in the market? Will Parvana get caught?" Tonya returned to the questions she wrote to write answers as she heard portions of the text read aloud. During the next reading, Tonya questioned, "What did she see in the window? Will the Taliban come back for them? Will she be forever selling and reading?" For this portion, Tonya never returned to her questions to answer them.

For book clubs, Tonya wrote questions related to the Titanic to complete historical research before reading the book. In a question she typed in the group document, she asked, "Why did the Titanic sink? How many people died? Why was the Titanic made? When did it sink? Tonya completed her research and shared her information with her group. During the first book club meeting, Tonya relied heavily on

the information she found. When I prompted her to think about connections between her findings and the text, Tonya mainly referred back to the research questions and answers. During the third book club meeting, Tonya asked the group, “They hit an iceberg, where are they?” Students in the group did not reply, and Tonya did not pursue this topic any further. Tonya also asked, “Why couldn’t there have been a bigger rock or something like that? And I have the basement is filled with water, why?” After I prompted them to respond to Tonya, students within the group began sharing their questions. Again, Tonya did not pursue additional discussion and did not respond to others’ questions. Further in the discussion, Tonya asked the group, “He could have gotten hurt so would you go out just to see a mummy?” Again, the other students do not respond, but Tonya wrote the question in the group discussion notes to think about for future meetings.

Tonya’s home life was very unpredictable before and during this time on top of having to navigate the COVID 19 pandemic as a ten-year-old. She has shown remarkable resilience and strength through the challenges. The texts, *Home of the Brave* and *The Breadwinner*, were selected due to both featuring main characters with unreliable home lives who maintain a level of perseverance and strength as well. The characters are also from diverse backgrounds like Tonya. While during the classroom read-aloud and discussions of *Home of the Brave* and *The Breadwinner*, Tonya was an enthusiastic participant in noting important plot events and making connections between herself, the characters, and the events in the text. *I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic* was selected due to the nature of excitement for the main character who also finds himself having to overcome the obstacles he experienced. While collections of texts

were presented to Tonya's group, she ultimately had this one as her first choice. She explained she wanted an action story where it would not be boring to read. Even though this was her first preference it seemed she had difficulty showing evidence of personal associations to the book. Tonya relied mostly on questioning the events and making predictions based on her questions. While she shared the questions with her group, her expectations of receiving responses were non-existent. Even though her questions were related to the plot of *I Survived*, there is very little evidence of any personal connections made. On the flip side, there is an abundance of evidence that relates her life to the texts, *Home of the Brave* and *The Breadwinner*, yet struggled to interrogate these texts by creating questions based on the inferences she made.

### *Chris*

**Background Information.** Chris is an eleven-year-old, white male in fifth grade. His father is in the military and they have lived on the military base for approximately two years. Before moving to New Jersey, Chris's family resided on a military base internationally where he was initially evaluated for an IEP. He qualified under the classification of Specific Learning Disability, however, Chris's mother has reported he takes medication for ADHD. Chris lives with his father, mother, and older brother. English is the only language spoken at home.

Chris says he enjoys playing video games in his free time outside of school. He is known to be reserved and soft-spoken. He is often eager to engage the teachers in small talk and is personable and polite around adults. Chris is observed as kind to students within the classroom, however, has been known to use terms such as "Nazi" and "gay" when interacting with others during recess and gym. When confronted about his word

choices, he denied ever using such language. Prior teachers described Chris as helpful and kind to all students and staff.

**Attitude Towards Learning.** Chris wrote on his student survey that he loved to read at home, and mainly enjoyed audiobooks. However, in his reading inventory, he said that reading a book is something he does not like to do very often, and he believed reading was a boring way to spend time. He viewed himself as a poor reader and thought he did not read as well as his friends. He also worried a lot about what other kids thought about his reading and believed reading is very hard for him. On the other hand, he believed his friends viewed him as an ok reader. He said his best friends thought reading is really fun, and will sometimes tell his friends about a book he read. Chris said he understood some of what he read and sometimes figured out a word he did not know. When his teachers ask him a question about what he had read, he said he usually had trouble thinking of an answer. Chris believed people who read a lot are interesting, and that libraries were an ok place to spend time. He also believed knowing how to read well was very important, and planned to spend some of his time reading as an adult. Chris sometimes talked about his ideas when discussing his ideas after reading with a partner or in a group setting. He would like for the teachers to read out loud in class every day. He also reported that he was unhappy when he received a book as a present. Chris explained that he preferred fiction books over non-fiction, and his favorite book was *Artemis Fowl*. He described his book selection process as just choosing one and did not like mystery or horror books. Chris reported reading was his most difficult subject and has not experienced any teachers doing fun things in class with reading.

**Family Response.** Chris’s mother reported that her biggest concern was getting Chris on grade level in reading. She was proud of the improvement he made but believed the rate of improving reading skills should be faster. Chris’s mom would like him to become a fluent reader who can think critically. At home, Chris’s grandmother sent him materials and texts for him to work on in addition to what he reads in school. Getting Chris to read independently at home was a struggle for his parents, and they wished they could increase his love and appreciation for literacy. Chris’s mom reported she was an English major in college and was in disbelief that her child easily dispels reading. It was also reported Chris’s older sibling had difficulty with literacy, but there was no history of family learning difficulties.

**Alternative Communication.** After understanding Chris’s personality and his disability, it was clear he was often hesitant to verbalize his ideas during whole-class discussions of texts. He wrote the bare minimum in his reader’s notebook. Since book clubs had to take place with specific social distancing requirements in place, students used shared documents for their notes and meetings took place over video conferencing programs. What emerged was Chris’s increased effort in sharing his thinking via typed responses in the shared documents. Before book clubs, most information processing was done by having students handwrite their thinking into their notebooks with fewer instances of responding on the computer. During these times, Chris showed an increase in his ability to develop inferences but struggled to make connections to his own life. One of his typed responses to a part in *Home of the Brave* read, “I think Kek he is getting use to living in America. So he is learning what he can in America because it is different,” whereas one of his written responses read, “I think he is going to ask her for

more cows.” Another typed response showed how he made more conclusions than his handwritten response, “I think he is going to get the job. He might never go back to Africa now.” This is another example of how he was not only making predictions but also drawing conclusions on how certain events affect the character. One of his handwritten responses read, “I think his mom and dad are dead?” Here he did not explain any further predictions or inferences he thought. To develop background knowledge on their historical fiction book club texts, students were instructed to create questions they wanted to research about the historical event in the text. Chris hand wrote, “Who made the Titanic? Why was the Titanic made? Why did the Titanic sink?” While during the book club meeting, Chris typed his questions and the answers he found along with additional questions to look for the next time their group read. The findings he typed read, “In 19-85 the titanic boat was found under 13,000 feet underwater. Because of RMS collision of an iceberg. The Titanic cost \$7,500,00. The titanic sink in 2 hours 40 min. The Titanic sank at 2:20 am. Harland and Wolff built the boat. There were over 2,000 people on the boat and only 1,500 people survived. There were 108 kids under the age of 14 on the boat. So George does not behave a lot because he got off the ship and would not go to school.” In addition to the notes during the book club discussion, Chris typed, “Why is the text call [sic] *I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic?*” While he typed these responses, it was observed he rarely verbalized his ideas during video conferencing for book club meetings. During the first book club meeting, Chris typed responses four times and never verbally shared his ideas. In the second book club meeting, he attempted to share his ideas once, but it was difficult to hear him. He typed his responses two times. During the third and fourth sessions, it was observed that Chris participated via

typing five times throughout both meetings. He attempted to verbalize ideas again during the fifth meeting, but it was a struggle to hear him. Chris participated by typing again four times. At the last meeting, Chris did not participate at all.

**I Think Statements.** Throughout the analysis of Chris's data, one theme that emerged was how he communicated his thoughts. Often students were prompted to begin their responses with "I think..." if they struggled with how they should begin their responses. Throughout all modalities, Chris utilized this strategy a total of thirteen times out of a total of twenty-one responses. Of his "I think" responses, seven of them were typed. Usually, his responses were one to two sentences long. For responses that included subsequent sentences, Chris began every sentence with "I think..." While reading *Home of the Brave*, Chris wrote in his notebook, "I think they are going to the petting zoo. I think she is going to be good for the petting zoo. I think they are going to find Kek's mom." After introducing the historical background of *The Breadwinner* to the class, Chris predicted by writing, "I think Parvana will experience bullying and judgment." When Chris did not begin his responses with "I think", they were usually phrases and focused on recalling an event in the portion read rather than developed predictions or inferences. For example, Chris wrote one response to *Home of the Brave*, "Food feeds family." The next day, Chris's written response read, "He is trying to make up [sic] the dish he broke." However, during book club discussions where he tended to type his responses more than verbally share them, he rarely wrote "I think..." to explain his thinking. Chris often started by describing the characters' actions and setting. When being read to, it seemed he was best able to process and communicate information by

utilizing the sentence starter, “I think...” When working with his peers, he did not require a sentence starter to communicate his ideas.

**Questions.** The first evidence of Chris creating any kind of questions was during the second text read aloud, *The Breadwinner*. Previously, students were told to write questions and other ideas that came to their heads as the read-aloud progressed. On this day, students were given explicit instructions and time to write questions before reading the book. Chris developed questions in response to a discussion of the setting. He wrote in his reading journal, “Will he get caught? What did she see? Who is she? What is it? Is it ugly?” Although Chris wrote these questions down in his notebook, it was observed that he refrained from sharing them during the class discussion. At the start of book clubs, Chris wrote questions to assist him while researching historical background information on the sinking of the Titanic. Chris wrote in his notebook, “Who made the Titanic? Why did the Titanic sink? Why was the Titanic made?” Chris shared his ideas during the first book club meeting by typing his responses in the group’s shared Google document notes. Additionally, Chris independently wrote questions as he read the text, *I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic*. He jotted down in his reading journal, “Where is Phoebe? Will they find Phoebe? Will George get in trouble?” This time, Chris did not share his ideas during his book club’s discussion.

Chris was a student who found utilizing multiple modes of communication essential to contribute to discussions. When only one option was offered for showing and sharing his thinking during the whole class discussion, Chris often struggled to develop personal connections to the text. In turn, this created difficulty to elaborate on the key details of the text. Providing alternative methods for communicating allowed Chris

multiple opportunities to comfortably express his responses and questions. In addition to alternative communication methods, Chris was given sentence frames that prepared a thought process for him. Having the sentence frames started ideas that he was able to build upon. Precise modeling and examples were also given to Chris for developing responses and eventually questions. With these supports in place, Chris created questions to eventually contribute, in his own way, to group discussions.

### ***Post-Survey Responses***

Upon completion of the study, the same survey both students completed at the beginning was also administered at the end to determine whether there were changes in attitudes towards literacy.

**Tonya.** Tonya still described herself as an “ok reader” and still sometimes reads in her free time. She said she still reads about the same as her friends, and that her best friends believe reading is ok to do. Yet, she said she almost never discusses books she reads with her friends. However, she still thought reading was “a good way to spend time,” and continued to view reading well as a very important life skill. She believed her friends viewed her as a good reader. This time around she said she sometimes figures out unknown words, whereas previously she almost never attempted to do so. She also replied that she almost always understands what she reads, whereas at the beginning of the study she said understood some of the texts during independent reading. Tonya continued to view others who read a lot as interesting and still felt very happy when she received a book as a present. Previously she worried about how her peers viewed her as a reader but now worried every day about what others thought of her as a reader. Tonya was having trouble thinking of an answer when her teachers asked her a question about

what she had read, whereas before she sometimes could think of an answer. She continued to almost always talk about her ideas when she was in a group or with a partner talking about what they read; however, she preferred when her teachers read out loud daily. Tonya felt reading was kind of easy for her, and planned to spend her time as an adult sometimes reading. Her favorite book was *Ten Good and Bad Things About My Life* because “it’s funny and interesting to read things about someone’s life.” She replied that she loved to learn about earthquakes when asked what her favorite non-fiction text was. Although she said her favorite author was Ann M. Martin previously, she reported on the post-survey that she did not have a favorite author. On the initial survey, she reported she loved fiction over non-fiction books, more specifically mystery and scary books were her favorite to read. In the post-survey, she said she wanted to read more non-fiction, adventure, and mystery books. Instead of taking specific steps to become a better reader, she said you had to read online to improve your reading. She continues to dislike reading and did not feel any teachers had done anything interesting or enjoyable during reading time. Tonya said reading is her most difficult subject because it is hard to read the words.

**Table 1**

*Tonya’s Pre and Post Survey Responses*

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student’s Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student’s Post-Survey Response</b>
My friends think I am:	A good reader	An OK reader
Reading a book is something I like to do:	Sometimes	Sometimes

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student's Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student's Post-Survey Response</b>
I read _____:	About the same as my friends	About the same as my friends
My best friends think reading is:	OK to do	OK to do
When I come to a word I don't know, I can:	Sometimes figure it out	Sometimes figure it out
I tell my friends about a good book I read:	I almost never do this	I almost never do this
When I am reading by myself, I understand:	Some of what I read	Almost everything I read
People who read a lot are:	Interesting	Interesting
I am _____:	An okay reader	An okay reader
I think libraries are:	An OK place to spend time	A great place to spend time
I worry about what other kids think about my reading:	Once in awhile	Everyday
Knowing how to read well is:	Very important	Very important
When my teachers ask me a question about what I have read, I _____:	Sometimes think of an answer	Have trouble thinking of an answer
I think reading is:	A good way to spend time	A good way to spend time
Reading is:	Kind of easy for me	Kind of easy for me
As an adult, I plan to spend:	Some of my time reading	Some of my time reading
When I am in a group talking or with a partner talking about what we are reading, I _____:	Almost always talk about my ideas	Almost always talk about my ideas

Survey Questions	Student's Pre-Survey Response	Student's Post-Survey Response
I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes:	Almost everyday	Almost every day
When I read out loud, I am a:	OK reader	Ok reader
If someone gives me a book for a present, I feel:	Very happy	Very happy
Think about an interesting fiction book or story you have read recently...Write the title below. Describe your feelings about the book. Why did you feel it was interesting? What did you like about it?	Ten Good and Bad Things About My Life. I love this b/c the characters are so like funny and they fit so good in the good. So that's why I love this book so much.	Ten Good and Bad Thing About My Life. I like the book b/c it's funny and interesting to read things about someone else's life.
Think about something important from a nonfiction book or article that you learned recently, NOT from your teacher or parents or television, but something you have READ. What did you read about? What did you learn? How did you know or find out about reading material on this? Why was reading this important to you?	I have not recently read any nonfiction books.	On September 19, 1985 in Mexico City an earthquake killed ten thousand people and hurt another 20 thousand. It was interesting b/c I love to learn about this kind of stuff. The name of the book is Earthquakes.
Who is your favorite author? Why?	Ann M. Martin b/c she makes books so interesting to read. Another reason is she makes sometimes long books and I love long books	I don't have one

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student's Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student's Post-Survey Response</b>
Explain what you think you have to do to learn to be a better reader?	First you have to listen. Second you have to focus. Last you have to just read.	Read online and read with it
Are there any books right now that you would like to read or certain kinds of books you like to read? Why?	Mystery and scary last funny	Yes, non-fiction and adventure and mystery
How do you decide what book to read?	I look at the cover and then I look at the first page and if I can read it well I go through the book. If it's good, I will get it.	Look on the first page and see if I can read it or not
Are there any kinds of books you DON'T like to read? Why?	History b/c it's just so boring in my opinion.	No, there is not
Do you prefer to read with a book in your hand or digitally?	Both b/c somethings you want it online and somethings not.	Digitally
In what class/subject do you most like to read? Why?	Math b/c it's fun to read the math stuff	Non-fiction and pets books
In what class/subject do you feel reading is most difficult? Why?	Writing b/c it's hard to do both	Kind of because sometimes it's hard to read the words.
Have any of your teachers ever done something with reading that you really enjoyed? Describe it.	No, not really	No, not really because I never liked reading
Do you share and discuss books, magazines, or other reading materials with your friends outside of school? How often?	I share books I like with my friends mostly	Yes but not that often

Survey Questions	Student's Pre-Survey Response	Student's Post-Survey Response
Do you share any of the following reading materials with members of your family: newspapers, magazines, religious materials, games? With whom? How often?	No	Yes I do it often
Do you belong to any clubs or organizations in which you read or write?	No	Yes because I love to write about pets

**Chris.** On Chris's first survey, he said that reading a book is something he did not like to do very often, while on the post-survey reading is something he liked to do sometimes. He previously believed reading was a boring way to spend time, and now believed it to be an ok way to spend time. He used to view himself as a poor reader on the initial survey. On the post-survey, he viewed himself as an ok reader. He still thought of himself as a poor reader compared to his friends. Every day he worried about what other kids thought of his reading and now believed reading is kind of easy. Some of what he read he understood when reading by himself. He said his best friends thought reading is really fun, and sometimes told his friends about a book he read. Chris said he still understood some of what he reads, and he continued to sometimes figure out a word he does not know. When his teachers asked him a question about what he had read, he said he could sometimes think of an answer. Whereas he usually had trouble thinking of a response. Chris continued to believe people who read a lot are interesting, and that libraries are an ok place to spend time. Additionally, he believed knowing how to read well is very important, and still planned to spend some of his time reading as an adult. In

the post-survey, Chris maintains the same response about group and partner work. He would sometimes talk about his ideas when discussing the text after reading with a partner or in a group setting. He only liked for the teachers to read out loud in class once in a while, as opposed to every day, his previous response. He also reported that he continued to be unhappy when he received a book as a present. Chris explained that he prefers fiction books over non-fiction, and his favorite book is still *Artemis Fowl*. He described his book selection process this time as reading the back to find something he liked. Chris reported on this survey that writing is his most difficult subject, and has still not experienced any teachers doing fun things in class with reading.

**Table 2**

*Chris's Pre and Post Survey Responses*

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student's Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student's Post-Survey Response</b>
My friends think I am:	An OK reader	An OK reader
Reading a book is something I like to do:	Not very often	Sometimes
I read _____:	Not as well as my friends	Not as well as my friends
My best friends think reading is:	Really fun	Really fun
When I come to a word I don't know, I can:	Sometimes figure it out	Almost always figure it out
I tell my friends about a good book I read:	I do this some of the time	I do this some of the time

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student's Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student's Post-Survey Response</b>
When I am reading by myself, I understand:	Some of what I read	Some of what I read
People who read a lot are:	Interesting	Interesting
I am _____:	A poor reader	An okay reader
I think libraries are:	An OK place to spend time	An OK place to spend time
I worry about what other kids think about my reading:	Everyday	Everyday
Knowing how to read well is:	Very important	Very important
When my teachers ask me a question about what I have read, I _____:	Have trouble thinking of an answer	Sometimes think of an answer
I think reading is:	A boring way to spend time	An OK way to spend time
Reading is:	Very hard for me	Kind of easy for me
As an adult, I plan to spend:	Some of my time reading	Some of my time reading
When I am in a group talking or with a partner talking about what we are reading, I _____:	Sometimes talk about my ideas	Sometimes talk about my ideas
I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes:	Everyday	Once in awhile
When I read out loud, I am a:	Poor reader	OK reader

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Student's Pre-Survey Response</b>	<b>Student's Post-Survey Response</b>
If someone gives me a book for a present, I feel:	Unhappy	Sort of happy
Think about an interesting fiction book or story you have read recently...Write the title below. Describe your feelings about the book. Why did you feel it was interesting? What did you like about it?	Artemis Fowl	Artemis Fowl
Think about something important from a nonfiction book or article that you learned recently, NOT from your teacher or parents or television, but something you have READ. What did you read about? What did you learn? How did you know or find out about reading material on this? Why was reading this important to you?	Carrots are good for you.	You read all day.
Who is your favorite author? Why?	Eoin Colfer	Eoin Colfer
Explain what you think you have to do to learn to be a better reader?	Because you read everything	You read all day
Are there any books right now that you would like to read or certain kinds of books you like to read? Why?	Science	No
How do you decide what book to read?	I just choose	I look at the back
Are there any kinds of books you DON'T like to read? Why?	Mystery/Horror	None
Do you prefer to read with a book in your hand or digitally?	Digitally	Online
In what class/subject do you most like to read? Why?	Word study because it's quiet	Read
In what class/subject do you feel reading is most difficult? Why?	Reading	Writing
Have any of your teachers ever done something with reading that you really enjoyed? Describe it.	No	No

Survey Questions	Student's Pre-Survey Response	Student's Post-Survey Response
Do you share and discuss books, magazines, or other reading materials with your friends outside of school? How often?	Do not	No
Do you share any of the following reading materials with members of your family: newspapers, magazines, religious materials, games? With whom? How often?	Nope	No
Do you belong to any clubs or organizations in which you read or write?	Yes but no	Yes and no

## Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that when literacy instruction includes students' FofK, students can process information from the text to develop conclusions and inferences. When students are given explicit instruction to create questions, they are capable of doing so. However, they may continue to struggle with operating group discussions independently. The following chapter outlines the conclusions and implications of the study. Additional suggestions and alternations for further research are discussed as well.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the findings of the study and overall conclusions based on the findings. Implications, as well as suggestions for future research, are also presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with final thoughts.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of the study was to understand how integrating students' Funds of Knowledge (FofK) into literacy instruction would help students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) independently develop discussion topics and questions to execute meaningful group discussions. The study took place in a fifth-grade classroom in Central New Jersey where two students were observed in a classroom setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. A teacher's research journal, student surveys, student journals, recorded video, and typed student responses were used to collect data throughout the study. The study began with two read-aloud texts including modeled thinking and behavior as an independent reader, paired with classroom discussions at the end of each reading session. Students were then paired homogeneously into book clubs where they selected the text they wanted to read. Members took notes as they independently read on independent reading days. Then shared their thoughts on meeting days, which took place a total of eight times for three weeks. Students were encouraged to find alternative ways to communicate, record their thoughts, and utilize audio texts. The pre and post-survey measured students' attitudes toward literacy and strategies they use to help them become better readers. Data analysis focused on two students with IEPs in the general education

classroom. Between the two students, a total of six themes emerged showing how students interacted with texts and each other: connections between self and funds of knowledge (FoK), emotional responses, creating questions, alternative ways to communicate, and making predictions.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that utilizing both students' FoK increases their ability to comprehend texts and make connections. Furthermore, students who have autonomy over the modes with which they can interact with and process texts increase their interest in literacy. However, students who have a slightly more positive view of literacy seemed to be more enthusiastic about developing discussion questions to lead with, while students with an already negative view of literacy struggled to ask questions during reading and group discussions. After the study, when readers had the opportunity to select their modes of learning, what emerged was their attitudes towards literacy slightly improved.

### **Conclusions of the Study**

The main goal of the study was to understand if using students' who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) FofK would help them develop questioning techniques to independently guide their book club discussions. I wanted to know more about how to engage students so they have the desired conversations they want about books rather than teacher-led discussions. To figure out how to motivate students and find what would get them talking, I researched ways to incorporate students' cultural and home backgrounds in instruction to increase independent discussion engagement. Additionally, I researched educational accommodations and modifications to support students with IEPs which would help increase participation.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that students engage with text more when they are given the choice on how to read or respond. When group members were able to type their responses rather than verbally reply to each other, they were more likely to expand on their ideas and make inferences that created discussion. By giving members the choice to type or verbally respond during book club meetings, students capitalize on their independence. Gay (2000) describes students' increase in independence when they can select their mode of learning rather than having it dictated by the teacher. Piazza et. al. (2015) found that using assistive technology encouraged students with IEPs to actively participate in the lesson. It became apparent that students who were given the ability to adapt to their learning styles increased output during small group meetings, especially Chris, who generally refrained from verbally participating in whole-class literature discussions. Along with having the opportunity to select a desired mode of output, both students were given the option to use a digital or paperback book. Accommodating students with IEPs by allowing them to utilize digital texts increased access and supported independent reading since the digital program read books to them. Both students in the study opted to use a digital text to read along with rather than the paperback. Piazza et. al. (2015) assures when varying the technologies, students become prepared for a world full of technology. Readers in the study were able to make the adjustments they needed so they could access the content and participate in conversations without teacher input. Lave and Wenger (1991) also explain that allowing students to select how they want to intake information allows them to become leaders in the classroom. When the teacher works peripherally with students, children have a great opportunity to independently practice what they have learned.

Naraian (2009) describes literature circles as a social practice in which students engage in social interaction. Often children with IEPs are self-conscious of sharing their insights with a larger group of peers. When in a smaller group, it was observed both students in the study were much more vocal and comfortable discussing their reading. Although they did not respond to each other's insights, they felt their ideas were important enough to either verbalize to the group or type in the shared documents. When grouped in smaller sections, students who did not typically share with the larger group were more likely to share with the smaller groups.

Through the research, it was also found that interest in the text increased when students were able to select a book. Groups were given a wide selection of historical fiction texts for the unit. They then discussed and voted on which one they would like to read. The students within the study showed greater participation in book clubs than during teacher-selected read-aloud. Gay (2000) asserts when teachers create a classroom atmosphere of inquiry and action, students take greater ownership of their learning. Chris and Tonya both independently read the text and came to meetings with comments and questions already prepared, indicating greater engagement with independent reading.

Incorporating culturally relevant teaching (CRT) by selecting texts that reflect students' lives can increase engagement is one conclusion that can be drawn from this study. Developing connections to learners' home lives was essential for them to see themselves in the characters. Understanding the learners' homes and backgrounds while selecting texts is what Ladson-Billings (1995) would describe as CRT. Additionally, it ensures that classroom discussions make an impact on students and their worlds. Both students are from backgrounds where they had to endure multiple moves and hardships in

their lives. Students saw themselves in the main characters of both read-aloud texts where the characters also endured hardship. This allowed students to create connections between themselves and the text so they could participate in whole-class discussions. They were also able to create questions to increase comprehension. By incorporating characters from various backgrounds and families, both students were able to feel confident in their personal histories. Children feel confident in their lives when texts are used as mirrors for them. Readers understand there are people similar to them in the world and are assured their stories are lived by others. This makes students feel as though they matter and are important, regardless of their background. Gay (2000) describes when this happens, students seek out additional opportunities to question, change, and grow. Even though Tonya's upbringing was different, she was more adept at sharing her personal experiences and how they connected to the characters in the texts read in class. She became enthusiastic about expanding on her responses and sharing them with both the entire class and the smaller book club.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The first was the need to maintain social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were not able to physically gather in smaller groups. They had to maintain a six feet distance thus limiting the way book clubs met. Groups were not able to dictate how they met and only had the choice to video conference. Some students felt self-conscious over video conferences and would close their cameras or refuse to speak on camera. Although there was an alternate method for participating in meetings, members had difficulty carrying on conversations with each other. Additionally, students had to remain at their desks during

the classroom read-aloud creating a classroom atmosphere that was almost too formal. Flexible grouping, turn and talking to partners, and other classroom strategies to increase participation and engagement were limited due to having to follow COVID-19 protocols. Students' interactions were mainly video conferencing, through Google documents, or whole-group discussions. If this study did not take place during the pandemic, I would have included an increased amount of classroom strategies for smaller groups and partner work. This would support Gay's (2000) theory that students equate literacy groups to a social event. Students' participation and conversations would be able to take place without the limitations and formality of technology and the current classroom setting.

In addition to the formality technology brings, it can also create class time wasted to troubleshoot technology issues. Often, students' video conferencing programs did not work, their sound lacked clearness, or their microphones were not functioning properly. Some students would not have their Chromebooks fully charged and the computer would shut down in the middle of meetings or they would be kicked out of the video conferencing meeting. Technology issues often interrupted instruction or I would have to assist others in the class while also working with my reading group. While using online note-taking helped to provide students with opportunities to have control over their mode of communication, I would not have meetings take place over the computer to avoid any additional distractions.

The next limitation to the study was the length of time. During the study, I had to quarantine and needed to pause the study. This interrupted the progress being made with the students of the study since a substitute teacher was not employing the same strategies

I was working on with the students. When I was able to return, the district had ordered all schools to be fully remote, and I had to complete the study via video conferencing and online lessons. It was at this point that I found students regressed in their progress and understanding the procedures for book clubs. I had to backtrack on the work that was in progress. If the study lasted for a longer period, having to backtrack would not have been as much of a factor in the study. Learners would have greater opportunities to master the procedures and strategies for book clubs. They would also become increasingly comfortable having conversations with each other.

### **Implications**

For educators and future researchers on this topic, the study has several implications. For teachers, they must understand and respect students' backgrounds. When this is accomplished, teachers can identify best practices for learners. It also encourages increased motivation and engagement from the class. When students can identify with literature, they develop greater inquiry into the text. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2000) both advocate for structuring pedagogy around the children they work with. Giving readers greater autonomy over what they read and how they read it along with allowing them to select their communication styles provides increased engagement from learners.

Another implication for educators is students feeling confident in their education and worthy of the information they obtain. When students feel their stories and backgrounds are honored in the classroom, they open up to the potential connections to be made between the text and their own lives. Giroux (2001) says when teachers allow students to step forward with their information to process and lead with

instructions. Increased comprehension and critical thinking are applied by learners when this happens.

For future teacher researchers, more research needs to be completed to understand how the various backgrounds of all levels of learners respond to utilizing Funds of Knowledge (FofK) in the classroom. While this study provides insight into the experiences of two student participants, further research including learners from varying backgrounds would provide a greater understanding of this study. This could include students who struggle with literacy and are not identified as having a learning disability requiring an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Both students exemplified two very different backgrounds and ways of communicating. They were also from similar educational levels. While they did produce evidence to show educators the need to understand students' home lives and personal stories, they only represented two out of thirteen children total in the classroom. It would help educators and other researchers to study all educational levels and backgrounds in the classroom to gather additional information. Further findings and strategies could be found if all students in the classroom participated.

### **Conclusion**

Incorporating FofK in the classroom can increase student participation and motivation. However, additional participants and research is needed to truly conclude whether students with IEPs can create discussion questions to maintain book club conversations. Last, having the ability to gather close together in the classroom could have a significant impact on the conversations. By removing the limited capabilities in terms of proximity to others in the classroom, teachers will be able to fully implement

FofK without distractions. Applying student feedback and using information from their lives is not only beneficial for their education but also essential to support and guide students into their futures. Using the techniques applied in this study is only just the beginning of building positive relationships and impact. It is my goal to continue to grow on this information to become a better educator who validates students' experiences.

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