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**THE INFLUENCE INCLUSIVE LITERATURE CIRCLES WITH
MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE HAS ON THE SELF-EFFICACIES OF 4TH
GRADE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

by
Brianna Norcross

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
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Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
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Dedication

To my late Father, who encouraged me and believed in me to begin this journey. He was one of my biggest supporters and would be proud to see where I am now.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my boyfriend, Kyle, who has supported and encouraged me through the entire process and picked up my slack when I have spent countless hours doing my work. Next, I would like to thank my colleagues, classmates, and friends who encouraged me along the way. I would have never made it through without them! Finally, I would like to thank my family for their constant support and encouragement as I came across obstacles while completing my degree.

Abstract

Brianna Norcross

THE INFLUENCE INCLUSIVE LITERATURE CIRCLES WITH MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE HAS ON THE SELF-EFFICACIES OF 4TH GRADE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2022-2023

Susan Browne, Ph.D

Master of Arts in Reading Education

This study seeks to determine what happens to fourth grade students with disabilities reading self-efficacies when they participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural literature. The purpose of this teacher research was to investigate strategies to improve reading self-efficacies of students with disabilities, investigating what would happen if students with disabilities were placed heterogeneously with their peers while reading books with characters with disabilities and how that influenced their reading self-efficacies. Four students with a disability were integrated with their general education peers in their inclusive classroom to participate in literature circles for four weeks. The multicultural books were books that contained characters with disabilities. Baseline data from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) was used to assess students' self-perceptions in reading. When analyzing the data, the three major themes within the study are: (1) Students' perceptions of disabilities and how they changed throughout the literature meetings; (2) Students made connections to the text through representation of their experiences; and (3) Students had an increased engagement and belief in their ability. The results suggest that over time, inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts can slightly improve the reading self-efficacies of students with disabilities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“This is too hard! I can’t do it!” Emily shouted and threw her hands up in the air as her reading assignment was presented to the class. Emily looked around the room defeated as all her peers got to work on their assignment. Emily was being provided with modified work in her third grade in class support, general education classroom. Just like Emily, the other students with disabilities within the classroom had similar reactions. As the Special Education teacher in the room, I am responsible for supporting the students with disabilities. As this was not the first time Emily and her classmates had these types of reactions to their reading assignments, I decided to ask Emily why these were her instant responses.

“I suck at reading,” Emily exclaimed to me. “Why doesn’t everyone else think this is hard?” She asked. Being in the inclusive setting, Emily is often pulled back with her other classmates with disabilities to receive extra support. When they are pulled back for small groups so frequently, the students are observed as often eye rolling and complaining about having to be pulled again.

“You always help us,” another student, Matt, stated. “I want to read what John (another student at his table) is reading”. Conversations about student needs are had frequently. We have these conversations with the students to help them understand and see that not everyone needs the same support in order to succeed in school. This specific incident is just one example of my students presenting with low reading self-efficacy, believing that they are not capable of completing the task they are given.

As a fourth year Teacher of Students with Disabilities, I have observed the low self-efficacy of my students during reading instruction. I have observed my students, especially students in class support classrooms, compare themselves to their peers, thinking that they are not capable. Students make comments like “How come John doesn’t have this on his desk?” or “how come Zoe gets to read that book?” Students with disabilities have the desire to read books that their peers are reading, when that book may be a challenge for that student. When they realize this, they continue to compare themselves and think that they are not capable of reading a book that their peers are. Overall, the students are observed as feeling defeated or unmotivated during reading instruction.

Being in an inclusive classroom again this year, working with the same students I had last year, I knew I wanted to see what I could do in order to improve their reading self-efficacies and to find joy in reading. My students have always enjoyed reading in literature circles, therefore I foresee them enjoying reading in literature circles. In these literature circles, the students will see themselves reading the same books as their peers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine what happens when students with disabilities take part in inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts. Specifically, this study will investigate how students with disabilities reading self-efficacies are affected by being in literature circles, reading the same book, with their general education peers. In addition, how multicultural texts, including characters with disabilities, impacts their reading self-efficacy. I hope to gain more knowledge on effective strategies to use in order to improve the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

I have consistently observed students with disabilities lack the reading self-efficacy that their general education peers have. They often compare themselves to their peers, resulting in minimal belief in their abilities. Not only are they comparing themselves and their abilities, according to Blaska (1996), they have limited resources to see themselves represented within the texts that they are reading, as there are limited chapter books that have characters with disabilities. My school and classroom lack books with characters with disabilities. No matter the classroom and no matter the student, they all deserve the right to feel included and confident in their abilities in reading. Teachers need to take the initiative to create a culturally relevant classroom environment and to help build the confidence and belief in their students.

The research question that will be investigated is:

- What happens to the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities when they participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural books?

In addition to the research question, the sub questions that will be addressed are:

- In what ways does student representation impact reading self-efficacy?
- How does student book choice impact reading self-efficacy?

The goal of my research is to find effective strategies that support students with disabilities reading self-efficacies, in hopes to support their overall reading achievement.

Story of the Question

As a fourth year teacher of students with disabilities, I often observe my students' lack of motivation and belief in their own abilities. Much of my job consists of telling my

students that they are capable of what they are being asked to do. After learning about the Affective lens in my clinical tutoring sessions at Rowan University, more specifically self-efficacy of learners, I found this specific theory to stick the most with me working in Special Education. Students with disabilities are the individuals who get pulled back to the kidney table for support more than their peers. My students often struggle with the confidence in themselves and belief that they are capable of completing a task they are given. I had always known that a lack of confidence and belief in yourself will damage the ability of an individual. I have worked hard using different strategies over the years, such as peer interactions, positive praise and choice, in order to help build the inner belief of my students, but have still observed that my students have a low reading self-efficacy. After reading more about Bandura's self-efficacy theory, I knew it was something that my students lacked and needed more support in building.

I began to dive into more research about strategies that support the reading-self efficacies of students. Vengas (2018) discusses how to strengthen a reader's self-efficacy through the use of literature circles. I was instantly intrigued. As I read her article, I found myself reflecting on my inclusive classroom. Working with my students in the previous year, they enjoyed book clubs, but were discouraged by not being able to pick their books based on interest. Therefore, I decided to research more about literature circles and how they can be effective when they are given to students with choice and are inclusive. This led me to including not just literature circles, but inclusive literature circles. In other words, the students are placed based on their book choice rather than their reading levels. This will allow students with disabilities to be mixed in groups with their peers. If a student chooses a book that is significantly above their reading level and

are showing signs of misunderstanding, they will be provided the opportunity to listen and read along on LearningAlly. LearningAlly is a website that reads books to the students while the words are present. The words highlight as they are read, allowing students to follow along with the reader.

In addition to the Affective lens, the Multicultural lens stood out to me.

Throughout my time in the program, I have gained more knowledge on the importance of using multicultural texts within the classroom. Blaska (1996) stated that students with disabilities are one of the most underrepresented groups within literature. This led me to reflect on my classroom library and how there is a lack of diversity for students with disabilities in order to see themselves within the books they are reading. Lawson (2021) discusses creating a culturally relevant classroom while using literature circles. I found myself instantly brainstorming ideas and strategies that I could implement within my classroom. With the knowledge of my classroom library and the lack of students with disabilities represented in chapter books combined with the knowledge of the effectiveness of literature circles, I decided to choose chapter books that have characters with a disability in the books that my students will be reading.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter two provides a review of the literature that has connected and influenced this study. Chapter three discusses the procedure of the study and research design, the context of the study. A description of the participants will be presented in this chapter. This chapter also discusses the procedure and data collection methods, as well as the plan for data analysis. Chapter four discusses the major data findings and analysis. Chapter

five, the final chapter, explains the summary of the studies findings, limitations of the study and implications for teachers and educators.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Classrooms have been evolving in order to be more inclusive for all students, including students with disabilities. According to Pak (2020), students with learning disabilities have a history of experiencing inequality within schools. LaNear and Frattura (2007) discuss the historical cases that made a lasting impact on students with disabilities educational rights. *Mills vs. The District of Columbia Board of Education* addressed the issue of providing students with disabilities education and not denying their accommodations in 1972. The Education for all Handicapped Children's Act in 1975 that was created to assure students receive free appropriate public education and related services. The Education for all Handicapped Children's Act assured that children were to receive, and not be denied, services.

Following the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004) there was an increased emphasis on educating students in the least restrictive environment (Whittaker, 2012). When students are placed in the least restrictive environment, such as an in-class support or inclusive classroom, it provides equity for students with disabilities. Inclusive classrooms, or co-taught classrooms can be beneficial for all students involved. Inclusive reading classrooms allow students with disabilities to be around their peers and to continue to have exposure to grade level content. Brawand, Stefanidis and King-Sears (2019) discuss the benefits of co-taught classrooms for reading instruction. The authors state that both general education and special education teachers

benefit from learning new skills and strategies from one another, overall improving teaching techniques for students with and without disabilities.

Although students are provided with the least restrictive environment, it is observed that students with disabilities have a lower self-efficacy compared to their peers. Self-efficacy is a term that was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s. Self-efficacy is a person's belief about their ability to perform a task. Bandura (1993) discussed the factors that influence one's self-efficacy. Based on Bandura's findings, self-efficacy is influenced and impacts cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. To furthermore improve the self-efficacies of students with disabilities, the implementation of authentic multicultural literature is vital in today's classrooms. It is important for teachers to use a pedagogy that reflects their students within the classroom. For students with disabilities, texts that mirror the life of the students have been very limited. Blaska (1996) states that students with disabilities are often overlooked and misinterpreted in children's books. The use of multicultural texts within the classroom will provide windows and mirrors for all students (Bishop, 1997). With the use of multicultural literature and effective teaching strategies, meaningful education to students with disabilities will be provided. With the changes in education for students with disabilities, it is imperative that all students are authentically represented in books around them. In order to support student success, it is crucial to think of the whole child, therefore also educating a child's social emotional growth.

Chapter two provides a review of research in the areas of self-efficacy, culturally relevant pedagogy and literature circles as related to students with disabilities within inclusive classrooms. The first section defines reading self-efficacy and culturally

relevant pedagogy. The second section discusses the impact self-efficacy has on reading achievement. The next section will define and talk through literature circles and how it impacts self-efficacy. In addition, this chapter reviews literature related to culturally relevant teaching and literature circles. Finally, the chapter will end with the summary of benefits of incorporating literature circles with students with disabilities.

Self-Efficacy

Reading self-efficacy plays an important role in contributing to students' academic success. Self-efficacy is a term that was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s. Self-efficacy is a person's belief about their ability to perform a task. Bandura (1993) discussed the factors that influence one's self-efficacy. Based on Bandura's findings, self-efficacy is influenced and impacts cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. The higher a student's perceived self-efficacy, the more they pay attention to their cognitive abilities (Bandura, 1993). According to Nes Ferrara (2005), "Self-efficacy for reading refers to individuals' assessments of how well they think they can accomplish a particular reading task and is reading influenced by how well they have performed on similar tasks, including any accompanying feedback and encouragement received" (p. 216). When students believe in their ability to complete a reading task, they are perceived to have a higher reading self-efficacy.

According to Orlich & Schatz (2020), "Empowering the whole learner requires an axiological shift when considering the importance of self-efficacy as a focus of attention to literacy learning" (p.735-736). The authors go on to say, "As students develop increased levels of self-efficacy, a diverse array of literacy skills also improve, demonstrating the connection between the affective and cognitive domains" (p. 736).

The Impact Self-Efficacy Has on Reading Achievement

Self-Efficacy strategies can be used to influence one's belief in themselves to complete a task. Current research has been conducted to see how self-efficacy and reading instruction and achievement are correlated. In a case study involving reading comprehension questions and motivation under the affective lens, Solheim (2011) aimed to examine if motivation could be a predictor of reading comprehension scores in multiple choice and short answers. Solheim looked at reading task value and reading self-efficacy as contributing factors. Overall, the researcher found that students who have low self-efficacy will struggle with complex reading tasks and assessments, although a “complex task” will vary from student to student. Solheim finalizes her results by stating that self-efficacy affects how much students comprehend a text but also how they show they comprehend. Therefore, it is important for teachers to think critically about the task they will be providing their students and what each student may consider a complex task.

When predicting motivators, interest and current reading self-efficacies of your students, surveys are a useful tool. In a case study using this method, the researchers conducted self-efficacy and interest surveys with their participants (Abbott, Mickail, Richards, Renninger, Hidi, Beers and Berniger, 2017). Overall, they found that “...for reading interest and reading self-efficacy were correlated with reading achievement measures, they were correlated with different reading achievement measures...” (p. 53). In other words, the authors found that students had a higher self-efficacy and more reading achievement when reading something of their interest.

Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) found essential components that support students self-efficacy in literacy to be teacher and peer modeling, student mastery experiences, and

feedback. The authors discuss the importance of establishing standards with setting goals through the use of modeling, using attainable goals to create accomplishments and to provide consistent and useful feedback. They state that “direct modeling of both literacy and self-efficacy is necessary; students tend to believe it is possible for themselves when they see it in their role models” (p. 739). In addition to teacher modeling, Schunk & Zimmerman (2007) found the impact peer modeling has on student self-efficacy. They state that:

“Although adult models can teach children skills, children derive the best self-efficacy information from models who are similar to themselves. Observing similar others succeed at a task, such as reading aloud in front of the class, may raise observers’ self-efficacy. Children are apt to believe that if their peers can succeed, they can as well” (p. 3).

Therefore, in order to contribute to the growth and student achievement, it is important for teachers to create experiences where students can themselves become the models for their peers.

Overall, leading to the development of self-efficacy and literacy achievement of the students, Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) discuss that master experiences are an initial factor to gaining self-efficacy. The authors state that students may be hesitant to take risks if their past is consistent with not achieving goals, therefore, “...failure is often a requisite ingredient of future success, but only if it is seen as part of the learning process” (p.742). Furthermore, it is important for teachers to create these experiences that will help shape and provide mastery for students to experience. Lastly, the authors discuss how feedback provides students with skills to build a higher self-efficacy. Teachers should be direct,

specific and give accurate feedback as “students do not learn from criticism; value and growth are derived from constructive feedback that recognize strengths and areas for improvement and specify how to leverage strengths toward making needed improvements” (p. 744). In summary, Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) and Schunk & Zimmerman (2007) found that with an effective utilization of modeling, mastery experiences, and feedback will lead to an overall increase in student literacy achievement.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In order to improve a student's achievement, it is crucial for teachers to implement culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching 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. 31). Ladson-Billings (2006), described a key factor of culturally responsive pedagogy with a focus on cultural competence, which “refers to helping students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture, where they are likely to have a chance of improving their socioeconomic status and making informed decisions about the lives they wish to lead” (p. 36).

Therefore, utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy will overall increase the cultural competence of students.

In order to support student success, it is critical to think of the whole child. Oslick & Pearson (2016) defines multicultural literature as not having one definition, “it can refer to any book about a group of people and their group or individual experience or literature about groups within America who have been overlooked and often ignored by the dominant culture” (p.104). Bishop (1997) goes on to discuss how without the use of

multicultural literature in classrooms, students will not see reflections of themselves. With the use of multicultural literature and effective teaching strategies, meaningful education to students with disabilities will be provided. With the changes in education for students with disabilities, it is imperative that all students are authentically represented in books around them.

Literature Circles and Reading Self-Efficacy

Literature circles can also be otherwise known as book clubs. According to Whittaker (2012), literature circles are “effective in improving reading comprehension and social skills for a broad range of students” (p. 215). Literature circles as a reflective practice. Scott (2010) defined reflection “as the conscious awareness and questioning of personal experience, a search for alternative explanations and interpretations, and identification of areas for improvement” (430). Reflection is used to help students grow. Sanacore (2013) argued that students need to slow down in order to be reflective in their literacy growth. Just as being reflective is critical, literature circles help impact how students perceive themselves. Sanacore (2013) states that “Literature circle discussions also represent a sense of social justice for all learners, including those at risk of failure, because all learners have opportunities to engage in dialogic activities that support their active and successful engagement in learning” (p.117), therefore aligning with Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) essential components of self-efficacy for reading achievement.

Sanacore (2013) went on to discuss his findings of reflection within literature circles. The author stated that initial responses from students were often personal responses, “with students taking on an “efferent” or an “aesthetic” stance (Rosenblatt, 1995)” (p. 117). He found that his students either looked for texts or made connections

with the text in order to understand what they were reading. Sanacore's research findings suggest that when participating in literature circles, students engage in a more balanced approach to answering questions and participating in discussions. In other words, students will answer both personally and critically. According to Sanacore (2013), "I have learned that the best way of enticing students to read and discuss a text is to "hook" them in personal ways. Students are more likely to become involved with literature when their selections and personal responses are respected" (p. 118). Therefore, in order to improve a student's self-efficacy, and ultimately their reading achievement, literature circles are used to make sure students are reading something that relates to themselves and to their interests.

Likewise, Venegas (2018) found self-efficacy improvement through the use of literature circles. Venegas (2018) used literature circles to discover if it would improve the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers. In her study, she explored if struggling readers' self-efficacies would benefit from participating in literature circles. The study was significant in utilizing a balanced literacy approach. She stated that "struggling readers with low self-efficacy often doubt that their reading skills can be improved. Thus, struggling readers require a more balanced approach to literacy instruction to develop, hone, and successfully apply their reading skills" (p. 419). Therefore, Venegas implemented literature circles as a way to creatively use the skills of her struggling readers. Her overall findings reported that the RSPS scores improved and there is potential for literature circles to increase a reader's self-efficacy.

Ferrara (2005) examined if paired reading instructional would impact reader self-perceptions of less-skilled readers. In this case study, Ferrara also looked at fluency,

accuracy, comprehension and perception. The researcher found that the student was more engaged and that reading self efficacy was related to what other people thought about her abilities. She states that struggling readers have a lower reading self-efficacy. Ferrara states that due to struggling readers lower self-efficacy, struggling readers must eventually believe that they can apply these skills that they have learned, although readers with low self-efficacies are unlikely to transfer their skills in different contexts (McCabe, 2003).

Venegas (2018) studied students reading self-efficacies in grades 4-6 when they participate in literature circles. The literature circles used in this case study took place over either week and students all read the same novel. Venegas' overall findings indicated that literature circles can improve the reader's self-efficacy. Educators should be intentional to improve a readers' self-efficacy. When Venegas analyzed her study, she examined one classroom teacher and student to see how literature circles also impacted the students' social emotional learning. Venegas (2018) analyzed the students' intrapersonal skills (self-management) and interpersonal skills (social awareness, social metacognition, empathy). The student took part in multiple roles throughout the literature circles which lead to the possible implications of skills. Overall, the student showed growth in all social emotional areas examined. These findings suggest that activities like literature circles foster the students socioemotional and academic learning. Therefore, this study shows a link between literature circles and how they can impact the self-efficacies of students.

Culturally Relevant Teaching through Literature Circles with Multicultural Literature

Bishop (1997) states that multicultural literature “is rooted in the call for inclusion and curricular reform by groups who have traditionally been marginalized in this society, and generally is used to refer to literature by or about people from such groups” (p. 14). With the use of diverse literature, similar to Sanacore (2013), Kemmerlin & Wilkins (2020) found that through the use of interactive book talks, students were provided with opportunities to share personal experiences and are able to make connections between themselves and the text. The authors continue to discuss how when using multicultural literature, their students were able to discuss and identify injustices and feel empathy for characters. For this reason, students are able to question society around their everyday lives due to exposure to multicultural literature.

Furthermore, children should be exposed and taught to recognize social injustices of minority groups. Adomat (2014) exposed students in second to fifth grade to books with characters with disabilities. As a result, children became more aware and found themselves to be more accepting of people with disabilities. Adomat (2014) researched the importance of literature discussions, allowing students to make connections and gain multiple perspectives. Adomat examined how issues of disabilities were discussed through conversations during literature circle discussions. The author specifically looked at how students can build more of a positive understanding and perspective of disabilities. The researcher found that students gathered more understanding of issues with the exploration of characters in books with various disabilities. While discussing injustices is critical to higher level thinking, the injustices that are discussed should provide windows

and mirrors for all students within the classroom, overall leading with a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) states that learning and curriculum should be relevant to the students in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP makes learning relevant to students by providing both windows and mirrors within the texts they are reading (Bishop, 1997). According to Lawson (2021), when teachers include diverse texts that students can make connections with, it increases their ability to make meaning of the text. In addition to making meaning of the text, with CRP, students are able to represent their knowledge in order to promote thinking. Lawson (2021) states that a culturally relevant practice to implement into classrooms are literature circles that include diverse conversations and dialogue between students. Overall, Lawson (2021) says that “Literature circles are culturally relevant if teachers keep their students at the center of their classroom” (p. 38).

In addition, Souto-Manning (2009) researched how multicultural children’s literature impacted culturally responsive pedagogy. The researcher found in first and second grade classrooms that they consider their own perspectives, as well as others, to participate in the discussions, overall benefiting their students’ academic success. The students found problems with segregated, pull-out educational programs in the school systems, affecting the students' lives. Souto-Manning (2009) findings emphasized the importance of using children’s literature to assist in benefiting all needs of all children. In order to promote CRP, Lawson (2021) states that it is important to provide choice and responsibility for students in literature circles. She states, “This allows students to select

books that include characters and cultural themes with which they can identify” (p. 38). Therefore, providing motivating factors for students to be engaged.

Oslick & Pearson (2016) found that when using texts that promote CRP with students with disabilities, that reciprocal teaching, literature circles, and critical literacy strategies were the most effective. Oslick & Pearson (2016) state, “Within the subtopic of literature including people with disabilities, we consider minority characters to be those with disabilities. It is important to note that within the greater culture of disability, promoting positive characters who have disabilities has to be done very carefully” (p.108). They state that through the use of literature circles, students can be engaged in critical thinking, reflection and discussion as they read and discuss texts with characters with disabilities. Sanacore (2013) suggests that “classroom and special education teachers also need to support this instructional direction by demonstrating, scaffolding, and nurturing both types of responses” (p.118). As a result, students with disabilities will greatly benefit from the use of CRP and multicultural texts within literature circles.

The Benefits of Incorporating Literature Circles with Students with Disabilities

As the students with disability population continues to grow, Sanacore (2013) argues that this has led to an influence in literature including people with disabilities. In order to discuss the texts, researchers found that in co taught classrooms, literature circles are extremely effective. O’Brein (2007) argues that literature circles are a best practice for students with learning and other disabilities. Whittaker (2012) created heterogeneous groups of students that chose to read and discuss the same book together. In order for the instructional approach to be the most effective, Whittaker (2012) argues that “teachers

must address certain instructional challenges for all students to benefit” and “The most effective instructional approaches for struggling readers (a) use peer and teacher feedback, (b) elicit ongoing interaction, and (c) encourage task completion” (p.215). Likewise, Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) and Schunk & Zimmerman (2007) would argue that these factors also contribute to a higher self-efficacy within students.

Whittaker’s (2012) study took place in a co taught classroom. The authors state that there is an increase in co teaching, therefore the use of small group co teaching approaches can be used effectively. The co teachers taught using different literacy strategies such as using peer and teacher feedback, encouraging task completion and ongoing instruction, so that everyone in the classroom would benefit from literature circles. Whittaker (2012) discusses how literature circles are used to increase the students' enjoyment of reading different genres and to focus on multiple literacy strategies. She found that students who are known to be struggling readers are able to participate more in literature circles due to the choosing of their own texts and with the structure of having two teachers to maximize differentiation.

Furthermore, Anderson & Corbett (2008) discuss how teachers of students with disabilities have used literature circles less frequently than general education teachers, although they should continue to be used more frequently to explore a collaborative, structured learning environment. The authors state that “literature circles are effective because they are dynamic; they encourage maximum opportunities for student involvement” (p. 25) and allow students who may not usually speak and be engaged, be engaged, which overall leads to empowering students and creating a positive classroom environment. Anderson & Corbett (2008) stated that they found struggling students to be

more engaged and successful when participating in literature circles and “it is exciting to watch students of all abilities support one another” (p.32). As a result, literature circles help advance students with disabilities literacy growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research shows that utilizing multicultural texts and literature circles with students with disabilities will improve the self-efficacy of students. Bandura’s theory on self-efficacy of students explains that in order for students to succeed, they need to believe that they are capable in order to impact their motivation and behaviors. As students with disabilities are observed as having lower self-efficacy compared to their peers, literature circles are an effective way to motivate students by having discussions about a book with their classmates who may not have a disability. Over time, students being actively engaged in multicultural texts will allow them to see their own, or a new perspective, allowing them to grow as individuals and as readers. These texts and group discussions will help foster student motivation and engagement in order to create a higher self-efficacy.

This study focuses on what happens when students with disabilities participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts containing characters with disabilities that represent their own or those around them. Chapter three will describe the organization of the study. Additionally, it will provide details about the school, community and classroom that the study took place. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the research design, procedures and data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3

Context, Research Design, and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, the context and methodology of the study are discussed. The beginning part of the chapter will outline the context of the study with a description of the community, school, classroom, and participants. In order to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved, all were given pseudonyms. This chapter will end with the procedure of the study, data collection and analysis.

Context of the Study

District and Community

This research study took place in a large North Jersey town. The school district is regional, therefore is a combination of two towns. The larger town will be referred to as Saeville while the smaller town will be referred to as Fairville. According to the United States Census Bureau data (2021) there are 24,676 estimated residents in Saeville and 7,699 in Fairville. Both towns are predominantly Caucasian communities, although the town also includes Asian, Hispanic and Black populations . The median household income in Saeville is \$161,299, while in Fairville it is \$178,311. In both towns, there is approximately 96% rate for high school graduation and approximately 3% of the population is labeled as having a disability. The public school district in this community includes a total of eight schools; five elementary (Pre-k-4), two middle (5-8) and one high school (9-12).

School

The research study took place in one of the public elementary schools in the district. According to the School Performance Report (2021), the school serves approximately 490 students in PK-4 with an average 13 to 1 teacher ratio. Among the 490 students, 2% of those receive free or reduced lunch. The racial make-up of the school includes students who are 64% white, 14% Asian or Pacific Islander, 13% Hispanic and 6% African American. Within the school, 6% of students are identified as having a disability.

Classroom

This research study took place in a fourth grade classroom in which there is a general education and special education teacher present for the core subjects (reading, writing and math). During the English Language Arts (ELA) block, the classroom consists of 17 students, 4 of whom are identified as having a disability. During the rest of the day, the classroom consists of 19 students, 8 of whom are identified as having a disability. The students' disabilities include anxiety disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), cerebral palsy, autism and specific learning disabilities. The students who are identified as having a specific learning disability can be described as having delays in the areas of reading fluency, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, and written expression. Other disabilities include dyslexia and auditory processing disorders.

Teacher Researcher

I am the Special Education teacher who provides reading and writing support for students with disabilities within the classroom. I have four years of teaching experience,

both in a general education and special education settings. As a white, non-disabled female teacher, I acknowledge my position in this research study that focuses on inequities on the culture of students with disabilities. It is important that I recognize how my experiences in school and now may be different from my students'. Therefore, it was crucial to get to know my students for who they are and to create an environment where they feel comfortable to share and participate in difficult conversations. These conversations will provide opportunities for students to expand their knowledge of students with disabilities in today's world and to grow their reading self-efficacies by participating in literature circles. I understand the importance of creating a safe environment for my students and to use the effective, social and cultural lenses within my classroom. I was the only teacher researcher for this study that was conducted in the fourth grade classroom during the afternoon ELA block.

Students and Participants

Out of the four students in the study, two are female while the other two are males. The two females are Caucasian, one male is Hispanic and the other male is African American. Emily, female, has anxiety disorder, ADHD and a specific learning disability with an area of delay in communication/processing. Ava, female, has autism with ADHD and delays in auditory processing. Jake, male, is dyslexic with delays in areas of reading. Matt, male, has ADHD, anxiety disorder and delays in auditory processing. All four students returned the permission slip and parents gave consent to participate in this research study.

Research Design

This study is qualitative teacher research. Qualitative teacher research involves collecting observational data. According to Patton (1990), “Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully” (p. 169). In other words, this qualitative teacher research was focused on the selected students with disabilities within the inclusion classroom. Therefore, the selection is a homogenous sample by using only the students with disabilities in the classroom. I collected data during literature circles that the students took part in. While the students were placed heterogeneously and the students with disabilities were placed in with the general education students, I had the opportunity to meet with each group of students and collect data specifically on the students with disabilities involvement.

The research question, what happens to the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities when they participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural books?, was formed based on observations and needs within the classroom during reading instruction. Data was collected through surveys, observations, recordings of literature circles and student work samples. The purpose of this teacher research was to investigate strategies to improve reading self-efficacies of students with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, I wanted to investigate what would happen if students with disabilities were placed heterogeneously with their peers while reading books with characters with disabilities and how that influenced their reading self-efficacies.

To have an authentic understanding of how peer interaction, student choice with multicultural texts impacts reading self-efficacy, it was imperative to provide these opportunities for my students in their natural environment. According to Shagoury and

Power (2012), “At its best, teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching. Observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting the curriculum to fit the needs of all students have always been important skills demonstrated by fine teachers” (p. 3). Based on my observations, my students with disabilities had a need in gaining a higher reading self-efficacy in relation to their general education peers.

While we do have a large selection of multicultural books within my school, characters with disabilities is an area that is not represented in the selection. In relation to student book options, there is a lack of resources when choosing books with characters with disabilities. This is observed as one factor that may contribute to the lack of self-efficacy in reading. The students have a hard time picking books and sticking with it to read the entire book. In addition, the students have difficulty making connections with the books, rather they discuss things that are different in their lives from the characters themselves. Therefore, it was crucial to provide appropriate multicultural texts for my students and to see how that influences their reading self-efficacy.

Procedure of the Study

The study took place over the course of five weeks, meeting twice a week for 20 minutes each time. At the beginning of the study, the students took the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995). This was used to gain more insight on how students perceive their reading ability when thinking about their progress, how they compare themselves, how they receive social feedback and their physiological states. To encourage student participation, students were presented with the front cover and book blurb of six different books that had characters with disabilities. The book choices students were given are presented in the chart below.

Table 1

Literature Circle Book Choices

Literature Circle Books	
Rules (Lord, 2008)	A young teenage girl lives with her autistic brother while facing the challenges of having a brother with disabilities. She wants a normal life, which is nearly impossible when her family's life revolves around his disability. She has spent years teaching David rules to avoid embarrassing behaviors. Catherine struggles with the stigma attached to her brother's disability, but that all changes when she meets Jason and she begins to question, what is normal?
The Baby-Sitters Club: Jessi's Secret Language (Martin, 2022)	Jessi takes on a babysitting job with a boy who has been deaf since birth. He uses sign language to communicate. Jessi embarks on the journey of learning sign language to communicate with Matt while learning the struggles and stigma that he faces being deaf.
Fish in a Tree (Mullaly-Hunt, 2017)	Ally has been able to hide her inability to read by creating disruptive distractions within the classroom. She has a new teacher who sees that she is more than the disruptive kid. She helps Ally grow her confidence and that dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of. Ally discovers that there is much more to her than she realized.
Out of my Mind (Draper, 2012)	Melody is unlike other people. She cannot walk, talk or write because she has cerebral palsy. What people don't know is that she has a photographic memory and can remember every detail and is the smartest kid in the whole class, but no one knows. Everyone looks at her as mentally challenged and she can't tell them otherwise but she is determined to let them know.

The students then were to choose their top three book choices. Due to groups being chosen based on choice, if a student chose a book that was at a higher level they were provided with instructions on listening and reading along on LearningAlly, therefore the students had free choice in any book that they wanted to read.

Once groups were made each student was provided with either their first or second choice. Within the classroom, there were a total of five groups (3-4 students per group). The students with disabilities were divided into two groups with their peers, reading *Rules* and *The Baby-Sitters Club*. In the first week, the students met with their groups to plan their next five weeks of reading. Together, they decided on how many pages they would read before they met each week. The students had the option to read every Wednesday during class (independently or together) and met every Friday. While reading, the students were to answer basic reading questions that would help lead their discussions each week.

Figure 1

Daily Reading Questions

Name: _____

Daily Reading Questions

1. Describe a character? Do you like or dislike this character & why?

2. What is happening in the story?

3. Predict: What do you think will happen next?

4. Describe the setting. (Where were they today?)

5. What did you just read? Please summarize in your own words.

Students noted text connections, predictions, feelings, character analysis and more as they read their stories. In addition to those questions, in each literature circle meeting, I was present to help guide the students into higher level thinking questions about multicultural texts components and society. This is where students reflected on the character's disability, what was happening in the story and related it to their lives. After the students finished their books, they took the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995) again. This was used to analyze if there was an increase in their scores. The RSPS is scored by looking at each area and how much each student scored in each area. Below is a chart that describes the score interpretation of the RSPS.

Table 2

RSPS Scoring Guide

	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
High	44+	26+	38+	37+
Average	39	21	33	31
Low	34	16	27	25

The students also took part in a group discussion where they were all asked to reflect on inclusive literature circles, their thoughts on reading and how they enjoyed the process. This was done with guided questions and follow up discussion questions as needed.

Figure 2

Post Research Student Interview

1. How did you feel about being able to choose your book?
 1. Were you more eager to read and participate?
2. Do you feel like in these literature circles, you were a good reader?
 1. Why or why not?

Sources of Data

A variety of qualitative data sources were used and collected during the course of the study. These sources were surveys, audio recordings, student work samples and teacher observations. Before and after literature circles began, students took the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995). This was used to analyze how they perceive themselves in the area of reading. Conversations were held at the end of the literature circles that reflected on how students felt about participating in these types of circles. Students' questions were also used as a data source to analyze and see if they were comprehending the text they were reading and what they thought was important in the story. Audio recordings were used to find important and relevant information that came from the students during literature circle meetings. This is where the majority of data was collected. Finally, a teacher researcher journal was used to collect observations throughout the entire study. The observations consisted of actions from the entire classroom, both students and teachers.

Data Analysis

Data collected during this study was analyzed to determine what happens when students with disabilities take part in inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts and how it influences their reading self-efficacies. During each meeting, I observed and took notes based on student responses and actions. In addition, I audio recorded each meeting. Doing so allowed me to go back and listen to the rich conversations that took place during the literature circles. Each week, as we discussed the guiding questions and more, I collected each student's work samples. This allowed me to analyze what the students thought were the most important aspects of what they have read and how it relates to the answers they provided or may have changed during literature circles.

At the conclusion of the study, I analyzed each student's responses to see if over time they were creating higher level answers. Data was analyzed by looking at each student individually. As I analyzed the audio recordings alongside my notes, I listened closely to see how the students were making connections and answering with higher level thoughts about students with disabilities as the characters. Some questions that were discussed were: What did you know about Autism before reading? What did you think about it? What do you think now? And How would you feel if you were in this character's position? These questions allowed students to analyze their perceptions on disabilities. During discussions, I was specifically looking for students to connect with the text in order to build a higher self-efficacy in their own abilities. Lastly, I analyzed their RSPS scores with their ones from the beginning of the study to analyze if there was any positive influence in how they see themselves in terms of progress, comparisons,

socially and physiologically. The three major themes found within the study are: (1) Students' perceptions of disabilities and how they changed throughout the literature meetings; (2) Students made connections to the text through representation of their experiences; and (3) Students had an increased engagement and belief in their ability (confidence) to understand and participate in literature circles. These themes will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Conclusion

The next chapter describes the findings and conclusions derived from the data analysis. The chapter will have descriptions and themes that were presented throughout the data collection process.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

Chapter four presents an analysis of the data and research findings after investigating the research question, what happens to the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities when they participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural books? Data was collected over four weeks with four students with disabilities. Data collected during this study was analyzed to determine what happens when students with disabilities take part in inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts and how it influences their reading self-efficacies. Data collection methods included scores from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS), observational notes on student responses, audio recordings from literature circle discussions, and written student responses to the text. The collected data was then analyzed to identify themes that occurred throughout the study.

Chapter four is organized into two parts. The first half of the chapter consists of detailed descriptions of each student that participated in the literature circles; the second half provides data analysis and major findings. Data analysis revealed three major patterns during literature circle discussions: (1) Students' perceptions of disabilities and how they changed throughout the literature circle meetings; (2) Students made connections to the text through representation of their experiences; and (3) Students had an increased engagement and belief in their ability to read, comprehend and participate in literature circles.

Student Profiles

A brief profile of each student is provided based on the students classifications and individual education plan. Included in the profile is the students age, gender, and how their disability impacts their learning. The students all took the RSPS and the profile presented observations while they took the scale. Student scores are also provided. The scoring categories are how students view their progress, how they compare themselves, how they receive social feedback and their physiological states.

Emily

Emily is a nine year old, Caucasian female in a fourth grade inclusion classroom. Emily is a student who is identified as having a disability. Emily has a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and communication impaired. Her disability impacts her ability to perform without accommodations in the general education classroom. Emily chose to read *Rules* (Lord, 2008). Due to Emily's reading levels and accommodations, Emily was given the option to listen to the book and follow along while it read to her on LearningAlly. Emily ended up choosing to follow along for the majority of the research on LearningAlly.

Emily took the RSPS to get a better understanding of her reading self-efficacy. As Emily was taking the assessment, she repeated multiple times that "UGH I suck at reading" and "OH definitely a 1, I know I can't read that good". Through the assessment, I learned that Emily enjoys reading but does not think that she or others believe that she is good at it. Through student interviews at the end of the process, Emily stated that she has gained a little more confidence in reading in front of her classmates, even though she

still believes she is not as good as her classmates. The chart below describes her scores before and after taking part in literature circles and where her scores fall in the score interpretation scale.

Table 3

Emily's RSPS Scores

	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
Before literature circles	26/45 low	6/30 low	15/45 low	23/40 low
After literature circles	35/45 +9 Low	9/30 +3 low	27/45 +12 low	26/40 +3 low

Emily's scores reflected a much lower score than the average fourth grade student, according to the descriptive statistics by scale and grade level presented by Henk & Melnick (1995). Although her scores were still in the low range after literature circles, her scores slightly improved.

Larry

Larry is a ten year old, Caucasian male in a fourth grade inclusion classroom. Larry is a student who is identified as having a disability. Larry has a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism. His disability impacts his ability to perform without accommodations in the general education classroom. Larry chose to read *Rules* (Lord, 2008). Due to Larry's reading levels and accommodations, he

was given the option to listen to the book and follow along while it read to her on LearningAlly. Larry chose to read the text on his own.

Larry took the Reader Self-Perception (RSPS) to get a better understanding of his reading self-efficacy. Larry did not present excitedly to take the assessment as he put his head down on the desk at the beginning of taking it. Through the assessment, I learned that Larry really enjoys reading. He stated in the assessment that he thinks he is a pretty good reader and loves to read graphic novels. Through student interviews at the end of the process, Larry stated he thinks he reads more than his classmates and just as well as they can. The chart below describes his scores before and after taking part in literature circles and where his scores fall in the score interpretation scale.

Table 4

Larry's RSPS Scores

	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
Before literature circles	35/45 low	17/30 low	26/45 low	34/40 average
After literature circles	39/45 +4 Average	18/30 +1 low	28/45 +2 low	37/40 +3 High

Larry's scores reflected a much lower score than the average fourth grade student, according to the descriptive statistics by scale and grade level presented by Henk & Melnick (1995). Although his scores ranged from low to average and even high, each score was raised after literature circles.

Jake

Jake is a nine year old, African American male in a fourth grade inclusion classroom. Jake is a student who is identified as having a disability. Jake has a diagnosis of Communication Impaired. His disability impacts his ability to perform without accommodations in the general education classroom. Jake chose to read *The Baby-Sitters Club: Jessi's Secret Language* (Martin, 2022). Due to Jake's reading levels and accommodations, he was given the option to listen to the book and follow along while it read to her on LearningAlly. Jake ended up choosing to read the text on his own.

Jake took the Reader Self-Perception (RSPS) to get a better understanding of his reading self-efficacy. Jake began taking the assessment by clicking through quickly and was then assisted by taking it one on one. To get the most accurate results, I sat and completed the assessment with him one question at a time. Through the assessment, I learned that Jake also enjoys reading. Through student interviews at the end of the process, Jake stated that he thinks he is an okay reader but could be better and that he doesn't read as good as the other kids in his class. Jake specifically made a comment about how when he reads out loud in the class he gets nervous because of his stutter, but he enjoyed reading in the literature circles. The chart below describes his scores before and after taking part in literature circles and where his scores fall in the score interpretation scale.

Table 5

Jake's RSPS Scores

	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
Before literature circles	32/45 low	13/30 low	27/45 low	40/40 High
After literature circles	40/45 +8 Average	16/30 +3 low	37/45 +10 Average	40/40 +0 High

Jake's scores reflected more of an low/average score for a fourth grade student, according to the descriptive statistics by scale and grade level presented by Henk & Melnick (1995). His scores all improved after participating in literature circles.

Matt

Matt is a nine year old, Hispanic male in a fourth grade inclusion classroom. Matt is a student who is identified as having a disability. Matt has a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Communication Impaired. His disability impacts his ability to perform without accommodations in the general education classroom. Matt chose to read *The Baby-Sitters Club: Jessi's Secret Language* (Martin, 2022). Matt took the Reader Self-Perception (RSPS) to get a better understanding of his reading self-efficacy. During the assessment, Matt stated "I love reading, definitely a 5" and "Can we read after this?", showing that he thoroughly enjoys reading. Through student interviews at the end of the process, Matt stated that he thinks he is a good reader

but he gets easily frustrated and more distracted than his peers. Matt also stated that he gets nervous and thinks that his peers think he is bad at reading. The chart below describes his scores before and after taking part in literature circles and where his scores fall in the score interpretation scale.

Table 6

Matt's RSPS Scores

	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
Before literature circles	34/45 Low	16/30 Low	21/45 Low	28/40 Low
After literature circles	41/45 +7 Average	27/30 +11 High	28/45 +7 Low	30/40 +2 Average

Matt's scores reflected more of an low/average score for a fourth grade student, according to the descriptive statistics by scale and grade level presented by Henk & Melnick (1995). His scores all improved after participating in literature circles.

The students' RSPS scores are critical to look at as they represent how students view themselves as a reader and how their attitude influences their reading. The main factors that students take into account when determining their capabilities is through performance, observational comparison, social feedback and physiological states (Bandura, 1997). The results show that when the students originally rate their progress they all scored in the low range, representing that they have a low belief in their capability. The students originally viewed how they have made improvements on tasks

and initially scored in the low range, but all improved their scores at the end of the research. This shows that they do not perceive themselves as making adequate progress with reading, although slightly improving their perception after literature circles.

The scale also questions how students perceive themselves compared to their peers. This area was crucial to look at as students with disabilities were integrated with their general education peers in the study. Before the integration in literature circles, the students all scored in the low range. Following the literature circles, they were mostly still in the low range. Scoring low in this category indicated that the students did not think they were as capable in completing a reading task as their peers. The students' scores did improve at the end of the study, showing that while they still did not perceive themselves as equal to their peers, the use of literature circles aided in improving their perception in comparison.

Another area that the RSPS scale looks at is social feedback. The questions asked about social feedback coming from their peers, teachers or family members. All the students scored on the low range, although slightly higher after participating in literature circles. The low score indicates that students either do not receive the feedback they are looking for or do not agree with what they are being told. The last factor, Physiological States, asked questions about how students feel when they read. The students mostly scored in the average/high range, indicating that they feel good when they read and enjoy reading.

This is important because the students all were going to enjoy reading, as it was an activity they felt good about completing. All the categories of the RSPS are very closely related, therefore if one category is low, it is likely another will be too (Henk &

Melnick, 2012). While they feel good when they read, it was determined that students perceive themselves as not making progress due to their comparisons of themselves against their general education peers and the lack of feedback. Although their scores did not drastically improve from pre and post surveys, the scores indicate that the integration of general education students with students with disabilities, completing the same tasks, improves the main factors that students take into account when determining their capability.

Major Patterns

Students' Perceptions of Disabilities

Throughout the study, students with disabilities were integrated with their peers in literature circles. The students were provided with questions to answer prior to meeting in order to guide the discussion (Appendix A). One question that was asked was to describe a character and if they like or dislike that character. This section discusses the students' answers and conversations surrounding this question.

The Babysitter's Club: Jessi's Secret Language (Martin, 2022). This text addresses disabilities with the main character babysitting a child who is deaf, named Matthew. The main character does not know sign language and experiences the challenge in learning sign language and communicating with the child she is babysitting. While on this journey, she is forced to see a stigma that is attached to people who are deaf. Jake and Matt were in a group with one of their general education peers for this literature circle.

In response to a discussion question that asked the student to describe a character, Jake described the boy who is deaf, as being “weird”. Matt had disagreed with Jake and

said, “I don’t think he is weird, I think that he just has a disability, like Rob and Paul (a set of twins in their school)”. I asked the boys to think further about their responses and why they thought he was weird or not. Jake continued by stating that he believes he would need to speak at a loud volume in order for the boy to understand him.

Jake: I CAN'T HEAR YOU! You would have to to scream and yell to communicate with him. That is annoying.
Matt: No! That is not how deaf people communicate.
Jake: BEE BOOP!
Matt: They aren’t like robots. They like uh communicate with their hands.
Teacher: Do you know what that is called?
Matt: Uhhh hand language? Since you don’t use noise?
Teacher: Yes, sign language!

Matt and Jake were asked if they have heard of sign language. Both of the boys eagerly raised their hands that they have heard of this type of communication before. The students were then asked to think about being deaf and how communicating may be a challenge for them. Both of them agreed that it can be difficult. Matt started the book with some understanding of the disability, but presented as eager to learn more about it in a respectful way. As the book progressed, Matt used the book to learn and use sign language within the classroom. Matt’s knowledge of sign language of people who are deaf expanded as he learned more about the disability through reading.

In addition to Matt, Jake learned more about the disability presented in the text. In the beginning of literature circles, Jake made comments that could be seen as offensive towards disabilities. For example, Jake said “BEE BOOP” and yelled as his way of imitating what he thought it was like to be deaf. Jake had little awareness or understanding of what it was like to be deaf or how to communicate with someone who is deaf. When he was asked why he said “BEE BOOP”, he exclaimed that it was because he

is deaf and that is what he would sound like. Jake's comment shows that he had little to no understanding on what it meant or sounded like to be deaf. Jake also presented as not having respect, as he made comments that are not respectful to people with disabilities. This was important because it opened up the opportunity for discussions with the group in order to expand Jake's knowledge on the disability.

Through reading and peer discussions, Jake's perspective and understanding began to shift. Towards the end of the book, the students were asked what they now know about being deaf and how do you think it would be if you were deaf? Jake stated that he knows that being deaf is when you have trouble hearing and you have to use sign language to talk. He continued to state that "It is not nice to make fun of people who are deaf" as this is an event that happened to the character in the text.

Teacher:	How has your view changed when you think about this disability?
Jake:	I think that if you see someone making fun of another person like that then you should stop them. That is not a nice thing to do to them, it is not their fault.
Matt:	I think that I can be more patient with anyone who may be deaf. I also think that, that, that, I want to learn sign language so I can be prepared to talk with anyone who can't hear.

Both students used what they learned about the disability in the story and thought about their own views about being deaf. They each thought about what it would be like if they were deaf or if they tried to communicate with someone deaf. Although Matt had more of an original understanding and respect for the disability, both of the students' perspectives widened and they gained more respect and an understanding for people who are deaf.

Rules (Lord, 2008). The two students reading this book were Emily and Larry, in conjunction with two of their general education peers. Within this text, one main

character named Catherine is faced with the struggles and stigma of having a brother with Autism (David), as well as making a new friend (Jason) that has cerebral palsy. When the students were asked to describe a character, in all the meetings, each student chose to describe David. It was compelling to see how their responses varied and evolved from the beginning of the book to the end.

Table 7

Comments made by Emily and Larry

First literature circle meeting	Last literature circle meeting
<p>Emily</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “David is a bad, bad boy” • “David gets in trouble all the time” • “Catherine (David’s sister) HATES David because he doesn’t follow the rules” • “David is crazy” <p>Larry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “David is annoying” • “David is a baaaaaadddd boy and doesn’t follow the rules” 	<p>Emily & Larry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “He doesn’t like loud noises maybe because of his disability” • “David has a disability, he has Autism” • “I bet he has rules because he can’t understand things like in social settings”

Both the students were aware that David had autism. They were both asked what autism was and how they would describe it to someone. In the beginning of the book, the students stated that it is when you are bad and do not listen, whereas when they were asked the same question at the end of the book, both students stated that it is when someone has difficulty with learning. Emily added on that that is why David has to be taught rules that not everyone may need to be taught. Furthermore, the students' perspective and view on autism shifted throughout the literature circles.

- Teacher: How has your view changed when you think about this disability?
Larry: I don't know. Maybe people with autism are just like everyone else or maybe not.
Emily: – interrupted Larry– I think that they are like us but they just need a little bit more help than we do with things.

The focus in the study involved in asking the students specifically about the characters with disabilities, that they would analyze the characters with disabilities and how they act and to eventually engage in deeper conversations about people with disabilities in society. While discussing this question, I hoped students would engage in conversations with one another and to agree or disagree, allowing them to feel connected to their peers. Part of this research study also aimed to analyze that the students, both with disabilities and without, would gain an understanding and respect of disabilities and people who have them.

Through discussions, the students all gained more knowledge and acceptance for people with disabilities. As the students conversed, they were able to be engaged in conversations they would not have had without being in a literature circle with their general education peers. These conversations allowed students to have an open mind and change their perspective on people with disabilities, overall becoming more accepting of their own disabilities. This created a realization that they are not so different from their peers. With this acceptance and respect, follows how the students can make connections through their own experiences to build their belief in their capabilities. The students not only see the characters with disabilities living functional lives, but also as they interact with their peers in literature circles, are exposed to feel a sense of belonging and equity.

Connections Made Through Representation and Experiences

Throughout the study, students were making connections on their own or were asked questions to help them make connections. One question that students were asked is how they can connect to the text or any characters. This section discusses the students' answers and conversations surrounding this question.

The Babysitter's Club: Jessi's Secret Language (Martin, 2022). While neither student in this group was deaf, nor was anyone in their classroom, the students were able to connect with the book, and each other, through literature circles. In the beginning of the book, the students made surface level connections with the text. Students made connections by saying they also like dance, they too have a sibling, or they have a babysitter. As the book progressed, both students discovered deeper connections with the characters in the text.

- Teacher: Think about yourself for a second. Think about what you are good at and what you may have a difficult time with. How can this relate to a character, like Matthew, in the book?
- Matt: I am good at gymnastics and Jessi is good at dancing. But like if I think about Matthew, he can't hear. Sometimes I like to think and pretend I can't hear when my parents are talking to me. But, I know that I can actually hear them so I feel grateful that I can hear. But I also think I am like him because sometimes kids make fun of me. Just like like that one boy made fun of Matthew, for always needing extra help in math.
- Jake: Uh I don't think I am like them. No no no I am. *pointing at the Matthew* I get mad like he does sometimes? Uh I think he gets mad.
- Matt: Oh yeah, me too!
- Teacher: How do you get mad? What does she get mad at? Is it similar?
- Jake: I get angry when when um I can't say what I want. Sometimes I repeat words My sister gets mad at me when I do this. She said it makes me sound like an idiot. And that makes me mad!

Through dialogue and discussion of the text, both Jake and Matt were able to connect with the text and characters superficially and on a deeper level. While they knew that they could not relate to the specific disability that Matthew had, they were able to

connect with certain aspects of the characters. For example, Jake was able to connect to the character superficially because they were both boys and on a deeper level by relating to feelings that a character may have. The character gets mad when being made fun of, which further allowed Jake to be able to make the connection of feeling mad when people make fun of him for repeating his words. These connections also helped develop their awareness of disabilities and belief that it is acceptable to have those difficulties.

Rules (Lord, 2008). The students were able to connect with the book, and each other, through literature circles. In the beginning of the book, similar to Jake and Matt, the students made surface level connections with the text. Students made connections by saying they have a sibling, they've seen someone with autism before and that they also like the video game store. As the literature circle members discussed autism as a disability, Emily shouted "OH OH I HAVE A DISABILITY!" and took a few seconds to think of the name of her disability. Emily began connecting with the book from the first meeting as she was able to relate her ADHD to David's autism. As the book progressed, the students discovered deeper connections with the characters in the text.

Teacher: Think about yourself for a second. Think about what you are good at and what you may have a difficult time with. How can this relate to a character, like Matthew, in the book?

Emily: I used to go to occupational therapy like David and Jason. But I don't think I am great at listening... *giggles* Sometimes I can get in trouble like David because I have ADHD. And that makes it hard for me to focus.

Larry: Wait, you have ADHD? Like they do in *Dogman*? Yeah I think I have that too. Sometimes I uh get super super hyper like David, out of nowhere, and I just run around my house like a crazy person.

To have the students think more about autism and how maybe they can connect to David, the next question asked was why do you think David needs to be taught rules? Are you like David and need to be taught rules?

- Larry: David can sometimes be crazy, well I mean I mean not crazy but he doesn't know what he's doing all the time. Like he needed to be taught not to take his pants off and that is kind of crazy because we all know not to take our pants off.
- Emily: I love that rule! *giggles* I think also that I sometimes need reminders of rules because sometimes focusing is hard for me and I can be very very very silly and I can't always control it and it can be satisfying to be silly. Oh and I also forgot that there is totally a boy with autism on my bus because he acts like David.
- Larry: Yeah I've seen him in the hallway before and one time I saw him in the assembly, the one with the author visit and he was wearing headphones or something because he probably doesn't like loud noises and David doesn't like loud noises.

It was very powerful to see these two students connect to David, and their peers around them, by talking about their own disabilities. Students discussed the question on if they could connect with a character or not. While picking these books and in discussing this question, to assist in answering the research question, students were to think about their own disability or experiences to gain an understanding and respect for people with disabilities. Having characters with disabilities, students with disabilities could see themselves within the text, making it relatable and to further develop a belief in their own abilities.

Through dialogue and discussion of the text, the students were able to develop deeper connections to the text. Instead of having superficial connections with the characters, such as she is a girl and so am I, the students were involved in rich conversations with their peers. Students with disabilities developed deeper connections due to the inclusive literature circles and being grouped with general education students. This allowed them to gain different perspectives, not only of characters but also of their peers. Although their general education peers did not relate in terms of having a disability, they often related to students within their classroom or the school community

who may have a disability. While being able to relate to the text, it allowed students with disabilities to see their own lives as a mirror. Furthermore, leading to deeper connections with the text and a better understanding of the story and awareness that other people also have the same disabilities as they do.

The students all made connections with the text, creating mirrors for the students' lives. Through the rich conversations with their peers, some students were even able to discuss their own disabilities as a connection. Creating open conversations with each other, the students with disabilities created a sense of belonging and acceptance with their peers. This sense is shown in the students' higher scores in the RSPS as they all developed more belief in their capabilities as they saw themselves as equal to their peers. This also helped develop their awareness of disabilities and belief that it is acceptable to have those difficulties.

Increased Engagement and Confidence

Before beginning the literature circles, I was hesitant and nervous about how the students would react and how they would be able to control their impulses when working with different peers in the classroom. The students were presented with the choice in their book by reading a blurb. They were then presented with a google form to choose their top three books that they would like to read, without having discussions with anyone in the room. Based on teacher observations, all the students showed excitement in choosing their books. Students stated that they were excited to choose a book versus being told what book they will be reading and who will be in their group. The students were asking when they would begin and be able to meet with their groups. When the books were brought in to distribute, the students all cheered with excitement. The students all

received calendars where they first met with their group members to plan out how much they would read before each meeting, therefore holding themselves accountable. Students were given the opportunity to read in class every Wednesday, whether it was alone or with their group. Any reading that was not complete in class was to be completed at home for homework. This session discusses how students felt about their experience and how it made them feel about themselves.

The Babysitter's Club: Jessi's Secret Language and Rules (Martin, 2022). The students were asked why they chose this book as their first choice. Jake responded that he loves graphic novels and he thought this one would be good. Matt stated that he has read another book in this series that he liked so he figured this one would be similar. Both students chose this book based on the first look and their initial thoughts of the book. They each picked this book as their first choice. Throughout the book club, the students were highly engaged in discussions. They did not choose to read the book together in school, therefore they read it independently. Jake required reminders every Thursday to make sure he had completed his reading and questions before they met on Friday, whereas Matt finished his reading early in the week. During a post interview, the students were asked to reflect on their experience with literature circles.

- Teacher: How did you feel about being able to choose your book? Were you more eager to read and participate?
- Matt: I loved being able to choose my book. Last year, we were just given the book club books and it was so annoying. I knew the other books so I knew I would like this book. I was so excited to read that.... *pauses for a few seconds* I secretly read ahead one week cause it was just so good!
- Jake: I did that too! For for the second meeting, I accidentally read like seven more pages. I was happy I was reading a graphic novel, because, as you know, those are my favorite books.

The next question asked the students to think about their brief ability in reading after having done literature circles. They were asked; do you feel like in these literature circles, you were a good reader? Why or why not?

Jake: Uh I think. I think I am an okay reader. *Matt interrupted Jake to state that he thinks Jake is a good reader* Oh okay yeah! I can read for hours and hours and hours if I like it, especially graphic novels.

Matt: We are great readers! I think this book was easy for me. So obviously I liked reading it. I think I could read the other ones too, maybe my second choice next.

Overall, the students all were enthusiastic about reading a book of their choice. Both students were active participants and stated that they think they are better readers when they are reading something of interest, stating that it was sometimes difficult to stop reading when they had to. Although Jake had slight doubts that he was a good reader, with the support of his classmate, he was able to gain more belief in himself and his capability of being a good reader. Without working with his peers, Jake could have missed the opportunity to gain that belief in himself. Although Matt stated that this book may have been too easy for him, he now has more belief in his ability to read the other texts after participating in literature circles.

Rules (Lord, 2008). Similar to the first group, the students all received their first choice in books. Throughout the book club, the students were highly engaged in discussions. This group of students chose to read a part of the book together every Wednesday. These students alternated between reading pages as they read to their required page. The students were asked why they chose the book that they did as their first choice. Emily giggled and said that she wanted to see what the rule about David not

pulling his pants down in public was about. Larry agreed with her answer. During a post interview, the students were asked to reflect on their experience with literature circles.

- Teacher: How did you feel about being able to choose your book? Were you more eager to read and participate?
- Emily: I liked being able to choose my book. I enjoyed reading together with like everyone because it also helped me with words I may not know. And and I loved to listen to it, one time we all listened together and that was cool!

Emily was asked to talk about her connections and how it made her want to read more.

- Emily: I also have a disability, that one with the A, *thinking* ADHD and I could connect to David because sometimes we act the same and it made me realize that maybe like David I can be different and difficult because it is hard for me to focus.
- Larry: I liked picking my own book but I forgot to read once, but you let me read it during class another day so I could be in my group. I was mad I forgot to read cause I always like this book. I also learned Emily has the same disability as me and that sometimes I wish I didn't have one so things would be easier for me.

The next question asked the students to think about their own ability in reading after having done literature circles. They were asked; do you feel like in these literature circles, you were a good reader? Why or why not?

- Emily: Oh wait, but I also realized that having a disability is common and I learned that about Larry too. But I think that reading together helped me and I liked talking about the book. I liked how even if I was stuck or confused Becca (another general education student) helped me.

Larry agreed with Emily that he found it helpful that the other students were there to help them with words or any confusion about the text. Both students stated that they also felt very comfortable with sharing things about themselves, like having a disability, with their peers that may not have one. They added that they were able to help answer a question that their group mates had which made them feel comfortable and capable of high engagement and participation.

This research study had a focus on student engagement and that students would be more engaged by having the choice of their books by interest, by deciding how much they were going to read and by having the peer interaction of reading and discussing the book together. From the beginning of the study, the students were enthusiastic to begin literature circles. More importantly, they were excited to work together and to have the freedom of choice. Showing the students the blurb of the book allowed them to have the choice on what they wanted to read, including genre. Therefore, Jake and Matt were eager to read due to their love for graphic novels, setting them up for success as they were likely to have a higher belief in their ability to read a book with familiarity. In addition to familiarity with the book, providing options and choice engaged the students more, as this was something that they *wanted* to read.

It was also noted that working in literature circles was beneficial to the students in learning not only about the text, but with being able to gain different perspectives. The students stated that the group helped them talk through situations or confusing parts of the text, furthering their understanding. This also gives the students with disabilities a sense of ability to rely on their group members, but also a sense of capability in themselves by being able to participate in the conversations.

Major Findings

An analysis of the data indicates that inclusive literature circles with multicultural texts can deepen a student with disabilities' understanding of the text, the world and their belief in their own ability. All four participants were able to make connections and change their perspectives on individuals with disabilities through student work and discussions in literature circles. Students showed enthusiasm and were eager to read and

share their ideas as they had discussions based on student choice, peer interactions and connections. They showed a deeper understanding and respect for the characters' disabilities, and more importantly their own disabilities. Students' RSPS scores slightly improved, showing a higher perception of their reading ability when thinking about progress, how they compare themselves to others, how they receive social feedback and their physiological states. Chapter five will provide an overall summary of the findings from the study. In addition, it will discuss limitations, implications for the classroom and suggestions for any further research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of the study findings, limitations and further implications for the classroom. This chapter will also discuss suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study asked the question: what happens to the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities when they participate in inclusive literature circles with multicultural books? Over the course of four weeks, students with disabilities participated in inclusive literature circles with multicultural books that provided both windows and mirrors to.... Data was collected in the form of student work, reading surveys, audio recordings of the literature circles and teacher observations. An analysis of the data revealed the following three major patterns: 1) Students' perceptions of disabilities and how they changed throughout the literature circle meetings; (2) Students made connections to the text through representation of their experiences; and (3) Students had an increased engagement and belief in their ability to read, comprehend and participate in literature circles.

The findings suggest that the incorporation of inclusive literature circles using multicultural literature supports increasing students' reading self-efficacy. Throughout the study, there were prominent changes in students' attitude towards reading and their belief in themselves through disabilities.

Conclusions

This study aimed to see the influence of students with disabilities reading self-efficacies when they are integrated in literature circles with their general education peers while reading literature with characters with disabilities. Based on the research conducted, it was established that it can positively influence the reading self-efficacy of students with disabilities. Providing the opportunity for students with disabilities to read the same literature that they chose as their peers, assisted in helping students feel included. In addition, the students with disabilities were able to make deep connections to the literature, making engagement in the literature circles meaningful.

According to Henk & Melnick (1995), The Reader Self-Perception Scale is a tool that is used to measure how children feel about themselves as readers. They state that, “Because of research in the affective domain, we now know with greater certainty that children who have made positive associations with reading tend to read more often... This deeper engagement translates into superior reading achievement” (p. 470). Prior to beginning the study, students took the Reader Self-Perception (RSPS). Following the completion of the study, the students took the same survey. Although the majority of the students still presented in the low range, in each category, the students all conveyed a higher score after participating in the literature circles. According to the RSPS scale, the most improved area of self-perception, on average, was in social feedback followed by progress, with the lowest area of improvement being in observational comparison. Therefore the highest improvement was in students receiving feedback while in literature circles, with the lowest being how they compare themselves to their peers. Based on an interview following the study, the students all suggested that literature circles helped

them in their reading. The students responded that they were more engaged due to the opportunity of book choice. In addition to having motivation to read due to book choice, the students' responses showed that they gained more belief in their abilities in reading due to peer interactions and connections to the text. A few students even stated that they think their group member is a good reader, which provided positive feedback to their peers. Overall, these components lead to the students all showing improvements in the areas of their reading self-efficacy.

Another finding drawn from this study is that having an understanding and awareness of disabilities influences the way students with disabilities will feel about themselves. As the study progressed, the students became more accepting of the characters with disabilities and began to understand why the characters may have acted a certain way. Venegas (2018) stated that an improved reading ability does not necessarily translate to an improved reading self-efficacy. Therefore, it was important for me to emphasize the importance of accepting disabilities in order to improve overall belief in themselves.

After the first meeting in literature circles, it became clear that students with disabilities view a disability as something that is “bad” or kids who have disabilities are “acting bad”. Therefore, it was a main focus of the study to address their perspective on disabilities in order to improve their own belief in themselves in relation to their disabilities. Therefore, students were asked questions on how the characters' disabilities can relate to their own and how they would feel if they were in the characters' situations. Overall, the guiding questions and discussions shifted how the students felt and thought about people with disabilities. Ortlieb & Schatz (2020) found that peer modeling is one

component that impacts the self-efficacy of students. The general education students participating in the literature circles were not the focus of the study, however, without working with their general education peers, the students with disabilities may have lacked the meaningful and impactful conversations that took place in the literature circles.

According to Venegas (2018), literature circles help improve students with disabilities reading comprehension and social skills when participating in discussions with their peers. Venegas (2018) also found in her study that this positively influenced her students' self-efficacies and attitude towards reading. Venegas (2018) findings correlate with the study findings that point to students' discussions and interactions with one another assisting them in impacted perspectives of themselves. Significantly, improving their attitude towards the literature circles, positively impacting the reading self-efficacies of students with disabilities.

Additionally, it is concluded that student choice influences student engagement, leading to greater positive associations towards reading and an overall improvement in reading self-efficacy. This conclusion is in relation to the subquestion; how does student book choice impact reading self-efficacy? Based on the data collected, the students were motivated and engaged due to their excitement of being able to choose their book. Based on previous research, it was concluded that students had a higher reading self-efficacy when reading something of their interest (Abbott, Mickail, Richards, Renninger, Hidi, Beers and Berniger, 2017). The results of this study correlate with the findings of my study. Allowing the students to choose from carefully selected books, increased their engagement in reading and participating in literature circles.

Lastly, the study concluded that student representation greatly impacts reading self-efficacy. The students read multicultural literature that represented either themselves or someone in their community, allowing them to relate to the text. The purposeful selection of literature that allowed students to see themselves or their peers represented in it enabled students to make rich and meaningful connections to the characters. Ladson-Billings (2006) describes her framework of culturally relevant pedagogy and the importance of focusing on cultural competence. She states that cultural competence:

“refers to helping students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture, where they are likely to have a chance of improving their socioeconomic status and making informed decisions about the lives they wish to lead” (p. 36).

Importantly, students with disabilities were able to honor their own beliefs of their disabilities while expanding their knowledge of their peers around them. Aronson & Laughter (2016) discuss how by creating culturally relevant education and cultural competence, students will have an increase in motivation, engagement and perception of themselves as capable students. Overall, this led to all students gaining insight on disabilities, which improved their self-efficacy, from specific choices in representation in the literature.

Limitations

One crucial limitation of this study was the amount of time to complete the research. The research study took place over the course of four weeks and the groups only meet one to two times per week. The study was projected to last longer, but because of scheduling with the school and school breaks, the study was conducted over four

weeks instead of six. If further research is conducted, I suggest that the research take place over a longer period of time.

Another limitation that was present was sample size. This study took place in an inclusive classroom, while the data was only collected and analyzed from students with disabilities. For this reason, the sample size was small compared to the entire population. If further research was conducted, it would be interesting to examine the impact of the study with both students with disabilities and general education students.

Implications for Teachers and Educators

Through analyzing the data from the study, there are several implications for teachers and educators within an inclusive classroom setting. The study offers beneficial classroom strategies that can help improve not only a student's self-efficacy, but their overall reading achievement. Specifically, educators can learn how to influence students with disabilities reading achievement. When students are placed in an inclusive classroom, being integrated with their general education peers, it is critical that teachers continue to maintain integrity in all students. When creating groups for students to participate in, it is beneficial to have students with disabilities integrated with their general education peers. This can support students with opportunities to engage in critical conversations. Additionally, it provides students with the opportunity to see that they are not “different” than their peers, creating a feeling of acceptance and capability in themselves.

Another implication for educators is to provide student choice when providing books. Not only will providing choice influence a student's self-efficacy, the choices provided are crucial. Therefore, it is essential that educators create a culturally responsive

classroom and use multicultural literature. This will allow students to have a representation of themselves in their choice of literature, as well as acquire more knowledge on other cultures that are in their community. When combining these components long term, students will develop a higher reading self-efficacy that supports their reading achievement.

While there were limitations to the study, it provided insight around improving students' reading self-efficacies. The most impactful limitation was time to conduct the study. As previous research places effective gains when focusing on reading self-efficacies. If there was more time to conduct research, I believe that the students' self-efficacies would have improved even more. Not only does improving a student's self-efficacy impact their reading, but it also can improve their overall belief in their abilities across their lives. This was shown as students gained more confidence and belief in themselves to participate and in reading. I look forward to the day when teachers utilize literature circles with students with disabilities as they are integrated with their general education peers, rather than being placed solely based on reading levels. After conducting this study, it became more apparent how important it is to consider student choice, peer interaction and representation in making students with disabilities have a successful reading experience. I look forward to seeing more teachers use books that have disability representation. I feel that it is a limited area and can be a lasting imprint on a student's life as it relates to themselves or those around them. I found success in this using approach, therefore I am excited to see how this approach will continue to influence my students with disabilities in the classroom.

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