9-10-2024

INCORPORATING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PRACTICES TO IMPROVE SELF-EFFICACY AND ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY LABELS

Jennifer Chestnut Zingaro
Rowan University

INCORPORATING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PRACTICES TO IMPROVE SELF-EFFICACY AND ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY LABELS

By Jennifer Chestnut Zingaro

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
Rowan University
August 30, 2024

Thesis Chair: Marjorie Madden, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Critical Literacy, Technology, and Multilingual Education

Committee Members:
Stephanie Abraham, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Critical Literacy, Technology, and Multilingual Education
Kate Kedley, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Critical Literacy, Technology, and Multilingual Education

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family. Thank you for always supporting me in my endeavors. Each one of you has inspired me in this journey. You mean everything to me. I love you all the turtles in the lake.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Kristina Weiss for inviting me to join Rowan University's CASE Team, co-creating our middle school GSA, and introducing me to Dr. Kate Kedley. Kate's inspiring work on gender studies in my classroom piqued my interest in using teacher research to promote equity for our students. With Kate's encouragement, I was accepted into the brilliant and radical Dr. Stephanie Abraham's Language, Literacy, and Culture Fulbright experience for a summer in Oaxaca, which cemented my notion that the status quo of our public education system could and should be challenged by everyday educators for the good of our students and their communities. Thank you Kristina, Kate, and Stephanie for setting an example of activism.

My utmost thanks goes out to the amazing professors in Rowan's Department of Critical Literacy, Technology, and Multilingual Education. Thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. Madden, who was always available with kindness, encouragement, and timely feedback. Drs.Susan Browne and Valarie Lee taught us so much during clinical as they pushed us to challenge what lessons and learning truly look like. To my clinical cohort: our friendships were forged in fire for one whirlwind summer. Many thanks to Bob Eisberg and Susan O'Donoghue for your encouragement and assistance during clinical.

Finally, to my school community of twenty years. Principal Therese Bonmati, for her flexibility and support. Thank you to my dear colleagues and fellow teachers who were always available for whatever I needed, and my students and their families for signing on to my research with enthusiasm and support. You are my inspiration.

Abstract

Jennifer Chestnut Zingaro
INCORPORATING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PRACTICES TO IMPROVE SELF-EFFICACY AND ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY LABELS
2024-2025
Marjorie Madden, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of middle school students with disability labels in the pull-out resource ELA setting when their teacher included culturally relevant practices. This study utilized qualitative teacher research inquiry methods, and data collection methods included student surveys, teacher journaling of class discussions and observations, and examination of student work samples. This study came about through the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in the segregated, special education middle school ELA program. Students with disability labels who test below grade level on standardized assessments are placed in a small group, homogeneous classroom with a narrowed, remedial replacement packaged curriculum of repetitive, skill-based mini-lessons on tested comprehension and writing standards, with the goal of improving standardized test scores that includes little student choice, no cooperative learning games, and no authentic 21st century writing. Upon examination and coding of teacher journal to find patterns and triangulation of data to discover themes, finding were that validating student voice led to a more trusting community, allowing student choice increased reading and writing engagement, maintaining high expectations while ensuring students experienced success built self-efficacy, and teaching critical consciousness empowered students to challenge the status quo.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

Chapter 1

Introduction: Story of the Question

I am the oldest of three siblings, and as we went through school it became clear that my brother had a very different learning style than my sister and me. His lack of quiet sitting landed him in the Child Study Team office, where my parents resisted having him labeled with a learning disability. I saw my parents struggle financially to pay for tutors and keep him out of trouble, and at homework time he and I read books and wrote his essays collaboratively. Because of his learning differences, he was not accepted into the Catholic school my sister and I attended, and he had to be segregated away from us and go on a different bus to public school, where he was bullied relentlessly for being "stupid." My parents finally allowed him to be classified with an IEP at the end of middle school, and he reports that having a special education teacher who implemented his learning accommodations enabled him to learn the skills he needed for career readiness, but that the social implications of being excluded from general education took a toll on his self-concept. It took all of us to get him through school, and he hated it until senior year when he was in a culinary work study program. Once he could complete authentic learning activities while standing, talking, and sinking his hands into his work, the foundational math and reading skills that had eluded him with paper and pencil in a silent classroom suddenly made sense. Today, he is a culinary school graduate and a licensed union plumber, who learned how to use a calculator to solve real world career math problems while he was actively on the job and being tutored by me at night, or in some cases via frantic texting when he was about to cut pipe on the job where a simple math error could be costly for the company as well as his reputation as an able worker.

Although my brother's education took place over thirty years ago, I often wonder how his self-efficacy, social-emotional development, and career readiness might have been impacted if he had been exposed to culturally relevant practices concurrently with inclusive special education services earlier in his schooling, rather than having to wait until twelfth grade.

Today, students with disability labels still face many equity issues in schools, such as being excluded from their peers, facing low expectations from teachers and staff, and being taught using scripted methods from pre-packaged curricula that lack connections to students' interests and culture. Despite mountains of research on the positive learning outcomes for students who are exposed to culturally relevant practices such as a choice of multicultural texts, authentic writing and learning activities, and student-led instruction and activities, remedial materials and teaching strategies used to address these students' learning differences are often drill-based and disconnected from authentic activities, with a strong focus on teaching basic reading and writing skills that attempt to train students to pass standardized tests. Additionally, students with disability labels often have intersecting identities that further support the case for culturally relevant practices, and are additionally harmed by oppressive school practices such as the overrepresentation of students of color and students with low income backgrounds in special education (Freire, 1970; Perouse-Harvey, 2022.)

In the school where I have taught for twenty years, middle school students with disability labels are removed from general education inclusion classes largely based on state standardized test scores including NJSLA (previously NJ ASK and PARCC testing) and NWEA/ MAP, and placed into a replacement small group resource room for the same

amount of ELA minutes as their classmates without IEPs. Teachers are expected to implement remedial packaged ELA programs such as Wilson Just Words, Read 180, and Connect to Comprehension with fidelity, while the general education students are doing novel studies through cooperative literature circles with connected and authentic writing tasks such as creating a blog or interviewing a family member and writing a compare/ contrast essay to be shared on a family visitation day. While the special education teacher can attempt to supplement the remedial curriculum with these culturally relevant activities, it is very challenging due to time constraints as the other classes are spending the entire sixty-eight minute block on these lessons and the special education teacher is trying to fit it in with the remedial program. Students without disability labels who benefit from ELA remediation are able to receive Basic Skills services within their ELA classes and at other times throughout the day, rather than being segregated for services. Within my classroom, this model causes the four to nine students per grade level who are placed in the small group resource class to question their abilities and wonder why they are being singled out to be excluded from their peers, especially since there are no other pull-out resource classes besides ELA and Math. Many of them ask what is wrong with them, and question if they are even expected to progress in their reading and writing skills. Oftentimes they get teased and bullied for being in the small group class, act out when they are in the resource room, and lose motivation to read and write because they are not interested in the text and have little choice or input into their readings and accompanying activities.

Purpose Statement

The study objective is to report on the lived experience of students with IEPs in the middle school pull-out resource room when their teacher incorporates culturally relevant practices. I will seek to elicit student reports and examine artifacts that contribute to their self-efficacy, motivation, behavior, self-concept, engagement, and achievement. A major theory guiding this study is Bandura's social learning theory, with the understanding that not all learning is observable or quantifiable on a standardized instrument, and that learning takes place through observing others (1977). For example, my students' engagement with self-selected reading and writing authentic tasks may lead to innovative self-expression that can not be quantified on a standardized test, such as writing in verse or creating graphic novels. Additionally, if they are excluded from their general education peers and are learning in a group of only four to nine classmates, they are missing out on social learning opportunities that occur in the larger and more diverse group. Bandura's self-efficacy research indicates that if students believe they are not capable of gaining the skills needed to achieve, they will not persist on challenging tasks (1993). Vygotsky's constructivist theory also guides this study, with the hope that increased opportunities for student-led, choice activities with a variety of peers will foster a greater joy for learning and engagement that will inevitably lead to achievement (1962). Viewing students from a funds of knowledge perspective and demonstrating respect and value for the literacies and skills they are bringing from their home and culture rather than a deficit perspective when compared to ableist, monocultural norms are taken from the works of multicultural theorists such as Ladson-Billings, Banks, Nieto, Gay, and Paris. Furthermore, this research draws on the work of disability theory and treating

human differences as a natural part of life rather than something to be excluded or assimilated into ableist norms (Connor, 2013).

These theories work together to answer the research question by taking frameworks from multicultural pedagogy and constructivist learning theories. They are synthesized with disability and critical race theory (DisCrit) to challenge the oppression and harm being repeated by districts that seek to withhold educational best practices from students with disability labels. These remediation practices favor repetitive foundational work using techniques that may further disengage youth from a rigorous education that could lead to more favorable life outcomes for these students (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri, 2013).

While I did not have an IEP, I have an insider perspective of what it was like to be from a low income family and see my parents and brother try to navigate the ableism, financial privilege, and segregation that is built into our school system. For the past twenty years, as a white teacher in a predominantly white middle class school suburban district, I have witnessed the overrepresentation of students of color and low socioeconomic students in special education. Like my brother, these students are removed from general education and segregated from their peers, then exposed to decodable text and multisensory phonics while being drilled on how to write a five paragraph essay to a standardized test prompt for years, while their classmates in general education classes read self-selected multicultural novels and express themselves through 21st century writing skills such as podcasts, blogs, and vlogs. When these students with disability labels inevitably improve their standardized tests scores from the constant repetition of sample test questions, the information is presented to the public at Board meetings and

the curriculum is lauded as the prescription necessary to "fix" these students, yet these same students see reading and writing as a dreaded activity with little purpose or relevance to their lives. The standardized test skills that were so important in middle school have little value in 21st century careers, and many of these students, like my brother, develop a loathing for school, poor self-concepts, and the belief that they do not have what it takes to attain successful careers. Furthermore, by being denied access to authentic learning experiences, they are unable to apply the basic skills they have mastered to real world scenarios. It is my hope that by centering student voices on the effects that culturally relevant pedagogy have on their self-efficacy and engagement with literacy activities, I can draw attention to the injustice of their segregation and exposure solely to repetitive, test-based replacement curriculum and help enact change in my district's practices to a supplemental remediation program while still including all students in the more engaging general education curriculum and practices.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Research Question: What is the lived experience of students with disability labels in the pull-out resource ELA setting when their teachers include culturally relevant practices?

Sub Questions

1.What happens when students are given a choice of topics to read about?

2. What happens when students are exposed to a variety of multicultural texts that are mirrors of their own experiences, and windows into the experiences of others?

3. What happens when students are given a choice of topics to write about?

4. What happens when students identify a problem in their community and write for authentic purposes to address the problem?

5. What happens when students are given a choice of how to express their written message?

6. What happens when students' culture and lived experiences are shared, normalized, and highly regarded rather than exoticized?

7. What happens when students with IEPs are given increased opportunities for cooperative learning with students without IEPs?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two follows with a review of literature relevant to the question. Subjects taken into consideration are the marginalization of students with disability labels, the lack of student-directed learning and authentic learning activities in remedial English Language Arts programs, the narrowing of the curriculum for students with disability labels, and the benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy on all learners, regardless of disability label. Chapter three consists of the qualitative research design and methods such as student surveys, transcripts of class discussions, examination of student artifacts, and teacher journaling observations. Chapter four explores the findings of the study, and chapter five summarizes the findings and their impact on future classrooms.

Chapter 2

Introduction of Literature Review

In schools across the nation, students with disability labels are removed from general education English Language Arts settings for remedial instruction through prepackaged skill and drill programs that focus on basic phonics and formulaic writing, at the expense of culturally responsive pedagogy and authentic, engaging literacy activities. When students with disability labels are segregated in pull-out settings with scripted ELA programs, they are denied pedagogical best practices such as student-directed learning, creative play, and authentic learning activities that are proven to increase student engagement and behavior, motivation, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, this segregation and narrowed focus on remedial skills comes at the expense of their social emotional development, self esteem, and friendship opportunities.

Chapter two is a review of relevant literature in four major areas: the marginalization of students with disability labels, the narrowing of the curriculum for these students, the lack of culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining learning opportunities for students with disability labels, and the intersection of Disability/Critical Race Theory (DisCrit).

M**arginalization of Students With Disability Labels**

A major theory guiding this study is Bandura's social learning theory, with the understanding that not all learning is observable or quantifiable on a standardized instrument, and that learning takes place through observing others (1977). For example, students' engagement with self-selected reading and writing authentic tasks may lead to innovative self-expression that can not be quantified on a standardized test, such as

writing in verse or creating graphic novels. Additionally, if they are excluded from their general education peers and are learning in a group of only four to nine classmates, they are missing out on social learning opportunities that occur in the larger and more diverse group. This segregation can lead them to question their self-worth and erode their self-confidence. Bandura's self-efficacy research indicates that if students believe they are not capable of gaining the skills needed to achieve, they will not persist on challenging tasks (1993).

Vygotsky's constructivist theory also guides this study, with the understanding that increased opportunities for student-led, choice activities with a variety of peers will foster a greater joy for learning and engagement that will inevitably lead to achievement (1962). Vygotsky asserts through his widely-accepted sociocultural theory that children learn best in social situations. It follows that segregating students with disability labels away from their peers robs them of the learning opportunity of working with what Vygotsky identified as an MKO (more knowledgeable other) and also of the chance to be the MKO in certain classroom activities, such as with technology, art, or music. This research supports inclusive practices such as heterogeneous cooperative group learning, which is not available to students in a small group, homogeneous special education setting (Eun, 2010; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Kozulin et al., 2003; Miller, 2011; Wertsch et al., 1993).

Additional tension found in segregated programs is highlighted in Pavri's work on the loneliness of children with disabilities, in which she states: "educators have not traditionally given students with disabilities equal opportunities for full participation in educational and extracurricular activities in school. Such a separate education system

likely affects the extent to which students with disabilities feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the school and classroom community" (2001, p.53).

Furthering this work, Wiener and Tardiff (2004) studied the effect of classroom placement on students with disability labels in grades 4 through 8 across multiple schools in Toronto. Using measures such as the *Friendship Quality Questionnaire- Revised* (FQQ-R; Parker & Asher, 1993), Kovacs' 1992 *Children's Depression Inventory*, the *Self Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students* (SPPLDS, Renick & Harter, 1988), and the *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale* (LSDS; Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1994), they spent two years gathering information from the students with learning disabilities receiving special education instruction in either inclusive and segregated settings, as well as their teachers. The researchers found that students in inclusion classrooms were more accepted by their peers, had more satisfying friendships, had better social skills, had fewer problem behaviors, and reported less loneliness than students in segregated special education settings (2004).

When teachers witness their students being isolated and excluded from their peers, they are spurred to take action. A 2004 case study by Harriott and Martin documented one teacher's quest to include her only student with Down syndrome, who sat alone and silently completed her work unless prompted by an adult to speak, into the full classroom community. The authors posited that "providing opportunities for socially competent peers to initiate interactions is important to promote the inclusion of students with less competent language and communication skills" (p. 50); opportunities that are lacking when students with disabilities are marginalized in small group, segregated classroom settings. By broadening the curriculum to incorporate multicultural literature

with accompanying activities and cooperative groups that included students of all abilities, the authors found that social interactions for all students increased inside and outside of class, students no longer required adult facilitation for interactions, and families of students with and without disability labels reported more social opportunities outside of school. Rather than isolated social skills training in a segregated classroom, building inclusive practices in a classroom routine can increase outcomes for all students, regardless of disability label. Additionally, in a 2024 review of studies on the barriers to inclusive education for children with disabilities, Bani and Lach noted that the children themselves reported "negative attitudes and stigma toward CWD (children with disabilities) at the school level" (p. 8). Despite these widely accepted frameworks and studies, students with disability labels are being denied these inclusive, cooperative activities which may in turn increase deficits in social skills and social-emotional learning (SEL), even in these post pandemic-shutdown times when schools are scrambling to provide more SEL support for students.

Narrowing of the Curriculum for Students with Disability Labels

In 2006, Frattura and Topinka wrote about the social justice challenge facing educators in the U. S. in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was further perpetuated by the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Pazey, Heilig, Cole, & Sumbera, 2014). The former researchers asserted that "homogeneous settings, instructional techniques and materials often are developed using a group norm rather than individual goals and objectives. Often, instruction is predominantly driven by available supports, classes, and instructional resources within the environment. Students in program-driven models often move as a group to lunch, art class, adapted physical

education, and music. Such program models use the child's label to determine placement in units/classrooms with other children of like deficits for parts or all of the day, which presents a stereotype situationally and symbolically of an outsider, silently and sometimes openly, defined as an expensive drain on the educational system and society" (2006, p. 328). In a school district in Texas labeled "underperforming" due to standardized test scores, Pazey et al. interviewed students with disability labels about their school experience. These students shared the narrowing of the curriculum to focus on test prep classes, sometimes on Saturdays, to improve their standardized test scores at the expense of inclusion in engaging, hands-on science classes and electives (2014). The authors cite Capper, Frattura, and Keyes' (2000) "major problems supporting the oppression associated with separate programs [such as]: Separate programs track and marginalize not only students of color and lower social classes. Separate programs blame and label students. Separate programs enable educators and students not to change. Separate programs prevent the transfer of educator and student's knowledge back to integrated environments. Separate programs act to remove the student from the classroom, resulting in missed instructional opportunities" (p. 330). Students with low achievement in reading and writing are often presented with less engaging material than their high-achieving peers, therefore they choose to read and write less, and the students who would benefit from more practice reading and writing are getting less practice (Vasudevan & Campano, 2009) . Furthermore, a lack of interest in reading and writing activities can lead to behavior problems and decreased attention. Guthrie and Wigfield's work (2000) on students' motivation to read shows that choice and authentic learning activities increase engagement, yet these factors are not included in remedial reading

programs. Students are made to read books that are considered to be on their "level" based on one standardized assessment, rather than being encouraged to read the books they are excited about and interested in. This often leads to more isolation and narrowing of the curriculum because students who test low in reading are offered a limited amount of texts to choose from when compared to their peers who have tested on-level. Despite this narrowing of the curriculum, students with disability labels are still judged on their proficiency in the full general curriculum on high-stakes standardized tests, creating a cycle of failure. In their 2009 article on ways to ensure all students are given equal opportunity to learn regardless of disability label, Roach et al. state: "Not knowing whether students in special education classes are afforded the opportunity to learn the instructional content for which they are held accountable on statewide tests leaves fundamental questions regarding educational equity and the validity of test score interpretations unanswered" (p. 513). In a 2014 study funded by the U.S. Department of Education, educational researcher Proctor explored how motivation and engagement predicted reading comprehension for both native English speaking and ELL students with disabilities in a segregated remedial reading program. He concluded that self-efficacy was the highest determinant for improvement in reading comprehension for this group, and that classrooms that fostered curiosity and relationship building were likely to show greater comprehension gains than those that focused solely on comprehension skill-building. These findings support what many teachers have observed about how to build enthusiasm for reading, yet districts still pay top dollar for prepackaged, scripted programs that include no cooperative games for team-building, no student-directed learning, and no room for passion projects based on student's curiosity. As the curriculum

is narrowed to test prep for readers identified as struggling, schools fail to make the connection between authentic activities and the reading proficiency necessary to perform college and career tasks.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

Research supports the inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy to improve academic engagement for all students, and there are many studies whose authors examine the effects on Response to Intervention (RTI), special education, students of color, and students with intersecting aspects of their identities, such as a disability label and non-dominant culture. For example, in Dr. Sonia Nieto's 1992 seminal work, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education,* she asserts that multicultural education is necessary educational reform that is antiracist, focused on social justice, and good for all students, not just students from nondominant cultures. Additionally, in her 2008 work she discusses the systemic inequities in the public school system by pointing out that caring for students and wanting to support their cultural development is insufficient, if teachers "fail to counter a social structure that treats them unequally" (p. 29). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings asserted a three point criteria for culturally relevant teaching: students must experience success, they must develop or maintain cultural competence, and they must develop a critical consciousness to which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (1995). Ladson-Billings further argues that we inappropriately measure the outcomes of Eurocentric curricula, instruction, and assessment, when we measure all students by the same cultural perspective (2006). These theories are grounded in the critical literacy work of Freire (1970), who asserts that the purpose of education is to empower students to challenge the

systems that seek to oppress them. These theories are similarly echoed in the prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure work of Banks (1993, p.25), and the culturally sustaining pedagogy research of Paris (2012), whose research draws on the work of disability theory and treating human differences as a natural part of life rather than something to be excluded or assimilated into ableist norms (Connor, 2013).

These assertions of culturally relevant best practice pedagogy can and should be applied to educating students with disability labels. However, there are still clearly gaps in proficient use of culturally relevant pedagogy practices by today's teachers. This was illustrated in 2016, when Gretchen Robinson studied the culturally relevant practices of RTI teachers in diverse school districts, and found that a majority of teachers reported that they did utilize culturally relevant practices, but upon further examination of their open-ended answers, these teachers may not have been as culturally responsive as they thought. This indicates a need for teachers to continually examine their practice, personal and institutional bias, and community connections, and revise teaching practice accordingly. An example of this was published in 2022, when educator Erin-Hope Whitney successfully revised her practice and conducted qualitative research on the inclusion of culturally and historically responsive book clubs with Black girls with disability labels. She reported that by stepping away from the remedial scripted reading program and allowing her students to read books that were mirrors into their cultural identity and windows into a different historical period, they engaged in and showed evidence of her learning targets "cultivating identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy" (2022, Whitney, p. 32). This suggests that teachers can address IEP goals and state

standards with students with disabilities without always relying on a scripted remedial program.

Disability Critical Race Theory

Disability Critical Race Theory, or DisCrit, is the framework designed by Dr. S.A. Annamma in collaboration with Disability Studies theorists Ferri and Connor to address the racism and discrimination faced by students of color with disability labels when they are held to Euro-centric ableist norms. They argue that "societal interpretations of and responses to specific differences from the normed body are what signify a dis/ability. Indeed, notions of dis/ability continually shift over time according to the social context" (2013, p.3). This is addressed in the current study's research question when determining the lived experience of students when their state-labeled "disability" is normalized and highly regarded, rather than being addressed as a deficiency in their existence that needs to be "fixed" by those who are not similarly afflicted.

In a 2022 study, Dr. Ebony Perouse-Harvey studied the intersectionality of disability and race and "preservice teachers' ability to see the ways in which referrals to and services within special education reproduce inequities as a function of race and perceptions of ability that are rooted in White, middle-class, able-bodied norms" (p.51). This study serves as evidence that the tensions many teachers feel about the segregation of their students is being perpetuated, as these preservice teachers were unable to identify the systemic harm being done to people of color through over-referrals into special education. Researchers Aukerman and Schuldt (2021) point out that as districts scramble to prove that they are utilizing what the public perceives as "Science of Reading" strategies, the purpose of reading instruction narrows to "an intensive focus on assessed

reading proficiency as the primary goal of reading instruction" (p. 84). They assert a science of reading framework with a four-pronged goal that includes decoding and comprehension while also incorporating culturally relevant practices such as improving self-efficacy, motivation and engagement with reading, and "honoring and leveraging different strengths and perspectives" in regard to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This relates directly to Gonzalez & Moll Funds of Knowledge lens of students and their families, rather than educators looking at students of color and low socioeconomic status being seen from a deficit perspective (2005).

Conclusion

Despite the abundance of scholarly research pointing out the inequities faced by students with disability labels and the availability of resources to rectify these injustices, these discriminatory practices are still the norm in many schools today. Students with disability labels are excluded from their general education peers and forced into skill and drill remedial classes that teach to a dominant-culture norm of standardized assessment that has little value for their college and career readiness. There exists an overrepresentation of students of color and students with socioeconomic disadvantages segregated in special education, and the aim of this study is to report on the lived experience of these students and use this information to enact a change toward more inclusivity and culturally relevant and engaging learning opportunities for these students. Chapter 3 will look at the context of the study and the research methodology.

Chapter 3

Research Design & Methods

This study was conducted using qualitative teacher research inquiry methods to explore the lived experience of students with disability labels in the pull-out resource ELA setting when their teacher includes culturally relevant practices. Teacher research scholars Cochran-Smith and Lytle defined teacher research as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (1993, p. 23-24). In a 2012 interview, Cochran-Smith further posited that a value of this inquiry "is that questions come from the practitioners, the teachers, instead of questions being imposed on them. There is active questioning of assumptions, interrogation of assumptions of common practices; there is an attempt to be systematic; there is a thoughtful consideration of multiple perspectives" (Fiorentini & Crecci, p.12). A tension that I am questioning within my school district is the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in the segregated, special education middle school ELA program. Students with disability labels who are testing below grade level on standardized reading and writing assessments are placed in a small group, homogeneous classroom with a remedial replacement packaged curriculum that includes little student choice, no cooperative learning games, and no authentic 21st century writing activities. Rather, the curriculum focuses on repetitive, skill-based mini-lessons on tested comprehension and writing standards, with the goal of improving standardized test scores. This leads me to further question the marginalization of these students, and the narrowing of the ELA curriculum when compared to the culturally relevant reading and writing activities being employed in the general education ELA setting. In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* chapter entitled

"Designing Qualitative Research for Studies in Education," author Tarozzi reports that teacher research takes place within a natural classroom setting, and is conducted by the educator while teaching and learning are taking place. It is based on an inquiry that comes from a tension within the classroom, and is often political and equity-based.This study consisted of qualitative teacher research comparing students' self-reported attitude, motivation, and self-efficacy toward ELA instruction from the scripted remedial reading and writing curriculum, and self-selected multicultural texts with student-led writing activities.

Data collection methods included pre and post surveys of student attitude and motivation for reading and writing about remedial reading program materials and self-selected materials. Additionally, self-efficacy rating scales were administered. Weekly check-in interviews and journaling of class discussions during individual self-selected reading conferences were examined, as well as student cooperative group conference discussion notes. During and after reading organizers and journal entries were analyzed, as were writing samples for authentic purposes and writing samples, and teaching observations from the scripted program.

School Site and Classroom Context

The school site is a PreK-8 one-building district in the southern New Jersey suburban town of Bellwyn (pseudonym). According to 2020 U.S. census data, the town has a population of 7,489 people, and 2022 census statistics report a total of 2,835 households, with a median income of $98,706. District enrollment was listed as 832 students in the September 2023 Board of Education minutes, 49% female and 51% male, of whom 16.3% have disability labels, 11.4% are considered Economically

Disadvantaged, and .4% are classified as English Language Learners (2022, New Jersey School Performance Report). The same report includes a student body racial breakdown of 75% White, 6.5% Hispanic, 9.2% Black or African American, 4.9% Asian, and 3.8% Two or More Races.

Participants in the study all have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with goals and accommodations that address their disability labels, and they receive the entirety of their English Language Arts instruction in the small group resource room setting for sixty-eight minutes per day. In contrast, students without disability labels who test below grade level in reading have sixty-eight minutes in the general education classroom with a second teacher who is considered a specialist, and then additional ELA minutes for small group supplemental remediation classes at other times in their schedule. The study was conducted in one classroom with participants in four classes taught by the same teacher: a fifth grade class with four students, a sixth grade class with seven students and an instructional assistant, a seventh grade class with nine students, and an eighth grade class with four students. Twelve of the twenty-four students identify as people of color, categorizing themselves as African American, Latinx, and multiracial. According to data from 2020-2022 published in the U.S. News Testing Report, students in this district performed above the state average in standardized testing, with 52% of students tested at or above the proficient level for reading, and 30% tested at or above that level for math.

Procedure of the Study

This study was conducted from October to December, for approximately 10 weeks. The study proceeded as follows:

Week 1: Obtained parental and student consent to use student data such as surveys, teacher reflections on classroom discussions and activities, student rating scales, and student artifacts. Students completed the Garfield reading pre-survey and self-efficacy rating scales (pre). Students were introduced to "My Story Matters" Mondays, in which each student selects an arrival ELA activity between a choice of self-selected reading, teacher time, writing, or computer work, and then the entire class creates and shares slideshows of their weekend stories for team building and conversation skills including speaking, listening, and presenting.

Week 2: Students completed the Garfield writing interest survey. Students were given a choice and voice in classroom organization and structure. They explored the classroom library, school library, and various audiobook programs. Teacher gave book talks featuring a variety of multicultural texts and included multimedia book trailers and video clips by the authors themselves. Students chose their own books to read and the format in which to read them, discussed and implemented seating arrangements and flexible seating, and brainstormed ideas for writing activities.

Week 3: Students worked on their self-selected authentic writing activities and continued reading their self-selected books. Students discussed and wrote in their journals about why they chose their particular books and the way they were reading them. They reflected on what was working and what they would change. Students also shared and reflected on their writing activities, and rated their interest level in continuing these writing activities or moving on to other assignments.

Weeks 4-7: Students continued self-selected authentic writing activities and reading their self-selected books alone, with partners, or in cooperative groups.

Week 8: Students completed Garfield Writing Interest Post-survey.

Week 9: Students completed Garfield Reading Interest Post-Surveys

Week 10: Students completed Self-Efficacy Post-Scales and participated in round table discussions about what they thought was working well in ELA and what could be improved.

Data Sources

Data collection took place through note-taking during class discussions, cooperative group work, and individual and group conferencing. Reflective teacher journaling, comparison of student pre- and post surveys, and examination of student artifacts all contributed to what educational researcher Guion (2002) describes as methodological triangulation, in which qualitative researchers "involve multiple qualitative methods to study the program" (p. 2). In her article she states that "triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies" (p.1).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a model of critical discourse analysis, which is defined in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2015) as "analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 466). Author Van Dijk further states that "critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality" (p. 466); in this case, challenging the inequities faced by students with disabilities labels who are segregated,

marginalized, and exposed to a narrow, test-based curriculum. Artifacts, surveys, and journals were then coded to identify themes that emerged in the data.

Chapter Four will focus on the data analysis from the qualitative study, with an explanation of recurring themes found across artifacts.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Chapter 4 includes the findings of my study investigating the research question: What is the lived experience of students with disability labels in the pull-out resource ELA setting when their teacher includes culturally relevant practices? Data was collected in a middle school resource room for ten weeks and then analyzed to determine themes and patterns that emerged across triangulated data points such as my teacher journal, student surveys, student work, and classroom discussions. My analysis gleaned four main themes from the data: validating student voice led to a more trusting community, allowing student choice increased reading and writing engagement, maintaining high expectations while ensuring students experienced success built self-efficacy, and teaching critical consciousness empowered students to challenge the status quo.

Validating Student Voice Led to a More Trusting Community

Community building was a major theme that emerged across data points when culturally relevant practices were interwoven into our classroom routine. By starting each week with our "My Story Matters" personal slideshows, students created a trusting environment where they celebrated each other's successes, discussed topics of importance to them, and supported each other in times of need. Even students who were initially reluctant to participate eventually shared parts of their lives that they wanted their classmates and teacher to know about. The remedial, scripted ELA program that our school has adopted for the resource room does not include any team building activities or

games; rather, students complete three twenty minute stations that include a computer station where students work alone on personalized remedial spelling, phonics, and comprehension skills based on the results of one standardized test; an independent reading station where students are directed to silently read a book from the reading program's library that matches their tested level from the same standardized test, and then take a computer-generated multiple choice test upon completion of each book; and a teacher group station where students read a passage with the teacher and write answers to text-based comprehension questions that are written in the same format as the state and district standardized tests. All of these activities are teacher-led and deficit-based, with a focus on remediating skills where students are not demonstrating proficiency in on their standardized tests. Under the umbrella of social-emotional learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and team building, I incorporated "Your Story Matters Mondays," in which students reported to class and completed the station of their choice, then spent the other two stations composing slideshows about themselves and then presenting them. I hoped that by sharing our stories every Monday, my students would make connections with each other, learn about each other's cultures and families, and gain personal confidence while realizing the value of their lived experiences while engaging in ELA skills for an authentic purpose.

An example of trust-building through culturally relevant pedagogy was evident with my 7th grade students who had all been in class together before except for one autistic student, Alma, whose previous years at our school were in a more restrictive self-contained setting for students with multiple disabilities. The other students were aware of her and knew what class she had been in, but they had not had any opportunities

to get to know her, and when school started she immediately moved her seat away from them and sat as far in the back of the room as possible. However, her beginning of the year surveys indicated she wanted to make friends and she liked working in groups or with partners, especially if she could be in charge of her self-identified areas of strength: technology, art, or spelling. On Week 1, I noted in my teacher journal that the students were talking "around" her rather than "to" her; for example, Conor asked me, "What book did Alma read this summer?" instead of asking her, and Jay asked another classmate if Alma was going to attend speech therapy with them. I modeled speaking directly to Alma, who answered hesitatingly and in a self-deprecating manner, saying, "I read this dumb book, you probably think it's dumb" and "I'm sure I have to go to speech because I can't speak right because of, you know" as she pointed to herself. I reflected in my journal that while all the kids were kind and got along with each other, there seemed to be two main friendship groups in the class, with Alma as the only total outsider. For Alma, I hoped that her classmates would start to see her more as an equal classmate and possible friend, rather than see her autistic traits as something that needed to be changed. I noted in my journal that students seemed to view her prior placement in a multiply disabled class as a deficit that set her apart from them, and hoped they would grow to see the value of her experience and realize she did not need to change in order to be important and valued by her community.

When we created our first "My Story Matters" slideshow, I modeled how to compose a title that was related to the stories the students were telling, such as "Windy Weekend," "Fun With Friends," or "Family First." The seventh graders were all enthusiastic about presenting, except for Brynna and Alma. According to my entries

dated 9/11/23, Brynna said they do not like to speak in front of the class but they would like to share their slides on the board if I would read them, and they wrote a sticky note to me stating that boy in the class had called them “fat” when they were in 5th grade, and they did not like or trust that boy anymore. I thanked them for letting me know about this barrier to trust in our classroom, and we decided I would read their slideshow and each week they could choose a sentence or slide to read as the school year moved forward. Brynna had changed their slides to a different color scheme than the template I had created, and I praised their aesthetic and eye for creating a visually pleasing slideshow rather than focusing on their refusal to present their story to the class. Each week they read a little bit more to the class, and by Week 5 they were presenting on their own without any assistance from me. In Week 4 Brynna added an additional “Emotion” slide to their slideshow and started writing each week that they were mad, and what they felt mad about. When their classmates questioned them about the new slide, they explained that since the school counselor had left for another district, they did not have a place in school where they could express these feelings safely, so they were incorporating them into the slideshow. This student shared that they have anxiety and depression and that talking through their feelings is the only way they can keep coming to school and not stay in bed all day. Brynna’s classmates accepted their explanation in a supportive manner, and connected to themselves or others in their family who also have anxiety or depression. Max, who had previously called them “fat,” was noticeably supportive and moved to sit at Brynna’s table to talk about how depressed his grandmother became when his young cousin committed a crime and went to jail. He told Brynna that his

grandmother would yell and cry loudly whenever they were together on weekends, and that it was very upsetting to him.

Alma titled her story “Dumb Slideshow 1,” loaded it with five pages of Super Mario memes, and when it was time to present said in a shrill voice, “I don’t want to tell these people about my life!” The students expectantly waited for my response and I pointed out that she does not have to tell us personal details about herself and she can choose to write about something else, such as Super Mario. I also noted her excellent capitalization in her title, and her classmate Mark directly asked her, “Are you going to keep that title for the school year and just change the number each week?” She looked right at him with a genuine and mischievous smile and answered, “Maybe” and the class laughed with her. As the weeks went on I noted in my teacher journal how this became a class joke that everyone looked forward to, and in my 9/17 entry, I noted that Conor looked up the school calendar and said to everyone that his goal was to get Alma to “Dumb Slideshow 20” and then “his life would be complete.” When Alma’s individual speech therapy schedule was changed and it conflicted with our weekend stories, her classmates asked if we could change the order of the classroom routine so that Alma would not miss it. As the weeks went on and her classmates shared details about their family gatherings, sports games, religious services, and hobbies, Alma wrote about her love of video games, her Christian education classes that would culminate in making her First Holy Communion, and the Peruvian dishes her mom and aunt would cook every Sunday. She wrote every week about how much she wanted a Stylophone, which none of her classmates had ever heard of, so she included information on her weekly slideshow story to explain what it was. When she got a Stylophone in November to celebrate her

good report card, she brought it into class and all of her classmates tried it with her. Alma also moved her seat from the back of the room all alone to a table with two other classmates. I connected the students' reactions and relationship building with Alma to the educational Dis/Crit philosophy that rather than treating this autistic student like she needed to change and conform, they embraced her creativity and made it part of class that they celebrated each week.

Reactions to their personalized slideshows dominated my teacher journal, as this activity validated student voice and gave them a predictable weekly forum where they could be heard. 7th grader Brynna had struggled with chronic absenteeism in previous grades, and when Conor commented that they always came to school on Mondays this year, they responded that even if they were feeling bad from spending the weekend at their dad's house, they did not want to miss sharing their slideshow. Conor said he never realized Brynna was upset from being at their dad's, and he just always thought they were cutting school. The conversation continued as such:

Conor: "Why do you hate going to your dad's? Or is it too personal?"

Brynna: "Yeah, it's personal, but I'll tell you. I have to share a room with my stepsister and she's a little kid and she wrecks my stuff. And if I get mad at her I get yelled at. And her room is so much nicer than my room at my mom's and it makes me mad. And he has a big dog and I'm allergic to it and it makes my nose run and my eyes itch and why did he get a dog if he knows I'm allergic? He picked a dog over me because my stepmom wanted one. And if I take allergy medicine it makes me tired and then I'm too tired to get up for school."

Conor: “That sucks. I don’t think any of us knew that and we all just thought you were allowed to stay home whenever you wanted so you skipped school a lot. Right, you guys?”

These are just a few of the ways that incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy created an atmosphere of trust and community in our classroom.

Allowing Student Choice Increased Reading and Writing Engagement

Another culturally relevant practice that yielded an increase in student engagement with reading was allowing students to choose the books they would read from all available titles, including our classroom and school library, free audiobooks on the Epic and Learning Ally apps, and books from home, instead of following the scripted program’s rule that they read from the leveled, remedial reading books that fell within within 100 points of their standardized-test generated Lexile score. A sixth grader, Gabe, switched into the resource class after one week in the inclusion general education class, and he shared that he was anxious and upset because his case manager and grandmother told him he was moved to the “lower class” because he was “failing.” The teacher journal entry for 9/26 indicates that after perusing the classroom library with a preferred classmate and selecting copies of the graphic novel *The New Kid* by Jerry Craft to read together, he said, “I can’t believe I get to read any book I want. In my other class we had to read what the teacher said, and I didn’t like it or understand it. I couldn’t pay attention and I would just sit there until she said silent time was up. Now because I’m reading this with Ezekiel, we help each other pay attention and talk about what we like or don’t understand. I’m so happy I got moved to this class because now I like reading.”

Students all responded positively to being able to choose their own books, and I modeled how to do book talks and encouraged them to do the same. I introduced Emily Style and Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of books being mirrors of our lives and windows into the lives of others, and the students independently would identify which they were choosing. 7th grader Alma selected the graphic novel *Frankie's World* and announced to the class, "I picked it because Frankie's autistic. She's like me!" A 6th grade boy with a behavioral disability label privately told me that as part of his mother's sobriety journey as his parents battled their addiction cycle, they were completing the "75 Hard Challenge," which included reading ten pages of a nonfiction self-help book each day. He said he had been doing it at home but he asked if I could help him find self-help books at school, and those became his self-selected reading books. Biracial 8th grader MJ selected *Black Brother, Black Brother* on the recommendation of his African American classmate Niall, and they sat together for reading shares and discussed their experiences with colorism; MJ said he is "so light people tell me I'm not really Black" and they say, "I can tell your brother is Black because of his hair, but you don't have Black hair." This spurred MJ to tell the whole class that he gets upset when people say he is not Black because coming from a blended race family, his lived experience includes racism and he shared his traumatic experience of someone yelling racist comments at his family at the local farmer's market right behind our school building because MJ's mom is White and his dad is Black. The other White students were shocked and thought this had happened in the past, and MJ told them it had happened that weekend while his grandparents were visiting from California. Niall told them that his family experiences racism all the time in their town, and he has "darker skin than any of my brothers and everyone says they are so

cute and people want to touch their hair and then they just look at me and don't say anything." Week 3 teacher journal entries reflect that MJ had switched from *Black Brother* to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever,* and when I asked him why during his reading conference, he said he "needed a break from *Black Brother, Black Brother* because some very heavy things had happened in the story" and he "just needed to laugh." He continued that in the other ELA class when you start a book you have to finish it, but he knew it would be okay to switch books in our class because the book was making him feel worried.

When presented with reading choices, seventh graders had a class discussion and decided they would like to read all together, and they wanted to select a Hispanic American author in response to the heritage month posters hanging in our classroom and because two out of the eight students identified as Hispanic. During our literature discussions on the short story *Seventh Grade* by Gary Soto, Liam who is of Puerto Rican, Black, and Mexican descent was connecting to the main character's family expectations and he turned to his autistic Peruvian classmate, Alma, and drew her into an animated conversation comparing their experiences being raised by Latina moms. Liam asked, "Yo, you have a Latina mom, too?" and when she nodded he proceeded with, "I feel so bad for you! Latina moms are SO STRICT! They are so in your business, they will question you and stay on you!" To which Alma replied, "The only moms I've ever seen as strict as Hispanic moms are my friend's Asian moms!" After making this connection with her classmate, they moved their seats next to each other to continue discussing their shared cultural background. A White student chimed in and said, "I'm not sure if we are really supposed to talk about race in class" and when I asked him why he said, "I think if I said

something about my mom acting a certain way because she was White it would mean I was racist, so isn't it the same for them talking about Hispanic moms?" This led to a class discussion on generalizations and how there can be common norms amongst cultures, but we should get to know people and accept that their stories are from their lived experience and not necessarily true for everyone of the same culture. Matt chimed in that he and Rose, his tablemate, are both White, but she calls her grandparents Nanny and Poppop and he calls his Dziadzi and Babcia, which prompted Conor to share that he is White and he calls his mom's mom Bubbe because she is Jewish. These literature discussions were all student-led and gave students opportunities to engage in discussions about race and culture in a safe, guided space which is helping them develop 21st century college and career language and personal skills.

Another example of engagement emerged when students would ask to do post-reading activities that were personally engaging to them. For example, four students across different classes chose to take Epic multiple choice comprehension quizzes each time they finished a book, citing reasons such as "It helps me keep track of my understanding. If I get a low score, I go back and reread the book and take the quiz again until I get a 90 or better," and "It makes me pay attention to my reading, like if I am not paying attention to the character's name I make sure I think about it because I know the quiz will ask me about it." Other students asked if they could do book reports when they finished a book, so we brainstormed a menu of choices and posted them in Google Classroom, and when completed they would share them with their classmates. One 8th grade student challenged herself to read the entire Harry Potter series, asked if she could plan a class party when she finished her third Harry Potter book, and she brought in

wands and spell cards for students to read and practice, the Harry Potter HeadBands game, Bertie Bots jellybeans for her classmates, and candy molds so the class could make chocolate frogs. This party inspired one of her classmates to start listening to the first Harry Potter audiobook at night before bed with her mom, sister, and brother. More evidence of reading engagement was found on our 1st Marking Period reflections, and my teacher journal states that 7th grader Rachel said, "I have read so many books this year. I have never read so many books before in my life. It's because we can read whatever book we want, and you let us read with our friends or alone." Rachel's mom echoed this sentiment in Marking Period 1 parent/ teacher conferences.

The 5th graders who had ELA class after lunch arrived early to class every day, and when I asked why they said it was so they would have more time to free read. Their preferred after-reading activity was to summarize and share on Google Docs with each other. They often wanted to continue reading and summarizing beyond the allotted time, so they would work on it at home despite it not being a mandatory assignment.

At the end of Marking Period 1, nine parents contacted me to say their middle schoolers were reading more than ever at home without being asked, and that they were talking about what they read at school. Many students asked to bring classroom books home because they connected to something in their family lives. For example, one parent reported that her daughter, Francisca, was reading our classroom library books about daily life in the Caribbean to her younger siblings to get them ready for their first family trip to visit their grandmother in the Dominican Republic. Francisca shared that her four year old brother is autistic and she thought that seeing images of the D.R. and hearing stories would help him be prepared and maybe "not have as many tantrums" (teacher

journal, Week 8). Francisca, who had rated reading as a non-preferred activity on her beginning of year survey, now had a purpose for reading that connected to her family's culture.

Allowing student choice rather than just writing for test-prep increased student engagement with writing as well. When introducing different types of writing, my classes brainstormed the real-life purposes for writing, and students placed the highest value on learning how to write stories that might become books, shows, or movies. They lamented that the middle school high stakes standardized tests do not heavily weigh creative writing skills, and instead focus on research and explanatory writing after reading informational text. When I pointed out that they are tested on continuing a story, they felt that was not a free enough writing format because the characters, settings, and plot had already been given to them. We started the year with the type of writing they were most engaged with, which was creative story writing and personal memoir. Students' stories were varied and personal, and they came in asking to write them each day. Some examples highlighted in my teacher journal are:

-5th grader June who started writing a flipbook on his own in class, then asked his Japanese grandfather to co-write it with him. They worked on it at home and included Japanese characters and English words and sentences.

-6th grader James who created a digital book that included interactive slides with questions for his readers to answer, and the final page included a key telling you if you answered questions a certain way, you might be autistic. At the end of presenting it to his class, he informed them all proudly that he is autistic and that he had just figured it out

this year, and when he shared it with his parents and siblings they confirmed that he is autistic.

-Two seventh grade students, Sloane and Brynna, co-wrote a story based on their favorite video game, *Cookie Run Kingdom.* Their characters were based on everyone in our class and they would write the story details in class, then FaceTime at home to collaborate on the artwork. They emailed me drafts of their story to edit at all hours of the day and night for multiple months.

-A seventh grade girl privately hand-wrote a three page love letter to another seventh grade girl, and asked if she could show it to me at my desk. After I silently read it she ripped it up, but she said she "just felt happy that she got to write it and show it to someone" (teacher journal, Week 8).

-8th grader MJ wrote a tribute to his grandmother for what he told the class was her three year "deathaversary." He presented it in front of the class and it included stories of her life when she was young, pictures of her through the years, and stories of their family. On the actual anniversary of her passing, he stayed home from school and shared it with his mom before they went to the cemetery.

-Alma wrote a story about her father's military service in Peru for Veteran's Day, after asking if it "counts" because he was not in the American military.

These are just a few examples of the student-directed writing that my middle school students eagerly engaged in rather than the scripted program's daily test prep writing.

High Expectations Coupled with Opportunities for Success Built Self-Efficacy

Student surveys showed that my students are willing to persist in challenging reading and writing tasks because they believe they have the tools to achieve their goals. This was evidenced when all four eighth graders who have print disability labels listed ELA as their strongest academic subject on a high school questionnaire. Additionally, the students who identified the inequity in the free and reduced lunch program started out being upset and sometimes crying over their frustration with thirst and hunger after being denied water bottles and satisfying food options, but then transformed into believing that they had the communication skills and resources to enact change and secure school lunch justice.

In 1995, Ladson-Billings wrote that culturally relevant teaching ensures that students of color have opportunities for success. An opportunity for success for an 8th grade African American boy named Niall came during a test prep writing activity, as documented in my teacher journal for October 16th-20th. After reading the student-selected dystopian short story *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, students were tasked with writing a continuation of the story. We looked at similar sample state testing questions and essay responses, I modeled writing the first paragraph, and we engaged in guided practice where we continued writing my model essay together. Niall paid attention and called out words and ideas with his classmates during the guided practice portion of writing, and his verbal contributions were quick, creative, and relevant. We reviewed the state writing rubric, and then students were directed to write their own continuation. Niall had rated writing as his least preferred activity on his writing survey, and he was normally my most reluctant writer. His inclusion class teachers often consulted with me

on ways to engage him, and reported that he would sit at his seat doing nothing for entire class periods during writing activities. His general education Social Studies teacher often said Niall was "lazy" and "did not care," and "there is no way he is going to make it in my class," while his special education inclusion teachers often reported they felt class was going too quickly for him and he did not have the basic reading, writing, attention, or listening comprehension skills to participate in the inclusion curriculum. I was prepared for Niall to need scaffolding and conferencing in order to complete the day's writing task, and I had graphic organizers, sentence starters, and a word bank ready if needed. However, when it was time for independent writing, Niall immediately opened his iPad and started writing without hesitation. As Niall has shared previously that he is recovering from major trauma in his previous schools and living conditions and he does not like when people come up behind him, I did not look at his iPad while he wrote, but monitored that he was on-task from afar. He worked without stopping until the bell rang and then asked if he could finish it at home that night, which inspired a good-natured giggle from his classroom best friend. MJ asked, "Niall, you never do your math homework and get a zero every day but you're going to do writing homework when you don't even have to?" Niall answered, "I don't want to forget my ideas or wait until tomorrow to finish this. We might run out of time in class. I gotta finish this." MJ asked if he also had to finish his writing for homework and I assured him that he did not, but anyone who wanted to could certainly work on it at home and then share it with me or the class. The next morning students had a choice between finishing their story continuation or self-selected reading if their stories were already written. All students except MJ had finished their stories at home. When asked if they wanted to share on the smartboard, all

students were eager to share their stories. We picked equity sticks to determine the order and it happened that Niall would be last. His other three classmates projected their documents with organized essays that clearly had a beginning, middle, and end, with multiple paragraphs and proper indenting. Each essay would have scored at least a 3 on the state's 6-point writing rubric. When it was Niall's turn to project his work, he opened a slideshow and revealed six-slides written in the style of a graphic novel, continuing the story of *The Lottery*. It was approximately six sentences and 73 words long, as opposed to five paragraphs. As he stood up front and read his work, the class alternated between looking at me for my reaction, and listening with rapt attention to his story paired with the stark art he had drawn or selected from online images. Niall had paired detailed, original black and white pencil drawings with his sparse words, that read: "Beginning: The school kids faces pale they say hope it is not Nancy Mrs Hutchinson git chosen and the Hutchinson kids look at the dad and…Middle: And the dad pulled a rad button and says I am sorry Wall terse running down his face and then he peas on the Dutton and a adam boom on the town and…End: It kills all the people in a 40 Radius of the explosion living There."

The only color in his drawing was the red button that the father character pressed to drop an atom bomb on the town. He ended the slideshow with two slides, one completely filled with the image of an atom bomb mushroom cloud, and the other with a grainy black and white photo of a bombed out town. He had not completed the task according to the rubric, nor had he written an essay, yet he presented his work with complete confidence because he knew it was great. From the culture of community and safe space we had created in our classroom, he knew that typos could be fixed and that if

he poured his artistic talent and creativity into this work, that would be valued over a proficient score on a state rubric. Niall's classmates and I commended him on his artistic rendering of this mundane assignment, and we pulled out our well-worn graphic novels from the classroom library and compared his work to the published authors. This activity sparked a class discussion about what we can do when we feel limited by the parameters of an assignment and want to show our individuality in a more creative way. The 8th graders had their own quick discussion about teachers whom they could approach to seek input into assignments, who all happened to be their special education or special area/ arts teachers, and that they believed that their current 8th grade Math, Science, and Social Studies teachers would never be flexible in their assignments. When I asked Niall what he thought might happen if he submitted this on the state standardized test, he answered, "I know this isn't an essay but I knew this would be better than an essay and I would be showing it to the class. I wrote it in a way that they would want to read, with pictures and imagination. If it was testing I would type the story in the box and send it to the state and I never would have seen my story again. But I showed this story to my mom and my little brothers and now they want to write graphic novels, too. In Social Studies I would just write what they said. Or maybe just get an F."

When Niall presented this as his written assignment, I had to decide how to react. Grade it with the standardized rubric and show him all the points he did not earn? Keep him in at lunchtime to complete the story as assigned? Or honor his trust in me and our classroom community to value his innovation and work ethic? I chose a Culturally Sustaining response to acknowledge that Niall is an artist and in order to make his schoolwork authentic and meaningful to him, he benefits from incorporating his

communication style, which is images over words. By leveraging Niall's strength in art to support his learning in ELA, I am fostering his self-efficacy and including assessment systems that support multiple ways of demonstrating learning. He created a second draft and with the help of spellcheck and grammar check, fixed his typos and misspellings. He copied and pasted the sentences into a document and expanded his writing to an acceptable essay that he could submit on a standardized test. We found a way to balance his interest and creativity and the demands of the remedial curriculum to ensure he is prepared for state testing.

Teaching Critical Consciousness Empowered Students to Challenge the Status Quo

Ladson-Billings asserted that a criteria for culturally relevant teaching is that students must develop a critical consciousness to which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (1995). One of our classroom journal routines is that each student maintains a running list of topics they might want to write about, and my first lesson on critical consciousness teaches students to identify injustices or problems in our school and community that we could investigate and challenge. Students were coming to class from lunch every day and asking immediately to go to the water fountain. When I questioned them why they were so thirsty after just having lunch, they told the story of not being allowed to get a water bottle because they all get free or reduced price lunch. They informed me that they were only allowed to have milk, strawberry milk, or chocolate milk. One student is lactose intolerant and she said there is no drink available for her under the current rules. Students questioned the nutritional value of the free lunch menu and why there are additional healthy menu items, such as salads, that they are not allowed to purchase. They are limited to taking the daily hot lunch, or a peanut butter

and jelly sandwich. Students decided to use their informational reading and writing skills to determine who the decision makers are in the school cafeteria, and attempt to solve the injustices they had identified. I wrote lesson plans on research skills, informational reading, and writing around their authentic community issue, and taught them how to use the school website to determine who was in charge of the cafeteria, and did a lesson on drafting a polite and professional email. As students emailed back and forth with the head of the independent food contractor used by our district, they found out that the U.S.D.A. created the guidelines for milk being the only beverage available to the students who receive free and reduced price lunch. Next they researched the U.S.D.A. and deduced that agriculture means farming and cows live on farms and produce the milk which is sold to schools. These 5th graders concluded that in an effort to support American farmers, government-subsidized lunches in public schools had to serve products from farms, and water does not come from a farm. Interestingly, the children were sympathetic to farmers and did not think it was unjust for the government to give guaranteed contracts to dairy farmers, but they still wanted a way to get water or juice for themselves during lunch. They decided their next avenue would be trying to get reusable water bottles, so they emailed the Home and School Association and asked for fundraiser money to buy water bottles with the school logo for all students. When Home and School emailed back and said they thought most students already had reusable water bottles and they were concerned it might be a waste of money, the 5th graders brainstormed and decided that if they made an online order form that families could fill out, that would avoid the waste of just giving water bottles to students who might not want them. When the research period of my study ended, they were waiting to hear back. In the meanwhile, they got staff

members who receive a free bottle with their cafeteria lunches but who decline because they use reusable water bottles, to take the free water and leave it with the school counselor, whose office is right outside of the cafeteria. Students know that if they need water, there is a stash of water bottles in her office. This authentic, problem-based lesson built students' confidence in their ability to be agents of change rather than feeling like victims of injustice, and they practiced positive, results-based communication rather than just complaining.

Another culturally sustaining practice built into our classroom routine was the acknowledgment and value placed on translanguaging. When 7th grader Alma spoke English with a few Spanish words mixed in on Week 1, students looked at her and she looked at me as if she did something wrong. I praised her knowledge of multiple languages and taught the class the prefix trans- and the vocabulary word *translanguaging*. We found examples of translanguaging in some of our classroom library books to further cement the idea that knowing multiple languages is valuable, and that having parents who speak a different language at home is not a deficit. On Week 2 I noted in my teacher journal that Max was also mixing in some Spanish words when he spoke to Alma, and she would smile broadly when he did this. In Week 4, the 7th grade Social Studies teacher who does not know Alma sent home a permission slip for students to watch a grade-wide movie. Even though Alma was in a small group self-contained Social Studies/Science special education class, her class was being included in the movie day. The next day, Alma brought the permission slip up to me in English class and announced loudly, "Mrs. Z. Some families want the permission slip in Spanish." Later that day I received an email from her parents, written in Spanish, asking me about the

film and whether it would be appropriate for their daughter and if it would go against her family's conservative Christian beliefs. I attribute this to the culturally sustaining pedagogy practices that were occurring in our classroom. Even though I do not teach Social Studies, I am not her case manager, and I was not associated with the film or permission slip, Alma felt comfortable challenging an English permission slip being sent home to a Spanish-speaking family, and her parents felt comfortable emailing me in Spanish even though I am not a fluent Spanish speaker. Additionally, they knew that I was aware of Alma's Christian catechism classes and her desire to make her holy communion. Alma's family felt empowered, and trusted that I was someone at the school who would work to communicate with them.

Summary of Data Analysis

As quoted in Chapter 2, multicultural education researcher Dr. Sonia Nieto asserted that caring for students and wanting to support their cultural development is insufficient, if teachers "fail to counter a social structure that treats them unequally" (1992, p. 29). The inequities identified in this study are the narrowing of the curriculum for students with disability labels who are placed in remedial classes based on standardized testing results, and the segregation of these students away from their non-disability labeled classmates. Due to the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy found in research based remedial ELA programs, the research project sought to explore the lived experience of students in these small group segregated programs when their teacher incorporates culturally relevant practices and culturally sustaining pedagogy into the resource room learning environment. The data shows that when their voices were validated and they had input into classroom decisions, these middle school students built

a strong and trusting class community, where they engaged in high-level discussions about race, culture, socioeconomic status, and family dynamics. Additionally, when they were given freedom to choose their own readings and writing topics, they looked forward to doing their ELA schoolwork rather than dreading it, which aligned with their beginning of the year reading and writing attitude surveys. Ensuring that students had opportunities for success by allowing them to use their strengths to supplement their weaknesses helped them find the determination to continue working on ELA skills while the rigor and expectations remained high. Furthermore, teaching and encouraging critical consciousness through modeling and questioning techniques empowered them to challenge the status quo when they identified systemic practices that aligned with Euro-centrist, ableist norms.

Chapter Five presents conclusions of this study, and areas for further research.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Summary

After ten weeks of studying the lived experience of students with disability labels in the pull-out resource English Language Arts setting when their teacher incorporates culturally relevant practices, it is evident that students are engaged and empowered when their voices and choices are centered in the classroom community. The various data points such as transcripts of their classroom discussions, reflections in my teacher journal, and their work samples show that in the middle school resource room, students respond positively to being included in the creation of classroom routines, having choice over the books they read, and giving input into their writing topics and publishing medium. Themes that emerged across data points were that validating student voice led to a more trusting community, allowing student choice increased reading and writing engagement, maintaining high expectations while ensuring students experienced success built self-efficacy, and teaching critical consciousness empowered students to challenge the status quo.

Exposing these students to a variety of multicultural texts that are mirrors of their own experiences, and windows into the experiences of others led to courageous classroom discussions in which students spontaneously shared personal details about their home lives and culture, furthering the multicultural education assertion that "culture counts," rather than subscribing to what educational researcher Gay referred to as "the middle class, Eurocentric educational frameworks of cultural blindness" (2000, p.21). This required a departure from the remedial, prepackaged program the district purchased

in order to raise these students standardized test scores, yet it increased other aspects of their ELA studentship such as self-efficacy and engagement. Gay further stated that "much intellectual ability and many other types of intelligences are lying untapped in ethnically diverse students. If these are recognized and used in the instructional process, school achievement will improve radically. Culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potential of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities" (2000, p. 20). The academic and psychosocial abilities may not be evident on a multiple-choice standardized test, but they would translate to innovation and skills that are valued in 21st century college and career settings, including but not limited to the arts and the trades.

By the end of the study, these middle school students who are identified by the school as being significantly below grade level as readers and writers were enthusiastically completing reading and writing activities that they deemed important and meaningful, and sharing those activities with their classmates and families. They rated themselves as proficient and engaged readers and writers on classroom surveys, and based their self-evaluation on the self-selected activities they were completing rather than the results of district and state standardized tests.

Conclusions

A conclusion of this study is that students with disability labels who are segregated into remedial resource classes benefit from the culturally sustaining and culturally relevant pedagogy that is not present in prepackaged remedial curricula. The narrowing of the curriculum to skill-based lessons written with the goal of improving standardized test scores approaches these students' education from a deficit-based

perspective rather than the culturally responsive practice of "using a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles" (Gay, 1992, p. 29).

Students do not arrive in our classrooms from a vacuum. They have lived experiences from home and from previous grades and schools. By centering student voices and allowing them a safe space to express themselves freely, these resource room students built community and even repaired former harm, as in the case of 7th graders Max and Brynna in regard to the name calling incident from 5th grade. Students like Alma who were considered to be "other" due to personality traits stemming from autism were brought into the group, accepted, and valued, in fitting with the Dis/Crit theory that "societal interpretations of and responses to specific differences from the normed body are what signify a dis/ability. Indeed, notions of dis/ability continually shift over time according to the social context" (Ferri & Connor, 2013, p.3). These 21st century students are ready to expand the social context of belonging in society, and it is our duty as teachers to ensure we are not perpetuating the exclusion of students with disabilities, but rather furthering the stance taken by The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (1975) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990,1997, 2004), which both state that "disability is a natural part of the human experience."

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study was the time constraints placed on data gathering for the study. Each of the four classes met for sixty-eight minutes per day, and data was gathered for ten weeks. Within those sixty-eight minutes, students had to complete district standardized testing and disruptions to lessons such as assemblies and school pictures.

Ideally, this study would have taken place over an entire school year or perhaps multiple years.

Another challenge was the time spent following the remedial pre-packaged ELA curriculum mandated by the school district. Many times it was noted in the teacher journal that students wanted to work on their self-selected reading and writing assignments, but they had to switch to the teacher-directed skill based lesson using the remedial reading workbook. While students were compliant with the remedial workbook lesson, it did not generate enthusiasm or show evidence of adding to their camaraderie or self-efficacy, and they approached the work as something they had to complete rather than something they were excited to learn about and share with others. So while culturally relevant pedagogy was present daily in class, there was not complete freedom to have the students lead their own learning on a daily basis. Many of the reading and writing initiatives the students spearheaded would have been better implemented if they had been able to use their entire ELA period reading and writing to their interest.

An additional limitation was the small sample size of 24 students in a one building school district. Two of the classes, the 5th and 8th grade resource rooms, only had four students each. A larger sample size across multiple ELA resource rooms would glean more data.

Implications

An implication of this study for other educators is that we must advocate for our students with disability labels to be exposed to the same culturally relevant pedagogy practices that their general education classmates are experiencing in non-special education classes. Teachers and administrators must work together to ensure that district

curricula selected to remediate skills for students with below grade level test scores do not limit students to test-prep only, at the expense of authentic and choice activities and reading that will develop students into lifelong readers and writers. Teachers must challenge the status quo of what defines achievement, and work to broaden the definition to include meaningful, culturally sustaining practices that center community values and are good for all students, not just students from nondominant cultures. Furthermore, if we are to acknowledge that standardized testing includes skills that students may need in order to pass admissions tests and licensing exams to further their studies and careers, than perhaps test prep belongs in a supplemental class in addition to an inclusion ELA class, rather than segregating students and narrowing the curriculum to test-prep remediation only.

An area for further study would be a review of the most commonly purchased pre-packaged ELA curricula with an analysis of the culturally relevant practices present in factors such as the selection of texts, the educational activities for a variety of learning styles, and the opportunities for student voice and choice. Further study could be conducted on the outcomes of students with disability labels who are identified as reading and writing below grade level who are included in the general education ELA class with additional remedial supplemental instruction, and students who are segregated for remediation ELA.

References

Amineh, R. J., Asl, H. D. (2015). Review of constructivism and social constructivism. *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, *1*(1), 9–16.

Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2012). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *16*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511

Aukerman, M., Schuldt, L.C. (2021) What Matters Most? Toward a Robust and Socially Just Science of Reading. *Reading Research Quarterly.* 56(S1). pp. S85–S103 | doi:10.1002/rrq.406

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educ. Psychol.* 28 117–148. 10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.* W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory. Prentice Hall.

Bani Odeh, K., & Lach, L. M. (2024). Barriers to, and facilitators of, education for children with disabilities worldwide: a descriptive review. *Frontiers in public health*, *11*, 1294849. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1294849

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom,* 6(3), ix-xi.

Brassard, Susan L. (2024). Recognizing and Promoting Success for Students with Disabilities through Collaborative Professional Learning Communities and Appreciative Inquiry. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/https://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:dissertation&res_dat=xri:pqm&rft_dat=xri:pqdiss:30990278

Bunch, M. (2023). Using Storytelling and Histories to Create Inclusive Spaces. *Radical Teacher*, *126*. https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2023.1109

Carroll, J. M., & Fox, A. C. (2017). Reading Self-Efficacy Predicts Word Reading But Not Comprehension in Both Girls and Boys. *Frontiers in psychology*, *7*, 2056. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.02056

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/ Outside: Teacher research and knowledge.* Teachers College Press.

Connor, D., Ferri, B., & Annamma, S. (2015). *DisCrit: Disability studies and critical race theory in education*. Teachers College Press.

Connor, D. J. (2013). Social justice in education for students with disabilities. In L. Florian (Ed.), The SAGE handbook of special education (2nd ed., pp. 111–128). SAGE Publishing.

Crenshaw, K.W. (1989) *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, U. Chi. Legal F. 139 . https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/3007

Eun, B. (2010). From learning to development: A sociocultural approach to instruction. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *40*(4), 401–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764x.2010.526593

Fiorentini, D., Crecci, V.M. (2015). Dialogues with Marilyn Cochrane Smith, *The Clearing House*, 88: 9–14.

Fitch, F. (2003). Inclusion, exclusion, and ideology: Special education students' changing sense of self. The Urban Review, 35(3), 233–252

Frattura, E. M., & Topinka, C. (2006). Theoretical underpinnings of separate educational programs: The social justice challenge continues. Education and Urban Society, 38(3), 327–344.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (1st ed.). Teachers College Press.

Gee, J. P. (1989). Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education,* 171(1), 5-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748917100101

Gee, K., Ryndak, D. L., Fisher, M., & Walker, V. L. (2024). Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Extensive Support Needs: Experts' Perspectives. Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 49(1), 3-19.

Guion, L. (2002) *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies.* University of Florida Extension: Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

Guthrie, JT. Wigfield, A. Metsala, JL. Cox, K.E. Motivational and Cognitive Predictors of Text Comprehension and Reading Amount. *Scientific Studies of Reading*. 1999;3(3):231. doi:10.1207/s1532799xssr0303_3

Guthrie, J. T. *et al.* Influences of Stimulating Tasks on Reading Motivation and Comprehension. *Journal of Educational Research, [s. l.]*, v. 99, n. 4, p. 232–246, 2006. DOI 10.3200/JOER.99.4.232-246. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=20417616&site=ehost-live. Acesso em: 11 jul. 2024.

Harriott, W. A., & Martin, S. S. (2004). Using Culturally Responsive Activities to Promote Social Competence and Classroom Community. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 37(1), 48-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990403700106

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. Educational Psychologist, 31(3/4), 191-206.

King Thorius, K. (2018). Responsive to What?: Conceptualizations of "Culture" and "Culturally Responsive" in Multiple Voices. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners : a Publication of the Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners.*, *18*(1), 3–21.

Klehr, M. (2012). Qualitative Teacher Research and the Complexity of Classroom Contexts. *Theory Into Practice*, *51*(2), 122–128. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/10.1080/00405841.2012.662867

Kozulin, A., Gindis, B., Ageyev, V. S., Miller, S. M. (2003). *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kulkarni, S. S., Miller, A. L., Nusbaum, E. A., Pearson, H., & Brown, L. X. (2023). Toward disability-centered, culturally sustaining pedagogies in teacher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, *65*(2), 107–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2023.2234952

Kurz, A., Elliott, S. N., Wehby, J. H., & Smithson, J. L. (2010). Alignment of the intended, planned, and enacted curriculum in general and special education and its relation to student achievement. *The Journal of Special Education, 44*(3), 131–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466909341196

McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Wilkinson, K., & Sabeti, S. (2020). Growing up a reader: Exploring children's and adolescents' perceptions of 'a reader.' *Educational Research*, *62*(2), 216–228. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/10.1080/00131881.2020.1747361

Miller, A. L. (2020). Disabled girls of color excavate exclusionary literacy practices and generate promising sociospatial-textual solutions. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *36*(2), 247–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1828649

Miller, P. (2011). Theories of developmental psychology (5th ed.). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Pavri, S. (2001). Loneliness in Children with Disabilities How Teachers Can Help. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 33(6), 52-58. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990103300607

Pazey, B. L., Heilig, J. V., Cole, H. A., & Sumbera, M. (2015). The more things change, the more they stay the same: Comparing special education students' experiences of accountability reform across two decades. The Urban Review, 47(3), 365–392. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0312-7

Perouse-Harvey, E. (2022) Seeing the Unseen: Applying Intersectionality and Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) Frameworks in Preservice Teacher Education. *Teachers College Record*, *124*(7), 51–81. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/10.1177/01614681221111429

Piaget, Jean. (1952) *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. International Universities Press.

Patrick Proctor, C. (2014). How motivation and engagement predict reading comprehension among native English-speaking and English-learning middle school students with disabilities in a remedial reading curriculum. *Learning and Individual Differences.*, *36*, 76–83.

Roach, A. T., Chilungu, E. N., LaSalle, T. P., Talapatra, D., Vignieri, M. J., & Kurz, A. (2009). Opportunities and Options for Facilitating and Evaluating Access to the General Curriculum for Students With Disabilities. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *84*(4), 511–528. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/10.1080/01619560903240954

Robinson, G. (2016). Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices of General and Special Education Teachers Within a Response to Intervention Framework. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners : a Publication of the Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners.*, *16*(2), 22–36.

State of New Jersey. (2022). *New Jersey School Performance Report.* https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2021-2022/school/summary/07/0330/020

United States Census Bureau. (2022). *Bellwyn Borough, Camden County, New Jersey*. United States Census, 2022. https://data.census.gov/

U.S. News https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/new-jersey/berlin-community-school-409064#:~:text=Test%20Scores%20at%20Berlin%20Community,above%20that%20level%20for%20reading.

Van Dijk, T. Tannen, D. Hamilton, H.E. Schiffrin, D. (2015) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Second Edition.* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Vasudevan, L., & Campano, G. (2009). The social production of adolescent risk and the promise of adolescent literacies. Review of Research in Education, 33, 310–353. doi:10.3102/ 0091732X08330003

Vygotsky, L. (1962). Thought and language (E. Hanf-mann & G. Vakar, Trans.) MIT Press.

Wertsch, J. V., Tulviste, P., Hagstrom, F. (1993). A sociocultural approach to agency. *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development*, *23*, 336–356.

Whitney, E. H. (2022). Fostering Joy in Reading: Implementing Culturally and Historically Responsive Book Clubs with Black Girls with Disabilities. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*, 22(1), 24–38. https://doi.org/10.56829/2158-396X-22.1.24

Wiener, J., & Tardif, C. Y. (2004). Social and Emotional Functioning of Children with Learning Disabilities: Does Special Education Placement Make a Difference. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, *19*(1), 20–32. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2004.00086.x