

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE IN THE ROLE OF THE READING SPECIALIST

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE IN THE ROLE OF THE READING SPECIALIST

The disproportionality of marginalized populations in K-12 Special Education in the US (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Barrio, 2021) is a longstanding problem. One solution is recognizing student differences as resources (Cooc & Kiru, 2018), not deficits. Asset-based pedagogies, which appreciate differences as strengths (Alim & Paris, 2017), are critical to apply when students are being considered for or are already placed in special education for reading. When reading specialists teach students to read in the dominant language, they must recognize students' cultural and linguistic assets to avoid identifying students as deficient when their skills don't match the dominant culture.

This qualitative study aimed to determine if and how reading specialists implemented three asset-based pedagogies in reading instruction: culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002a), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Findings showed the application of myriad culturally responsive practices, including broadening the definition of reading, designing curriculum, and building relationships. However, multi-level barriers negatively impacted efforts, including limited resources, access to specialized knowledge, and whole-school practices. Additionally, students often responded to literacy challenges in ways that impeded their learning.

Findings have implications for research, teacher education, and K-12 students. Future research must include students' perspectives in identifying identity-affirming practices. Teacher education must include multiple ways for students to engage in literacy activities. Expanding literacy practices is essential to providing equitable learning spaces for all students.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The disproportionality of marginalized populations in K-12 Special Education in the US (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Artiles, Kozleski, et al., 2010; Barrio, 2021; Slesaransky-Poe & Garcia, 2014; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, [OSERS] 2016) is a longstanding and persistent problem. Its solution has eluded the system for decades. Disproportionality is defined as a “group’s over or underrepresentation in an educational category, program, or service in comparison with the group’s proportion in the overall population” (Donovan & Cross, 2002, p. 62). The literature proposes several contributing factors (Voulgarides et al., 2017; Shealey et al., 2011). Researchers discuss educator biases and a deficit view of student differences (Ahram et al., 2011; Oswald et al., 2002; Miner & Clarke-Stewart, 2008; Voulgarides et al., 2017) and biased school processes (Skiba et al., 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986, as cited in Obiakor & Green, 2014). Cooc and Kiru (2018) suggested focusing on the special education assessment process with attention to data collection and educator training in culturally responsive pedagogy. Asset-based pedagogies, rooted in the idea that student differences are resources (Alim & Paris, 2017), could address these suggested problems.

Education rooted in asset-based pedagogies (e.g., culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy) incorporates cultural and linguistic diversity into the curriculum. With culturally responsive instruction, educators understand the lived experiences of their students and teach them through “their own cultural filters” and “accept differences among ethnic groups, individuals, and cultures as normative to the human condition and valuable to societal and personal development” (Gay, 2013, p. 50). A culturally responsive classroom inherently mitigates biases and misunderstandings and is relevant in a search for a solution to disproportionality.

All educators should recognize the positive outcomes of culturally responsive practices, appreciating that “a growing body of literature confirms that culturally responsive literacy instruction,

including culturally accessible images and themes, promotes achievement among culturally and linguistically diverse learners" (Zygmunt et al., 2015, p.25). Recognizing cultural and linguistic strengths is also linked to academic success in students with learning disabilities (Gay, 2002b; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Though essential across content areas in all educational settings, this study focuses on culturally responsive literacy practice in special education and pre-referral settings. I will discuss why a culturally responsive approach does not inherently guide literacy instruction in these settings.

What is Literacy, and What Guides its Instruction?

The nature of literacy instruction depends on how you answer the question, "What is reading/literacy?" Divergent perspectives (Perry, 2012) have varied implications for the focus of literacy instruction. A cognitive perspective of literacy (Gray, 1925; Chall, 1983, as cited in Purcell-Gates et al., 2004) views literacy as a skill that develops in stages, with one stage mastered before the reader moves to the next, more complex stage. An example is moving from decoding single words to word automaticity, to fluent and effortless reading. In 1999, Ehri proposed that reading develops in phases and that comprehension does not occur at any meaningful level until one masters decoding (Ehri, 1999, as cited in Purcell-Gates et al., 2004).

Much research supports instruction in these discrete cognitive skills foundational to literacy. Unlike spoken language, which is "hard-wired" in our brains (Moats, 2020), reading and writing are acquired skills, and most children require instruction (Wolf, 2007). In both prevention and intervention studies, phonological awareness (e.g., rhyming, segmenting syllables in words, segmenting and blending speech sounds) and letter-sound awareness are essential in learning to read. Numerous studies show the importance of explicitly teaching phonemic awareness (Shapiro & Solity, 2008; Ball & Blachman, 1988; Foorman et al., 2003; Cunningham, 1990; Kjeldsen et al., 2014). Kilpatrick (2015) proposed that most students who are "at-risk" or "struggling" will require explicit instruction in these essential skills to learn to read.

In skills-based reading instruction, teaching phonological awareness is a hierarchy of skills moving from more accessible to more complex tasks (Kilpatrick, 2015). Education involves activities such as orally segmenting words into syllables by clapping, orally segmenting syllables or words into sounds by tapping or manipulating letters or tokens, and explicitly teaching sound-letter correspondences. Kilpatrick (2015) highlighted many studies showing the advantages of explicit and systematic instruction in letter-sound correspondence vs. teaching phonics informally, especially for “at risk” or “struggling” readers. *Explicit* refers to direct teaching of the relationship between letters and sounds and other skills, such as blending sounds. The systematic component conveys a specific and planned sequence of sounds to teach students versus teaching students the sounds informally as the need arises (Kilpatrick, 2015). This approach to reading is an example of evidence-based instruction, which educational law (ESSA, 2015) mandates.

The National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000) identified five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills. They recommended explicit and systematic instruction to develop skill automaticity for students to become fluent readers who can comprehend and think critically. No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002), the educational law in place from 2002- 2015, called for a linear approach to instruction in these five building blocks of literacy. It suggests that educators address the first four blocks, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency, before the final block of reading comprehension can be mastered (Hines & Conner-Zachocki, 2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015) replaced NCLB, and its grant program funds evidence-based intervention in writing, phonological awareness, and decoding. Student progress depends on success with reading and writing tasks as measured with high-stakes testing. Thus, educational law and policy privilege this cognitive perspective, endorsing one-size-fits-all literacy instruction and assessments that are not inherently culturally responsive.

“Remedial’ or ‘intervention’ spaces (e.g., special education and its pre-referral settings) require this skill-based literacy instruction. This teaching often entails scripted reading programs (Ede, 2006) designed to provide the previously described sequential and systematic instruction. With a sole focus on discrete skills, there is little room for educators to embrace student differences and view *reading* more broadly as an activity performed in a broader context of *literacy*. In this wider context of literacy, we recognize and appreciate students' diverse strengths and assets. Educators embrace literacy “more broadly, not only at the act of reading but at the beliefs, attitudes, and social practices that literate individuals and social groups follow in a variety of settings and situations” (Rueda, 2013, p. 84). With this lens on literacy as a social practice, students’ unique literacy strengths can be honored in addition to print-based reading and writing. This approach allows educators to design literacy experiences that harness student strengths. A sole focus on cognitive skills does not easily enable teaching students through their cultural lenses. Incorporating culturally responsive practices into these settings can make literacy education equitable for diverse learners. I propose that a combination of skills-based reading and culturally responsive literacy instruction is necessary.

Culturally Responsive Practice - A Possibility in Mitigating Disproportionality

Several studies point to the possibility of culturally responsive practices mitigating disproportionality. In their synthesis of international research on this topic, Cooc and Kiru (2018) suggested several solutions: a focus on the special education assessment process, data collection, and teacher training in culturally responsive practices. Barrio (2021) examined pre-service teachers' beliefs about culturally responsive practices and pre-referral models and found that teacher perceptions did not match their instruction. Pre-service educators reported feeling confident in their knowledge and skills in culturally responsive practices and their understanding of the tiered instruction system required before special education referrals; however, a qualitative analysis of their work indicated a limited understanding of these topics. Findings included a “narrow view of diversity,” primarily focused on

ability. In most cases, their work “did not include the application or inclusion of CRP” (Barrio, 2021, p. 12). Barrio (2021) called for studies looking at implementing culturally responsive practices, particularly in remedial and pre-referral spaces, to ensure appropriate assessments and eliminate inappropriate referrals of culturally and linguistically diverse students to special education.

Reading Specialists as Decision Makers

When a student is not achieving grade-level expectations, educational teams often question the appropriateness of the educational setting. A child encounters many decision-makers in the possible transition to a special education placement. Thus, it is essential to view the problem of disproportionality and its solution as existing in general and special educational settings (Shealey et al., 2011; Barrio, 2021). The reading specialist is crucial at this general and special education crossroads. They are pivotal in critical decisions about a student’s educational placement. With myriad roles in both settings (e.g., choosing curriculum, informing pedagogy, coaching, and teaching and evaluating students’ literacy skills), reading specialists are potential contributors to a fair referral process. However, whether they possess the autonomy to implement culturally responsive practice in these spaces warrants consideration.

Providing culturally responsive literacy instruction to students at this general and special education border is challenging when a cognitive lens on literacy prevails. Reading specialists practice against an educational backdrop where they are “conceptualized as instrumental to a reform effort focused on data-driven instruction and improvement at all levels’ (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). This reform and data-driven instruction are inherent in educational policy and laws, NCLB (2002) from 2002 to 2015, and ESSA (2015) since 2015. The reading specialist often continues to consult in delivering these scripted programs. While ensuring that students develop the needed skills to read and write, this study will explore how they “teach them the traits they need to become protectors of the earth and all of its inhabitants” (Delpit, 2006, p. xvi). How do they allow students to redefine themselves and engage

in literacy practices “connected to social justice and change for rights” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 35)?

Summary

While a cognitive perspective is integral to the role of the reading specialist in teaching students to read and write, and there is consistent evidence to support explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding and encoding, automaticity and fluency of reading (Al Otaiba et al., 2009; Kilpatrick, 2015), this instruction can’t be to the exclusion of teaching students the literacy skills that “shape their identities and critical understandings of themselves, of communities, and of the world (Muhammad, 2020). An expanded concept of *literacy* as it is defined by Rueda (2013) looks “more broadly not only at the act of reading but at the beliefs, attitudes, and social practices that literate individuals and social groups follow in a variety of settings and situations” (p. 84). With a sociocultural lens on literacy, one appreciates the cultural and linguistic relevance in a student’s literacy experiences. Thus, a dual lens on literacy appreciates that “cognitive reasoning works in conjunction with beliefs, values, and habits of mind that form an individual’s identity” (Davidson, 2010, p. 251). This dual-lens approach counters the view that students are deficient, and their families are to blame (Valencia, 1997) when their literacy skills do not match the skills of the dominant culture. However, a limited understanding of operationalizing culturally responsive practice in one-size-fits-all educational discourse with scripted, cognitive-based programs exists. When the cognitive skills of reading have been the sole focus of reading instruction, challenges occur in educators’ attempts to make that instruction culturally responsive (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Shealey, 2007).

A reading specialist must champion both literacy practices to bring equity to the classroom. Embracing and promoting culturally responsive practices affords identity-centered learning that supports students in challenging the inequities they face in their schools and communities, preparing them for life beyond K-12 education (Muhammad, 2020). Without this broader context of literacy, which honors cultural and linguistic diversity, the current one-size-fits-all manner disadvantages diverse

students. When they do not meet the mainstream literacy “benchmarks,” they are at risk of being labeled as “nonreaders” or “struggling” Foregrounding the unique strengths and knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse students also supports positive learner identities. “Students may struggle in reading print, but it should not be the central way in which they are defined” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 41).

This study describes ways reading specialists who learn about cognitive, skills-based instruction and culturally responsive practice find the importance and the space for this dual-lens approach to literacy instruction in remedial settings. It explored perceptions of possible tensions when combining these approaches. The findings in this study will also inform future iterations of a course designed to integrate cognitive, skills-based reading and culturally responsive literacy instruction.

1.2 Significance/Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to identify if and how reading specialists deliver skills-based reading instruction in culturally responsive ways. It sought to understand how they negotiated our one-size-fits-all educational discourse in remedial spaces to support all learners. Participants in this study took part in a graduate program, studying the affordances of cognitive, skills-based reading instruction and culturally responsive literacy practice. While ensuring that students develop the basic skills needed to read, deemed a civil right of the 21st century (Weeden, 2020), reading specialists must dig deeper and integrate a student’s strengths into their learning to provide equitable literacy instruction for all students.

While some studies show the effectiveness of culturally responsive practices in special education (Orosco & O’Connor, 2014; Gay, 2002b; Klingner & Edwards, 2006), this study was specific to reading specialists. I studied how they adopted culturally responsive teaching in pre-referral spaces or special education settings. This study also identified any obstacles they described. I explored how they weave this practice into their myriad roles of choosing literature and curricula, coaching other educators, assessing students, and devising and delivering instruction. Knowledge gained through this

study will contribute to teacher education pedagogy that fosters equitable educational practices and supports teacher autonomy. By identifying ways that educators open the curriculum and challenge dominant ideologies, we can see how they confront what Delpit (2006) refers to as “teacher-proof” programming, which can describe some scripted literacy practices within this space. Furthermore, Barrio’s (2021) findings of the limited application of pre-service teachers’ knowledge of culturally responsive practices led to her recommendation of “more in-depth learning experiences on CRP” (p. 1) for pre-service teachers. The results of this study will inform such learning experiences.

There is much to learn about this educational space. Educators have encountered challenges as they attempted to balance skills-based reading instruction and culturally responsive practices (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Shealey, 2007). The results of such studies can significantly impact marginalized students' learning experiences if we can provide all students the opportunity to see themselves in their literacy experiences. In addition to impacting teacher education and supporting equitable literacy instruction, gaining such insight could suggest ways to influence future policy. Exploring the successes and challenges that reading specialists experienced in applying a dual-lens approach to literacy instruction provided insight into managing the educational spaces where we make decisions regarding special education. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?
- Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?
- How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?

Local context

The local context was essential to the study’s significance. Most students graduating from this program teach in the public education system in Massachusetts, where students attain some of the

highest scores in our nation's reading levels as measured in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments (National Center of Educational Statistics, 1992). However, not all demographic groups are part of this stellar performance. This state wrestles with performance gaps that they have been ineffectual in closing, gaps that are not statistically different from those found in 1998. I will elaborate on the local context in chapter three.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

Researcher Positionality

As a white, middle-class, monolingual female educator, I am part of the growing mismatch between teachers and the increasing multilingual and multi-ethnic student body (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). As a speech-language pathologist and reading specialist who taught in two white, middle-class public schools, I barely noticed that curricula and a one-size-fits-all approach did not serve all students. When I moved to teach and supervise graduate student teacher candidates in diverse, urban public schools, I quickly realized my ineptness at understanding the inextricable relationships among literacy, language, and culture. As I traveled to schools and observed teacher candidates in diverse classrooms, I quickly realized I was ill-equipped to supervise these candidates. For the first 20 years of my career, my white privilege prevented me from being bothered by the fact that school curricula privileged one group.

Before enrolling in the Ed.D. program in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at Indiana University, I solely embraced the cognitive, skills-based lens of reading. The impact of culture was invisible to me as the curriculum nicely reflected the norms and lived experiences of the white students I taught. As a speech-language pathologist, I trained to diagnose speech and language disorders and devise plans to “fix” whatever ails the student. The etymology of the word pathology indicates to people that I am looking to find out what is “wrong” with them. I leaned toward finding disorders vs. differences and embraced the tangible and measurable skills associated with a strictly cognitive

approach to literacy.

As I observed in diverse schools, I wondered how linguistically diverse students could be held to the same standard as heritage English speakers in their command of the English language. I realized that when the schema presented in language comprehension tasks didn't match the lived experiences of diverse learners, they were often inappropriately deemed low comprehenders. I began to see the devastating consequences of teaching and evaluating students in a one-size-fits-all manner.

My practice and teaching began to encompass a broader lens of literacy instruction, which appreciates the contexts in which literacy learning occurs while still recognizing the cognitive skills involved in decoding and encoding text.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Culturally Responsive Pedagogies

A sociocultural theoretical framework guided this study that problematized the white cultural hegemony predominating reading curricula and instruction. When literacy experiences do not reflect a student's background knowledge, and their reading skills don't measure up to that of the dominant culture, systems often identify students as deficient. A sociocultural framework highlights the social and cultural contexts in which learning occurs, and asset-based pedagogies bring those contexts to light.

Asset-based pedagogies position differences in students' language, literacy, and culture as resources (Alim & Paris, 2017) as opposed to deficiencies that impede their learning. Myriad ways of communicating and participating are celebrated and incorporated into classrooms, and students are not labeled deficient or disordered when their practices don't align with the dominant culture. Such pedagogies are in opposition to a deficit mindset (Valencia, 1997), where teachers and schools blame academic challenges on students and families and look to them for the solutions, seeing it necessary to "fix" their perceived problems (Gay, 2018).

Educational practices must "offer counter-narratives to deficit ideology outcomes" and "place

value on students' insights, languages, and cultural practices, as well as seek to critique injustices, oppression, and other social-political issues" (Flint & Jagers, 2021, p.2). We must see student assets vs. deficits to realize equity in every classroom. When classrooms no longer serve only the dominant culture, the varied lenses of diverse students can begin to afford them insight into their learning (Gay, 2018). In this study, I aim to describe if and how reading specialists provide literacy instruction through an asset-based lens, specifically culturally responsive practice. I will describe practices and beliefs that support equitable literacy instruction in the current one-size-fits-all educational climate.

Three asset-based pedagogies guided this study: *culturally responsive teaching* (CRT) (Gay, 2002a), *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), and *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Alim & Paris, 2015). In Chapter 2, I will outline how these three pedagogies, which appreciate students' assets in literacy instruction, supported this study.

1.5 Summary

Students of marginalized populations are overrepresented in special education, and biased school processes and potential bias of educators have been identified as potentially contributing to this problem. Given that culturally responsive practices provide a counter narrative to a biased thinking, this study looks to identify how such practices can be incorporated specifically into literacy instruction. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the three culturally responsive pedagogies that contributed to this study's framework. Then I will discuss the relevant literature I reviewed to understand how others have looked at culturally responsive practices in reading education in pre-referral settings and special education settings.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Gay (2002b) proposed that “many students of color are disproportionately assigned to special education” (p. 613), and proposed causes of disproportionality relate to a misunderstanding of CLD students (Ahram et al., 2011; Oswald et al., 2002; Miner & Clarke-Stewart, 2008; Voulgarides et al., 2017). Asset-based pedagogies necessitate educators to develop an understanding of their students as these pedagogies honor student differences as resources (Paris & Alim, 2017). By increasing their awareness of student strengths, reading specialists could make more informed decisions about educational placements (i.e., general education vs. special education) and reading instruction.

Gay (2002b) proposed that “the educational quality of students of color in both special and regular education can be improved significantly by using instructional programs and practices that reflect their cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives” (p.613). Barrio (2021) called for studies on implementing culturally responsive practices, particularly in remedial and pre-referral spaces, to help address disproportionality. However, educational laws (ESSA, 2015) guide the instruction in these pre-referral and special education spaces, and the reading instruction considered evidence-based practice is not inherently culturally responsive. This study aimed to understand if and how reading specialists appreciate students’ assets in pre-referral spaces and special education. Three asset-based pedagogies guided the study: culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a,1995b), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2002, 2018), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2015).

For this study, it was essential to understand how others have looked at culturally responsive practices in reading education in pre-referral settings and special education settings. In this chapter, I will first delineate the three theoretical frameworks that guided the study and then discuss relevant literacy research guided by culturally responsive practice.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

As I reviewed the literature, I expected to find delineated culturally responsive frameworks (i.e., CRP, CRT, and CSP) guiding each study, but this was not the case. I found no studies adhering to one framework. Most reviewed studies cited Gay (2000, 2002) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b) to explain the culturally responsive framework supporting the study. Furthermore, the authors conflated the frameworks, often using relevant and responsive terms interchangeably. I did not find studies with “at-risk” or special education students using culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as a framework.

I will use culturally responsive practices as an umbrella term throughout this paper. When the literature cites explicitly one of the three frameworks, I will use the following acronyms: culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2002, 2018), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2015)

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002, 2018) began with Gay’s early work in multicultural education, which primarily promoted content and curriculum that appreciated and incorporated multiple cultures (Gay, 1975). She described this early work as “teaching to” cultural diversity with a focus on fostering multicultural awareness in all students (Gay, 2013). She expanded her concept of CRT to include what she described as “teaching through” cultural diversity with a call for educators to use the “cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as instructional resources to improve their learning opportunities and outcomes” (Gay, 2013, p. 67). Gay proposed that these practices “make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them [CLD students]” (Gay, 2018, p. 36). CLD students benefit from the opportunity to experience their schooling through their cultural lenses (Gay, 2018), affording them empowerment that has always been available to the dominant, white, middle-class culture. Curriculum remains a cornerstone of CRT, but her more recent work foregrounds the role of educators, and she describes five essential features of CRT.

Of Gay's (2002a) five essential CRT elements, the first, a *solid knowledge base* of student culture, undergirds all the others. Understanding the multiple cultures in the classroom helps teachers move beyond 'symbolic curriculum' (Gay, 2002a), such as ethnic food and holiday celebrations. The knowledge base affords opportunities to genuinely *include ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum* in ways that disrupt misconceptions and stereotypes portrayed in the media. Understanding a culture informs *communication with ethnically diverse students*. While recognizing that not all cultural members take up their habits and customs, understanding communication styles can support teaching practices, such as presenting information, giving feedback, and engaging student participation. Teaching and learning practices that honor myriad ways of participating promote equity and inclusion. Knowledge of communication styles and lived experiences help educators *respond to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction*. Finally, the *deep knowledge* that culturally responsive teachers incorporate into the teaching and learning of their students *demonstrates caring and builds learning communities*. While attending to individual styles to scaffold their instruction, they maintain high expectations of their students. The collaborative relationships they foster in the classroom provide a support system for meeting high expectations.

Gay broadened the scope of culturally responsive teaching practices to include general and special education settings, proposing that cultural consciousness and competence could change the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education. (Gay, 2002b). CRT aims to mitigate educator biases, which can preclude high expectations of students and possibly lead to misplacing them in special education. With an increased awareness of how culture mediates learning, varied communication, participation styles, and classroom behaviors may more appropriately be seen as differences than disorders.

This framework supported the identification of culturally responsive practices in reading instruction. With specific reference to special education and the role of biases in potentially lowering

student expectations for learning, this lens was beneficial as I studied the pre-referral and special education spaces. This framework also holds specific tenets specific to the delivery of instruction and curriculum, which directly related to my study.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) critiqued the practice of measuring student success based on how well they conform to the existing or dominant school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Her teaching moved beyond leveraging students' strengths for achievement in school-sanctioned ways (e.g., high-stakes testing). Her version of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is one in which cultural and linguistic assets are "not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum." (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 46). Ladson-Billings (1995a) explained culturally relevant pedagogy as a "pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (p. 160). Given its critique of measuring student success against the dominant school cultures, this framework was relevant in guiding this study that questioned the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to reading instruction.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) established a grounded theory of CRP through her extensive work with eight teachers of African American students whom she later called the "Dreamkeepers" (1994). From her analysis of their teaching methods, which affirmed African American heritage and challenged systemic educational inequities, Ladson-Billings (1995a) articulated three essential features of CRP: *academic success*, development or maintenance of *cultural competence*, and cultural critique or a *critical consciousness* "through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p.160). These tenets are relevant to this study which sought to identify equitable literacy practices in an educational context where students of color do not experience the same levels of "achievement" as their white counterparts (i.e., achievement/opportunity gap).

Ladson-Billings (1995a) emphasized that the *academic success* achieved by African American

students cannot be at the expense of their cultural identities. Academic success should be something broader, the “intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75). I sought to identify how reading specialists bring a student’s lived experiences into literacy tasks while ensuring students learn to read and write. How did they provide opportunities for success outside the scripted interventions and high-stakes assessments focused on the cognitive-based reading and writing skills with which their students struggle?

Cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2011) is student-focused, referring to “help[ing] students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture” (p. 40). For example, educators using rap lyrics (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) as an initial launch into a poetry unit allows students to display cultural competence. In culturally relevant practice, all students can possess and produce curriculum worthy knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This study sought to identify ways in which reading specialists appreciated a student’s heritage language or dialect while they acquired school-sanctioned print skills.

Finally, Ladson-Billings wrote that CRP necessitates a *sociopolitical consciousness*, “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.75) to support students in challenging inequities in their lives and communities. CRP demands attention to how a group has been positioned socially, economically, and historically. The teachers in Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) study tackled community issues by working with students to propose ideas to transform a vacant community space contributing to violence. This study responded to inequities that students face in their schools and classrooms. Practices such as labeling students and positioning them as behavior problems or “at risk” students lead to inequitable learning experiences. Ladson-Billings (2011) reminded us that how we respond to the complexity of these students’ lives can reify their perceived deficits or foster their learning and growth. In this study, I sought to identify how educators create opportunities for students

to counter the “struggling reader” narrative and apply literacy skills in ways meaningful to them, their families, and their communities.

In culturally relevant pedagogy, students generate knowledge to be shared. As educators embrace student expertise, dynamic teacher-learner relationships can shift, with students sharing their knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Promoting all students as contributors fosters a supportive and collaborative learning space instead of a competitive space where students seek individual recognition for their achievements. (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). I learned how reading specialists involve students in their instruction, seeing them as language and literacy experts.

Finally, culturally relevant pedagogy requires critical reflection on who the dominant curriculum represents and who it misrepresents or renders invisible (Ladson-Billings, 2011). The curricular materials chosen for literacy instruction are vital to providing students with literacy experiences that mirror their lived experiences. I will now describe the extension of this pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) that further supported my study.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

With foundational tenets of CRP, “the remix” (Ladson-Billings, 2014) of CRP is essential to studying literacy instruction in the 21st century. Ladson-Billings (2014) discussed the dynamic nature of culture and how three generations of a cultural group could vary in their expression. She defined culture as “an amalgamation for human activity, production, thought and belief systems’ which can relate to nations, religions, ethnicity, and even less-defined groups such as youth” (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Paris and Alim (2014) embraced this progressive aspect of culture when they extended *culturally relevant pedagogy* to the notion of *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP). A CSP lens helped identify when study participants acknowledged more contemporary aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity and when those practices critiqued inequity. This was especially pertinent in a study of literacy in the digital age with the ever-evolving literacy practices adopted by youth.

In the context of K-12 literacy instruction, this study benefited from CSP's focus on youth culture (Paris, 2012, Paris & Alim, 2014). Avoiding a sole focus on heritage practices, CSP appreciates that students may embrace traditional ways of being or a "reworking (of) this set of knowledges to meet their current cultural and political realities" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 8). As literacy educators begin to appreciate their students' more contemporary expressions of cultural and linguistic diversity, the CSP framework provides opportunities for students labeled as "struggling" readers. They can rewrite identities when educators sustain practices valued and even created by the youth themselves, offering a generative space for positive identity formation for youth traditionally seen as deficient. Culturally sustaining classrooms allow all students to claim, display, and take pride in their heritage or community practices and languages that are integral to their identity. Practices such as translanguaging encourage students to express themselves in a way that places equal value in their heritage language and afford them cultural capital not afforded to them in monolingual classrooms.

Paris (2012) suggested that "relevant" and "responsive" instruction were not enough to "ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (p.93). Culturally sustaining pedagogy "has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). By sustaining the cultural and linguistic practices that students bring to school, we acknowledge that "the linguistic and cultural flexibility of many children of color ideally positions them for success in a diversifying, globalizing world" (Alim & Paris, 2015, p.80). Paris (2012) called for educators to move from making curricula and practices "relevant" to ensure that they sustain all students' cultural and linguistic assets. When asset-based pedagogies merely use the skills of diverse students to access the dominant curriculum and culture, they are not sustaining the unique skills that could afford these students positions of power in a U.S. that is moving toward a majority multicultural and multilingual society (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006, Smelser, Wilson, & Mitchell, 2001, Wang, 2013, as cited in Paris & Alim, 2014).

Highly pertinent to my study is the emphasis that CSP does not preclude access to the dominant culture; instead, it suggests all students must have equal life opportunities. Thus, print-based reading and writing instruction is a right for all students. However, Paris and Alim (2014) argued that educators need to facilitate students' skills with Dominant American English (DAE) and appreciate cultural flexibility to support a multiethnic and multilingual US. Reading specialists strive to provide access to print (e.g., reading and writing) to ensure equal opportunity for all. Still, they must do so in a context that sustains the linguistic and literacy skills students already possess.

An outcome to which Alim and Paris (2017) referred is educational equity in a pluralistic society:

A pluralistic society, we must remember, needs both within-group cultural practices (in the case of language, say, Spanish or African American Language or Navajo or Samoan) and common, across group cultural practices (in the case of language in most institutional settings in the United States, Dominant American English) to exist and thrive. (Paris, 2011)

A CSP lens in literacy instruction will allow students opportunities to foster their heritage language skills while learning those of the dominant culture, which can afford them equitable access to future opportunities.

In promoting this "remix" of CRP, Ladson-Billings (2014) highlighted how a broader view of culture engages equity issues in a deeper way than CRP. An expansive notion of culture beyond ethnic practices includes other groups to which youths ascribe, as "youth do maintain notions of membership (i.e., in-group versus out-group), language, art, beliefs, and so on" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.75). Adopting a 'sustaining' notion of culture, CSP accounts for "the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.76), thus fostering student agency. This dynamic interpretation of culture makes this pedagogy more applicable to groups marginalized in ways other than race and ethnicity (e.g., ability, sex, gender, and socioeconomic status). In studies such as mine that involve the teaching and learning of diverse populations, one must acknowledge the "collusive nature of race and disability" (Annamma et al., 2018, p 53). Thus, a CSP lens

supports students who are marginalized in multiple ways.

Paris's (2018) notion of sustaining culture may best afford students opportunities to negate or redefine their identity as "struggling" or "at-risk" readers. My participants include K-12 reading specialists, many of whom work with students who have seen themselves in a deficient light for many years. I can imagine the possibilities of allowing them to shine in classrooms that open the concept of "literacy" and validate the literacy practices they possess. As participants have taken my course, which promotes multimodal tool use in learning assessments, I hoped to identify ways they find space for this. However, teachers may be less likely to adopt such practices in times of common core standards and high-stakes testing when the pressure to succeed on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is a significant concern. Unfortunately, Paris has warned that "CSP can't exist in schools as they currently are" (Caraballo et al., 2020, p. 699). Educators may shy away from practices that critique power relations, those that may make them vulnerable to criticism.

Summary

Reading specialists must ensure that all students acquire the skills to read and write in the language of power in their classroom and this country, a skill called the civil right of the 21st century (Weeden, 2020). Our educational system sets students up to achieve this with high priority given to cognitive, skills-based reading and writing instruction. However, this instruction is insufficient and cannot be the sole focus of literacy instruction. Muhammad (2020) reminds us that "Students may struggle in reading print, but it should not be the central way in which they are defined" (p. 41).

Realizing the stigma felt by adolescents identified with learning disabilities (Daley & Rappolt-Schlichtmann, 2018), culturally responsive practices could be a potential protective factor in supporting students as they achieve skills-based reading skills. It is a nuanced skill to negotiate the one-size-fits-all landscape, to take an approach to reading instruction that also appreciates the diversity in students' identities and does not minimize the associated strengths which students bring to the classroom.

Furthermore, with a decades-long problem of disproportionate representation of students of color in special education (Barrio, 2021; Slesaransky-Poe & Garcia, 2014; OSERS, 2016) and the mismatch between diverse students and the dominant classroom culture, it is critical to understand remedial and intervention literacy spaces. Equity is essential in these spaces where decisions regarding students' educational placements are made. With the lenses of three asset-based pedagogies, this study sought to describe if and how reading specialists counter a deficit mindset by recognizing students' diverse strengths in learning spaces that prioritize skills-based reading and writing.

2.3 Potential of Culturally Responsive Practices in Mitigating Disproportionality

A solution to the problem of disproportionality has eluded the educational system for over 40 years and is mired in numerous plausible causes, many of which have been detailed in the literature (Voulgarides et al., 2017; Shealey et al., 2011). Shealey et al. (2011) identified studies where merely defining and measuring disproportionality were possible obstacles to its elimination (Blanchett, 2006; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Skiba et al., 2006). The cultural mismatch between white middle-class educators and students of diverse backgrounds has been extensively explored, often problematizing instances where students are referred to special education for misunderstood student behaviors (Oswald et al., 2002; Miner et al., 2008). Voulgarides et al. (2017) consolidated findings on sociodemographic factors, discussing how non-dominant students receiving free or reduced lunch or those from non-traditional family structures are viewed with a deficient lens. Other studies questioned the appropriateness of the intervention in the core and pre-referral settings as factors (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Klingner et al., 2006) and suggested potential biases in the assessment process (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986 as cited in Obiakor & Green, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008). Many proposed causes relate to a misunderstanding of CLD students and the potential biases of educators. Thus, culturally responsive practices may help minimize inappropriate referrals to special education (Brown, 2019).

Culturally responsive pedagogies could diminish misunderstandings of CLD students as

educators prepare to teach diverse students through “their own cultural filters” and “accept differences among ethnic groups, individuals, and cultures as normative to the human condition and valuable to societal and personal development” (Gay, 2013, p. 50). Culturally responsive educators actively learn about their students’ lived experiences, “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Educators harness their students’ cultural and linguistic strengths rather than dismissing them or rendering those differences deficient. Furthermore, the home-school connections, a cornerstone of culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2018; Nieto, 2013), also help to deconstruct and prevent misunderstandings.

Learning disabilities are a high-incidence category in special education and involve subjective judgment in their assignment (Artiles, Bal, et al., 2010; Thorius & Tan, 2016), so addressing biases is essential. Additionally, the reflection required of culturally responsive educators (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2019) supports the need to identify and check biases. Understanding the role of culture in education and the use of culturally responsive practice is a “step toward teachers understanding how their own culture and/or gender may have contributed to the overrepresentation of African American and Latinx students into special education and their retention in those placements” (Brown et al., 2019, p. 307).

In culturally responsive classrooms, students whose language and culture do not match the dominant culture are provided more opportunities to be succeed, possibly mitigating referrals to special education. Klingner et al. (2005) argued that not all students arrive at school with the same level of print knowledge, and the sociocultural context must be considered in literacy instruction (Artiles, 2003; Ruiz, 1998 as cited in Klingner et al., 2005). When the assets of diverse language skills are foregrounded and the social, cultural, and historical contexts of learning are considered, students can make meaning and participate in literacy experiences (Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Moll et al., 1992, Moll, 2014).

Suppose educators adopt a “widened lens” of literacy and view the cognitive aspects of reading as embedded within the sociocultural components of literacy (Purcell-Gates, 2012). In that case, students’ abilities are not measured merely by a narrow set of cognitive-based skills. Cultural values, beliefs, and ways of learning are acknowledged as students gain access to skills-based reading and writing skills. When broader literacy skills are appreciated and recognized as tools to support a student’s acquisition of reading, a referral to special education may be spared.

I turn to the challenges of applying culturally responsive practices to literacy instruction in the current educational system of high-stakes testing and a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. By discussing existing challenges, specifically related to literacy instruction for students deemed “at-risk” or “struggling readers,” I will elucidate the need for this proposed study.

2.4 Obstacles to a Dual-Lens Approach to Literacy Instruction in Remedial Spaces

Culturally responsive practice is essential in combating the biases and misunderstandings often resulting in special education referrals (Skiba et al., 2000; Neal et al., 2003, as cited in Voulgarides et al., 2017). Yet, the context in which educators make special education referrals is not always conducive to culturally responsive practice. NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) embraced a cognitive, skills-based construct of reading and called for high-stakes testing and accountability when students do not meet grade-level expectations. When educational law mandated evidence-based instruction, scripted programs were created and adopted (Ede, 2006) to align with skills-based education.

The National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000) identified five components of reading necessary for instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills. Explicit and systematic instruction in all these areas was deemed essential, along with a focus on automatizing these skills to become a fluent reader who can comprehend and think critically when reading. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) states the most effective approach to teaching reading is a structured literacy approach (International Dyslexia Association, 2019) where

explicit and systematic instruction is provided at all levels of language “sounds, spellings for sounds and syllables, patterns and conventions of the writing system, meaningful parts of words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourse within longer texts” (p. 1).

A cognitive approach to teaching discrete skills assumes that learning to read is universal and that teaching someone to read can be removed from sociocultural contexts (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Instructional implications mean teaching reading is similar regardless of the sociocultural or socioeconomic contexts. Progress is measured in a one-size-fits-all manner; in this environment, the technical and measurable aspects of reading are foregrounded (Smagorinsky et al., 2020), deeming sociocultural factors irrelevant (Berliner, 2014 as cited in Smagorinsky et al., 2020).

A solely cognitive view of reading and its instruction, which has not been examined for cultural relevance (Trainor & Bal, 2014, p. 1), limits educators’ autonomy to choosing teaching strategies and materials that reflect the lived experiences of their students (Shealey, 2007). Highly scripted programs are particularly at odds with culturally responsive literacy pedagogy, significantly limiting educator autonomy (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013).

With a sole focus on discrete skills, it is challenging to acknowledge home and family literacy practices (Perry, 2012). By neglecting to honor the unique traditions that students bring to the school environment, opportunities to build on existing strengths are nonexistent, and students are at increased risk of being seen as deficient. Furthermore, we know that recognizing students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds is tied to academic success in students, including those with learning disabilities (Gay, 2002b; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Students deserve the explicit instruction essential to master print reading. However, it cannot be to the exclusion of a broader appreciation of literacy. A sociocultural view of literacy (Gee, 2004; Moll, 1992) appreciates all students’ assets and varied literacy practices.

I argue the need to embrace a dual-lens approach to literacy instruction, one that appreciates the contexts in which literacy learning takes place while teaching the discrete skills of decoding and

encoding text. Purcell-Gates (2012) noted that “context is as essential to the learning as the skill being learned” (p. 470). If literacy is “the intertwining and mutual enabling of schooling and life practice that account for much of the development of literate persons” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2016, p.1219), then embracing one perspective to the exclusion of others leaves out critical components in literacy education.

In addition to the limiting aspects of scripted curricula (Ede, 2006), controlled reading programs make it challenging to incorporate authentic texts that allow children to see themselves in the books they read (Bishop, 1990). When students cannot personally connect to authentic literature meaningfully, literacy experiences are not equitable. Scripted reading programs also make it challenging to respond to the individual needs of the learners (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013). My study explores how special educators manage the competing priorities of explicit instruction and culturally responsive practice and find space for direct instruction and authentic experiences. I will next describe the calls made for culturally responsive practices to combat disproportionality and the limited results thus far.

2.5 Proposals for Culturally Responsive Practice

Numerous scholars (Klingner et al., 2005; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011) have described various culturally responsive frameworks and principles based on the work of pioneers in the field of culturally responsive education (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2011, 2014; Gay, 2002a, 2010, 2013; Nieto, 2013). Other scholars suggested ways of implementing a culturally sustaining lens (Paris, 2012) in reading, writing, and math instruction (Freeman-Green et al., 2021). Numerous studies remix the ideas of these pioneers, and the literature is replete with proposed culturally responsive frameworks that target various levels and aspects of the educational system.

Klingner et al. (2005, 2006) called for culturally relevant teaching beyond the classroom to the entire educational system. With a multi-level vision of change, he warranted culturally relevant education to be implemented in teacher preparation and professional development and be considered

relevant to school leaders, families, and communities. Similarly, Shealey et al. (2011) called for a whole system approach to address the disproportionate representation of students of color. Such calls for whole-system policies are significant as the seeds of disproportionality are planted in the general education setting.

Kourea et al. (2018) brought the focus from whole system frameworks to the classroom to focus on meeting student needs in core classroom instruction, before their referral to special education. They honed in on teacher practice and reflection, citing the importance of being culturally responsive in whole-class environments. Teaching in the general education setting must be relevant and applicable to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners before they should be considered for remedial support (Klingner et al., 2005). Kourea et al. 's (2018) framework included the special education environment making specific suggestions for culturally responsive reading instruction including multicultural literature with explicit evidence-based instruction. They stress the “how” of teaching, calling for it to include cooperative learning and integrate students’ social experiences into instruction. Academic and behavioral environmental supports are also critical components of their framework, and they speak to the necessity of reading instruction being done in meaningful contexts.

While some studies move beyond suggested frameworks and study the implementation and student outcomes of culturally responsive practices in general education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016), there is far less literature examining the affordances of culturally responsive practices for literacy intervention in special education or its pre-referral stages (Shealey et al., 2011; Orosco & O’Connor, 2014).

2.6 Lack of Studies in Intervention Settings

Blanchett and colleagues (2005) called for culturally responsive teaching to address disproportionately in special education when they wrote in a special issue commemorating the 50 years since Brown vs. Board of education. This call seems to have been unanswered. Shealey and colleagues’

(2011) searched for quantitative or qualitative empirical studies specific to implementing culturally responsive practice in special education, hoping to find student outcomes and identify potential obstacles in its application. As with my literature review, they reported that existing research primarily discussed conceptual frameworks with little focus on results. They found only eight studies that met their criteria and could not answer their questions about the implementation and outcomes of culturally responsive practice in special education classrooms. At that time, Shealey and colleagues (2011) called for “research designed to examine the effectiveness of culturally responsive pre-referral interventions and instruction for ethnically diverse learners.” (p. 378). Ten years later, there remains a lack of such studies.

This lack of response is especially disconcerting due to the pervasive effects of disproportionality. In a recent review of the “current status” of culturally responsive practice in special education, Brown et al. (2019) described that researchers have primarily focused on working with families, classroom management, and transition services. Other than stating that only 3% of African American and Latinx students in grade 12 with disabilities scored in the proficient range in reading in 2015, this article that addressed “current status” and “future directions” did not mention reading or literacy skills specifically.

2.7 The Potential for Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction

Appreciating and building on CLD students’ strengths in teaching them to read supports success. Reading comprehension depends on background knowledge, including world knowledge, event knowledge, procedural knowledge, and vocabulary (Kintsch, 1998). Culturally responsive literacy instruction would ensure students engage with readings and topics related to their experiences. Choosing culturally relevant texts would allow students to use their “cultural schema” as a comprehension strategy (Walker & Hutchison, 2021, p.423). The relationship between motivation and engagement during reading activities has also been explored. Frankel et al. (2016) reminded us that

“tasks will be valued to the degree they engage students in practices that are authentic to life beyond school” (p. 13). Culturally responsive approaches foster engagement, motivation, and achievement, which are especially important for students who have not experienced success. In spaces where students are “struggling” or “at-risk,” these approaches accentuate students’ assets instead of perceived deficits; however, we have little research regarding culturally responsive literacy practices in remedial spaces.

To establish the need for my work, I will describe research incorporating culturally responsive practices in reading instruction with students in special education or the pre-referral stages and in studies where students are identified as “at-risk” for not meeting reading benchmarks. When the terms special education or pre-referral stages were not stated, the study was still included in this review if there was an indication that “at-risk” students were involved. For example, if data collection included Student Study Team referrals, which are referrals made when students are not meeting academic progress in the general education setting, the study was included.

Organizing the studies by the chosen theoretical framework proved challenging as mentioned in section 2.2. Overall, my findings were like the review by Aronson and Laughter (2016), who found that studies are rarely situated in one culturally responsive framework. Instead, several authors are cited when a study adopts culturally responsive frameworks. The reviewed studies often conflated relevant and responsive. In my literature review, I will use specific terms (i.e., culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and culturally sustaining pedagogy) as they relate to each study for clarity. Otherwise, I will use the generic term culturally responsive practice for consistency. I will review each study’s findings and any obstacles encountered. I did not find studies of culturally sustaining pedagogy that fit the criteria for my review.

2.8 Research in Culturally Responsive Literacy Practice

Studies Related to Educator Practice in Pre-referral Stages of Special Education

In a qualitative study “grounded in the theoretical and conceptual framework of sociocultural language and literacy acquisition” (Shealey, 2007, p.4), Shealey sought to answer the research questions: 1. What instructional methods do urban elementary teachers use to provide culturally responsive reading instruction? and 2. What elements of culturally responsive teaching are exemplified by effective reading teachers? While recognizing other related terms (e.g., culturally responsible, appropriate, relevant), Shealey cited Gay (2000) in defining culturally responsive teaching, but incorporated the work of several scholars, including Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b), in developing her observational rubric. The article used relevant and responsive interchangeably.

This study took place in a school where 90% of the student population were of ethnically diverse backgrounds and 80% received free or reduced lunch. Though not identified as the pre-referral stages of special education, the most significant problem faced by the school were the ramifications of standardized testing. Additionally, data collection included students’ records of Student Team Study referrals, which are referrals made to a team that convenes when students experience academic or social challenges. This study adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to reading instruction in the form of a scripted reading program for “direct and explicit instruction in the areas of decoding, fluency, and comprehension” (Shealey, 2007, p. 5) in response to the high-stakes testing mandated by NCLB (2002).

Administrators and the reading specialist suggested four highly effective reading educators, two each from grades two and three. Shealey collected data through interviews, observations, focus groups, and documents and analyzed the data to discover what these highly effective teachers did to provide culturally relevant reading instruction. Using open, axial, and selective coding to define categories as described by Creswell & Poth (2018) along with themes noted in related literature, Shealey developed a coding process that led to a theoretical framework with which she analyzed the findings.

Teachers agreed that students needed explicit instruction in reading skills but were in favor of a balanced literacy approach (Freppon & Dahl, 1998, Pressley, Rochrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002,

as cited in Shealey, 2007). The intensive programs chosen to support high stakes testing left little time to individualize instruction. While this challenge was noted, all four teachers provided a comprehensive literacy program. The instructional methods they identified as important to teaching reading were literacy centers, direct instruction, guided reading, silent reading, modeling, and culturally responsive teaching. Data analysis revealed the teachers incorporated four key elements of culturally responsive teaching: caring for students, high expectations, communication (acknowledging home languages), and sensitivity to learning styles. This study shows that incorporating culturally responsive practices into structured reading instruction is possible but requires teacher innovation.

McIntyre and Hulan (2013) conducted a year-long descriptive study to determine how elementary educators implemented evidence-based cognitive reading instruction (e.g., explicit skill instruction such as sound awareness, phonics, and automaticity in word reading) and culturally responsive practice. While they cite many scholars of culturally relevant and responsive practice, including Gay and Ladson-Billings, the definition used to frame this study is one provided by Banks (2003):

These four teachers had taken a graduate-level course where they learned an instructional model that included the five components of reading identified by the NRP (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) and culturally responsive instruction. The participants taught in both rural and urban schools with varying degrees of diversity and student populations whose eligibility for federal free and reduced lunch programs ranged from 46-85%. Instructional settings included pairs, small groups, and the whole class. Though some ability groupings were noted, it was unclear how many students were categorized as “at-risk.”

Data collection included lesson observations, lesson analysis, follow-up interviews, and a teacher survey. The a priori codes used to analyze data related to the graduate course content, including instructional practice, strategies, and principles. The methodology was robust as re-coding and triangulation were described. The identified patterns included “1. researched-based strategies, 2. principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, 3. instruction that blended perspectives, and 4. teachers’ views on the feasibility of the model” (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013, p. 35).

The evidence of integrating cognitive and culturally responsive methods of instruction varied relative to the grade level and the reading components being taught, with older grades seeing greater incidents of blended practice. Culturally responsive instruction was successfully implemented into the explicitly teaching comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency tasks. Instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics was not as conducive to culturally responsive teaching; however, most observed lessons focused on comprehension with phonics embedded in only two comprehension sessions. Teachers found that following the often scripted, systematic and explicit instructional techniques precluded the opportunity to respond to the individuality of the learners, which is what I suspect from my study. It also shows that structured skills-based components such as phonics may be more challenging to make culturally responsive, which is another expectation I have. This study supports the need to learn more about how reading specialists can implement reading instruction with a dual-lens approach.

In a qualitative study, Hilaski (2020) described how four teachers considered their students' cultural and linguistic strengths in their Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) instruction. Through professional development activities including journal readings, relationship building with students and families, and teacher reflections on videotaped instruction, teachers explored culturally responsive theory and identified practices that could be implemented along with the required Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1993). Using a constant comparative method (Charmaz & Thornburg, 2021, Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Hilaski, 2020), the author analyzed data collected over five months including pre- and post-interviews with participants, bi-weekly professional development sessions, reflective journaling of participants, teacher and student artifacts, and professional development audio and video recordings. Two cycles of coding included primary data sources (e.g., interview transcripts and audio and video recordings of the PD, reflective journals) and secondary data sources (e.g., teacher and student artifacts).

References to several scholars were made in describing the culturally responsive framework.

Professional development readings only included Gay (2010), but the researcher referenced many culturally responsive researchers who informed her work including Nieto (2013) and Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b). Aspects of culturally responsive practices highlighted included building on students' cultural and linguistic strengths to increase student achievement, most often quoting Gay (2010) and Nieto (2013). Other highlighted elements included critical self-reflection by the educator, avoiding a deficit mindset by holding high student expectations, and attention to social justice issues. Researchers' goals included describing initial educators' beliefs and practices and determining if changes occurred in beliefs or practices following their participation in the study.

The authors described specific actions of these educators as they individualized instruction during program implementation. The educators expanded on the *observation* component of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) by moving this out of the classroom and finding what was meaningful in the students' homes and communities (e.g., observing students in school settings outside of the classroom such as recess, attending community events such as a church, and meeting with parents). Expanding the *conversational* element of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), the teachers continued to identify the needs and interests of students. They listened and identified linguistic differences between students' heritage languages and English that could be incorporated into their reading lessons. They then initiated conversations that helped their students develop a meta-awareness of differences between one's spoken language and written language (e.g., one might say *cookin'* in spoken language but needs to write *'cooking'* in written form). The teachers devised their *instruction* using the information gleaned in observations and conversations. They carefully selected or created instructional materials that would interest students and allow them to access background knowledge and language skills to support comprehension, read English works, and develop vocabulary. Their teacher-created books specifically targeted topics of interest and language and vocabulary that would support learning. They avoided topics that may trigger trauma in their students. While we may surmise that changes in behaviors (i.e.,

teaching practices) can suggest a change in teacher beliefs, there was not much discussion related to the researcher's goal of understanding changes in teacher beliefs. The most significant challenges identified in this study were the time needed for out-of-school activities that allowed teachers to get to know their students and families and then adapt their instruction in ways that appreciated the uniqueness of students. This research will be helpful to my study as it suggests a potential obstacle that educators encounter when planning culturally responsive practice. This study also shows some successes in modifying an existing reading program to be culturally responsive.

Piazza and Duncan (2012) described two case studies involving literacy intervention in an after-school literacy program which was part of a community project supporting families with incarcerated parents. This study focused on two 14-year-old, black male students identified as "struggling readers," who had been enrolled in the program by their mothers. Along with culturally responsive literacy instruction, which incorporates student strengths and interests, the teacher and counseling psychologist "examine[d] ways to plan instruction that would reverse their thinking that reading and writing are irrelevant to their lives" (Piazza & Duncan, 2012, p.230). They focused on student engagement and the possibility of countering their deficit identities as learners.

Instruction followed CRP principles described by Ladson-Billings (2006, 2011): command respect, respect for students, and high academic and behavioral expectations in a caring environment. Other scholars of culturally responsive practice (Gay, 2002a) were cited, and the terms relevant and responsive interchangeably.

Data were collected via participant observations, teaching plans, reflections on student progress, parent interviews, and researcher journals. The iterative coding process began with "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Piazza & Duncan, 2012) where weekly researcher reflections (i.e., conversations) informed the coding cycle and eventual themes. The initially identified "open themes" were shared with parents through member checking (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Findings included three final themes: textual connections, elements of motivation and engagement, and relationships. Unique to this study was the specificity of *culturally relevant texts* to individual circumstances (e.g., one student read newspaper articles about a shooting event that involved his brother as the perpetrator). Relevant “texts” included various media, including newspaper articles, social media sites, video games, and board games (e.g., games offered scenarios where students critically reflected on the lives of a range of characters that represented different life paths). Findings also included *Motivation and engagement* were most significant for those “texts” most connected to their personal experiences. They were noted to participate, ask questions, and negotiate, unlike when irrelevant texts were used. Finally, while both young men were initially reluctant to participate in the literacy intervention program, the researchers described a *building of trust and relationships* that gradually supported the boys in critically engaging in conversations about the power of literacy in their lives.

While the study aimed to “develop further resilience and positive views of themselves as learners” (Piazza & Duncan, 2012, p. 230), this study demonstrated creative ways that the researchers harnessed interests and strengths in the context of culturally responsive literacy instruction. Even though direct, explicit instruction was not part of this study, the authors proposed increasing student engagement before one could work on reading strategies. Given the deficit perspective of some students in reading intervention, this study illuminates that student engagement should not be ruled out as an obstacle in my research.

Studies Related to Effects of Culturally Responsive Practices in Pre-referral Stages of Special Education

Walker and Hutchison (2021) examined whether culturally responsive practices would promote literacy achievement in eighth-grade Black male students receiving reading instruction in a public charter school. Though the educational placement of the students was not explicitly stated, they described the differentiated instruction needed to reach the ability levels of all the students. The

education was a combination of skills-based instruction (e.g., reading comprehension strategies) and culturally responsive practice as defined by Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 2009) as well as others (Carjuzaa, 2012, Rhodes, 2015, as cited in Walker & Hutchison, 2021); Culturally responsive practice was defined as expecting excellence and aligning materials and instruction with cultural and linguistic experiences of the students. Culturally relevant texts allowed the students to use their “cultural schema” as a comprehension strategy (Walker & Hutchison, 2021, p.423).

An English Language Arts teacher and literacy specialist used mixed methods in this year-long study. Using qualitative methods, they analyzed 1. field notes taken during observations and student interactions and 2. teacher-researcher journal entries written weekly for approximately two and one-half months. The quantitative analysis involved a paired sample t-test to note differences in a high-stakes assessment, Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) scores (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009). MAP assessments are given at interim times throughout the year in grades K-12 to screen, measure growth, and predict math, reading, language, and science proficiency. For this study, they were administered at the beginning and end of the school year to determine if a year-long focus on culturally responsive practice impacted literacy achievement. While this quantitative portion of the study showed significant improvement in MAP scores, I will discuss the qualitative aspects of the study as they are more pertinent to the purposes of my review.

The authors noted four culturally responsive themes in the reading instruction through an iterative coding process. First, the *instructional strategies* reflected culturally responsive practice because the differentiated instruction was based on research showing that Black male students can experience discomfort reading aloud in large groups (Tatum, 2000). Students could listen to others read in whole-class instruction and then read aloud in smaller, out-of-class settings. Educators aligned instruction with students’ cultural experiences and included practices such as simulated cultural storytelling. Secondly, *culturally relevant teaching and texts* included materials chosen to highlight

“identity, culture, family, urban life, stereotypes, and acceptance” and “mirror[ed] the challenges and triumphs” of the students (Walker & Hutchison, 2021, p. 425). Students engaged in discussions around these texts, some of which they helped select. *Direct interactions* validated students and “reminded them of their resiliency and perseverance by providing realistic goals and proof of literacy growth” (Walker & Hutchison, 2021, p. 425). Finally, *the teacher mindset* opposed a deficit mindset; journal entries reflected an awareness of how these students were perceived in society along with teacher reflections on bringing students to their full potential. Though challenges to incorporating culturally responsive practice weren’t recorded for this study, it supports the need for my work. The authors identified the need for future work to include more students in these studies who regularly receive culturally responsive instruction, not just receiving it as part of a research study. In my study, culturally responsive practices are not provided as part of the study, so I believe it responds to this call. This study also provides culturally responsive practices such as attending to the setting of instruction and student agency that could supplement any reading specialist’s teaching practice.

In a practitioner inquiry study, Houchen (2013) designed a reading course for high school students who failed the mandatory state assessment required for graduation. Houchen (2013) recognized that scripted, remedial reading programs for students working below grade level and failing high-stakes assessments did not address their strengths and weaknesses or the critical skill of literature comprehension (Dennis, 2009, Lee, 2007, Franzak, 2006, as cited in Houchen, 2013). This year-long course’s curriculum and instructional methods were informed by culturally relevant pedagogy, literacy theory, and English language arts instruction and included student voice in its development. Culturally relevant pedagogy informed by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b), Gay (2002), and many others scaffolded the framework for this study. Following a review of the literature on culturally responsive practice, specifically with African American students and literacy theory, Houchen (2013) articulated the following driving principles in the course design: 1. To create strong and caring relationships with

students based on mutual respect and high expectations; 2. To access student thinking regarding their own learning needs and their cultural background to inform the curriculum; and 3. To teach metacognition and comprehension skills and strategies in multiple forms both explicitly and generatively (p. 98).

Data were collected throughout three cycles of “planning, action, assessment, reflection, and re-planning” (Houchen, 2013, p. 98) and included standardized reading test scores for the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), notes from student focus groups, student work (i.e., journals, essays, assignments), and teacher-researcher journals. Eighty-four percent of the students taking the retake exam passed after 13-25 weeks of the described instruction. I will focus more on the qualitative analysis of the focus groups, teacher observations, and teacher journals. While they shared data units used in each cycle of coding, they did not describe the coding process in detail.

Houchen (2013) described the students’ perspectives, including the psychological impact of repeated test failure and remedial classes. The author learned how “failure on the FCAT can translate to personal failure for the student” and “being assigned to remedial class is perceived as a loss to the student’s academic choice-making and affects their school-related persona” (Houchen, 2013, p. 103). Houchen (2013) worked to understand her students’ behavioral challenges and managed them with respect, communicated with them via text messaging, and praised their strengths, leading to the theme that “relationships are built one on one” (p.105). She also learned that “a relaxed class is not a lax class” as her students experienced a safe learning environment though she held high expectations of them (Houchen, 2013, p. 107). Students’ comments reflected the rigor of the course yet the feeling of being treated with respect and not spoken to in ways that reiterated past failures. Finally, she showed that “all literacies are valid and can be used for instruction” (Houchen, 2013, p.108) with her success in utilizing the students’ preference for communicating and engaging in learning activities through text messaging. Using this avenue of communication offered them privacy, an opportunity to utilize what they identified

as their primary space for “reading” outside of the classroom, and an efficient and effective means of getting information and content to them. This study shows how an educator overcame the limitations of scripted programs to improve literacy skills via culturally responsive practices. While it was not a true representation of integrating culturally responsive practice into skills-based instruction, the unique ways in which this educator was culturally responsive could feasibly supplement the instruction of any reading specialist. Thus, this study provided additional practices I may consider when analyzing my data for culturally responsive practices.

Cartledge et al. (2015) employed quantitative methods to determine the effect of culturally relevant materials on the reading skills of eight second-grade, African American students at risk for special education placement due to reading challenges. This study looked at the effects of culturally relevant reading materials on students’ reading fluency, comprehension, and passage likability. While acknowledging the importance of children “seeing” themselves in literature (Bishop, 2007) and the value of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), the authors raised concern that empirical evidence was lacking.

Using culturally responsive practice to inform this study, they highlighted student interest (Gay, 2018), the ability to make personal connections when text is relevant (Ma’ayan, 2010; Ebe, 2011), and the importance of culturally relevant literature in affirming students’ identity (Bishop, 2007). The culturally relevant passages were developed for the study based on student interest, which was determined through parent and teacher interviews, student group interviews, and observations of the students at non-academic times during the school day. The authors found notable positive effects of the texts on reading fluency, suggesting that students read the text more fluently because they were more familiar with the content. The effectiveness of the passages was less notable in the comprehension assessment with students showing “slightly better” comprehension of the culturally relevant passages than of the non-culturally relevant passages (Cartledge et al., 2015, p. 38). The favorability ratings

gleaned from the students were slightly, but not significantly, higher for the culturally relevant texts.

This study is relevant to my work in that educators were able to use culturally relevant materials while addressing the skills-based reading component of reading fluency.

Worthy et al. (2012) described the “re-storying” of two second graders beginning their school year with negative histories related to emotional, academic, and behavioral challenges in prior classrooms. Through culturally responsive literacy practice, this educator worked to “re-story” or reframe the identities of these learners as valued classroom participants. Teacher practices working to reframe identity were based on Wortham’s (2004) “theory and research in social identification, effective teaching, culturally responsive/relevant teaching, and the ethic of care” (p.569). The culturally responsive aspect of their framework was built on Gay’s (2010) notion that learning is enhanced when incorporating student strengths and cultural and linguistic assets and Ladson-Billings’ s (1995b) criteria of CRP including academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Their concept of social identification (Wortham, 2004) acknowledges that life experiences and ways of being across social settings (e.g., home, school, community) factor into one’s identity (e.g., gender, race, ability). They underscored the power of an educator’s beliefs about teaching and learning in shaping personal and learner identities.

The authors used an ethnographic approach to collecting data in a second-grade classroom for general and special education inclusion students and described the teacher’s practice that “re-storied” two students’ identities. They observed how an effective teacher was able to weave culturally responsive practices into best reading and writing instruction, “read alouds, process writing, curriculum integration, thematic instruction, and explicit teaching” (Worthy, 2012, p. 570) in a collaborative classroom environment that honored student input and promoted student responsibility. For one academic year, they collected data during a two-hour literacy block and “morning menu” (i.e., the 30 minutes of morning time with independent work choice related to cross-curricular projects), including

observations, interviews, informal conversations with the teacher and students, and work samples. Via open coding, they developed the concept of “re-storying” across six students and then described the specific “re-storying” of two of them.

Read alouds were identified as a space to highlight student preferences and life experiences while focusing on relationship building. Conversations encouraged student participation which allowed the teacher to identify student beliefs, needs, and interests (Gay, 2010) and discuss topics of social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Reading and writing workshops focused on the student’s interests, self-selections for reading and writing, and avoided ability grouping in favor of other grouping strategies (e.g., skill building, student-identified challenges). Finally, “morning menu” activities were conducive to robust relationship building when the educator engaged in individual conversations while allowing students to work collaboratively.

The authors described the re-storying of one withdrawn student who became more engaged because of these teaching practices. A solid connection with the family formed an understanding of the family and student histories that informed the educator’s decisions on ways to present content and engage the student in activities. Careful choices of student pairings facilitated student connections and literature choices related to student interest promoted engagement. Finally, the importance of language was noted both with respect to meeting the students’ academic language needs as well as using teacher language to support positive identity development.

A second student’s “re-storying” was related to a history of negative behaviors that had resulted in this young student spending much of his time in disciplinary settings. The educator again fostered family relationships and attended to classroom behavior to identify strategies specific to this student. While recognizing his energetic participation during read-alouds as a form of engagement and using his comments to spark class conversations, the teacher worked to affirm his potential at any opportunity. While redirecting any nonconforming behaviors, she first recognized her belief in the value of his

contributions and redirected his participation in a more appropriate manner vs. penalizing him for the behavior as had been his previous experience. The educator “re-storied” his status with peers by promoting his academic strengths as a resource to the class. The relevance to my study is seen in the educator’s ability to weave culturally responsive practice into reading instruction; however, the instruction in this study does not represent the highly structured instruction used to teach foundational reading skills as in my study. Thus, this suggests the need for my study.

Studies of Culturally Responsive Reading Practices in Special Educations Settings

Orosco and O’Connor (2014) observed a special education resource room teacher providing explicit reading instruction through a culturally responsive lens in an elementary classroom with students who were either in special education or the pre-referral stages for reading challenges. This ESL/bilingual special education teacher was chosen based on her training and her students’ success, which included gains they made on the Woodcock Munoz Language Survey (WMLS) (Woodcock, 2005), a standardized test of language proficiency. In this qualitative case study, they asked 1. What were the features of her instruction with Latino ELLs who were having reading difficulties, and what did instruction look like? 2. To what extent did instruction appear to match ELLs’ cultural and linguistic learning needs? and 3. How did the teacher’s instructional beliefs, judgments, and professional development support instruction with Latino ELLs?

The authors employed a social constructivist theoretical framework, describing it as a “culturally responsive structure” that “makes the concentrated effort in the classroom to incorporate students’ language, history, literature, and other cultural aspects of a particular racial or ethnic group to instructionally engage students’ belonging to that group in authentic student-centered learning” (Orosco & O’Connor, 2014, p. 516). To be successful, educators need to learn about students’ cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and integrate that knowledge into reading instruction (Genesse & Riches, 2006, as cited in Orosco & O’Connor, 2014). Instructional practices that emphasized collaboration were also

cited as a culturally responsive aspect of their framework. Several scholars were quoted as the authors outlined the culturally responsive aspects of their practice. The study did not embrace one framework, but rather they outlined their concept of culturally responsive practice with the previously highlighted principles.

Data collection included classroom observations, teacher interviews, school demographics, artifacts and documents related to culturally responsive teaching such as curricula, and professional development. The authors provided a detailed description of their coding process, utilizing an inductive analysis process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, as cited in Orosco & O'Connor, 2014), axial coding, and selective coding (Harry et al., 2005) that lead to the formulation of themes. They provided examples of codes, and three themes were identified that guided educators in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities: Cultural Aspects of Teaching Reading, Culturally Relevant Skills-Based Instruction, and Collaborative Agency Time. Cultural Aspects of Reading referred to such practices as choosing literature from the standards-based curriculum that reflected students' background knowledge and experiences. She also used the students' heritage language to tap into their background knowledge for comprehension and vocabulary instruction. A key take-away for the theme, Culturally Relevant Skills-Based Instruction, was that the practices found to be effective for monolingual learners (e.g., skills-based instruction) would have to be differentiated for culturally and linguistically diverse students. During the explicit instruction for comprehension and vocabulary, the teacher engaged in conversations with the students that leveraged their cultural and linguistic strengths. While phonological awareness and phonics were examples of the skills-based instruction provided in the classroom, these were not discussed relative to this theme. Finally, Collaborative Agency Time referred to strong family connections made by this educator, recognizing the relevance of supporting her students' and families' needs outside of the classroom.

While they did not discuss obstacles faced by the educator participant, they cited obstacles that

prevented students from receiving this rich, culturally responsive instruction. The tendency of special educators to focus on skills-based instruction without a culturally responsive lens and the lack of culturally responsive content in special education programs were suggested hindrances. These hindrances support the need for more research into the ability to provide culturally responsive literacy instruction.

Summary

While the literature is replete with suggestions for culturally responsive frameworks, what culturally responsive practices should look like in core learning experiences, pre-referral spaces and in special education instruction, there is a paucity of research on how culturally responsive practice is operationalized in literacy instruction and related student outcomes with students with reading challenges. The dearth of such studies identified by Shealey et al. (2011) ten years ago exists today. In my search of studies on the implementation and outcomes of culturally responsive literacy teaching in special education, I found only Orosco and O'Connor's study (2014) which began by highlighting the need for research illuminating the relationships among language, literacy, and culture, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education. My search for culturally responsive practices with "at-risk" students was a bit more productive though, again, surprisingly lean.

Specific culturally responsive frameworks (i.e., relevant, responsive, sustaining) were not adhered to exclusively in the reviewed studies. All but one of the nine studies cited both Gay (2000, 2002a) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b) to outline the tenets of culturally responsive teaching on which they focused their study. Additionally, every study acknowledged the culturally responsive work of many others (Moll et al., 1992; Lee, 2007; Compton-Lilly, 2008) as well, with Nieto (2002, 2013) being the next most, and almost as frequently, cited scholar. Furthermore, the aspects of culturally responsive frameworks were conflated and the terms relevant and responsive were often used interchangeably. I did not find any studies with "at-risk" or special education students citing culturally

sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as its framework.

The most frequently referenced characteristic of cultural responsiveness was that of using cultural and linguistic strengths to inform choice of materials and instructional strategies to support student success. This was highlighted in every study to some degree. The next most frequently embraced aspects of culturally responsive practice were holding high expectations (Houchen, 2013; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013), the value of culturally responsive practice in countering a deficit mindset (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Houchen, 2013; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007), and its importance in fostering student motivation (Worthy et al., 2012; Cartledge et al., 2015; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Houchen, 2013; Shealey, 2007; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013). Its affordances for affirming student identity (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Worthy et al., 2012; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007) and embracing a caring learning environment (Houchen, 2013; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Shealey, 2007; Worthy et al., 2012; Walker & Hutchison, 2021) were also important in several studies. Interestingly, only four of the nine studies referenced addressing teacher bias (Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Walker & Hutchison, 2021). Finally, the aspect of CR that Ladson-Billings called the forgotten, critical consciousness, was mentioned only in the Worthy et al. (2012) and Houchen (2013) studies, though incorporating issues of social justice was highlighted in the Hilaski (2020) study. Finally, of note, was that Piazza and Duncan, (2012) and Houchen (2013) cited evidence-based instruction as being culturally responsive.

Gaps to fill.

The participants in these studies were primarily general education teachers providing reading instruction except for a literacy specialist in one study (Walker & Hutchison, 2021), two educators with graduate reading degrees in the Shealey (2007) study, a counseling psychologist in another (Piazza &

Duncan, 2012), and an ESL/Special educator in the Orosco & O'Connor (2014) study. It was unclear in most studies if the participants had specific training in skills-based, explicit reading instruction or culturally responsive instruction. The exception was when teachers underwent training in a specific program such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993). Hilaski (2020) described professional development geared toward planning culturally responsive instruction with Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) lessons in that study. McIntyre and Hulan (2013) followed teachers who had taken part in a graduate-level course in skills-based reading instructions and culturally responsive practice. No other studies discussed detailed training. My study will fill that gap as I will describe the practices and perspectives of in-service teachers who have taken part in a graduate program that provides education in structured, explicit, and systematic reading instruction and culturally responsive practice.

The studies examined reading instruction for "struggling readers". However, many did not explicitly state the type of instruction (i.e., systematic, skills-based instruction vs, culturally responsive instruction). Three studies provided the clearest description of participants adopting both cognitive skills-based and culturally responsive lenses (Shealey, 2007; McIntyre and Hulan, 2013; and Orosco & O'Connor, 2012). Others were more focused as Walker and Hutchison (2021) looked at comprehension strategies using culturally responsive materials. Hilaski's (2020) study was specific to Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), and Cartledge et al. (2015) only looked at the effects of culturally relevant books on reading fluency. In my study, I look at participants who have received instruction in both culturally responsive practices and structured literacy intervention.

Finally, I turn to the analysis of the studies I explored. Varying degrees of analyses were described with McIntyre and Hulan (2013) being the most transparent with the method of analysis including in depth coding descriptions and examples provided. While not providing codes, others clearly described the method of coding with solid references (Shealey, 2007; Hilaski, 2020; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Without seeing a coding path to which themes were identified, some

studies (Hilaski, 2020; Houchen, 2013) read more like a narrative describing examples of culturally responsive practice noted in the participants' instruction. Unique to my study is that I included the purposeful coding of both explicit, skills-based reading instruction as well as culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining practice. In addition, I provide the reader with the codes and themes from all phases of analysis.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this qualitative study, I described the participants' experiences implementing skills-based, culturally responsive literacy instruction. Using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022a), I analyzed data collected through focus groups, I looked for commonalities among experiences as well as any diverse perspectives related to successes and obstacles in pre-referral settings and special education.

In this chapter, I will highlight the affordances of collecting data through focus groups to gain perspectives on how culturally responsive practice informs literacy instruction. I will discuss how focus groups best provided information to inform changes to a graduate level literacy course. I will share the broad and local contexts significant to the study and the selection of participants and their purposeful groupings in focus groups. My own positionality includes references to epistemology and ontology as Braun and Clarke (2022b) discussed the importance of reflecting on these in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Following the description of data collection, I will explain the phases of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) that guided analysis. This explanation will include the procedures for analyzing data, establishing validity, and presenting my findings.

3.2 Focus group methodology

While initially planning both classroom observations and interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented my access to schools for two consecutive years. While these methods of data collection will support future work in this area, I collected data from the educators' perspectives via focus groups for this study.

I chose focus groups after comparing their effectiveness compared to individual interviews related to the study. Focus groups occur when "a group of people with certain characteristics generate narrative data in focused discussion" (Curry, 2015, slide 2). According to Breen (2006), focus groups are

appropriate when your study benefits from having participants “share and compare their experiences”, “develop and generate ideas”, and/or “explore issues of shared importance” (p. 465). This sharing and comparing of views around this topic of shared importance, literacy instruction, best afforded me the opportunity to identify patterns and themes in my data. While interviews focus on individual perspectives, focus groups collectively generate ideas (Breen, 2006). Additionally, with the goal to inform my teaching, focus group methodology serves to “generate ideas for the purpose of devising recommendations for future change and student learning” (Breen, 2006, p. 464). Themes interpreted across focus groups will be more reliable for informing course changes than views expressed in individual interviews.

Furthermore, Morgan (2012) described that, unlike interviews, participants share their views, sometimes informed by how their perspectives compare or diverge from others in the group. As myriad factors impact teaching and learning, groups represented different grade level teachers and school demographics and provided rich data about what participants hold in common and what was unique to their setting.

3.3 Context/setting of the study.

Larger context

This study was situated in the larger context of persistent overrepresentation of students of color in the K-12 U.S. special education system (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Barrio, 2021; OSERS, 2016). Numerous attempts have been made to combat this persistent problem. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (2004) and its reauthorization in 2004 which was closely aligned with The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (2002) were implemented to provide a free and appropriate education that meets the needs of all students in the least restrictive environment. In attempting to close the achievement gap between white students and students of color, NCLB called for evidence-based instruction along with increased accountability for states to improve results on high-stakes assessments.

While NCLB was replaced in December 2015 with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), evidence-based practice and high-stakes assessment continue to be part of the plan to raise achievement in lower-performing students. Such laws prioritize a cognitive, skills-based construct of reading, and student progress is measured in a one-size-fits-all manner. In this environment, the technical and measurable aspects of reading are foregrounded (Smagorinsky et al., 2020) deeming sociocultural factors irrelevant (Berliner, 2014 as cited in Smagorinsky et al., 2020). When high-stakes assessments identify students who are reading below grade expected levels, their instruction begins to take place in increasingly restricted environments with increasingly restricted methods of instruction in a tiered system of instruction (ESSA, 2015).

Reading specialists practice within this tiered system of education designed to identify students who need extra support or special education services. Students who are identified as lagging behind their peers in the classroom (Tier 1) are slated to receive additional instructional support in Tier 2 or Tier 3 with each tier increasing in the intensity of support, in this case, literacy support (ESSA, 2015). Tier 3 is often seen as the pre-referral stage for special education, a place where students receive increased intensity in specialized instruction and may be referred for a special education evaluation. All three tiers call for evidence-based practice (ESSA, 2015), and what counts as evidenced-based practice limits instructional choices.

Evidence-based instruction is typically found by referring to What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, Institute..., n.d.) where “experimental designs, notably the randomized control trial (RCT) are the gold standard” (Proctor & Chang-Bacon, 2020, p. 27). Proctor and Chang (2020) discussed one limitation of RCTs as not accounting for social factors, and they called for broader methodology in literacy research to explore the how and why questions related to literacy instruction. Furthermore, the applicability of evidence-based practices in some contexts has been questioned given that studies have generally been carried out with English-speaking students reading in English

(Goldenberg, 2011, as cited in Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Thus, mandates that define appropriate practices unfairly constrain instructional practices in the tiered system of instruction because they prioritize experimental studies. Qualitative studies are more conducive to understanding the nuances of culturally responsive literacy practices, yet they are not appreciated in identifying evidence-based practice.

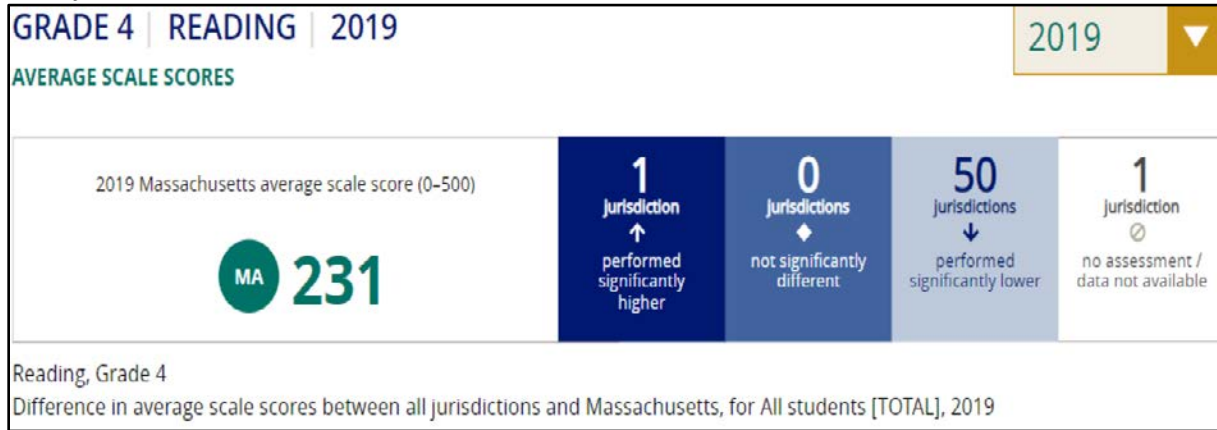
The reading instruction provided in these instances foregrounds a skills-based, cognitive approach which often includes highly structured, systematic reading instruction, often with scripted programs (Ede, 2006), thereby limiting autonomy in making instructional choices and choosing instructional materials. While the context appropriately ensures every student his/her right to foundational literacy instruction, such mandated approaches to instruction make it challenging to find space to accommodate the culturally and linguistically diverse needs of learners. Seemingly, the policies and laws created to address the inequities often preclude equitable opportunities for all students to demonstrate individual assets.

Local context

I turn to the local context to support the necessity of this study. Massachusetts schools achieve some of the highest scores in our nation's reading levels as measured in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments (National Center of Educational Progress [NAEP], 1992) (See Figure A). However, this stellar performance is not enjoyed by all demographic groups. In fact, this state wrestles with performance gaps that are not statistically different from those found in 1998. In a 2019 snapshot of grade 8 reading performance in this state, Black students had an average score that was 21 points lower than that for White students (Figure B). In 2019, Hispanic students had an average score that was 29 points lower than that of White students. Gaps in educational achievement have been present since the beginning of this national assessment in 1992.

Figure A

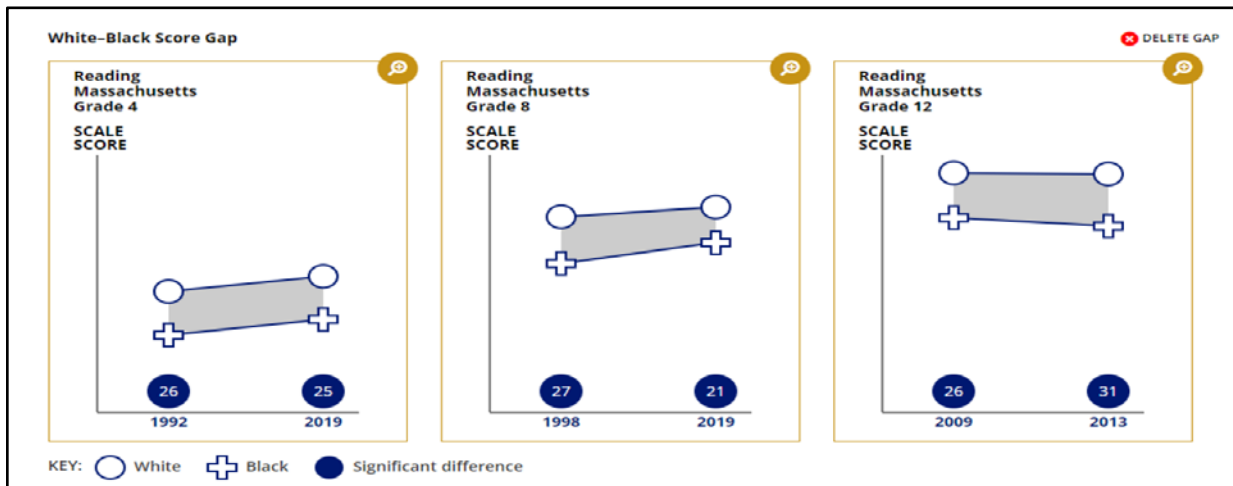
Comparison of Massachusetts scores on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to other jurisdictions.



Note: Only one jurisdiction performed higher than Massachusetts

Figure B

White-Black score gap in Massachusetts scores on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



Note: In 2019, the black-white score gap in reading was 25 in Grade 4 and 21 in Grade 8.

3.4 Participants and recruitment

Why Reading Specialists?

Understanding how multiple lenses can be applied to school literacy practices is best

understood by those who interface with literacy instruction across educational settings. As key players in choosing curriculum, informing pedagogy, coaching teachers, teaching, and evaluating students' literacy skills, reading specialists widely impact literacy instruction. Practicing in general and special education settings, reading specialists are often at a crossroads, deciding if a student will require special education services. Reading specialists must meet this responsibility with a solid understanding of language differences vs. language disorders and an understanding that not all literacy practices are the same. This understanding warrants a wider lens of literacy, one that appreciates the diverse literacy experiences that students bring to their learning environments and recognizes them as resourceful learners as opposed to deficient readers who need to be fixed. Reading specialists are also educators who face constraints in their pedagogical choices by law and policy that mandate evidence-based practice and high-stakes assessments (NCLB, 2002; ESSA, 2015). Reading specialists practice against an educational backdrop where they are "conceptualized as instrumental to a reform effort focused on data-driven instruction and improvement at all levels" (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Thus, gaining the perspectives of reading specialists was critical to understanding how one might incorporate culturally responsive literacy practices into school-based literacy instruction.

Participant Selection and Sampling

I chose participants based on their completion of the previously described reading specialist graduate program and participation in the previously described course, which was redesigned to include both skills-based and culturally responsive literacy instruction. I invited only to program completers to avoid a conflict of interest. Another requirement was provision of supplemental literacy support to K-12 students in a special or general education public school setting. This was to ensure participants were faced with the previously described potential tension of negotiating space for culturally responsive practice in an environment of high stakes testing and accountability. Reading specialists practiced in various settings. Those providing literacy support in general education may be doing so in any of the

three tiers in a Multi-tiered System of Support MTSS (ESSA, 2015). Tier one involves classroom instruction while tiers two and three represent levels of literacy intervention increasing in intensity. Others provided support in a special education setting, which was more restrictive (e.g., outside the general education classroom in small group settings).

Thirteen individuals responded to the initial request, and I purposefully divided these participants into 2 focus groups, A and B. While initial sampling was related to program and course completion, the make-up of the first two focus groups relied on purposeful sampling. This sampling involved choosing participants to obtain relevant data from a range of perspectives (Yin, 2016), yet making sure they could relate to others in the group (Breen, 2006). Groups included participants representing varied grade levels and school demographics (Appendix A). I organized these two focus groups to ensure each group consisted of at least two participants representing each of these characteristics.

I decided on two initial groups for two reasons. I wanted to ensure that the participants in each focus group would have others to relate to (e.g., similar grade level, school demographics) to afford the benefits of having participants who can “share and compare their experiences”, “develop and generate ideas”, and “explore issues of shared importance” (Breen, 2006, p. 465). Secondly, though the number of participants in a focus group can go as low as 4 (Krueger and Casey, 2015), I was concerned about the quality of the group should someone be unable to participate on the day of the meeting.

Krueger and Casey (2015) purport that three focus groups are necessary. I sent a request for participants from the latest graduating cohort and formed a third focus group. A fourth focus group was comprised of participants from the first two groups who expressed a desire to come back for a second session to continue the discussion. The grade levels and school demographics for these groups are in Appendix A as well. I was limited in my ability to purposefully sort participants in Focus Groups C and D. I eliminated participant 9 from my data analysis. I felt that her contributions might skew my data when I

realized that she wasn't practicing in a public setting under the constraints imposed by educational laws. I. Though she was working with students with reading disabilities, she was working in a private school for students with learning disabilities where students were not required to participate in high stakes testing.

Though RTA has no rigid guidelines about selection, I chose my participants carefully. I was sure I had representatives from varied grade levels and from schools with a range of demographics, I also was sure to have several representatives from each group as the intent of RTA is to look for patterns and themes across data.

3.5 Role of the researcher

As a reading specialist and speech-language pathologist who worked over 18 years in public schools, I have a deep understanding of my participants' role with students who are lagging their peers in reading and writing, those deemed "at risk" of having a language learning/reading disability. As an assistant professor in an educator preparation program for reading specialists, I recognize the need for in-service and pre-service reading specialists to be well-equipped to appreciate the myriad perspectives and diverse literacy needs in K-12 classrooms. My adoption of a nested view of literacy, where the cognitive skills needed for reading and writing printed are embedded in a sociocultural context (Purcell-Gates, 2012) has been impactful. My own practice and my teaching have undergone significant changes. All students have the right to skills-based reading and writing that will provide them with the foundational skills to engage in meaningful literacy activities that can "shape their identities and critical understandings of themselves, of communities, and of the world (Muhammad, 2020). While ensuring all students acquire skills in reading and writing print, educators must take care to honor the unique practices that culturally and linguistically diverse students bring to the school environment. As the director of an educator preparation program for reading specialists, it is my responsibility to make

explicit the cognitive skills-based instruction and culturally responsive literacy practices in literacy assessment and instruction. I believe this dual-lens approach is essential for educators to make informed decision around special education placements and create equitable literacy experiences.

My journey to intertwine culturally responsive pedagogy into my graduate teaching is a dynamic process that began 5 years ago. As I cast a wider net on what counts as literacy, I redesigned a curriculum for a graduate-level literacy course to include culturally responsive components. Purcell-Gates (2012) noted that “context is as essential to the learning as the skill being learned” (p.470). If literacy is “the intertwining and mutual enabling of schooling and life practice that account for much of the development of literate persons” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2016, p.1219), ignoring the sociocultural context of literacy learning was leaving out critical components of literacy education. With that perspective, I sought to ensure that both approaches to literacy instruction existed in my course. While I was adept at applying the skills-based lens, I reflected on my LCLE coursework, and the insights provided by my mentor Dr. Mitzi Lewison on her teachings in her children’s literature course. I will outline the additions made to the curriculum of this course taken by all study participants.

Teaching Narrative and Expository Literacy Skills is a graduate-level course within a literacy and language certificate program heavily influenced by cognitive-based learning with recent, robust efforts to restructure the courses to align with anti-oppressive teaching practices. In addition to learning a structured approach to explicitly teaching reading and writing skills, students read and apply knowledge of deficit ideology, the necessity of multiple perspectives where all voices are represented in the classroom, issues related to controversial books and social justice, biases in books and educational content, and a view of literacy beyond reading and writing print.

My course has several components rooted in culturally responsive education. The course begins with a discussion around Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story” and the idea that and educator’s literature choices can disrupt or perpetuate stereotypes. They utilize tools to assess books

and educational materials for biases. They then shift to creating diverse classroom libraries representing all aspects of diversity (e.g., culture, race, ability, gender identity, sexuality). Finally, the graduate students work throughout the course building a text set rooted in an essential question related to a social justice issue pertinent to their community, school, or classroom. Their text sets must address varied reading levels as well as include multiple modalities for students to learn the content and demonstrate their knowledge.

The idea to transform my course arose from several events. Student discussion posts reflecting discomfort and resistance to embracing some forms of diversity in the classroom (e.g., gender and sexuality) were juxtaposed with their commendable effort and enthusiasm in creating diverse classroom libraries. I began wondering about pre- and in-service teachers' perceived challenges as they considered how their new learning would fit into their current practices. I also wondered about the value students put on culturally responsive practice. I recalled my not-so-distant past when I had not noticed that the curriculum served one dominant culture. After being asked by one student why my literature course was so "focused on culture", the need for me to understand teacher candidates' perceptions and practice became more urgent. That question cemented my commitment to support pre- and in-service teachers in understanding deficit-based thinking and transforming educational practices to provide equitable opportunities for all students. The final event was a survey I sent out to graduates asking about their implementation of the "diverse library" created for the course. Though the response rate was low, very few students reported they had put their diverse libraries into practice.

As a focus group moderator for this study, I looked to understand the views, possibilities, and challenges of the reading specialists in teaching literacy with a dual-lens approach in the current educational context. I recognize this is an initial step in understanding teacher practice in varied settings. Though immediate findings will inform some changes to my course, I will continue to learn about how educators navigate these seemingly conflicting lenses to contribute to a broader framework of culturally

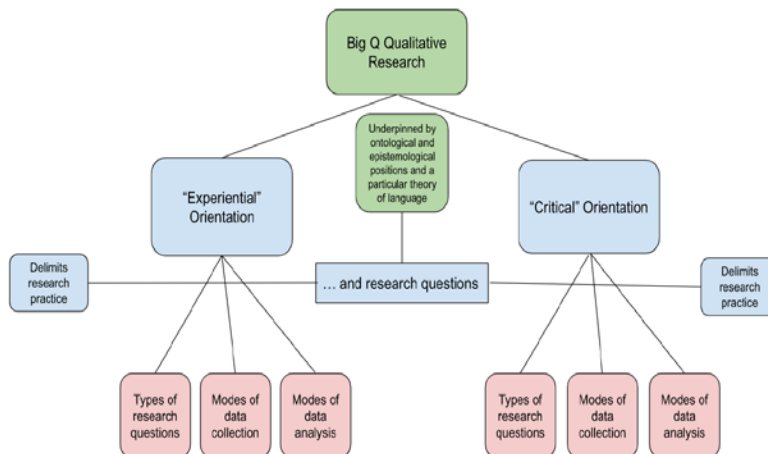
responsive literacy instruction.

Epistemology, ontology, and my view of language

Prior to choosing reflexive thematic analysis, I reflected on the conceptual underpinnings and the design of my work (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Braun and Clarke (2022b) remind us to think about “bigger” ideas.... about the nature of reality and what research gives you access to; about what constitutes meaningful knowledge, and about language and how it operates” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p 157)

I reflected extensively on this and noted in my August 4, 2022, journal entry why I think my work reflects more of a critical vs. experiential orientation (though I thought it could be a bit of both) (Figure C).

Figure C
Questions for considering orientation.



Adapted from Braun & Clark, 2022a, p. 159 Note: I considered the factors along the bottom row as defined in Braun and Clark (2022a) when deciding between experiential vs critical orientations.

I looked at the types of research questions I was asking and determined they were related to critical inquiry because I am studying possibilities for more equitable literacy instruction for children of diverse backgrounds. I also determined that the underpinnings of this study are critical qualitative

because I am “interrogating and unpacking patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 10)

It is important for the researcher to delineate ontological and epistemological perspectives along with one’s conceptualization of language to clearly explain the theoretical underpinnings of one’s reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). They explain that reflexive thematic analysis is not atheoretical as often assumed but rather theoretically flexible. They write that “theory provides TA with analytic power and analytic validity” (p. 157).

My ontological perspective as I attempt to understand how multiple lenses of literacy are embraced in remedial literacy instruction is one of critical realism, which Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest is the most common in qualitative research. A question they suggest when determining one’s perspective was “Is reality discovered from the process of research or is it created through research?” As I honored the reflexivity of the process, continually reflecting on my own subjectivities and how those informed my interpretation, I worked under the assumption that realities can be created. I believe the snapshot of experiences I gleaned from this study guided me in understanding the ‘realities’ of participants’ literacy instruction.

My epistemological perspective is one of contextualism. I moved through my analysis with the belief that “knowledge cannot be separated from the knower, and the researchers’ values and practices inevitably shape the knowledge they produce” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 179). I was true to the need for reflexivity that this requires. I recognized throughout that knowledge is highly dependent and situated in the context (Braun & Clarke, 2022a)

Finally, Braun and Clarke (2022a) urge researchers to identify their view of language (Figure D). I considered reflective, intentional, and constructionist views of language.

Figure D Views of Language -

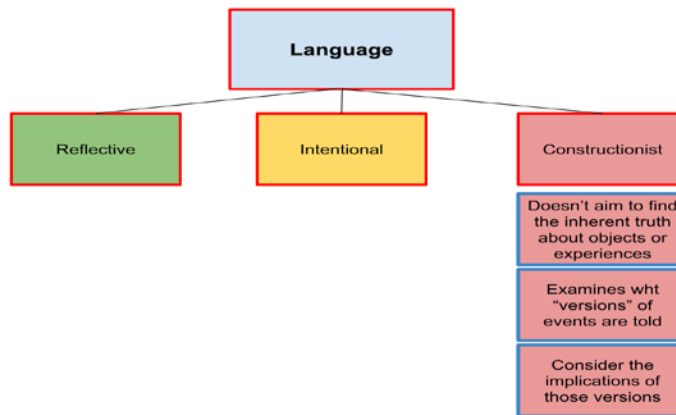


Chart created from content from Braun & Clarke, 2022a.

The three characteristics of a constructionist view of language in the above figure are true for my study. With a constructionist view of language (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), “meaning is created and constructed in and through language” (p. 164). As I tried to understand ways reading specialists operationalized a dual-lens approach to literacy instruction via focus groups, I appreciated the “active” role of language and viewed meaning as “malleable and flexible” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 164). As participants engaged in focus groups, they frequently reframed their thoughts. With a constructionist view one does not “aim to find inherent truth,” but rather an analysis of the “‘versions of events’ that are told” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 165).

3.6 Data collection

I collected data (see Table 1) via four focus groups which took place between April 2022 through August 2022. Curry (2015) suggests 5-10 participants. I formed two focus groups from the initial 13 respondents, Focus Groups A and B. I sent a second recruitment email to 2022 graduates, forming a third group, Focus Group C. A fourth group, D, included participants from focus groups A and B, who desired a second opportunity to continue the conversation. Braun and Clark (2022b) suggest purposive sampling can provide the “potential to maximize understanding of the phenomena under investigation” (p.14). See Section 3.4 for detailed explanation of focus group formation. The focus group guiding

questions can be found in Table 2.

Table 1
Data collection

Data	Period of collection
Focus group A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 participants • Grades K-5 • 75-90-minutes 	April 2022
Focus group B. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 participants • Grades 4-12 • 75-90-minutes 	April 2022
Focus Group C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 participants • Grades 6-12 • 75-90-minutes 	July 2022
Focus Group D <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 returning participants • Grades K-8 • 75-90-minutes 	August 2022
Reflective Journal	April through August 2022

Table 2
Alignment of focus group questions to research questions

FOCUS GROUP GUIDING QUESTIONS	RESEARCH QUESTION
What does it mean to be a reader? From your perspective, the school’s perspective, student's perspective?	How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader? Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how? How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?

<p>How is the reading curriculum chosen in your school, classroom, or sessions? Is it possible to adapt the curriculum? If so, how do you do this? What information do you use to make adaptations? (Do they use student data)</p>	<p>How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?</p>
<p>How are students identified as needing supplemental reading instruction?</p> <p>Are their strengths also identified and how?</p>	<p>How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?</p> <p>Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?</p>
<p>What comes to mind when someone says culturally responsive or culturally relevant literacy instruction?</p> <p>Are there examples you can give of culturally relevant literacy instruction being integrated into your reading instruction?</p> <p>Are there any challenges to integrating culturally responsive practice into reading instruction?</p>	<p>Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?</p> <p>How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?</p>
<p>What are some current literacy practices that you would choose to keep if you were designing a curriculum?</p>	<p>How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?</p> <p>Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?</p> <p>How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?</p>
<p>What are some current literacy practices that you would choose to leave behind if you were designing a curriculum?</p>	<p>How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?</p> <p>Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?</p> <p>How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings</p>

	providing instructional support for reading?
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3.7 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is “the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis.” (Braun & Clark, 2006 p.78). Through a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), I identified prevailing themes across participants in the four focus groups.

I transcribed each focus group in its entirety, as the transcriptions were the primary data source. Keeping my research questions in mind, I coded all analytically relevant information. My initial inductive coding did not include established codes. I maintained and organized my data in the qualitative data analysis program, Nvivo™. The software was conducive to the iterative process, where I added and reframed codes through the various coding phases in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). It also afforded a systematic collection of my data for my study to continue beyond this project. I stored the various phases of coding systematically in separate Nvivo files. This process was aligned with the tenets of RTA in that creating one codebook puts boundaries on a process that should be reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). In each subsequent phase of analysis, the initial code descriptions changed, and other codes were added or deleted as needed. Thus, a code book existed in each phase of analysis within the software program.

I used memoing, writing short phrases, ideas, or key concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018) from the initial stages of data collection. Memoing continued throughout the analysis process in the form of analytic memoing, documenting thoughts related to coding choices as they occurred and possibly changed throughout each iteration or cycle of data analysis. Analytic memos that chronicle the data analysis process made the process transparent and will potentially limit questions regarding selectivity and bias that can sometimes arise in qualitative research (Yin, 2016). I documented my thoughts via the

memo and annotation features in Nvivo.

Why Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

Braun and Clarke (2022b) provide explicit guidance in designing a study with RTA. They provide the possible foci of studies that align with RTA. (Table 3).

Table 3
Guiding questions for RTA

Research Question	Foci conducive to RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022b)
1. How do these reading specialists frame what it means to be a reader?	“The social or discursive construction of particular “social objects,” subject positions, or other social phenomena in particular contexts and the implications and effects of these” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 11).
2. Do reading specialists incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into supplemental or remedial reading instruction? If so, how?	“The views, perceptions, understandings, perspectives, needs, motivations of particular groups, about particular phenomena, in particular contexts (often combined with lived experience questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 11).
3. How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in instructional support settings?	“The views, perceptions, understandings, perspectives, needs, motivations of particular groups, about particular phenomena, in particular contexts (often combined with lived experience questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 11).

Note: My research questions align with two foci amenable to RTA.

Research question one related to a focus on finding out how readers are described and positioned in the school contexts and the results of that positioning. Research questions two and three related to a focus on gaining perspectives about phenomena (i.e., culturally responsive literacy instruction) from reading specialists in varied contexts.

Another reflexive aspect of RTA is the monitoring of data such that “reviewing transcripts of the initial interviews or focus groups is vital to check they are generating rich “on target” data” (Braun & Clarke, 2022b, p.13). Following an initial focus group with feedback from my committee, I added questions such as “what is the one aspect of your reading intervention that you would keep and one that you would live to eliminate?” I also eliminated questions that seemed less related to my research

questions (e.g., How are students discharged from reading services?). The original set of questions are in Appendix D.

Avoiding the idea of saturation, an RTA mindset does not ascribe to the idea that everything in the data has been “found.” Reflexivity is situated in an understanding that an interpretation of the data relates to researcher positionality which is subject to change. I will not view my analysis as a finished product.

The following description of the phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) show the systematic process of data analysis.

Six phases of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

Phase one: Familiarizing yourself with the data set: I began this step by listening to and watching the video recordings of the focus groups. I then manually transcribed them in Nvivo which allowed me to think more deeply about the participants’ conversations. I continually wrote in my reflexive journal to reflect on my thoughts.

Phase two: Coding: Braun and Clarke’s (2022a) RTA include the use of both surface feature or “semantic codes” and more interpretive or “latent” codes which were implicit or conceptually rooted. As I read through the transcripts for this initial phase of coding, I looked for aspects of the data that seemed meaningful to my research questions, and I designated code labels. As I coded data in each focus group, I expanded codes as I added units of data. At times, I changed code names. See Appendix E to view the coding process.

Phase three: Generating initial themes: Braun and Clarke (2022a) suggest reviewing codes that could collectively hold “core” ideas relate to the research questions. As I completed this phase, it was important to keep in mind that there should be a core idea or concept that binds a group of codes and is meaningful to the research questions. When these core ideas were not transparent, I removed and

reassigned codes to different themes or formulated new themes. See Appendix E for my how my phase two codes evolved to phase three initial themes. See my Phase Three Themes below.

Table 4
Phase Three Themes

Readers have strong print-based knowledge	Print skills lead to personal growth and joy	Print skills provide access to school and knowledge	Readers engage in literacy in multimodal ways	Multimodal engagement leads to joy and confidence
CR materials/literature must be authentic	adapting or creating materials	building relationships	Broader definition of reading	Multimodal access leads to knowledge and growth opportunities
incorporating interests and background	whole school practices marginalized students	sustaining heritage language requires skills	curriculum doesn't meet diverse needs	CR affirms identities
CR increases awareness of other cultures	CR increases student engagement	Kids disengage and lay low	Non-readers don't fit in	Concurring social emotional needs

Phase four: Developing and Reviewing Themes: At this phase, one checks back to be sure the codes support the theme and returns to the data set to “assess the viability of pose of your overall analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.35). Focusing on the “central organizing concept” of each theme prompts a critical eye on the viability of the themes. At this phase, one thinks about “the relationship between the themes, and existing knowledge, and/or practice in your research field, and the wider context of your research” (p. 35). This is where I tightened up my analysis, realizing that many initial themes shared core ideas. See Appendix E for my how my phase three themes evolved to phase four themes. Phase four themes are below. (Table 5)

Table 5
Phase Four Themes

Students recognize and react to non-reader status
Overcoming obstacles

CR practices engage and affirm
Multi-level obstacles persist.
Greater affordances of print-based reading.
Readers defined primarily by print-based knowledge.

Phase five: Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes: Referred to as the “fine-tuning” of themes, this phase involves being sure the themes have clear boundaries. Braun and Clarke (2022a) suggest answering the questions, “what story does the theme tell?” and “how does this theme fit into my overall story about the data?” Themes are eliminated if not robust at this point. At this phase, I finalized my findings with 4 final themes which I explicate in Chapter 5.

Phase six: Writing up: This began well before the final write-up. Notes written in the reflexive journal and other memos and annotations became part of the final write-up. This phase was where I began to have a clearer understanding of my analysis. It was only when I began writing that I started to see areas that lacked clarity or thoughts needing refinement.

3.8 Strategies for validating findings/trustworthiness/assessing quality.

Drawing from the work of Eisner and Peshkin (1990), Cho and Trent’s (2006) discussion of validity begins with its traditional definition as “determining the degree to which researchers’ claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants’ constructions of reality) being studied” (p. 320). They go on to describe a *transactional* approach to ensuring validity which involves interaction with the research participants. As I conducted focus groups, I often sought clarification to ensure I would accurately represent their perspectives and experiences. For example, when one participant stated, “I believe there are all kinds of texts.,” I asked her to elaborate on what those might be.

The practice of transactional validity allowed for a space where “misunderstandings can be adjusted and thus fixed” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322). One technique that allows for this transactional approach is member checking (Yin, 2016, Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314; as cited in Cho & Trent, 2006)

which involves looking to the participants to determine the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. This occurred in focus groups as I looked to the participants to assess the accuracy of the summaries, which I presented at the end of each focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

A second technique important in establishing trustworthiness is triangulation. First introduced in a systematic way regarding qualitative research by Norman Denzin in 1970, Flick (2017) provides a simple definition of triangulation as occurring when "an issue of research is considered - or in a constructivist formulation is constituted- from (at least) two points or perspectives" (p. 528). I acknowledge that relying only on focus groups was a limitation in achieving triangulation in its truest sense. However, I was sure that my final themes reflected content from all four focus groups. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) discusses the benefits of constant comparison in studies involving several focus groups since looking across groups to determine if themes prevail is a way of looking for data saturation. Newman et al. (2017) referred to this looking across focus groups as data source triangulation (p.90) and the thematic analysis as methodological triangulation. However, though I looked for themes, I was careful to consider comments and opinions which opposed the themes. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) described the importance of noting these "dissenters" (p. 5) as another way to support validity or trustworthiness.

Finally, using systematic analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2015) where the process of analysis was detailed was another way, I established trustworthiness of the results. The transparency of my coding process and the evolution of the themes in line with the rigorous phases of RTA are reflected in my tables detailing the coding process (Appendix E). This will provide transparency and an easily accessible digital audit trail "as a validation strategy for documenting thinking processes that clarify understandings over time" (Creswell & Poth, 2018. P. 188).

3.9 Ethical concerns

In addition to obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board at Indiana University

(Appendix B), I put several steps in place throughout the study to address ethical issues (see Table 4). I provided all participants with a study information sheet (Appendix C) as deemed necessary by the IRB. Additionally, I abided by the American Educational Research Association’s (AERA) code of ethics (2011) which sets forth standards and principles to guide educational research. Standard 7, nonexploitation, guides the researcher in relation to their work with participants over which they may have supervisory or evaluative authority. As I am both the researcher and a primary faculty member teaching in the graduate program in which the reading certificate program is situated, I only recruited program completers to avoid any conflict of interest.

As the program director and a faculty member, it is my desire that teacher educators will incorporate program content into their educational practices. I took care to have a clear definition of culturally responsive practices to be sure that the identified instances of such teachings were not subjective. Being conscious of any bias that may be present due to my positioning is in accordance with AERA’s code of ethics Standard 10, Conflicts of Interest. Finally, Standard 12, Confidentiality, guided the protection of the identity of both the educators and the students involved in this study. I was diligent in de-identifying all data as I logged and organize it within the data analysis software. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Guided by IRB protocol and AERA’s code of ethics, I outline the steps I took to ensure ethical practice throughout the study in Table 6.

Table 6 *Outline of study*

Timing During Research Process	Tasks
Prior to conducting the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain Institutional Review Board Approval
Beginning to conduct the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact potential participants via email informing them of the general purposes of the study and asking them to reply with interest until I’ve

	<p>secured a pool of at least 10 participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the voluntary nature of participation and identify any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences that I need to be aware of relative to the participants. • Obtain all consents necessary for the study
Collecting Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convey to participants the timeline for data collection. • Throughout collection, inform participants of purpose and use of data. • Clearly define instances of what I would call culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure identified instances are not subjective. • Ensure questions align with research questions and avoid leading questions particularly when attempting to identify instances of culturally relevant pedagogy. • Store data and artifacts in secure locations for 5 years (APA, 2010)
Analyzing Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon storage and organization of data, de identify data units. • Report all perspectives. • Engage in triangulation and member checking throughout collection and analysis (see Validity section of report) to ensure accurate representation of participants' reality.
Reporting Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest and comprehensive reporting of perspectives • Careful attention to avoid identifying information in any reporting. • Attention to APA (2010) guidelines for permissions to reprint or adapt the work of others.

(Adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 56, Table 3.2)

3.10 Structuring of the findings

I present findings with tables and figures with descriptions following each. Tables and figures offer transparency around the detail of the analyses within and across focus groups. The presentation for Themes One and Two slightly differs from those of Themes Three and Four. Themes One and Two were subthemes promoted to final themes (See Appendix E). For these, I provided a map showing the final theme in the center and the subthemes that led to that theme. I followed that with a table illustrating the subthemes, descriptions, and the number of focus groups represented along with the number of references. By providing the focus group information, I wanted to show that the representation of themes across groups. The number of references relating to the codes is not meant to provide

quantitative information about my data. Rather, I used them to show that some ideas were discussed more frequently than others. For example, this was useful in Theme one when reporting on the frequency of comments related to the printed word vs. multiliteracies. Furthermore, since the results are informing future iterations of my graduate level course, I wanted to be sure changes are based on data provided from all groups.

I interpreted Themes Three and Four from subthemes (Appendix E). In presenting findings on these, I began with a map of the final theme in the middle and the subthemes that led to it. The table contains the same information previously described. In the last two themes, I also provided an illustration of the initial themes that led to the theme. (Appendix E)

I addressed the range of audiences that may be drawn to this research (Creswell, 2018). For practitioners, I described instances of culturally responsive literacy instruction and obstacles in Chapter 4 Findings. As this is a dissertation and my committee is the primary audience, I wove the theoretical frameworks of my study into my reporting in Chapter 5 Discussion. In consideration of my committed and readers already familiar with the existing research in this area, I also reported how my findings align or diverge from other studies of this phenomenon (McIntyre and Hulan, 2013, Sleeter, 2012, Shealey, 2007) in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Findings

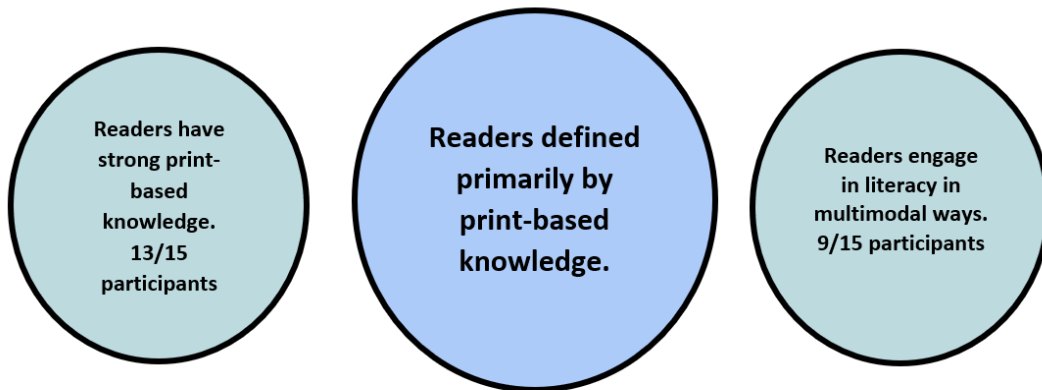
4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from this qualitative study of culturally responsive literacy instruction in the role of the reading specialist. I share the analysis of the transcripts from 4 focus groups comprised of 15 participants. Using a reflexive thematic analysis, I arrived at four major themes. The following three questions guided my analysis:

- How do reading specialists frame what it means to be a “reader”?
- Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?
- How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?

4.2 Theme 1: “Readers” are Defined Primarily by Print-based Knowledge.

Figure E
Theme 1 with subthemes



Strong print-based skills (i.e., reading printed text), primarily describes how most participants perceived the construct of a “reader” (Figure E and Table 7).

Table 7:
Characteristics of readers

Code	Description	# of Focus groups	References
Readers have strong print-based knowledge	The initial codes leading to this theme related to the skills needed to decode and comprehend the written word (i.e., decoding, reading fluency, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension skills).	4	36
Readers engage in literacy in multimodal ways.	The initial codes leading to this theme related to readers participating in literacy activities through alternative modalities such as audio, videos, visuals, movies, oral expression, mobile devices, etc.	4	14

Table 7 shows the descriptions of initial codes leading to this theme, the number of focus groups in which the references were made, and the number of references relating to each theme.

Overview

Eighty-seven percent of participants described readers as having print-based skills with 36 references to this characteristic (Figure E and Table 7). Sixty percent of participants discussed multimodal access to literacy with 14 references noted, less than half the references to print skills. Discussions around readers having solid print-based skills were more common than discussions about multimodal access, resulting in the Theme One, “Readers” are defined primarily by print-based knowledge.

Subtheme: “Readers” have strong print-based knowledge

Participants described many attributes of a reader, including solid comprehension of the printed word that is dependent on solid decoding skills. Several participants discussed decoding, being able to translate the printed word into speech, as a primary characteristic of a reader. Lara’s description of reading as “basically translating those abstract symbols on a page into speech” and Beth’s comment that “first and foremost [a reader] is somebody who can decode effectively” capture the importance of a reader independently unlocking the code to the printed word.

Others discussed the efficiency with which readers could do this, including the fluency or ease with which one can decode as Anna shared, “but I would add the word fluency.... they have to be a

fluent reader.....to be able to comprehend what they're reading”

Several others agreed with the notion that one needs to be able to read text fluently enough to grasp what they are reading, culminating in an ability to think about and ultimately comprehend the text. Amy described a reader as “somebody who can decode text effectively enough to comprehend what they're reading, to put it just in simple [terms].”

Still, others brought in other components of reading that are necessary to support comprehension, including language skills. Dana reported “there's many different facets to a reader...often people's perception is the decoder, but there's vocabulary, there's language there's decoding, there's synthesizing”.

Christa agreed that a reader needs to integrate the linguistic information when reading print, stating that “a reader is a thinker. You have to think when you read.” A close analysis of all data excerpts coded to “readers have strong print-based knowledge” revealed all data units referred to the central concept that a reader possesses a solid ability to read and comprehend the printed word.

Subtheme summary: Having strong print-based knowledge was the way 13/15 or eighty-seven percent of the participants described what it means to be a reader (Figure E). Table 7 indicates these participants were spread across focus groups. It also shows the number of references made suggesting print-based skills are essential to being a reader. Thirty-six references across participants were made regarding this reader characteristic.

Subtheme: “Readers” engage in literacy in multimodal ways.

While participants primarily described reading as print-based skills, they also shared that “readers” engaged in literacy activities in ways other than decoding the printed word (Figure E). Table 7 shows the code description, the number of focus groups, and data references.

While all groups began with discussions of print reading, several participants described an increasing appreciation of listening to audiobooks or listening to others read as being a ‘reader.’ An

acceptance of audiobooks was the most prevalent alternative to print reading cited. Christa recalled a recent shift toward this at her middle school level.

I'm hearing especially middle school literacy specialists using sort of a language around readers at the middle school who are having trouble decoding. So I'm hearing language like "you can read with your ears not just your eyes" which I think is an interesting you know so they are encouraging students to listen to books.

While Christa shared that reading specialists are encouraging students to use multimodal ways to access texts, this is only something she has only recently noticed. She added that it was "interesting" with a tone that indicated a hint of surprise that audio books were being suggested.

Michelle shared that her thoughts have shifted in this area as well stating, "my own definition of a reader has broadened as I've broadened my horizons. Like you're saying, just giving students opportunities to interact with the text, however it looks for them you know, and maybe through audiobooks". Michelle, like Christa, implied that this considering an alternative way of accessing text is a recent shift.

Nancy shared the importance of considering multimodal access beyond the confines of the school day.

At one point when Harry Potter hit another like resurgence of fame. I'm not really sure what to say but I had a handful of students who would listen to it on the audiobook because it wasn't a book that they could decode and then they were still able to be a part of those conversations at lunch at recess or you know whatever....and it wouldn't be a book that they could access if they were just handed the paper version so it's really really really nice to see when they feel so you know comfortable and confident with.... you know they feel like real.... they feel like a true reader and I just I do want to see that.

Nancy saw audiobooks as an important way for students to be included in the social interaction with peers that often takes place around popular literature. She explained her perception of the student being able to feel like a "true reader", and without audiobooks, they would not have been able to participate in some of the most social parts of the school day.

There was some disagreement about when audiobooks should be allowed, however. One

participant felt this should be held off as long as possible while the student was learning to read print. Others disagreed, feeling that access to audiobooks should be at every level so that students could access literature and information and “be invited to the party” as Christa said.

Still, others felt that students could engage in literature by listening to others read, sharing how this was a way for students to be “readers” in the classroom. Beth suggested that students “who can't decode text at all can certainly still be a reader by thinking about the text and analyzing it and really delving into it”, explaining how “[a] middle schooler who's reading at a first-grade level can still be a reader” when present in the classroom and listening to the text read or participating in text discussions.

Some participants moved beyond the idea of audiobooks and listening to texts to appreciate other forms of literacy. They discussed how students could access content and demonstrate knowledge in other multimodal ways. A discussion around digital books reminded Chris that we can “think about multiple literacies.... knowing how to access different forms of print”.

Grace agreed and recognized the novel ways that youth culture access and provide information, stating there are “multiple ways.... that people read” and added that she felt “the most important thing for them is their social media and WhatsApp being able to communicate and read through the printed words that come up on their phone from their employer”. She appreciated that her students used alternative access to text to do tasks that are most meaningful to teens, such as communicating with peers and maintaining employment. Grace conveyed the importance of recognizing texting and other mobile applications such as “talking points,” a mobile app or web-browser-based tool that can be used to send text messages that can be received in over 100 languages, as “reading”. Recognizing these tools was a way to ensure equal access to school information, she reported that “there's not an admin or a teacher who's not using talking points... you know, and that's the basic right ... they're (the students) becoming part of the community and communicating.” In addition to the social aspect of texting, adopting these other means of communication was a turning point in her school with the

monumental influence it had on building community.

In a poignant story of how Grace met a newcomer during the pandemic, she conveyed how students' skills are often underestimated when a narrow view of literacy is adopted.

I was told she wasn't a reader...not a reader like she didn't speak Spanish she didn't speak English she had never learned to read, and she had never gone to school, and so I got her at the start of the pandemic, and I thought OK this is gonna be challenging.... I realized she's much further ahead than everybody's saying, and so finally about two or three months in after I've been working with her....I realize she's texting her brother and I'm like well she speaks Mahm she's from the Highlands of Guatemala, and I was like Oh well I'm curious (curious about the WhatsApp mobile application and the Mahm language)... She's (the newcomer) like Oh no Miss like no like I use Spanish.... I'm like so you're texting your brother in Spanish so you're reading and writing in Spanish just like Oh yeah and I mean she just so it's just so interesting that like she's not a reader.

This student who was described as “not a reader” was engaging in literacy activities that were not being recognized until she met with Grace. Grace described how this student was positioned as a non-reader by the system and indicated her surprise to find the student communicating in a language other than her heritage language when she had been told the student was “not a reader”.

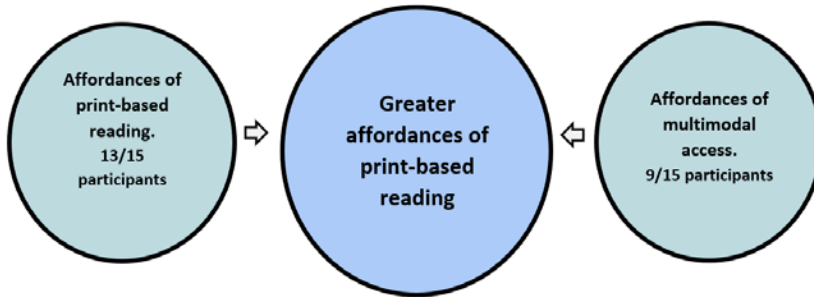
Elise expressed agreement regarding the multiliteracies used by students to communicate and access jobs but indicated that “outside of humanities teachers or special Ed teachers.... I think they're [the student] ... they're not getting the message that that is (that is) reading”. Thus, while the participants recognized multimodal literacy skills, Elise reminded us that not all educators appreciate this broader view of literacy.

Subtheme summary: Engaging in literacy activities in multimodal ways was how 9/15 or 60% of the participants recognized “reading”. (Figure E). Table 7 shows 14 references across groups suggested literacy included multimodal activities.

4. Theme 2: Greater Affordances of Print-based Reading

Figure F

Theme 2 with subthemes.



Greater affordances of print-based reading compared to multimodal access to literacy. (Figure F and Table 8).

Table 8

Affordances of print-based reading and multimodal access to literacy.

Name	Description	Focus groups	References
Affordances of print-based reading	Initial codes that referenced advantages associated with print reading (access to school or world knowledge, personal growth, joy)	4	46
Affordances of multimodal access	Initial codes that referenced advantages associated with multimodal access to literacies (access to school or world knowledge, personal growth, joy)	4	15

Table 8 shows the descriptions of initial codes leading to this theme, the number of focus groups in which the references were made, and the number of references relating to each theme.

Overview

Eighty-seven percent of participants described the affordances of print-based skills with 46 references to this characteristic (Figure F and Table 8). Sixty percent of participants discussed the affordances of multimodal access to literacy with 14 references noted. Discussions around the affordances of print-based skills were far more common than those of about multimodal access, resulting in Theme Two, Greater affordances of print-based reading.

Subtheme: Affordances of print-based reading

Participants discussed the many opportunities available to those who can read print. Many of these advantages related to access to knowledge, both in and out of the classroom. Participants shared that limited or non-print readers often lose out.

They described how students requiring reading support experienced restricted access to school, often beginning in the early years of schooling. Mia shared how school culture inherently requires print reading for a student to be successful. She shared that those who can't access printed text can't share in school success, saying, "unfortunately for you know a lot of the students that we work with in intervention.... they haven't you know been able to find success early on.... learning to read has been difficult". She went on to imply that there was no alternative for students who can't read print, stating, "because they can't do it yet or they can't do it well enough, yet you know.... reading is school and that's just how it is".

Dana explained how the struggle to participate in learning continues into middle school as she talked about a student "who can decode.... his rate's really slow and that affects his understanding and his ability to get assignments done."

Print reading was also associated with success with mandated high stakes testing by Elise, indicating that a reader is someone with "well-rounded kind of set of skills around being able to decipher arguments to summarize in a way that you know.... a reader is going to be successful on the MCAS."

Participants described how access to school became easier for their students as they learned to decode print in instructional reading support. Michael highlighted his students' success when they "transfer [learned] skills into their classes," referring to how students learn decoding skills and transfer them to other settings, enabling them to participate in the general education setting.

Chris shared that by providing instructional support in reading, students are "finally able to

access print and decode and read and understand what they're reading." She described her perception of a student who can "blossom....in self-confidence which is absolutely amazing and so humbling each time.... when they're finally able to create something for the first time independently". These participants recognized that the work they do with their students in reading support affords them access to school that they did not have before.

Others suggested the transformations that occur as student become skilled readers. Elise described that a reader grows into a learner, "being able to make arguments.... being able to know about the world and come into a conversation and have a strong argument with somebody and to be able to be powerful... set you up for your career".

Chris also referenced a new ability to participate in learning, sharing that "becoming a reader is almost becoming a new person.....has more of a voice in the classroom....and elsewhere too." These examples suggest a major transformation in life when one gains the ability to read print. The idea of being a "new person" with "more of a voice" effected change in a student's life in and out of the classroom.

Print also afforded access to knowledge that is important to one's well-being. Karen suggested that "maybe more important than anything else...they need to be literate for their health. They need to be literate to get a job.... just all of these reasons that are not just...oh they need to read to pass a test."

Lara also shared the importance of reading print in our world. She commented that "text is all around us and the point of learning how to read is so that you can take those texts and you can understand them and make them meaningful and use it." This suggests that reading is a necessary daily life skill.

Chris recalled a quote "by Paulo Freire about reading the word.... means reading the world and just so...how powerful that is.... being a reader is being empowered and having access to this knowledge which also means accessing opportunities".

Moving away from gaining knowledge and accessing opportunities, a few participants equated print reading with joy and introspection. Mia spoke of the joy she experienced when being part of that transition for a student. She described teaching a student to read as “a gift” because “to be a reader is to gain joy and information from the text.”

Amy referred to “a human connection” when you “have the book and the person interacting come together to really make something happen.... it's through that analysis of self while you're reading that you truly develop from the reading.” She continued to explain how reading can “broaden you and teach you about life as an individual and help you evolve as an individual and hopefully in turn like learn from past mistakes.”

Subtheme summary: The affordances of print-based reading were noted by 13/15 or eighty-seven percent of the participants. (Figure F). Table 8 shows these participants were spread across focus groups with 46 total references made suggesting the affordances of print-based skills.

Subtheme: Affordances of multimodal access.

Participants shared that multimodal access to literacy afforded similar advantages and opportunities. Nancy shared how multimodal access, in the form of videos, allowed all students to access information during the instructional unit on dance. While the three-week unit included print texts, it also included other ways for students to learn the information. Nancy shared that the unit entailed “research[ing] all of the types of dances.... they had to read text... they had to watch videos... they zoomed with people from the country.” The opportunity to glean information about varied forms of dance was provided through many access points, including texts, videos, and zoom meetings with folks in other countries.

Anna recalled an activity from the graduate course under study, and she expressed gratitude for a course assignment creating text sets which required multiple modalities to allow accessibility to students with varied interests and skills.

Now the media that you can use to help kids engage and learn and... and I love that. By the way XXX, it was hard when I was doing it. I don't know if I loved it, but I loved having.....I loved it but anyway it's so nice here to hear you, XXX, say how much the kids... that having all that different those different forms to interact with.

Anna acknowledged that creating such units of study can be challenging but rewarding when all students have access. Gaining access to knowledge was also possible via mobile devices.

Using mobile applications offered a way for students and families to access information about the school community. Grace shared that *Talking points* was a way that all students and families could access information about school events, regardless of their heritage language. The application eliminated language barriers, allowing them to seek and clarify information in their language of choice. Messages were translated into English or the language of choice for the school members receiving the message. Grace discussed how students accessed information for out-of-school essential activities that required literacy as she shared how her students used their mobile devices to “communicate and read through the printed words that come up on their phone from their employer.”

Grace’s story about the newcomer in the previous section showed how students could use mobile technologies for other literacy activities such as communicating via texting. She shared how the student was texting with her brother in a language different from their heritage language. When Grace questioned if the student’s language, Mahm, was available in the application, her student surprised her with the response, “Oh no Miss... like no.... like I use Spanish.” She had been communicating on her phone using another language, Spanish, to communicate with her brother when she had been designated as a “non-reader” by the school. Multiliteracies enabled this student to participate in literacy activities despite her school-assigned reading status.

Elise furthered the discussion around mobile applications when she suggested that such mobile technologies could help “bridge that gap.... especially during the pandemic” explaining how students collaborated on a project using “social media posts in response to something.... letting students know....

that is indicative of like you're reading abilities...so I think.... that's like a bit of a shift that's occurring.”

Grace further highlighted the accessibility provided by mobile devices as she discussed a student using voice messaging to access information in and out of school, sharing that:

We've all figured out.... how to use WhatsApp and voice messaging with her. So she can voice message and you know she's starting to make a little progress very small but a little.... that's important. That's how they communicate with their employer that is so important for them.

Elise concurred with Grace regarding the importance of using mobile applications to access literacy tasks in daily life. She shared out mobile devices was just another way that her students were “reading”:

All the ways that my students are readers...they're able to text their friends.... they're able to apply for a job or have like the conversation to try and figure out like what those hours are like you know to try and just get an application.

Several participants also discussed how students unable decode grade-level content could still access the curriculum and participate in classroom literacy activities. Beth suggested that a student reading below grade level or even a student “who can't decode text at all can certainly still be a reader by thinking about the text and analyzing it and really delving into it”. Students who were able to access the content by listening to others read or listening to the audiobook meaningful participated in literacy activities with peers. Students who were challenged by reading print also participated in literacy activities via storytelling. Beth shared that readers include “somebody who understands the story and can convey it.” She shared that for some students “we focus on like expression and how they're telling the story so even if they're struggling maybe with decoding it but they're really able to kind of tell the story through other kinds of forms... so still reading.... but expressive.”

Christa recognized the equitable access offered to all students when students have access to a “literacy-rich environment” sharing,

We want to invite people (into the) into the community right...There will be students who feel like ‘because I can't decode I'm not a reader’, and I think particularly as

students get older we need to accept them and take them for where they are...not that I would not encourage and continue with the decoding lessons but we need to give them access to a literacy-rich environment because often (there are) their language ability is high and we want them to be invited to the party.

Chris shared the most comprehensive example of embracing multiliteracies to provide equitable access to school content. She shared how access to multimedia was standard in a classroom employing a Universal Design for Learning,

We use UDL a lot and so we had multiple means of presenting the information making sure that you know there was video, audio.... auditory meaning in addition to print which was the most challenging. And then similarly we made sure that the students had multiple means of expressing what they learned. And, so again, you know print was just... writing was one option but not the only one.... the students could also do role plays or you know to create and maybe PowerPoint or like a visual....so you know tapping into all the different abilities that students had.... just making sure that we were allowing students to have just so many opportunities to access the content and then to express what they understood.

Multiliteracies also afforded opportunities related to personal satisfaction and confidence for students challenged by printed text. Dana discussed the importance of providing choices to students to allow them to “choose [their] his strength.” She shared how her student was given several literacy activities, and he “gravitate[d] towards you know making a game or making a cartoon.... and that allow[ed] him to [choose].”

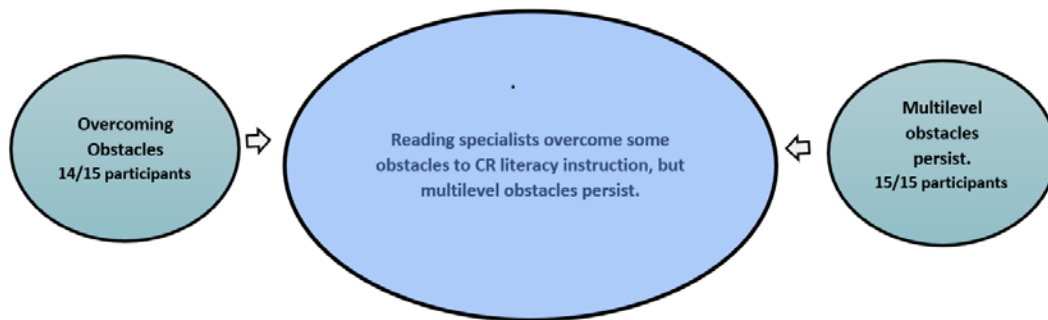
While the use of audiobooks was referenced as a means of accessing school content in previous examples, audiobooks were cited as a means for students to participate in pop culture. Nancy talked about a time when Harry Potter books were highly popular, and she described her perception of how audiobooks enabled her students “be a part of those conversations at lunch at recess”. She discussed how they, otherwise, would not have been able to participate, and she shared her thoughts on seeing her students become involved with peers, stating, it was “really, really, really nice to see.... when they feel so you know comfortable and confident.... you know they feel like real...they feel like a true reader and I just I do want to see that”.

Michelle talked about the potential pleasure that could be experienced when students have “opportunities to interact with the text, however it looks for them you know....it may be through audiobooks.... it may be through scaffolding.... just allowing them to make their own meaning and just exposure....to that joy of reading.”

Subtheme summary: The affordances of multimodal access to literacy were noted by 9/15 or 60% of the participants. (Figure F). Table 8 shows these participants were spread across focus groups with 15 total references made suggesting the affordances of multimodal access to literacy.

4.4 Theme 3 Reading Specialists Overcome some Obstacles to CR Literacy Instruction, but Multi-level Obstacles Persist.

Figure G
Theme 3 with subthemes



Theme three was interpreted through two subthemes, Overcoming Obstacles and Multi-level Obstacles Persist

Table 9

Overcoming Obstacles and Multi-level Obstacles Persist

Subtheme	Initial themes leading to subtheme	Focus Groups	References
Overcoming Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adapting or creating CR materials at reading level ● Broadening the definition of reading ● Sustaining language requires specialized skills. ● Building relationships ● Literature authentically reflecting students' identities 	4	91

Multilevel Obstacles persist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Curriculum doesn't meet diverse needs. ● Whole-school practices marginalize diverse populations. ● Sustaining language requires specialized skills. 	4	83
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Reading specialists described numerous ways that they modified their reading instruction to be culturally responsive despite barriers. Table 9 shows the subtheme label, initial themes informing the subtheme, focus group representation, and the number of references made to each subtheme.

Overview: Numerous examples of how reading specialists provided culturally responsive literacy instruction were given across groups. However, there were nearly as many obstacles described across groups as well, leading to Theme 3 Reading specialists overcome some obstacles to CR literacy instruction, but multi-level obstacles persist.

Subtheme 1: Overcoming Obstacles.

Figure H
Theme 3 Subtheme 1 map

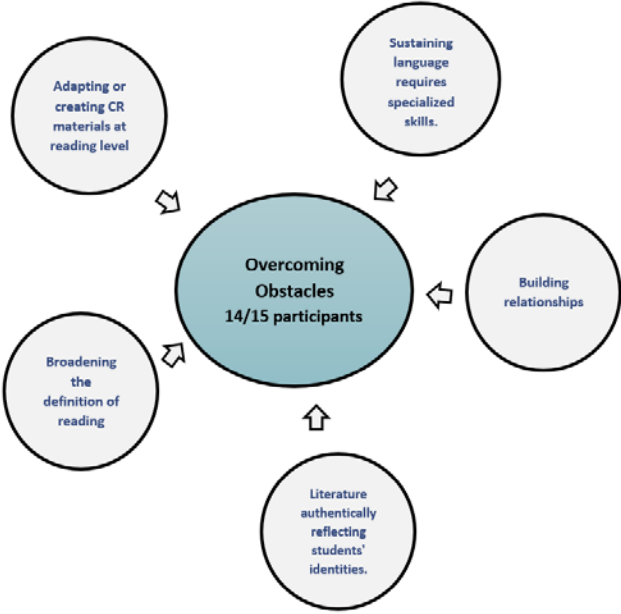


Figure H shows five initial themes that informed the subtheme Overcoming Obstacles.

Participants discussed the many ways they overcome the obstacles to provide culturally

responsive literacy instruction. Participants prioritized literature that was meaningful to their students. When meaningful materials weren't available to meet their students' current reading levels, participants modified existing materials or created new ones that better reflected the culture and language of their students. In addition to meaningful texts, broadening their definition of what counts as reading supported their efforts to be culturally responsive. Home-school connections resulted in relationships with families and an understanding of their students that informed the content of their reading instruction. Finally, instruction was informed by and, when possible, worked to sustain the students' heritage language to the extent possible.

Choosing literature

A common way participants described making reading instruction culturally and linguistically responsive was by thoughtful consideration of the materials and resources and choosing meaningful literature for their students. Many participants referred to what Amy referred to as establishing a "human connection to the text" where "we see ourselves in the literature in order for it to have meaning." To do that, the content of the text must reflect the lived experiences of the reader.

Anna elaborated on what the nature of this connection meant, stating that it is more than students seeing themselves "just physically," and texts need to provide ways for readers to "relate to the character." Mia reiterated this when discussing how some texts appear diverse, but only on a superficial level. Like Anna, she noted that texts might have diverse characters but not diverse content. Karen added that students of color need to see themselves in everyday experiences and not in characters who are only struggling. Students needed to see themselves in celebratory ways. The texts available in structured literacy intervention notably lacked such diversity, and participants had to find other ways to bring diverse texts to their readers.

With materials not available in her school, Elise shared how she found digital books online through archive.org where a free account provides access to "libraries across the world." She was able

to find texts that her student from Ethiopia could relate to. She captured the necessity of these texts being authentic as she talked about finding books that show what daily events might look like in her students' cultures, such as "having breakfast with my family" or "what it's like for me (the student) when I go to the market."

Grace shared the importance of finding authentic texts written by people who've lived the experiences portrayed in the text.

One that I so loved during the pandemic on epic books... it was great 'cause I had it in Spanish, and they had it in English and if they could just publish Portuguese [I'd be] really happy...but it's by Eugene Morales is called Dreamers, and I just loved it. It was about a woman...to me it was just such a great way to start off and welcome them into the world of literature. She's crossing the border...and she had a young baby and you know and she was their age [talking about the newcomers in her own classroom] ...with the kinds of responsibilities that that they have when they all make that same journey. Many...many of our students are crossing [the] border.

Participants brought a wide appreciation for diversity beyond ethnicity and language in choosing literature. Amy reflected on the need to bring gender awareness to the curriculum:

They [students] don't really know how to put words around that...they don't see it anywhere. There are some good books... Julian wants to be a mermaid is a great example... a little boy and his grandmother...sees the child developing and...kind of questioning his sexuality and he wants to dress up like a mermaid. So they go for it and it's fabulous. It's just again like allowing each child whoever they are whatever they're experiencing to identify themselves in some kind of literature.

Amy explained that reading these books can affirm identity and give students the language they need to discuss their diverse identities. Others included diverse economic levels and diverse abilities in their literature choices. Mia shared a recent find about "the oldest person (who) ever learned to read ... she was like 114", and its applicability to her "students...struggling to learn to read". She elaborated that choosing meaningful read-alouds could help all students connect ...with different people with different experience".

Adapting or creating materials

Participants frequently saw the need to adapt or create materials to support culturally

responsive literacy instruction. Michael explained that reading intervention resources at the sentence and paragraph level often use “names of people and place names that maybe are like whiter or like more suburban... maybe a name that you know is not very common in urban [areas]”. He suggested modifying these decodable materials by changing the names to reflect the culture and community. Michael recalled how a “student made a comment, ‘cops?’” when he was using the strategy acronyms COPS (capitalize, overall, punctuation, and spelling) included a poster illustration of police officers to display in the room to support writing. He suggested changing this since it seemed triggering for students based on their lived experiences, stating, “no one should be traumatized when they are working on a thing that is already a challenge for them”.

Non-fiction was also frequently used to make reading instruction culturally responsive. This was important to Lara as she created reading lessons that motivated her middle school learners around issues of “rights and their identity and how life is in the world”. She shared her perception of how her students “get really interested in current events”. She takes time to preview materials highlight words that reflect the literacy concepts they are learning.

Maria also modified content to support reading level when she created a lesson on “transgender international transgender awareness day”, and similar to Lara talked about the importance of making accessible “what's in the news.... what is current in the world”. She shared how she prepares lessons by “pull[ing] out words that we’ll segment before..... then I’ll like give them sections to read that are orthographically controlled because I do the pre work...making sure that they know.... learn[ed] syllable types.”

Similarly, Beth has employed non-fiction for her “kids from Guatemala reading about the Maya. They are super-duper psyched 'cause they're like, ‘those are my people’”. She also chose non-fiction to meet the needs and interests of “one group of students who's very interested in the LGBTQ issues”.

In the absence of finding materials to modify, Chris shared that educators often needed to

create materials. Dana discussed how she incorporated reading instruction into project-based learning. She described one unit on planting in a greenhouse and how it connected with lived experiences a student had with their grandparents. She noted that her next plan was to incorporate vocabulary from her student's trip home to India into her structured literacy lesson. by "share[ing] some of his experiences from the trip.... sort of making them but a bigger part of the lesson....that might be new words to me or new words to other people... concepts that we're all learning together " In the absence of related materials, Dana created her own passages that were accessible to her students and related to the content. She also modified stories or articles to make them decodable.

Grace detailed her experience with creating texts through "language experience" where "we tell stories, we write stories and then we read the stories that we have written together so that we're...they're reading each other stories and they're learning each other's perspective and making those connections". This practice supported future students and other educators as well adding to "more resources.... really great first-person narratives from multiple immigrant and young adult groups". Elaborating on the authenticity of this practice, Grace states "that's why we start with the narrative...it's really grounds us and sort of who we are why we're here".

In the absence of decodable texts in literacy instruction, participants found other places to incorporate relevant texts. Mia planned to incorporate culturally relevant materials into school-wide activities. She discussed the incorporating culturally diverse books into whole school events such as on Fridays where "oftentimes we'll play like literacy-based games" She plans on "incorporating more read alouds you know which I can obviously make culturally diverse...some really good books I've found recently".

Dana offered students "a menu of different literacy activities after his OG lesson...having that choice which he gravitates towards certain activities because they show his strength, so he wants to show his learning in a certain way". At the end of the structured lesson, her student would "gravitate

towards you know making a game or making a cartoon or showing it in a certain way and that allows him to choose his strength so we're not saying oh you have a strength in this... he's choosing". Dana's example introduces the concept of broadening one's definition of reading which was another way participants found to be culturally responsive.

Broadening Definition of Literacy

Culturally responsive practice was also seen in the way participants embraced a broader view of "readers" and "texts". Although Theme 1 showed that reading specialists were more apt to describe readers as having strong print-based skills, there were many instances where participants expanded options for students to engage in literacy experiences. Like Dana's practice of offering her student varied literacy activities at the end of a structured literacy session (e.g., cartoons, games), Lara explained that anything that could provide students with information should be counted as "text", including "text", books, articles, movies, arts, visuals and "all that good stuff".

As stated in the section *Readers engage in multimodal literacy activities*, reading specialists broadened the definition of reading by allowing access to texts via audiobooks or another reader. While continuing to provide decoding instruction, Christa's practice of "give[ing]them [students] access to a literacy rich environment" was critical if all students are going to access the curriculum.

Others shared a broader definition of 'reading' with students to support their confidence in the beginning stages of reading. Anna assures students they are 'reading' when they engage in "rhyming patterns" or listen to "mom and dad read you a story with really big words that nobody taught you how to read yet... but you know.... you're following along with the story with the reader". She emphasized the importance of this in maintaining a student's sense of self as a "reader" and related how excited her young reader appeared when he was told this.

Amy supported engagement in oral language activities as well and talked about her young students orally creating stories, "they are taking their language and creating it into a story to be shared".

Beth similarly noted that students who could not yet decode could participate in literacy activities by orally sharing stories.

Beth described how oral participation should be encouraged at the middle school level as well as in elementary school, agreeing with Michael that middle schoolers can be readers in the classroom by “thinking about the text and analyzing it, and really delving into it”. These broader interpretations of “reading” were ways that participants kept students engaged in literacy while they were working on the skills needed to independently read grade-level materials.

A broadened definition of reading was seen in a wide appreciation of mobile devices to allow access for older students. Previously described uses of apps (e.g., WhatsApp and Talking Points) by Grace’s students made text accessible to all students so that they could communicate for social as well as economic reasons. Elise added that the pandemic also increased the use of social media as a means for students to participate in literacy activities, also broadening the definition of literacy.

Media literacies, such as in Nancy’s dance unit and in Anna’s discussion of the text set assignment, broadened the idea of literacy. By adding multimedia options to sets of texts designed for learning units, the content was made accessible to all students regardless of reading level. Chris supported other forms of “text” to increase students’ access to content, adding that “digital books...also made me think about multiple literacies right and so knowing how to access different forms of prints”. Chris’s discussion of how at her school practiced UDL also broadened the definition of literacy.

Building relationships

When discussing culturally responsive reading instruction, participants described the essential practices of understanding students and their lived experiences, followed by building and maintaining relationships. These relationships included both teacher-student relationships as well as student-student relationships.

Amy talked about getting “good flavor for a child by just conversing with them and seeing how

good their language skills are.” For younger students, this often involved connecting with parents and guardians as Amy discussed the importance of learning about home practices,

...talking with the parents about what their habits are at home as far as reading goes
...coupled with the culture you know it could be anything...know what their culture is.....we've had some nice experiences with some kids from new to the country from different countries and having the parents come in to share about their cultures.

Amy sought information from parents and guardians to get to know her students better and incorporate that knowledge into her teaching. Anna discussed a similar strategy of having “lots of conversations... listening to conversations between kids and reaching out to families.” By inviting parents into the classroom to discuss cultural practices, participants created a setting where a child's cultural assets could be understood and appreciated by educators and classmates. With an understanding and appreciation of lived experiences, trusting relationships could be built.

Amy discussed how these trusting relationships were especially important in their work because “we are asking them (the students) to focus on and work on the thing that's the hardest for them”. She added that “a lot of communication.... just communicating and having general conversations.... can really kind of help take that pressure off.”

Nancy also talked about the vulnerability of students who have experienced challenges for so long saying that “to me.... [that]has always been the biggest thing like the relationship building.... I'd worked with middle school. There's a little more reluctance to come and whatever do what they gotta do. So, I am very honest with them”. She went on to explain the importance of being honest with students about their reading challenges and the way they're going to address them. Amy agreed with Nancy about being honest with students and discussed how she shared student progress with them to build trust.

Michael and Anna also discussed a safe learning space. Michael achieved a safe space when considering a child's lived experiences and not using a police officer's image to warn them to write

properly (i.e., COPS strategy). He felt this was an important way to not trigger memories of traumatizing experiences seen in their communities. Michael explained “there's...a lot of steps I feel like I need to take to establish like the trust and the privacy to respect like the dignity of the student because of how they are seeing themselves as not a reader.”

Anna concurred stating, “[an] environment where kids feel comfortable... that's the only place that they're ever going to be able to take a risk and show and demonstrate that they can't read... building a relationship.... creating a safe environment where kids actually want to come.” Anna and Michael suggest the particular significance of relationship building in students receiving reading support.

Michael and Grace carried the idea of trusting relationships to include peer relationships. Michael explained how he matched students with similar heritage languages and “made the reading classroom a little bit into like a little shared experience.” Grace described that her practice of having students create the classroom content by writing and sharing their stories was important for students to learn about their peer’s perspectives and make connections.

The importance of how one communicates about a child’s heritage language was critical for Michael in building trust. He described being careful to include aspects of a child’s language, saying “I think is really important because if I were to respond in a different way and like frame like no, no, no, no, no... English only...Spanish is wrong... that would really alter the character of my relationship with these students”. This brings me to the last culturally responsive practice of sustaining language. Sustaining heritage language requires specialized skills.

This last example of ways that reading specialists can be culturally responsive was only referenced by four participants, but the discussion revealed critical information. Michael suggested not conveying a preference for English over a student’s heritage language but rather supporting English along with a student’s heritage language. Anna agreed, stating that “you need to read and write and communicate with others in this (English) language...this mainstream English” but acknowledged that

“you have to be able to do both.” There was a brief discussion as to how and when to require the use of mainstream English over a dialect, however, as the sound structures of languages are often different and can lead to varied spellings of target words.

Michael shared how it was important to require correction of an accent that eliminates the /r/ sound to support spelling but reports that dialect would not be corrected in oral reading or “if we were working on skills like fluency or reading or the passage or book or something.” Anna discussed the importance of talking with these students about code-switching and how changes suggested would be in the service of teaching “mainstream English.” Educators disagreed on how to implement culturally responsive reading and writing instruction when a child speaks a dialect of mainstream English.

Grace’s example of inviting students to write their stories in their heritage language shows how she strives to sustain a student’s heritage language, but the practice is not typical. Furthermore, Grace sustains language by teaching reading in a student’s heritage language:

I have tried to teach. I'm teaching a young woman to read in Spanish using a primer from Colombia but that's that can only go so far. My Spanish is decent but like that's not ...I should not be teaching her. It's got to be a native speaker and somebody who's really qualified. So I just don't know how we're going to move that mountain.

Grace described that sustaining language can be challenging even for someone who has some command of a student’s heritage language. For this reason, along with the disagreement over when to allow a dialect in the classroom, this code is also one that informed the interpretation that *reading specialists encounter challenges*. The discussion will continue there to avoid redundancy.

Summary of Theme 3: Practices in culturally responsive reading instruction were described by 14/15 or 93% the total participants (Figure G). A total of 91 references across participants referenced modifications of reading practice (Table 9). All four focus groups contributed to codes except for sustaining heritage language which was only referenced in three focus groups. Only 4 participants referenced sustaining language.

Subtheme 2: Multi-level obstacles persist.

Figure I Theme 3 Subtheme 2 map

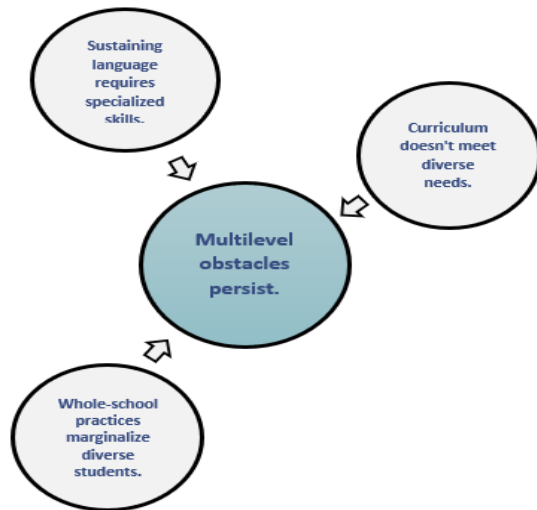


Figure I shows three initial themes that informed the subtheme multi-level obstacles persist.

As participants described their culturally responsive literacy practices, it was apparent that several factors hindered their efforts to integrate culturally responsive practice. I noted obstacles at the level of the educator providing the instruction, in practices outside of the instructional setting, and in school-wide systems that marginalized students.

Sustaining language requires specialized skills.

Educator preparedness came up as a challenge to sustaining heritage language in the expanding demographics in today's schools. In the previous section, Grace described how she skillfully provided instruction to a Spanish-speaking student, but she spoke of the challenge. Grace explained that language learners required and deserved instruction in both their heritage and the dominant languages. While she worked diligently to do this, she noted its challenges. This Spanish-speaking educator shared that she is not able to give her Spanish-speaking students the quality literacy instruction that they deserve. Grace, a highly skilled educator with experience in multilingual classrooms, further noted that she did not have the language skills to support students in other languages.

Michael and Anna both discussed the challenges presented in reading and spelling instruction when differences exist between a child's English dialect and mainstream English. Decisions on when and if to require students to use the dominant English dialect were fraught with conflict between supporting a student's literacy in mainstream English and validating a student's heritage language or dialect.

Michael added that educators are not always prepared to teach CLD students with reading challenges. He stated, "Culturally responsive teaching also has to do with staffing and resources... I think there's a lot of people in my district who probably don't have that knowledge about dyslexia." He acknowledged staffing shortages requiring educators to serve several roles, saying, "a lot who just can't do much about it because they're the only teacher in the classroom and they are they have three teaching licenses, and they have to be everything to everyone."

Curriculum doesn't meet diverse needs.

Additionally, there is a lack of culturally responsive and appropriate materials for culturally and linguistically diverse students. This ranged from the standard curriculum to materials required for specialized reading instruction. Mia noted that "kids really need to see themselves in literature and in some of the typical literature they don't now. It's not the way society is today," indicating that overall, the available literature was not diverse enough to allow all students to see themselves and make connections to what they are reading.

Michelle recalled a past time when *Sarah Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) was in the curriculum for her class that "was entirely African American students. It was 4th grade, and it was required reading for 4th grade" and "it was just....100% like nothing that they had been exposed to".

Elise acknowledged her school library had impressive offerings for CLD students, but access to meaningful literature was lacking for students not reading at grade level. She shared that her school library's cultural and linguistic diverse offerings were "great for our average student reader...but I think for a lower level of readers it's just a ton harder." Elise had to find appropriate materials outside of the

school's resources.

In unpacking the previous subtheme, *Overcoming Obstacles*, we saw that educators were able to provide culturally responsive literacy instruction, but also realized the inherent barriers in the curriculum. Several participants questioned the authenticity of “diverse” texts where characters “looked” diverse, but the text lacked authentic content. Michelle shared that this was true of existing evidence-based reading materials. She felt that the “decodable text” available was “not great literature.... some characters that look different... and you know they'll have the little pictures.” The books that her students could decode did not provide them with meaningful literacy experiences.

The scripted curriculum for students not meeting literacy benchmarks did not meet Grace's needs either, and we learned from her that “[the material was] just not accessible. There's just no way, absolutely no way, to do a straight up [structured literacy] approach with the multilingual students I'm working with.” Though she acknowledged newer texts were available by the publisher of the scripted curriculum, they were not available to her because “they were so expensive”. Grace relied on a curriculum from 20 years ago developed for English Language Learners saying, “it's the best thing I've found”. In response to sparse resources, she shared that she and her colleagues “for the past eight years since I've been here...teachers have been developing our curriculum... we really haven't had a lot of resources”.

Elise agreed with the limitations of scripted reading programs stating, “[they're] just not resonating with my students' experiences”. When trying to create alternative materials for her readers, she faced further challenges in finding meaningful images that reflected her students' identities.

Christa “struggle(ed) to find decodables” saying she “100% agreed with the decodable issue”. Dana elaborated how decodable texts presented comprehension obstacles as well because CLD students didn't have the necessary vocabulary and lived experiences to comprehend the story even though they could decode the words.

When responding to a question about the practice she would leave behind if she could, Elise shared that it would be these “very bland, white privilege... based decodable texts that are in phonics programs”. Michael also expressed concern that the white, Eurocentric names of the characters in decodable texts and materials do not reflect culturally and linguistically diverse students. Chris shared how authenticity can be especially difficult when looking for texts for high-school English Language Learners because there was the added challenge of finding texts were accessible and age-appropriate. Whole school practices marginalize students.

Lastly, obstacles were present at a more systemic level. Nancy recalled providing encouragement for her student and family when they did not want to acknowledge their heritage language:

.... [a student] whose native language was Haitian Creole and she spoke Haitian Creole at home.... Mom was reluctant to admit that because she was in nervous that there would be judgment from us her teachers you know.... if she couldn't say a sound correctly it was because she spoke Haitian Creole at home.

Their perception that the school would not accept their heritage was apparent. Nancy recognized that and attempted to welcome and appreciate the student’s language skills in her own classroom. Michael shared experiences where he felt his colleagues held a deficit mindset:

I definitely have encountered situations where you know maybe because of the weakness in reading there's maybe behaviors that like surface because of that or avoidance that happens in other classes... running into.....adults are building a negative image of that child.... I've definitely seen that before and had moments where I was trying to get data about a child from a setting where I wasn't present... I was running into kind of like either just a wholly negative stereotype of this child of what they could do or like almost like the soft bigotry.... I know it's really hard for him so like they said three things out loud but had an entire blank essay so like ‘good for them’.

In this story, Michael shared that he felt teachers did not appreciate the social emotional challenges of students not meeting academic expectations. He continued that “part of it is also.... adults needing to reframe how we look at our students specifically through the lens of race because a lot of children are pathologized pretty quickly especially when they stop being like little and cute”. In his story,

we see that a student's negative behaviors were potentially misinterpreted, and the expectations of students were lowered.

Anna agreed with Michael that "different teachers and the different teaching styles and different perceptions" sometimes brought "negative information" about a child. While she used her strong relationship with her student to support them, it didn't negate the fact that the child was deemed a behavior problem. Anna shared her feeling that "the teachers with the negative perception are always going to have a negative perception whether it's your student or somebody else's".

Elise had similar experiences where she felt that teachers lowered expectations of her students who struggled with reading, saying it seemed that they viewed the challenge as "just a problem rather than something to develop and support". She shared how one of her students who couldn't read word problems in math was expected to "focus on the kind of rote work" or sent to a "special ed teacher or myself". She suggested that some classroom teachers are not "believing in and kind of taking on what their role is to develop classroom readers and feel.... that responsibility... that gets relegated to those humanities teachers."

Participants shared numerous experiences of teachers potentially impacting student progress and self-esteem. Maria shared that she's heard "a lot of teachers at my school describe some of the students in my classes as non-readers". Beth's student who considered herself a reader was told by teachers that listening to books was not reading.

Other whole school practices such as school-wide assessments that determined a child's learning setting were also not equitable. Countless descriptions of whole-school testing indicated that the same measure was used to evaluate all students. Dana spoke of the need to supplement testing with "multiple interactions" saying that "you can do those.... literacy screening or literacy battery but you really need the informal interactions to be part of the puzzle." Without this awareness to include other measures to identify CLD student strengths, there is a risk of students' learning profiles being sorely

misinterpreted.

Michael identified the challenge of whole school testing in finding student strengths:

One challenge I've encountered is that the universal screeners or like the interims for the curriculum that the teachers are required to use at the secondary level in my district. (They) don't tease out... there aren't opportunities for a student maybe with gaps or unfinished instruction into coding to show strength.

Others agreed with Michael's description of how whole school testing and progress monitoring do not show the growth made by all students. Chris commented that universal assessments can be problematic because they need to be culturally responsive "and a lot of times they're not" She recalled working in another state that "didn't like to rely on standardized testing because.... the assessments that are used...often do not contain passages that were culturally appropriate.... so, it was just very difficult for the students to access the passage".

Amy and Mia described a school culture where those who are unable to unlock the reading code may feel excluded from the school setting at an early age. Amy perceived that "even as young as first and 2nd grade, they already feel somewhat defeated".

Mia shared that sentiment when she described students as "knowing that they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing", and added, "reading is school and that's just how it is". This suggests an educational setting where fitting in depends on one achievement, reading print. Elise also related to how her students have limited spaces in the school environment where they can see themselves as readers:

But I think we have our.... academic rigors set [at]...such a high level that for I mean you know I'm predominantly working with students on IEPs ...there's....just a number of students who fit into that bucket of either having poorly developed reading skills or you know not quite being at grade level.... you know [they] really don't have many opportunities to see themselves as readers.

Grace shared similar thoughts on how culturally and linguistically diverse students face exclusionary experiences early on when their heritage language is not appreciated. Schools need to

change so that when “learners come in, they are able to continue in their language...to see themselves as academics and writers because we lose so many”. She further shared her experiences of the perils of a system that doesn’t support sustaining heritage languages:

We have a huge group of rising long-term ELLs who are coming up and they've been in our district forever and they are flatlining in.... their academics a group where I'm going to predict that we have some.... students who've been here from kindergarten we tried to rise raise bilingual kids and we failed ...there's just big gaps in their ability to read and write.

Grace’s description of her student communicating in two languages via texting also showed how an educational system further marginalized a student by designating a student a “non-reader”, when, in fact, the student was communicating in two languages.

Beth also described the exclusionary aspects inherent in the system that she expects will affect her student:

She’s a second language speaker and her friends her Brazilian friends are starting to get her into different books so she's coming in every day super excited about books. However, I don't think she'll ever consider herself a reader because of the access testing that takes place. She's been in EL for seven years dyslexic. She's passed.... the speaking the listening and the writing but she can't pass the reading 'cause there's no accommodation on it. So, in that vein, she's like 'I'll never be a reader' like I'll never be considered an English language reader because I won't pass that.

This devastating example shared the perceived hopelessness this young student felt by being unable to pass whole-school assessments. Amy also shared how some traditional school-wide practices excluded students and families with gender diversity. Describing a lack of cultural responsiveness in her system, she related that curriculum and practice do not tend to serve those families and students. She discussed how practices such as making Mother’s and Father’s Day cards marginalize students from same-sex marriages and questioned why this practice cannot be slightly altered. Other practices that separate boys and girls also marginalized students who are questioning their gender identity and/or sexuality.

4.5 Theme 4 Culturally Responsive Literacy Practices Engage Students and Affirm Identities but don't Address the Social Justice Issues Related to the Stigma of “Struggling” Reader.

Figure J
Theme 4 map with subthemes

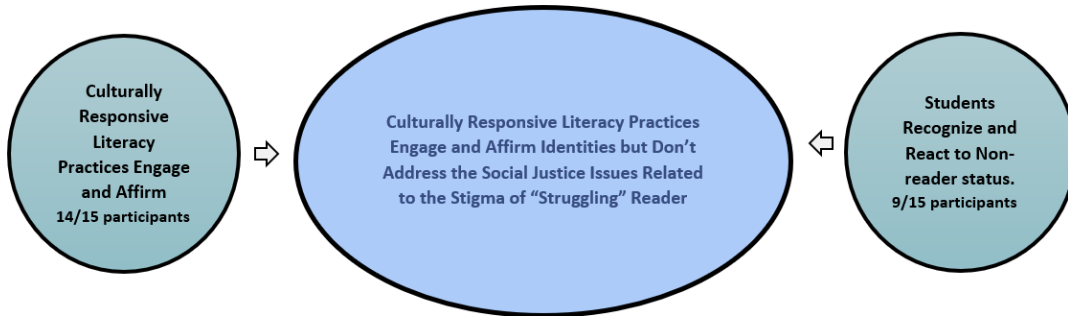


Figure J shows that Theme Four was interpreted through two subthemes, Culturally Responsive Practices Engage and Affirm and Students Recognize and React to Non-reader Status.

Table 10

Culturally Responsive Practices Engage and Affirm and Students Recognize and React to Non-reader Status

Subthemes	Initial themes informing the subthemes	Focus groups	References
Culturally Responsive Practices Engage and Affirm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases awareness of other cultures Engages CR practice affirms identities 	4	32
Students Recognize and React to Non-reader Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-readers don't fit in. Concurring social-emotional needs Kids disengage and lay low 	4	28

Table 10 shows the subtheme label, initial themes informing the subthemes, focus group representation, and the number of references made to each subtheme.

Overview: Numerous examples of how reading specialists described culturally responsive literacy instruction as affirming and engaging were seen across groups. However, there were nearly as many instances where participants described how students recognize their positioning as “nonreaders.” This led to Theme Four Culturally Responsive Literacy Practices Engage Students and Affirm Identities but don't Address the Social Justice Issues Related to the Stigma of “Struggling” Reader.

Subtheme 1 Culturally Responsive Practices Engage and Affirm

Figure K
Theme 4 Subtheme 1 map

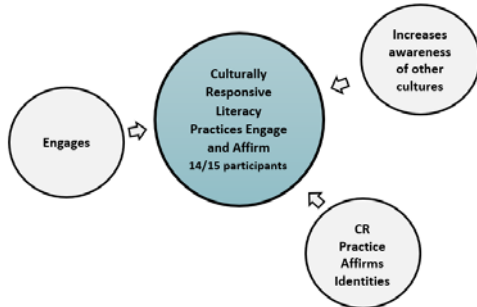


Figure K shows three initial themes that informed the subtheme Culturally Responsive Practices Engage and Affirm.

CR Practice Affirms

While sounding cliché, the notion of seeing oneself in the literature was popular across the groups. With the intent of affirming students' identities and cultures, participants repeatedly stated it was critical for students to "see" themselves. Dana shared, "kids really need to see themselves in literature and in some of the typical literature, they don't now. It's [the literature in schools] not the way society is today." Christa described culturally responsive literature as "books that kids wanna read because they'll find out something about themselves."

Amy noted that culturally responsive literature was necessary for all readers:

...interacting...come together to really make something happen, and it's through that analysis of self while you're reading that you truly develop from the reading... it turns us all back to the whole point of why we're here... what does that cultural responsive literacy look like and mean.... we have to see ourselves in the literature in order for it to have meaning to you and it is why we have to you know evolve this whole process away from just the simplistic viewpoint of if can you mechanically read and understand to 'how does that broaden you and and teach you about life as an individual'

Amy shared that a purpose of reading is to learn about yourself and your life, and without culturally responsive literacy materials, all students won't be able to experience that growth. In Nancy's dance unit she shared how it was "exciting to watch how involved they got because they were so thrilled

to be like...my grandparents, my parents are from Haiti....” This unit clearly affirmed a student’s family identity.

One purpose of building relationships in Theme Three was to get to know students and their families to be able to affirm identities. Amy honored the lived experiences of her new student “by inviting parents to come into the classroom and share their cultures with the class,” reporting that “it was helpful.” Amy shared how relationship building affirms students because “when you ask somebody about themselves...you care.... they want to share about their culture and even what they're just interested in.” The information Amy gleaned from these experiences about home reading habits and culture informed literature choices.

Amy’s literature choices aimed to affirm other aspects of diversity. She spoke about the identities of the children of same-sex parents and children questioning their gender identity. She recalled a personal experience where a student later indicated that he “never saw himself anywhere and he thought he was just odd.” She elaborated that having literature to affirm one’s identity also gives them the language to talk about their identities, “how to put words around that.”

Grace turned to the authors to find culturally affirming literature:

starting [the year] off and welcome[ing] them into the world of literature..... about a woman crossing the border....and she had a young baby ...and she was their age right with the kinds of responsibilities that that they have when they all make that same journey. Many.... of our students are crossing the border.

The text, *Dreamers* (Morales, 2018), was specifically chosen to affirm her students' recently lived experiences as the author also endured a border crossing. Grace chose this text early in the year to foster a welcoming and safe space for her students.

Elise related that images in the classroom were equally as important as literature. She searched for images that were culturally responsive so her students could see their everyday activities of “having breakfast with my family” or “going to the market” displayed in the classroom. This shows the importance of creating a classroom environment that welcomes more than the dominant culture. Elise

explained how this was “the broadest level” showing how it both allowed students “to introspect internally on their own identity development” and “look [ing] out further and learn about other cultures.”

Moving beyond the materials, Grace affirmed identities by sustaining students’ heritage languages. She invited her students to teach her more about their language when she asked them “how do I say this word?” She affirmed their position as new language learners by sharing that she is learning Spanish. She shared with them, “it’s hard for me to pronounce it...” She explained that she can “really model...how... I’m coming along as a Spanish speaker.... so, we do it together and it feels like very nice.... and very sort of collaborative.”

Chris, who also works with English learners shares that for them “it’s not just about accessing print.... but also, being also feeling validated for you know being able to leverage their native language as much as possible.”

Awareness of other cultures

While previous codes and themes referred to the importance of students seeing themselves in the literature, participants also discussed the importance of seeing others. In the previous subtheme, Elise sought images representing varied cultures in her classroom with a goal of increasing awareness of others. Anna also felt it was essential to honor various cultures:

It's really important for kids like in [classrooms] that are predominantly white.... that all those children have the opportunity to see others.... see other children or other cultures in all of the texts that they read... that they have that exposure to the world through their books... and teachers need to be you know the mindful stewards about bringing that into the classroom. ...yes, it's about the individual seeing themselves in the book, but it's also the book being able to represent a wider broader inclusive world.

Anna suggested that culturally responsive literature was critical for all classrooms to foster a sense of inclusion, and her comments indicate it is also the responsibility of educators.

As I have reached the findings related to Theme 3, many of the stories will be familiar to the readers but also contribute to this theme as well. Dana brought the culture of India to her whole class

through the eyes of her student. Nancy's three-week dance allowed global connections as her students met with people from other countries as they researched diverse types of dances. Grace leveraged the global experiences of her own students by weaving their stories into the curriculum, so students were "learning each other's perspectives." Mia also shared that the purpose of a culturally responsive read-alouds was to help all students understand the lived experiences of others.

Maria described the affordances of culturally responsive literacy instruction to increase awareness of global issues, describing how "two weeks ago it was like transgender international transgender awareness day, and we did something related to that... it's a lot dictated by like what's in the news. We read a lot of news ELA articles about what is current in the world." Lara shared a similar priority for her 8th-grade students in civics class who were interested in learning about rights and identity.

Engages

Several participants highlighted how culturally responsive content and materials foster engagement. Dana's student who traveled to India was "... a leader in the lesson.... a bigger part of the lesson." She allowed him to take space as "the teacher" for the lesson.

Nancy reported that the dance unit motivated her students of Haitian heritage to do more research on the topic. Her students took the initiative to further explore the topic, reporting they would "talk to so and so" about the topic. Beyond the classroom, her students were gaining more first-hand cultural information from relatives.

Elise explained that culturally affirming literature gives purpose to students and exudes "curiosity and interest" vs students asking, "why are we gonna read that and why are we doing that?" She added that culturally affirming practice can support "how you define yourself in a school setting." We see that relevance is crucial to students recognizing the importance in their schoolwork.

Lara also shared that content affirming her 8th-grade students' rights "gets them going a lot

on.... their rights and their identity and how life is in the world.” Again, she talked about how students’ interest increased when topics related to their own rights and positioning in the world.

Beth identified a text about adolescent experiences and shared how it seemed that the students “couldn’t get enough of it.... One of them wanted to borrow it.” On the flip side, Beth reported that another class did not share the enthusiasm for the same text and “wanted nothing to do with it”. This illustrates that determining engaging texts is highly variable and dependent on the individual and collective identities of the class. Elise elaborated that finding those places of connection could be especially helpful to students with reading challenges who may have developed a reluctance to engage in reading activities.

Subtheme 2 Readers Recognize and React to Non-reader Status

Figure L *Subtheme 2 map*

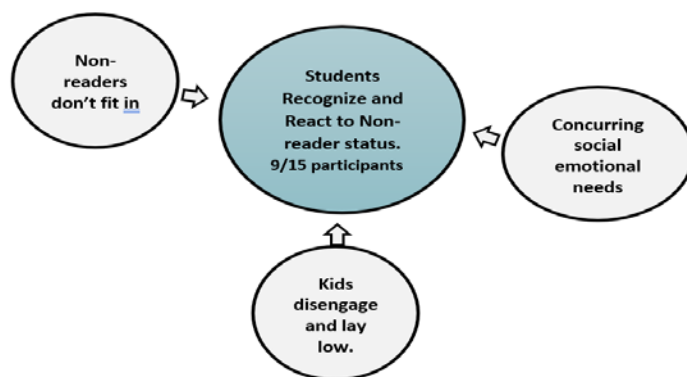


Figure L shows three initial themes that informed the subtheme Readers Recognize and React to Non-reader Status.

When participants were asked to describe the challenges faced by their students, it became evident that they felt the identity of a “struggling” reader was internalized by students. Figure L shows the three initial themes informing the subtheme: non-readers don’t fit in, concurring social-emotional needs, and kids disengage and lay low. Again, some of the same scenarios that have been described informed this subtheme, so I will not repeat quotes, but rather refer to the instance.

Non-readers don’t fit in.

A learner's identity can be compromised early as seen in Mia's and Amy's stories where they perceived students feeling as though they don't belong and feeling defeated when they realized they are not meeting school expectations. Mia shared that "going through elementary school, being a reader is sort of like synonymous with being successful or not successful". Mia highlighted the experience of young students not meeting reading benchmarks. She explained that not only do they seem aware that they aren't doing what is expected of them, but they are also comparing themselves early on to their peers, aware that the expectation is something they cannot meet.

Christa also revealed the implicit message that children receive early in their school years, saying that she thinks "there will be students who feel like.... because I can't decode, I'm not a reader." Amy adds to the perceived feeling of exclusion experienced by non-readers in the early grades.

When our children come to us challenged you know by even as young as first and 2nd grade they already feel somewhat defeated. They know they're different, and there's no other choice. You have to go to school. You can't choose another place to go each day so when you're not successful it's so hard on them.

Amy explicitly stated that the only option children have is to go to school, a place where they are not being successful. In Amy's experience, children as young as grades 1 and 2 experienced failure to the point where she perceived that they felt different from their peers. She alluded to a sense of feeling somewhat trapped in a place where they were not succeeding.

Michael noted the same feeling of not meeting the expectations of a middle school student. He suggested that students feel like it's "sort of this mystical thing that like some people just get and some people don't...I think they're (the students) more likely to feel that way if they have experienced difficulty." Beth projected self-awareness in middle school students saying she felt they would "definitely say readers are smart, and readers like to read and they [the students themselves] were neither of those things."

Stories from middle and high school participants indicated a sense of hopelessness. We learned about Beth's concern that her student's recent excitement about Brazilian literature will be diminished

because her student feels little hope that she will pass the schools' reading assessments. Grace cautions that as the system currently exists, where linguistically diverse students are not always allowed to continue to work in their heritage language, "we lose many because they don't have the English." She elaborated that these newcomers must be allowed to sustain their language so they "see themselves as academics and writers."

In addition to the academic component, Elise, another middle school educator, considered the social dynamic when a group of children or teens are reading the most popular literature. She recalled her own experience of not being a "reader" early on, when she was "comparing myself to friends or their classmates that I would see...in class like you know pulling out the newest Harry Potter." She shared the isolation students might feel when they are not able to participate in the latest hype around literature.

Disengage and lay low.

When students aren't reading at the expected grade level, they often disengaged from their learning. Anna experiences were that "oftentimes they're not the first ones to speak up or you know they sort of have learned to kind of lay low". She went on to explain that she recognized this behavior "in the [general education] classroom and noted that one student surprised her because it was a student who she "can never get [him] to stop talking" in her own classroom. Anna attributed that to his being in the reading support setting where they are "drawing out his strengths." This characteristic implies that students have learned this behavior due their limited reading status.

Michael also noted avoidance in the students he works with, saying, "I definitely have encountered situations where you know maybe because of the weakness in reading there's maybe behaviors that like surface because of that or avoidance." He also shared that these behaviors were often seen in mainstream setting.

Other behaviors impeded the learning process. Nancy described one group where she noticed

“they go back to the ones [readings] that they find really comfortable, and they basically can read them so well they're memorized.” She was concerned that they avoided taking risks in their learning, evidenced by their sticking to the simpler text they could successfully decode. She sought to learn ways to “develop[ing] that confidence to kind of keep going....” While Nancy reflected on the students’ lack of progress, she was unsure how to push them further along without adding stress to their school experiences.

Mia and Elise discussed this avoidance as well. Mia shared that students who have not experienced success in reading avoid it. Mia felt that “they're not.... independently seeking out text for joy or to.... learn new things from.” Elise acknowledged the same reluctance to participate in students who have struggled with print, sharing the necessity of finding texts that are relatable enough that might persuade students to take those learning risks.

Concurring social-emotional needs

Participant noted the social-emotional needs of limited or non-readers across the grades. Amy, an elementary school reading specialist, noted that the focus...on social-emotional learning” in the schools is “critical.” While she was referring to school-wide initiatives, she explained that it was especially important for limited readers as they are being asked to “do really hard things.” When describing a student as “visibly frustrated” she relied on creating movement breaks around student interests and areas where the student experiences success. For one student, this involved running the bases on the school’s baseball field.

These social-emotional challenges were significant at the middle school level, perhaps more so. Michael, a middle school educator, acknowledged that his students sometimes make choices that are “not always the best” sharing how one sixth grader “spends most of her time in the hallway.” Michael is careful to not put blame on the child but felt strongly (as indicated by tone) that “there's no excuse for her arriving in my classroom in 6th grade not knowing how to read”. Michael is committed to addressing

not only the students' reading needs but also indicates that much of his work with his students is to "reshape their self-image" after years of being seen as a "struggling reader." While seeing it as his role to address the social and emotional needs of his students, he also recognizes that the problem at a much deeper level. He acknowledged that often this is even more challenging for students of color, suggesting that "a lot of children are pathologized pretty quickly especially when they stop being.... little and cute."

Michael and Anna both talked about their perceived negative perceptions other educators in general education sometimes had of their students (refer to Section 4.4 Multi-level Obstacles Persist). Anna noted how important it is to teach these students to "advocate for themselves" in the face of any adversity or negative feelings they may experience. At the middle school level, these examples show how students can be "positioned" by others in negative ways.

Christa also expressed frustration with the school administration for inadvertently contributing to the negative experiences of students. She appreciated that these students are working to improve something that is very challenging for them and shared that the connection between their reading challenge and negative behaviors is not always understood. She described a school practice where "kids who would end up in our office.... the first thing.... is [they] say pick a book.....and how many of those behavior problems are kids that can't read?" This practice of asking a child who struggles to read to "pick a book" in a disciplinary setting suggested a lack of awareness of the social-emotional needs related to learning challenges.

It is also important to recognize these social-emotional needs are often mitigated by the reading support they receive. We learned this in Chris's perception that some students "hate reading because it's so challenging and you know may suffer from really severe anxiety at the site of a book". She went on to recognize that the work reading specialists do shifts these negative emotions as students are "raising their hands and want to read something out loud in front of the whole class, which is amazing."

She shares how other educators notice this shift in her students and appreciate “what it means for them to be finally able to access print and decode and read and understand what they're reading is also gaining a voice”. Chris added that social-emotional learning (SEL) must be woven throughout the school day and social emotional learning cannot be seen as a separate curriculum.

While the goal of a reading specialist is for children to access print, Amy shared the necessity of addressing self-esteem:

....to keep the self-esteem intact is the most important thing because there will be other avenues for that child to achieve and grow and do great things in the world. But if their self-esteem is lost, all is lost, you know. So, I think that's one of our most important jobs.

Michael likewise acknowledged “a lot of steps.... to establish like the trust and the privacy to respect.... the dignity of the student because of how they are seeing themselves as not a reader.”

Overview: Eighty-seven percent or 14/15 (93%) of the participants, representing all focus groups, expressed the idea that Culturally Responsive Practices are Affirming and Engaging (Figure J). Sixty percent or 9/15 participants shared experiences with how Readers Recognize and React to Non-reader Status (Figure J).

4.6 Summary

Overall, findings showed the participants valued both print reading and multimodal access to literacy. Conversations about the importance of reading and writing print were considerably more frequent, however, as were the affordances of print reading compared to multimodal access. Skilled print-readers equated to being a successful student and fitting in. Participants shared numerous ways that they delivered culturally responsive literacy instruction, moving beyond the concept of relatable materials to include relationship building, supporting inclusive learning environments, sustaining heritage languages, and appreciating a broader definition of reading so that all students could access the curriculum. However, there were also numerous obstacles to culturally responsive literacy instruction,

from not having the nuanced skills to deliver the instruction to CLD students to school-wide practices that further marginalized students such as the prevalence of a deficit mindset and whole-school testing that disadvantaged CLD students. Lastly, while the participants shared many affirming and engaging student experiences with culturally responsive literacy instruction, there was the overall sense that students recognized and reacted early to the label of “struggling” reader.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss these themes as they relate my theoretical framework and how the findings aligned with the literature I reviewed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

I am fortunate to have spent time with these dedicated educators to hear their experiences with culturally responsive literacy instruction. My findings indicate these reading specialists have a solid understanding of the need and the mechanism for incorporating culturally responsive and sustaining practices into reading instruction. I recognize that my interpretation of the findings is limited to the perceptions and skills of these fifteen reading specialists. However, as I share how the findings align with my theoretical framework, I believe I will show that they offer accessible and meaningful ways for reading specialists to practice culturally responsive, skills-based literacy instruction. As I intertwine the findings with those of studies I reviewed, I will show that my findings also suggest significant and valid modifications to my course. Findings, above all, elucidate the unequivocal and immediate need to address the stigma and alienation felt by students who are designated as “struggling”, “at-risk” or “non-readers”.

5.2 Discussion Theme 1 “Readers” are primarily defined by print-based knowledge.

Research Question 1. How do reading specialists frame what it means to be a “reader”?

Theme One:

While the participants valued the multimodal ways that readers could engage in literacy activities, they prioritized print-based reading when describing readers. The value of print-based reading aligns with the primary role of these reading specialists, which is to teach all students how to read and write. The participants learned in their graduate program that our brain is not hard-wired to read, and that their students who find reading challenging require explicit instruction in the foundational skills of reading (Moats, 2020). Thus, their practice incorporates the five components of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (NRP, 2000). The emphasis on print reading also appears related to its necessity for passing high stakes testing, the ultimate measure of

student and school success (NCLB, 2002, ESSA, 2015). The pressure to meet these demands was clear in Dana's statement.

There's just not enough time... there's so many goals in my school.... they are so behind in reading... parents have expectations by spring they should be reading.... we'd love to read or read aloud to you....it will take away from us hitting all our goals. So, I think there's that pressure versus what I would like to teach which is a problem.

She explicitly juxtaposes the pressure of the system with the desire of teachers. Dana expressed the wish and the need to have time for both types of instruction. The intensive programs chosen to support high stakes testing left little time to individualize instruction as in the Shealey (2007) study.

Elise verified this systemic priority. When asked how a "reader" would be identified in her school, she surmised it would be someone with a "well-rounded.... set of skills.... being able to decipher arguments to summarize a reader is someone who is going to be successful on the MCAS". Karen also alluded to the priority that MCAS took in her school and how the program of instruction was decided for them based on the low academic standing of her school. Thus, while many participants share their personal views and desires to incorporate other literacy experiences, the prioritization of print is somewhat motivated by the school's pressure to prepare students for high stakes testing.

Prioritizing print is also seen in Theme Two, when participants described the many advantages and opportunities afforded to those who read print. In the next theme, I will describe the affordances of print reading, most notably of which is access to school and learning. Though fewer, I will also discuss the affordances of multi-modal access to literacy as they align more closely with my theoretical framework. This next theme also answers question one.

5.3 Discussion Theme 2 - Greater Affordances to Print-based Reading.

Research Question 1. How do reading specialists frame what it means to be a "reader"?

Participants described print readers as having more advantages (46 references) than those who access literacy in multimodal ways (15 references). Of the 46 references to print-based advantages, 40

of them related to knowledge or personal growth in the school setting. Much like Theme One, these affordances appeared rooted in the culture of the educational system that prioritizes print reading. Access to foundational reading skills seemed the only way to succeed in school from an early stage of schooling. Mia said, “reading is school, and that's just how it is.” Amy noted that children seem aware as early as grades one or two that they do not fit in.

Like Mia, Amy suggested the tension is unavoidable, stating, “You must go to school. You can't choose another place to go each day...when you're not successful. It's so hard on them.” These strong sentiments suggested that being a print reader means belonging in our educational system.

Participants also discussed how reading print afforded access to world knowledge. Amy reflected, “how does that [literacy] broaden you and teach you about life as an individual and help you evolve as an individual?” Her suggestion of the transformative power of literacy relates to the CRT opportunity “to learn to better understand and critique their social position and context” (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 41).

Lara took learning beyond the classroom with reading instruction involving topics of water rights and transgender awareness day. Ladson-Billings (2014) called for culturally responsive practice to foster *sociopolitical consciousness* or “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (p.75). This sociopolitical consciousness allows students to identify inequities and question the ways that groups have been historically and currently marginalized and positioned as powerless.

Karen also referenced a student’s ability to participate in life beyond school suggesting the necessity of print reading for health and employment, not just “to pass a test”. Chris shared how receiving specialized reading intervention affords that access to knowledge and self-expression. Access to print for purposes beyond school related to reading being deemed a civil right of the 21st century (Weeden, 2020).

While print reading was more often the route to success, participants appreciated the advantages of multimodal access to literacy in 15 references. Though fewer, I saw a commitment to culturally responsive practice in these examples. Some used alternative forms of print (e.g., drawing/writing a comic) to bring student strengths into their learning. Christa's description of a Universal Design for Learning, where students access content and demonstrate knowledge in multiple modalities and Lara's broadening of what counts as texts also brought equity to the classroom. With this asset-based mindset, they appreciated the varied ways diverse learners accessed and demonstrated knowledge. A UDL classroom responds to the idea that culture informs *communication with ethnically diverse students* (Gay, 2002a) and recognizes that communication styles should inform teaching, such as how to present information, give feedback, and foster student participation.

Providing access to literature via audiobooks or by listening to other readers also increased possibilities for how students could experience authentic texts that allow children to see themselves in the books they read (Bishop, 1990). Allowing audiobooks was essential for these students given the absence of diversity in controlled reading programs. When engaging with literature that reflects interests and culture, the varied lenses of diverse students can begin to afford them insight into their learning (Gay, 2018).

This wider access to content was experienced by Nancy's students who watched videos and connected with folks in other countries via Zoom, allowing students to access content in alternative ways. If her dance unit solely focused on print reading, some students would have been disadvantaged. Additionally, her dance unit also fostered a "valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (Paris, 2012, p.93) as her students authentically learned about the cultures of students in the classroom.

Grace and Elise embraced CSP in honoring the dynamic nature of youth culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) when recognizing the use of mobile technologies to eliminate linguistic

barriers and expand opportunities for participation. Like Houchen (2013), they showed that “all literacies are valid and can be used for instruction” (p.108). Mobile devices were efficient and effective means of getting information and content to students.

While prioritizing print instruction, however, I will describe how participants made this skills-based instruction culturally responsive despite obstacles in Theme Three.

5.4 Discussion Theme 3 Reading specialists overcome some obstacles to CR literacy instruction, but multilevel obstacles persist.

Research Question 2 Do reading specialists incorporate culturally responsive literacy practice into their supplemental reading instruction? If so, how?

Findings suggest a solid understanding of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies in the way participants wove the principles of the pedagogies into their literacy instruction. However, findings also indicate tension between the participants’ solid understanding and their ability to operationalize that knowledge in their primary role in specialized reading instruction. With their depth of skill and knowledge, they were able to hurdle some of these barriers. Others appear less surmountable.

At a basic level, participants sought *literature authentically reflecting student identities* that would provide “mirrors and windows” for students to see themselves and other cultures in literature (Bishop, 1990). We repeatedly heard about the lack of diversity in the reading curriculum for students in instructional support. The numerous references to the absence of appropriate materials corroborated the limited autonomy of educators in choosing teaching strategies and materials that reflect the lived experiences of their students (Shealey, 2007). Participants *adapted and created materials* to support culturally responsive practice, similar to the findings of McIntyre and Hulan (2013). Participants’ efforts to maneuver this roadblock were commendable and aligned with the theoretical framework of this study.

Without appropriate materials, Grace’s students wrote stories about their lived experiences in

their heritage language, exemplifying culturally sustaining pedagogy. She is “supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). By sustaining the cultural and linguistic practices that students bring to school, she acknowledged that “the linguistic and cultural flexibility of many children of color ideally positions them for success in a diversifying, globalizing world” (Alim & Paris, 2015, p.80). This example also adheres to the tenet that student strengths are “not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum.” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 46). With this goal of sustaining language, Grace is positioning her students to be leaders in a shifting global world. She is confronting the current school practice that does not honor heritage languages, thus stripping students of this possibility.

Dana harnessed student expertise about India into the structured literacy sessions. By offering him the opportunity to teach new vocabulary, she expanded the dynamic teacher-learner relationships that allow all students to be seen as teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Promoting all students as contributors fosters a supportive and collaborative learning space instead of a competitive space where students seek individual recognition for their achievements. (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Dana and Grace recognized that teachers are not the only ones who hold and generate knowledge in a culturally responsive classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Furthermore, they are examples of embracing Funds of Identity in the classroom, where one gleans information specific to student identity via artifacts created by students (e.g., texts, pictures), called “identity artifacts” (Subero et al., 2018).

Maria, Lara, and Elise all adapted high-interest non-fiction texts to students’ reading levels. Lara incorporated current events related to students’ “rights and their identity and how life is in the world.” Elise addressed water rights and transgender awareness. Their choices supported another tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, sociopolitical consciousness, which is that content relates to the social contexts in which they live (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and prepares them to confront injustice.

The practice of *building relationships* supported efforts to identify interests and strengths. For

younger students, Amy talked with parents about “their habits at home as far as reading goes” to learn about literacy experiences, interests, and cultural experiences. Relationship building was critical in supporting diverse students and related to Ladson-Billings’ s work (2009) where she described her teachers’ tendency to “demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage the same connectedness between the students” (p. 28). Social relations are paramount in the dynamics of a CR classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Michael prioritized peer-peer relationships when deliberately grouping students with similar lived experiences.

Participants worked to build trust with students and families. Nancy went out of her way to reinforce to a mom the importance of maintaining home language use when she perceived they were trying to hide their heritage language from the school. This reference to home-school connections is a cornerstone of culturally responsive practice (Gay, 2018; Nieto, 2013) and helps to deconstruct and prevent misunderstandings. These practices supported student learning, similar to the benefits of a caring learning environment noted in other studies (Houchen, 2013; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Shealey, 2007; Worthy et al., 2012; Walker & Hutchison, 2021). In the face of a culture that does not naturally reflect their students, participants turned to relationship building to try to bridge the gap.

Unfortunately, these examples also hinted at the presence of a deficit mindset (Valencia, 1997) in some schools. Nancy suggested her “student and family were nervous that there would be judgment from us, her teachers you know.... if she couldn't say a sound correctly it was because she spoke Haitian Creole at home.” Nancy’s relationship-building countered that narrative, aligning with other studies (Orosco & O’Connor, 2014; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Houchen, 2013; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007) which found the value of culturally responsive practice in producing a counternarrative to a deficit mindset.

Participants battled other oppressive school-based practices which were more challenging to overcome. Grace’s passion was palpable as she described feeling “morally and ethically bound” to

ensure students continue to build their heritage language skills. This desire to sustain a student's heritage language while building English proficiency reflects culturally sustaining pedagogy proposed by Paris (2012) when warranting educators "ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (p.93).

Findings also suggest, however, that *sustaining heritage language requires specialized skills* in a demographically expanding student population. Paris and Alim (2014) argued that along with the need for educators to facilitate students' skills with Dominant American English (DAE), they need to appreciate cultural flexibility to support a multiethnic and multilingual US. Structured literacy instruction that supports two or more languages requires a specialized set of skills. Bilingual reading specialists worked to sustain students' reading development in their heritage language, but challenges were acknowledged by Grace who is a highly skilled educator with Spanish skills. This appeared similar to the McIntyre and Hulan (2013) study that found instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics was not as conducive to culturally responsive teaching.

Karen, who also speaks Spanish, reiterated that she can support some students but expressed concern that with other languages she "may not be able to make those connections" when students are struggling to learn to read in English. These participants recognized a key take away of the Orosco and O'Connor (2014) study which was that the practices found to be effective for monolingual learners (e.g., skills-based instruction) must be differentiated for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The participants in this study, however, demonstrate how difficult that can be.

There was also a recognition that diversity should move beyond language and ethnicity to include gender, sexuality, and ability. Amy called for literature choices to appreciate diversity and counter some current *school practices that marginalize* same-sex families and students questioning their gender identity. Her efforts reflect a tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, which is critically thinking about the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2011) and creating opportunities to reflect on who is represented,

who is misrepresented, and who is left out. Persistent school traditions of Mother's Day and Father's Day or practices of separating "boys" and "girls" posed challenges for some.

At the institutional level, a one-size-fits-all means of assessing students and measuring their progress posed challenges. Chris's acknowledged that "assessments should be culturally responsive and a lot of times they're not." When children are assessed with inappropriate measures, an inadequate measure of their skills further marginalizes them. We saw this when Grace's student's skilled use of two languages went unnoticed because one of them was not English. With high-stakes testing and evidence-based practices mandated by educational laws (NCLB, 2004, ESSA, 2015), the available assessment tools failed Chris and Grace's culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. We see continued need to address potential biases in assessment processes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986 as cited in Obiakor & Green, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008).

Elise and Michael also saw a lowering of expectations when teachers resorted to "rote practices" that significantly challenged student progress and limited their potential for success. This aligns with the studies I reviewed discussing the importance of culturally responsive practices in holding high expectations of students (Houchen, 2013; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013). The practice of maintaining high expectations is rooted in Ladson-Billings' s (1995a) calls for *academic excellence* in students. My study suggests that educators need support in maintaining these high expectations for students to reach their true potential.

Finally, Chris's practice of providing all students with access via a Universal Design for Learning appreciated the multiple ways of presenting content and assessing knowledge that culturally relevant teachers employ to reach all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). By presenting content to students either through alternative forms of texts (e.g., video, audio books, digital content) or listening to others read texts, all students are involved in literacy activities.

The extent to which UDL can be operationalized may mitigate the devastating effects of a child's realization that they do not fit in when they are challenged by reading print. As Christa suggested, they have to be "invited to the party". We see in the last theme that while culturally and linguistically responsive practice engages students and affirms identities, it is not addressing the stigma associated with being labeled as a limited or non-reader.

5.5 Discussion Theme 4 Culturally responsive literacy practices engage students and affirm identities but do not address the social justice issues related to the stigma of "struggling reader".

Research Question 3 How do reading specialists describe the benefits of culturally responsive literacy instruction in settings providing instructional support for reading?

Theme Four embodies the notion that CR practice avoids further marginalization of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and promotes an understanding and appreciation of all cultures in all classrooms, regardless of the demographic makeup. Participants spoke about the need for CR instruction to ensure all students are included in the learning community.

Perhaps the simplest affirming practice is the adherence to the concept of "mirrors and windows" (Bishop, 1997). Most participants (13/15) discussed efforts to identify literature in which their students could see themselves and their families. Incorporating culturally relevant materials was also the most frequently referenced characteristic of CR found in the studies I reviewed as it was highlighted in every study to some degree. Its affordances for affirming student identity were identified in several of them (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Worthy et al., 2012; Hilaski, 2020; Shealey, 2007). I also noted the affirming nature of such literature (Sims Bishop, 2007) in several examples in this study.

Nancy's dance unit affirmed cultural identity and increased engagement as she noted her feelings in watching the student, "it was just very exciting to watch how involved they got because they were so thrilled to be like....my grandparents my parents are from Haiti". The increased motivation

perceived by Nancy has been cited in other studies (Worthy et al., 2012; Cartledge et al., 2015; Piazza & Duncan, 2012; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Houchen, 2013; Shealey, 2007; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013).

Nancy's unit also showed how allowing students multiple ways to engage in literacy practices is affirming as students can share their knowledge in multiple ways.

Nancy and Grace affirmed culture by making it part of the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In both instances, the curriculum no longer solely served the dominant culture, and the varied lenses of diverse students began to afford them insight into their learning (Gay, 2018). This exemplified cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2011) where teaching was student-focused and included practices that "help students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture" (p. 40). Participants were improving literacy skills while making student culture part of the curriculum.

The idea of sustaining language was particularly motivating and affirming for CLD students. Chris, who works with English learners shared her perception that students' can be "validated for.... being able to leverage their native language as much as possible". Validating heritage language skills allows students positions of power in a U.S. that is moving toward a majority multicultural and multilingual society (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Smelser et al., 2001, Wang, 2013, as cited in Paris & Alim, 2014).

While essential for honoring CLD students, it was also noted that culturally responsive practices cannot be restricted to diverse schools. Participants appreciated the importance of CR pedagogy to promote a broader sense of inclusion in the classroom as CR instruction promotes learning about other cultures. Anna noted that regardless of school demographics, "Whether it's a mostly white school or mostly Hispanic school or mostly African American school...that all those children have opportunity to see others". She added, "it's also the book being able to represent a wider broader inclusive world". Culturally responsive teachers have a larger goal of sustaining the language and cultures of all students

and preparing them for life beyond the classroom. These participants recognized that we need “books that reflect the racial, ethnic and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” so as not to “reinforce and maintain old social patterns by setting up the American white middle class as the norm, and all others as ‘multicultural’” (Bishop, 1997, p.3).

While we see an appreciation for the affirming and engaging aspects of culturally responsive practice, findings suggest a disheartening outcome. The effects of solely privileging print skills seem to be resulting in students who recognize and react to their positioning of “struggling readers”.

Findings revealed far too many comments suggesting that the battle of stigma sadly begins in elementary school and becomes exacerbated through the years. Christa shared her perception that students feel, “I’m not a reader.”

Amy suggested that, in the early grades, “they already feel somewhat defeated.”

Beth described the potential thoughts of students who have repeatedly failed whole school assessments, indicating such students may feel, “I’ll never be a reader” because “I won’t pass that [school-sanctioned assessments].”

Like Houchen (2013), who saw that “failure on the FCAT can translate to personal failure for the student” (p. 103), participants noted the psychological impact of repeated test failure and remedial classes.

Michael and Anna discussed the negative images of their students expressed by other educators, and Michael described the “pathologizing” of students of color”. It is apparent that a DisCrit lens is also needed to address the “collusive nature of race and disability” (Annamma et al., 2018, p 53). DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) affords a lens recognizing the layered experiences of oppression resulting from both disability and race and/or any other identity that may be regarded as outside the “norm” (e.g., linguistic difference, gender, sexual).

Michael’s description of the negative behaviors that surface are examples of what Enriquez

(2014) described as embodying the struggle, where their resistance to a label is seen in behaviors such as not going to class or packing one's bag before a class is over. It is urgent to apply knowledge of this embodiment so that students like Michael's sixth grader are not spending any time at all "in the hallway" and Nancy's students are not disrupting their reading progress because they are reading memorized texts because they are afraid to take risks. Young students are comparing themselves to their peers early in their schooling, and they are aware they are not meeting benchmarks designated by educational laws (NCLB, 2004, ESSA, 2015). In addition to providing all students with the right to read and write (Weeden, 2020), we need to find ways to eliminate stigma and honor the strengths that students already possess.

This is not new information, but it is critical to address. Schachter and Schachter (2012) proposed that student identities are a product of the definitions of what it means to be a reader in school. Hall's work (2012) can guide us in trying to disrupt the identity these students have developed by modeling her work that links reading instruction to student identity early on. While my literature review did not include identity, I see that was a limitation. "Students may struggle in reading print, but it should not be the central way in which they are defined" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 41).

Note: As I was writing about this last theme and thinking about CR practices that may have a direct impact on diminishing the stigma felt by "struggling readers", I speculated that the following practices might directly allow students to demonstrate their strengths: sustaining language; broadening one's definition of reading (e.g. multimodal access to literacy); and adapting or creating CR materials to meet student's reading level to allow for participation. These could potentially provide a counter narrative to the lack of skill a student has in decoding English. I looked at the data to further analyze these practices.

Figure M shows that educators at both grade levels note that students recognize their positioning as "struggling reader" with the percentages not differing much from K-5 to 6-12 educators.

Of note, however, is that these activities that may allow students to show strengths and possibly help avoid stigma are offered more in the later grades (Figure N and Table 11).

Figure M *Students recognize and react*

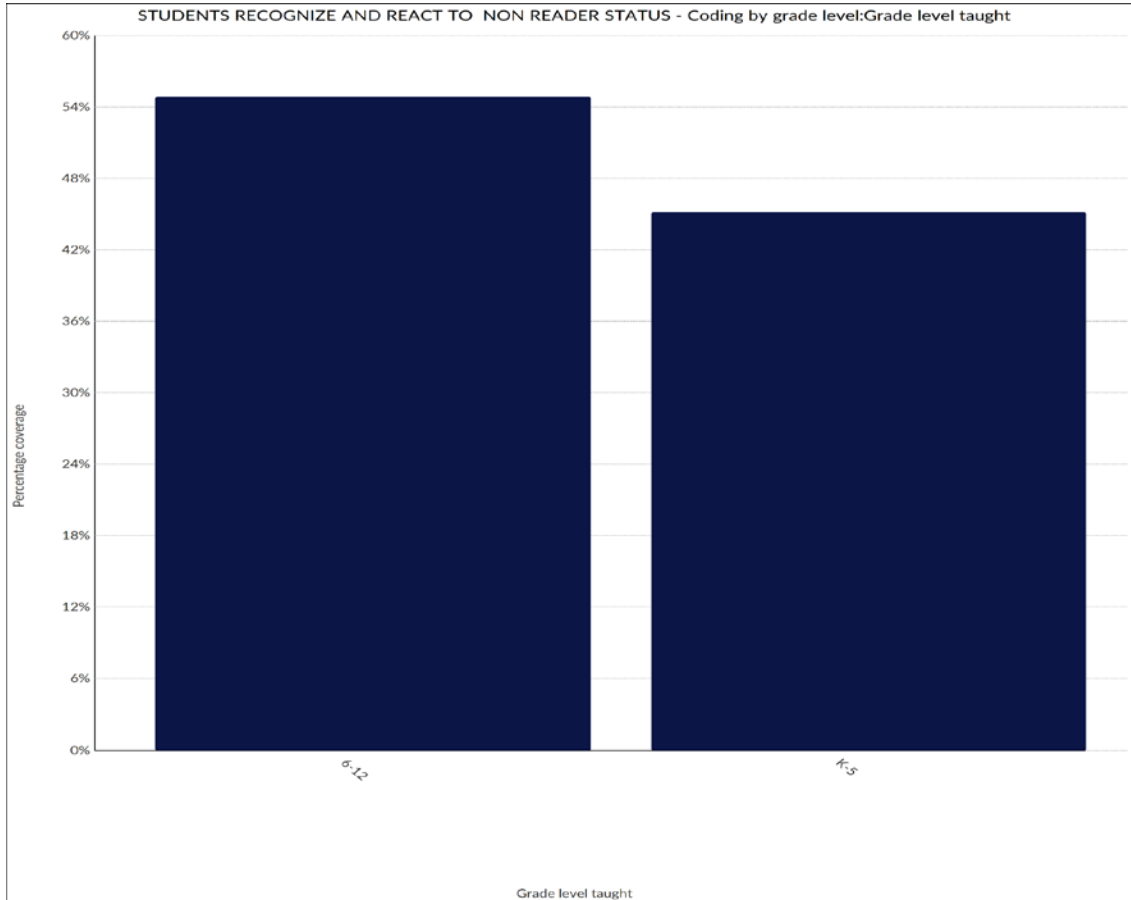


Figure M shows slightly over 54% of educators in Grades 6-12 made comments relating to students recognizing and reacting to their positioning as struggling readers, compared to slightly over 46% of educators in Grades K-5

Figure N Comparison of educator comments on potential protective factors.

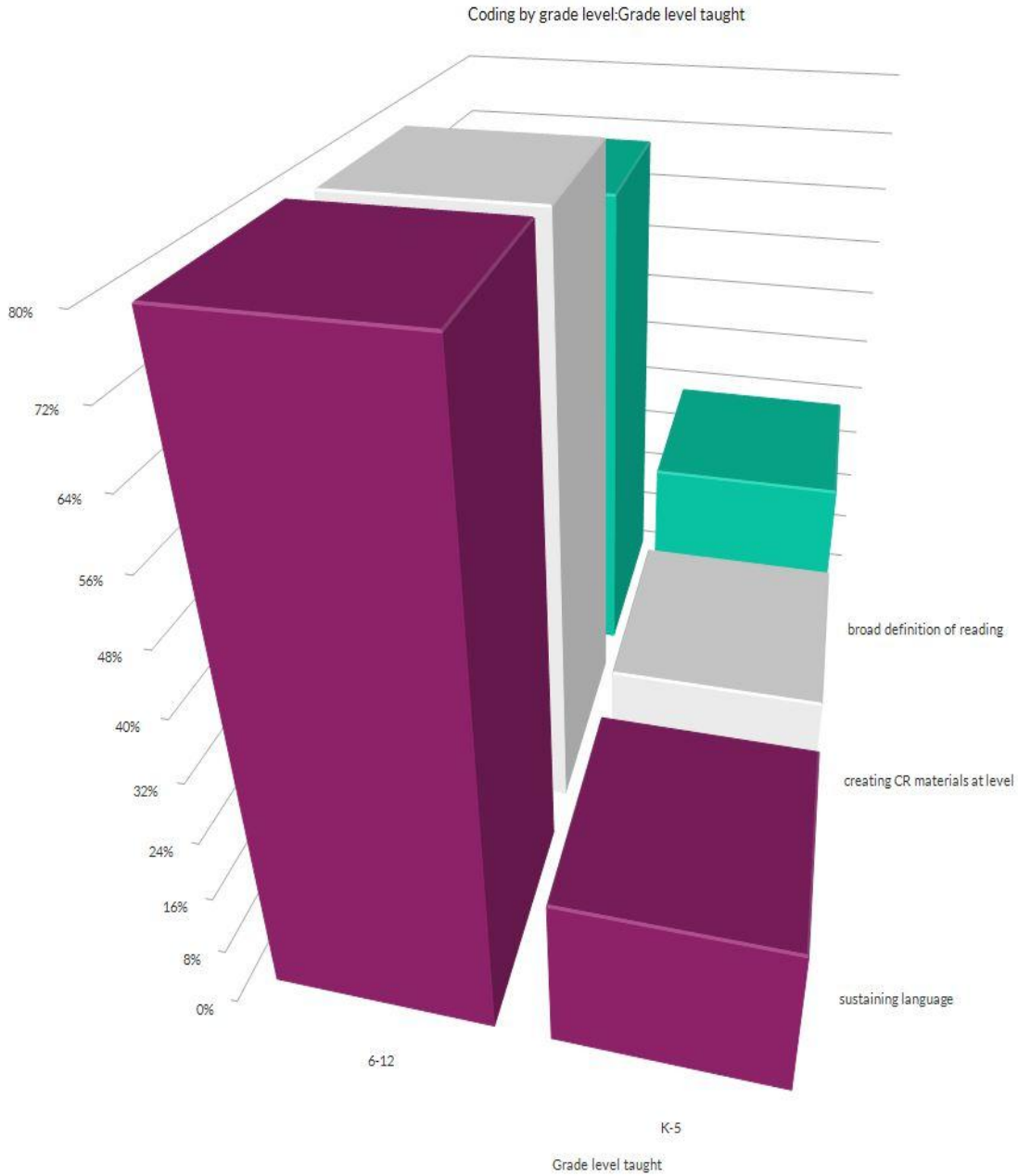


Figure N shows educators in Grades 6-12 talked more frequently about sustaining language, creating CR materials, and broadening the definition of reading.

Table 11 Code percentages

Code	Grade level taught	Percentage coverage
sustaining language	6-12	79.55%
sustaining language	K-5	20.45%
creating CR materials at level	6-12	78.56%
creating CR materials at level	K-5	21.44%
broaden definition of reading	6-12	69.73%
broaden definition of reading	K-5	30.28%

Table 11 shows the percentages for each code and grade level that were extracted from Nvivo to make the distinctions between grade levels in Figure X more explicit.

Thus, my data showed that while a comparable number of educators from each grade level notice that students identify with the negative labeling of “struggling” reader, the practices that potentially provide protective factors are more likely to emerge in the later grades. In Chapter 6, I will show how this information and other findings inform implications.

Chapter 6 Implications

6.1 Introduction

I begin this reflection by recognizing that my findings are context-bound and situated (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and related to my interpretation of the experiences of these participants. With my purposeful sampling of this group of educators from different grade levels and varied demographically represented schools, my findings represent varied experiences. However, I acknowledge that educators in similar schools and positions may have different experiences. The unifying context is that these educators were participants in my course, and the patterns I see will appropriately inform modifications made to the next iteration of my course.

In Chapter 1, in my statement of the problem, I wrote about the danger of a strictly skills-based approach to literacy. I suggested that culturally responsive literacy practice must be deliberate in settings not inherently conducive to alternative views of literacy. I wanted to glean information that would help me teach educators how to integrate culturally responsive literacy practices into skills-based reading instruction. I attained that goal, but one finding lies heavy on my heart, “STUDENTS RECOGNIZE AND REACT TO NON-READER STATUS.” A priority is to incorporate ways to address the stigma of students with learning differences or challenges. Daley and Rappolt-Schlichtmann (2018) write:

Stigma consciousness focuses on the belief that others see you in light of the stereotype about your group, regardless of actual behavior. In the case of students with LD, this consciousness would reflect an expectation that others primarily think of you in light of the negative attributes of all students with LD, even if you have not internalized those attributes. (p.201)

I will propose implications in this chapter but finding ways to avoid this stigma in K-12 classrooms is a priority for the next iteration of my course.

6.2 Implications for Research

We need to learn from students in remedial reading support how we can support them. We must inquire about teaching practices that contribute to their positive learning experiences and those

which negatively impact their learner and reader identities. Student voices will be essential to understanding how to maximize opportunities to sustain linguistic and cultural identities and minimize the impact of learning challenges.

We should further explore the reading specialist's role in establishing a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in their general education settings. A UDL allows students to access academic content in multiple ways and choose multiple ways of demonstrating their knowledge. Students who struggle with print reading will have opportunities throughout the school day to participate in their chosen modality, demonstrate knowledge in multiple ways, and thus have a voice in the classroom and community.

Specialized reading instruction for diverse learners must consider and appreciate dialect and heritage language. The extent that educators need to collaborate with others with expertise in the student's heritage language (e.g., ESL instructor, parents) and dialect (e.g., ESL teacher, Speech Language Pathologist) will depend on the educator's experience. However, future research into these collaborations will inform pre- and in-service education.

Lastly, it would be advantageous to explore further the idea that educators may be waiting until the later grades to introduce practices that could mitigate the label of "struggling reader." In the meantime, it would be feasible and appropriate to suggest these practices of sustaining language; broadening one's definition of reading (e.g., to include multimodal access to literacy); and adapting or creating CR materials to meet student's reading level to allow for participation begin in the earlier grades.

6.3 Implications for Teacher Education - Suggestions for Course Modifications.

Based on the findings, it would be beneficial to include assignments in writing lesson plans that incorporate a Universal Design for Learning in mainstream classrooms that allow for a broader range of literacy activities at all grade levels. Lesson plans for students with reading challenges should build in ways to foster positive identity development (Hall, 2012, 2016).

Assessment planning for culturally responsive students should be more explicit with case studies. Instruction should include ways to collaborate with other professionals (e.g., ESL teachers, parents, speech language pathologists) in devising plans for both assessment and instruction. This would maximize the ability to weave heritage language instruction into structured literacy intervention.

As reading specialists often provide professional development (PD) for general and special education teachers, assignments should include PD on UDL and multimedia literacy activities, the implications of labeling students, fostering positive reader identities, and sharing culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation procedures with teachers and administrators along with the limitations of current educational assessments.

6.4 Implications for K-12 Readers

The most pressing finding from this study is the need to eliminate student feelings of not belonging when they have differences and challenges with print reading. By increasing teacher education in understanding the stigma of labeling and increasing multimodal access to literacy, we provide an equitable learning environment for all students.

6.5 Where Do We Go from Here?

It is a civil right for all students to learn to read and write (Weeden, 2020) to ensure equitable lifetime opportunities and wellness. Reading specialists need to continue to provide evidence-based practice that safeguards that right. However, this instruction must be culturally and linguistically relevant and sustaining to eliminate a feeling of not belonging. How do we provide this instruction without marginalizing students in the classroom? How do we do this while sustaining and allowing students to access the strengths they already possess? Initial steps include eliminating labels and embracing a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) where students can gain knowledge by presenting content in multiple modalities and allowing students multiple means of representation to demonstrate their knowledge. Reading specialists must collaborate with a team of teachers for UDL to occur in all

classes. The cultural competence, academic success, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2011) that support students in challenging inequities in their lives and communities cannot be reserved for print readers.

How do we provide reading and writing instruction in a culturally and linguistically responsive way? This begins with addressing the multi-level obstacles. At a systems level, reading specialists must know the ramifications of assessing students with a one-size-fits-all approach. Participants shared that the assessment tools designed for the dominant culture are inappropriate for CLD students. Reading specialist candidates must leave programs with the skills to design appropriate and culturally responsive assessment plans and share that knowledge with teachers and administrators via professional development.

We need to decrease reliance on scripted structured literacy programs by teaching future educators to design structured and systematic literacy instruction specific to their students. Scripted curricula further marginalize CLD students when they do not reflect the experiences of all students. My course needs to better support future reading specialists in individualizing instruction. Chris described reading instruction that honored both languages. If an educator cannot provide this teaching, ESL teachers need to be part of the planning process for linguistically diverse students. Sustaining heritage language while increasing access to the dominant language must be the norm, not the exception. Reading specialists need to share their expertise and plan instruction as part of a team that can appreciate the varied learning experiences of all students.

Finally, we must address the lack of diverse texts available to students. Pre- and in-service educators can learn to be advocates for meaningful, culturally responsive materials. They should be on curriculum review teams and inform the choice of bias-free and authentic content.

6.6 Conclusion

This qualitative inquiry examined how reading specialists operationalize culturally responsive

teaching in their reading instruction. Findings suggested there are myriad ways that reading specialists who are trained in both culturally responsive and skills-based literacy instruction accomplish this. However, their informed and laudable efforts are negatively impacted by multi-level barriers, including limited resources, access to specialized knowledge, and whole-school practices that marginalize students. Furthermore, the prominent focus on print-based reading, while necessary to ensure all students learn to read and write, cannot be to the exclusion of the culturally responsive and sustaining practices that honor a student's strengths and affirm all cultures and abilities. Findings ways to expand these practices to specifically address the stigma and exclusion felt by “struggling readers” is essential.

I believe we can provide an equitable literacy education with a dual lens. In *Society Reschooling*, an essay on the language and literacy practices in and out of school, Street (2012) a pioneer in the sociocultural lens of literacy, ends his commentary with “the two fields, then, instead of being polar opposites, might embrace and build on the strengths of each other” (p. 226).

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Appendix A School Demographics for Participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	% African American	% Asian students	% Hispanic students	% Native American students	% White students	% Native American	% Multi-Race Non-Hispanic students	# Female	# Male students	# Non-binary students	grades	Focus group A 4/11/2022	Focus Group B 4/13/2022	Focus Group C 7/20/22	Focus Group D 8/11/22
3 Amy	0.8	5.9	5.6	0	83.7	0.3	3.7	161	195		K-5	X			X
4 Beth	3.3	1.1	17.4	0	74.8	0	3.5	286	260	1	6-12		X		
5 Christa	4.8	2.1	5.4	0.3	85.3	0	2.1	185	188	0	K-5		X		
6 Michelle	52.8	4.9	33.1	0.5	4	0.4	4.2	234	313	0	K-5	X			
7 Nancy	48.1	1.8	41.4	0.2	5.8	0	2.7	231	216	0	K-5	X			X
8 Dana	3.4	27.5	12.8	0.2	49.7	0.2	6.2	255	276	0	K-5		X		X
10 Michael	58.7	1	33.4	0.2	1.9	0.9	4	287	289	2	6-12		X		X
11 Mia	20	9	31	4	1425	1	35				K-5	X			
12 Maria	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6-12	X			
13 Karen	37.1	10.6	47.6	0.3	1.5	0	2.9	156	184	0	6-12		X		
14 Lara	31.5	6.2	39.2	0.5	17.4	0.3	5	318	348	0	6-12	X			
15 Anna	3.5	13.9	3.9	0	72	0	6.7	226	263	0	K-5	X			X
16 Grace	10.9	5.8	47.3	0.2	33.5	0.2	2.1	630	669	5	6-12			X	
17 Elise											6-12			X	
18 Chris	37.1	10.6	47.6	0.3	1.5	0	2.9	156	184	0	6-12			X	

Appendix B: Indiana University IRB Approval

Protocol Number: 13028

Submission Type: Exempt

Initial Approval Date: 11/19/21

Amendment Number: A0002

Approval Date: 02/25/22

Amendment Request

4004

Describe the changes being made.

I am adding information to the recruitment letter so that potential participants understand what I am considering as "culturally" relevant.

4005

Why are these changes being made (i.e., what is the rationale for these changes)?

I do not want potential participants to think I am just looking for educators who work with ethnically or linguistically diverse students. I want them to consider all aspects of diversity (e.g. ability, sexuality, dialect, gender, etc.)

General Information

Principal Investigator: Hines, Mary Beth

Title: Culturally Responsive Practice in the Role of the Reading Specialist

0100

Select your protocol type

Exempt

0259

Are there any affiliated personnel you are unable to add because they were not found in the drop-down list?

No

Conflict of Interest

0110

Do any of the research personnel have a significant financial interest which could affect this research?

No

0114

Are any of the research personnel aware of an institutional conflict of interest which could affect or be affected by this research?

No

0195

Are you requesting that the IU IRB serve as the IRB of record for any non-affiliated researchers?

No

Research Basics

0102

Will the research be funded, fully or partly, by any off the following sources? This includes pass-through funding.

No external funding

0832

Select all of the following participant types that will be included in the research.

None of the above

0800

The research includes: Select all options that apply.

Research involving data collection with subject interaction.

Research Design

0150

Provide a brief statement (no more than 2-3 sentences) of the purpose of this study in lay terms.

The purpose of this study is to learn if and how reading specialists implement culturally responsive practices (CRP) in their targeted reading instruction in special education and general education spaces designed for supplemental reading instruction. Additionally, the study is designed to identify educators' perceived affordances and obstacles to implementing CRP during reading instruction, including how they perceive their students' need for and responses to CRP. Information learned in the study will inform future iterations of graduate level coursework in reading instruction.

0812

Describe the research interactions or interventions and data collection methods for this study.

Include the frequency and duration of procedure or activity.

I will conduct online focus groups with 8-20 participants. I will divide the participants into two groups, one being those who work with elementary school students and the second being those working with middle and high school students. From those two groups, I will create core groups of 6-8 participants. I anticipate that I may have more elementary level participants so there may need to be 3 core groups of educators, two elementary groups and one middle/high school group. Each core group will participate in 2-3 focus groups which will run for 60-90 minutes each. Ideally, I will video record the zoom meetings if participants agree. I may also look at the school reading curriculum and any materials the teachers use in their instruction if this becomes important.

0813

Will identifiable information be collected?

Yes

0814

If disclosed outside of the research, could subjects' data place them at risk of any of the following:

- criminal or civil liability
- damage to their financial standing,
- damage to their employability
- damage to their educational advancement
- damage to their reputation

No

Research Settings

0116

Select all of the settings where the research interactions or interventions will take place.

Other

0121

Name or describe the school or other settings where the research interactions or interventions will take place.

The focus groups will be held in an online setting via Zoom.

0122

Select one of the following as it relates to the other research settings.

Permission from the location is not required.

0123

Explain why permission from the location is not required.

The focus groups will be held virtually via zoom

Confidentiality and Privacy

0133

Select any source of information listed below that will be used for the research, either to identify potential subjects or gather research data. Select all that apply.

None of the above

0135

Will any data generated as part of the research be entered into a subject's medical record?

No

0159

Describe where identifiable electronic subject data will be stored, and how it will be protected to ensure confidentiality (e.g., all electronic data will be collected and stored on only encrypted devices)

The video recordings will be stored on an encrypted device. Following the transcription, which will use pseudonyms, the recording will be deleted. When transcribed, pseudonyms will be used for both teacher and any students whose name may inadvertently be mentioned.

0162

Describe the procedures that will be used to ensure confidentiality of written/paper records that contain subjects' identifiable data.

If any notes are taken during the zoom meetings, pseudonyms will be used.

Transnational Research

0826

Is this research taking place outside the United States?

No

Eligibility and Recruitment

0816

List criteria used to determine that a subject is eligible to participate in this study.

The educator participants identified for the study will be employed in public elementary, middle, or high schools in the role of providing reading instruction. The educator participants will have taken a literature course taught by the researcher that incorporates content and assignments involving culturally responsive reading instruction. They will have fully completed the course and have graduated from the program by the time of their participation

0304

Will subjects be offered any of the following for their participation in the study? All of these are forms of payment. Select all that apply.

None of the above. No payment.

0307

Describe your recruitment process, including how subjects will be identified and contacted.

I will recruit the educators via the attached email. They were chosen because they completed a course that contained content in culturally responsive teaching.

0819

Describe how you will obtain permission from subjects to participate, which includes the following information:

- They are being asked to participate in research,
- What they will be asked to do,
- Their participation is voluntary,
- The risks and benefits of participation, and

- Who to contact with any questions about the research?

A separate study information sheet will be given to each potential subject to review. The study information sheet is uploaded in the Protocol Attachments below.

0821

Will any member of the research team be in a position of authority (e.g., instructor and his/her students, manager, and his/her employees) over the subjects?

No

Appendix C: Study Information Sheet

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Study Information Sheet

Culturally Responsive Practice in the Role of the Reading Specialist

IRB # 13028

You are being invited to participate in a research study to learn how reading specialists implement culturally responsive practices (CRP) in their reading instruction in special education settings and general education spaces designed for supplemental reading instruction. Additionally, the study is designed to identify educators' perceived affordances and obstacles to implementing CRP in these spaces. Invited participants will have completed a course, CD 827 Teaching Narrative and Expository Literacy, which contained content around culturally responsive reading practices.

This research is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirement of a Doctor of Education Degree in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at Indiana University. Any recordings made to collect data will be stored on an encrypted computer and deleted immediately after transcription of the data is completed. All data will be deidentified. Names of participants and their schools will not be identified.

The study is being conducted by:

Trish Kelley-Nazzaro

Ed.D. student in Literacy, Language, and Culture Education in the Department of Education at the University of Indiana.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine if and how reading specialists integrate culturally responsive pedagogy into reading instruction in spaces where remedial reading instruction takes place. Affordances and obstacles in incorporating culturally responsive materials and instruction will be described. The results will be incorporated into future iterations of reading specialist coursework to support educators in culturally responsive literacy instruction.

Number of People that Will Participate in this Study: 8-20

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 8-20 reading specialists.

Procedures for the Study:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in the following:

Participate in 2 or 3 focus groups (60-90 minutes) conducted via zoom conferences that will be scheduled between March and June. Focus groups will be created for elementary level and middle/high school level educators with various dates offered for flexibility.

Allow the researcher to record the zoom session for ease of transcription. In the transcription, educators will be given pseudonyms. The recording will be deleted following its transcription.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY: While taking part in the study the risks are minimal. You can decide to leave the focus group if you choose and/or decide to not participate in a second session.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY:

You will not directly benefit from this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The zoom recordings will be on a password protected computer. The recordings will be accessed and transcribed by me following the zoom sessions using pseudonyms only. After they have been transcribed, the recordings will be deleted from the hard drive of the computer. Transcripts of the focus groups will be stored electronically on a password protected computer.

PAYMENT

You will not be paid for participating in this study

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

If you have any questions about the study, contact.

me,

Trish Kelley-Nazzaro

978-270-1253

tkelleyn@iu.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.

Appendix D: Focus Group Questions

Note: (modified after committee feedback- see Table 1)

1. How are students identified as needing the reading services you provide?
 - a. Who is part of this decision?
2. How are the students' reading goals identified?
 - a. Who is part of this decision making?
3. How do you identify the nature of the reading instruction you provide for your students?
 - a. If this is a scripted curriculum, follow-up questions:
 1. Is it possible to adapt the curriculum to fit the student? If so, how do you do this?
 - b. How are decisions made around frequency and setting for instruction (e.g., student groupings)?
4. How do you choose the reading materials that you will use in your reading instruction?
 - a. Is there anyone else involved in this decision?
5. How are students able to use their strengths during their instructional time with you?
6. How do you measure the reading progress of your students?
7. How do you measure your student's progress in their work with you?
 - a. What are the school's expectations for student progress in their time with you?
 - b. In your experience what factors support student progress in their work with you?
 - c. In your experience, what factors present obstacles to student progress in their work with you?
 - d. What are the school's expectations for student progress in their time with you?
 - e. How do you determine that a student no longer requires your specialized reading instruction?

Appendix E Cycles of Coding

Culturally Responsive Practice in the Role of the Reading Specialist

Cycles of Coding

Phase two First cycle coding

1) Skills-based	2) Print synonymous with school success	3) CR impact student engagement	4) reading is multifaceted	5) engagement feeds success	6) English is ultimate goal	7) curriculum needs skills focus
8) part of school identity	9) teacher impacts student engagement	10) many aspects of diversity	11) success impacts engagement	12) labels carry significance	13) human connection	14) print reading fosters confidence
15) teachers label kids	16) kids see other cultures	17) images are important	18) limited decodable resources	19) relationships important	20) Character portrayal matters	21) sustaining language and culture
22) schools leave kids behind	23) adapting nonfiction	24) success depends on appropriate materials	25) mainstream has better resources	26) scripted curriculum not diverse	27) literacy broadens teaches and changes you	28) reading is joy
29) access to the world	30) access to school knowledge	31) CR assessment is critical	32) home school connections	33) tracking by ability	34) teachers give up on kids	35) I'm not reader
36) negative behaviors	37) leveraging heritage language	38) project-based learning	39) lived experiences	40) socio political awareness	41) authenticity important	42) student choice
43) can't access school	44) multimodal access to literacy	45) fitting CR into structured literacy	46) CR is more than in the materials	47) CR promotes inclusion	48) Schools misidentifyin g students	49) kids want to look successful

50) not only culture but language	51) broader view of texts/reading	52) kids won't take risks	53) promote new literacies	54) skills I don't have	55) affirming literature	56) understand they don't fit in
57) engage student strengths	58) Not biased/check for bias	59) audiobooks and listening to others	60) Student interests	61) Misperceive skills with narrow focus	62) deficit views	63) good decoding to comprehend
64) reading knowledge measured by skills	65) pass MCAS	66) access to social connections	67/can't be superficial			

Phase 3 Generating Initial Themes

1. Readers have strong print-based knowledge 1, 7, 2, 4, 63, 64, 65, 8	2. Print skills lead to personal growth and joy; 1, 11, 13, 14, 27, 28,	3. Print skills provide access to school and knowledge. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 30, 43	4. Readers engage in literacy in multimodal ways. 59, 53, 51, 44, 38, 66, 42	5. Multimodal engagement leads to joy and confidence 3, 44, 4, 66, 51, 53, 42, 27	6. Multimodal access leads to knowledge and growth opportunities 33, 44, 4, 51, 59, 53, 11, 29	7. CR materials/literature must be authentic 5, 13, 10, 17, 47, 45, 50, 55, 18, 20, 41, 58
8. adapting or creating materials 60, 57, 51, 55, 45, 38, 23, 26, 17, 18, 42, 9, 21, 24, 25	9. building relationships 5, 9, 19, 32, 10, 21, 22, 46	10. broader definition of reading 42, 21, 38, 59, 51	11. incorporating interests and background 11, 19, 38, 39, 42, 46, 57	12. whole school practices marginalized students. 2, 6, 8, 11, 22, 34, 48, 61, 62, 64, 65, 9, 12, 15, 24, 25, 31, 33, 43,	13. sustaining heritage language requires skills. 21, 22, 37, 39, 50, 53 54	14. curriculum doesn't meet diverse needs 13, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 31, 45

				54		
15. CR affirms identities. 42, 10, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, 39, 41, 47, 57, 58	16. CR increases awareness of other cultures. 10,13, 16, 40, 46, 47	17. CR increases student engagement. 42, 11, 13, 16,40, 45, 57,	18. Kids disengage and lay low. 8, 9, 12, 15, 67, 43, 49, 56, 52	19. Nonreaders don't fit in. 22, 8, 9,12, 67, 56, 49	20. Concurring social emotional needs 2, 2, 15, 19, 22, 67, 36, 56	

Phase four Developing and Reviewing Themes (subthemes)

Students recognize and react to non-reader status. 18, 19, 20	Overcoming obstacles 7,8,9,10,11	CR practices engage and affirm. 15, 16, 17	Multi-level Obstacles Persist 12, 13, 14	Greater affordances of print-based reading 2, 3, 5,6
Readers defined primarily by print-based knowledge. 1, 4, 12				

Phase 5 Refining, Defining and Naming Themes

Theme 1: Readers are defined primarily by print-based knowledge.

Theme 2: Greater affordances of print-based reading

Theme 3: Reading specialists overcome some obstacles to CR literacy instruction but multilevel obstacles persist.

Theme 4: Culturally responsive literacy practices engage students and affirm identities and engage students but don't address the social justice issues related to the stigma of the "struggling reader" label.

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Degrees

Ed.D.	Indiana University Literacy, Bloomington, IN Culture and Language Education		May 2023
CAS	MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, MA	2005	
MS	Communication Science and Disorders, Boston University, Boston, MA		1989
BA	Biology <i>Summa cum Laude</i> , Regis College, Weston, MA		1987

Certificates & Licensure

Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech Language Pathology,
American Speech Language Hearing Association (awarded 1989)
01081517

Massachusetts State License Speech Language Pathology
(awarded 1989) #3386

Massachusetts Teaching License Speech/Language/Hearing
Disorder, all levels Professional level (awarded 1996) # 329739

Massachusetts Teaching License Reading, All Levels,
Professional level (awarded 2007) # 329739

Wilson Reading Certification Level 1, Wilson

Professional Experiences

CAS Literacy and Language Program Director /Assistant Professor, MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, MA-	2020
CAS Literacy and Language Program Director/Instructor, MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, MA-	2017-2020
Clinical Instructor, MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, MA	2015-2017
Speech Language Pathologist/Reading Specialist, Newburyport Public Schools, Newburyport, MA	2001-2015
Speech Language Pathologist, Dracut Public Schools, Dracut, MA	1996-2001
Outpatient Supervisor Speech-Language Pathology, Mass General Hospital	1993-1995
Speech Language Pathologist,	1992-1993
Speech Language Pathologist Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital, Salem, NH	1989-1992

Honors and Awards

- ACE Award (Award for continuing education) ASHA November 2019
- ACE Award (Award for continuing education) ASHA February 2014
- ACE Award (Award for continuing education) ASHA March 2013
- Graduation with Distinction (MS), Sargent College of Allied Health, Communication Disorders, Boston University (1989).
- Summa Cum Laude, Valedictorian (BA) Regis College, Biology, Weston, MA (1897)

Educational Activities

**Courses taught at MGH Institute
Primary Instructor - Graduate**

CD 827 Teaching Narrative and Expository Literacy;	2018-
CD 882-01 School Based Reading Practicum Fall and Spring semesters	2017-
CD 858-02 Special Topics- SLP in the Schools	2017- 2018
CD 881-01 Year 2 CSD Reading Outplacement Fall and Spring semesters 2017	2017-

Guest Lecturer MGH Institute

CD 760 Guest Lecture in Clinical Practicum Seminar Adolescent Language and Literacy	2020
CD 745 Spoken Written Language Development and Disorders Adolescent Language and Literacy	2016-2018
CD 745 Spoken Written Language Development and Disorders Adolescent Language: Compensating with Technology	2016

Guest Lecturer Emerson College

Adolescent Language: Compensating with Technology	2019
---	------

Clinical Supervision

CAS Program Supervisor for Field-based placements	2017-
CSD Program Supervisor for Field-based placements	2017-
CSD Clinical Supervision: In-house Speech, Language, and Literacy Center (MGH Institute)	2015-2017
Clinical Preceptor – Massachusetts General Hospital Supervised SLP graduate students	1992-1995

Mentoring

Committee Member for master's student thesis 2020
Ciara Woods, M.S. 2020 MGH Institute

Service

Committee Service Department and Institute

- LEARN Committee. The Language, Literacy, Education and Research Network (LEARN) 2019-
- Diverse Library Project 2020 -
- Continuing Education Committee 2016 -
- Inter-Professional Activities Committee 2016 -
- Certificate of Advanced Studies Admissions Committee. 2017 -
- Communications Sciences and Disorders Admissions Committee. 2015 - 2017.
- Advisory Committee – quality improvement 2016-2017
under direction of Director of Institutional Effectiveness

Professional Service

- Manuscript review Indiana Literacy Journal 2020
- Consultation to Boston Public Schools. reading and written language disabilities. 2017
- Manuscript Review Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in the Schools January 2018 2018
- Massachusetts Branch of the International Dyslexia Association Board Member. 2015-

Community Service

- MGH Community Impact Day. 2015, 2016.
- Infant Development Day. 2015, 2016
- Dyslexia Day on the Hill. Organized a group of students and faculty to be present at Dyslexia Day on the Hill to promote awareness of dyslexia legislation. February 1, 2016.
- Our Neighbors' Table (food bank) Amesbury, MA 2019, 2020

Presentations

- Worek, A., Halvorson, B., Young, I., **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.**, Larrivee, E., Riotte, M., Gao, G., Zipse, L., & Gochyyev, P. (November 2022). Inter-rater reliability of a tool for evaluating anti-oppressive and oppressive themes in decodable texts. Poster presentation accepted to the Annual ASHA Conference. New Orleans, LA.
- Hines, M.B., Metzger, J.A., Raymond, C., **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.**, Larson, K., Warmerdam, T. (2020) Cultivating epistemic privilege and hope in circuits of dispossession: Practitioner inquiry for social change. Panel Presentation. International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Chicago, IL. (Cancelled due to Covid-19)
- Croft, K. & **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.** (2018) Translating theory to practice: Teaching literacy to individuals with complex communication needs. Poster Presentation. American Speech Language and Hearing Association Annual Conference. Boston, MA
- **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.** & Haynes, C. (2017) The efficacy of types of feedback on student follow-through and clinical growth. Poster Presentation. American Speech Language and Hearing Association Annual Conference. Los Angeles, CA
- **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.** (2016) Adolescent language and literacy: Using technology to compensate. Poster Presentation. American Speech Language and Hearing Association Annual Conference. Philadelphia, PA

Publications

- Radville, K, Larrivee, E., Baron, L.S., **Kelley-Nazzaro, P.**, & Christodoulou, J. Online Training Modules for Teaching Assessment Skills to Graduate Student Clinicians. (2022). Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_LSHSS-21-00068

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Wilson Level 1
- Project Read
- Think SRSD Evidence based writing instruction
- Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing LIPS training
- Wilson Just Words
- Language Based Learning Disabilities- Strategies for Success
- MassCue Massachusetts Computer Using Educators
- Adolescent Language and Literacy: Supporting Emotional, Social, and Academic Growth MABIDA Reaching All Readers 2013
- Advanced Clinical Decision-Making in the Treatment of CAS
Diagnosis and Management of Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CA