Choice, Voice, and Agency: A Photovoice Study Exploring Multiple Means of Expression as Inclusive Pedagogy

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CHOICE, VOICE, AND AGENCY: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY EXPLORING
MULTIPLE MEANS OF EXPRESSION AS INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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May 2019

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

CHOICE, VOICE, AND AGENCY: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY EXPLORING
MULTIPLE MEANS OF EXPRESSION AS INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Pedagogy that centers primarily on oral and written language significantly limits the educational progress of students with disabilities because it may not regularly afford them opportunities to express what they have learned. It stands to reason that increased opportunities for expression through multiple ways or modes of meaning-making will lead to greater expressivity for all students. This research study documents, examines, and helps support five general and special education teachers’ learning of pedagogical practices that foster increased opportunities for expression of learning with respect to students with disabilities in elementary and middle school (grades 3-7) classrooms. I use photovoice research methodology in which participants took photographs of and shared stories about their regular classroom practice with other participants. Photovoice allows participants to simultaneously grapple with the relationship between perceptions of disability and pedagogical decision-making while designing, implementing, and reflecting on more inclusive practices for students with disabilities. The findings from this study demonstrate that teachers understanding of and practices concerning increased expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is the result of a localized discourse (Newark, NJ) situated within broader national Discourses related to literacy and disability. The study’s design forefronts the potential of multimodal expression as evidenced by teachers’ own expressions of learning and their descriptions of opportunities offered to students for expression of learning through multiple arts media and modalities. This study adds to the field of inclusive pedagogy by documenting teachers’ ideas, action, and reflection about connections between literacy and disability paradigms and practice as it relates to teaching practice for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: inclusive literacy, inclusive pedagogy, expression, multimodality, photovoice
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with deep appreciation to my beloved parents, Rose and Neil Sanzari, to my best friend and husband, Joseph Ciotoli, and to my two beautiful children, Christopher and Ava.

They are the heart and soul of all that I am and all that I do.
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Chapter One: Background, Purpose, and Significance of the Study

This dissertation describes a qualitative research study of the inclusive literacy pedagogy of a small group of upper elementary and middle school (grades 3-7), general and special education in teachers in inclusive classrooms. This study examines the intersection of these teachers’ conceptions of disability and literacy and the ways in which these conceptions seem to influence pedagogical practices—as far as can be documented—which may either limit/exclude or increase/include students with identified learning needs opportunities for meaning-making. I use photovoice methodology to document teachers’ multimodal (verbal, written, and visual) descriptions of inclusive pedagogy for increased expression of students with disabilities. I employ a thematic and critical discourse approach to analyze teachers’ language and to explore the complex relationship between disability and the construction of students’ literate identities.

Framing the Problem

I am the mother of two children, a son (known as Christopher) with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and a daughter without disabilities. There is an incongruity between what I believe Christopher understands—what he can receptively process—and what he can express in verbal and written language. The discrepancy between what Christopher can communicate through verbal and written language and what he expresses through visual and physical means (e.g., drawing, patterning of objects, and repetitive actions) has been a long-standing issue in his education. Christopher has always shown a marked preference for visual communication and at home uses a variety of multiple arts media for expression. He regularly uses Legos, paper and pencil, colored blocks, paint, and various household objects to represent his thinking, recreate his experiences, and express himself. He often creates multimodal ensembles that incorporate visual and written language. Christopher’s teachers and therapists do not embrace his primary modes of
communication; all schooling efforts have been to help him better express himself through oral and written language. Christopher made slow progress up the ladder of reading levels. Teacher after teacher insisted that because he could not retell, summarize, and answer inferential questions, they could not move him to the next level of text complexity. Writing posed a similar problem: Christopher could write answers to “who,” “what,” “where,” and “when” questions and his grammar and syntax was almost always spot on, but again teachers pointed to his need for writing prompts as indications of his lower level thinking.

The influence of normalized paradigms of literacy and disability contributed to Christopher’s teachers identifying him as less literate than his peers and his inability to express himself in ways that were officially sanctioned (speaking and writing) made his inclusion in classrooms difficult. Sociocultural perspectives examine the ways that educational structures and practices reduce individual complexity to a deficit within the student and obscure our understanding of social processes, policies, and institutions that produce stigmatized social identities and education inequities (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). Collins (2011) calls the reading of classroom actions and interactions through the lens of deficiency “ability profiling” (p. xiii). From a sociocultural perspective, “identities” are inscribed over time as repeated instances of deficit “positioning” (Collins, 2011, p. 14) and result in the disabling of students who deviate from the ideal or norm. Teacher perceptions, grounded in institutionalized paradigms and policies concerning “disabled student type” may influence instructional practices, particularly when those students are placed in general education classrooms.

Mainstream ideas about literacy education also serve to frame and enact a particular and recognizable literate identity for students largely determined by students’ ability classifications; an identity that is founded on the teaching of “non-normal” students within normalized settings.
The understanding of literacy as a linear, ladder-like process of skill acquisition requires that students with disabilities demonstrate proficiency in order to access increasingly higher level “rungs” of teaching and learning (Kliewer & Biklen, 2001). Students labeled as “emergent” or “early” literacy learners are often perceived as incapable of learning content-related curriculum and instruction typically introduced in upper elementary and middle grades. Compounding the issue is the marked preference for oral and written language as the dominant means of communication between teachers and students in classrooms (Serafini, 2013). Thus, there is a wide gap between traditional teaching of the general education curriculum and how students can “show what they know” (Jorgensen & Lambert, 2012, p.29).

This study overtly recognized a pluralized notion of literacy as theorized by the New London Group (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). A multiliteracies conception of literacy actively recognizes that meaning making is conveyed through multiple modes—or vehicles—of expression. The production of diverse “texts” by students is critical in the formation of their literate identities and how these identities are perceived by others. That is, recognizing students’ learning as expressed through images or musical sounds may lead teachers to reconsider what “counts” as expression of learning and to positive perceptions of students as literate and accomplished. This, in turn, can expand students’ opportunities to learn and succeed in classrooms.

Teachers’ pedagogical choices matter with respect to the individual and collective schooling experiences of children. Kliewer and Biklen (2007) use the term local understanding to describe a particular way in which teachers perceive and respond to students. Teachers who see beyond special education labels and can envision an “individual’s citizenship or right to full community participation…and crafts responsive contexts to which one’s active citizenship might
be fostered and realized” (Kliwer, 2008, p. 9) demonstrates local understanding. A teacher’s lens of local understanding views every student, including those with disabilities, as a full citizen capable of learning and participating as a literate citizen (Kliwer, 2008). Increased opportunities for expression—though multiple ways or modes—may lead to lead to greater access and participation in inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities.

**Statement of the Problem**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2014) defines literacy as “a fundamental right and the foundation for lifelong learning. It imparts knowledge, skills and the self-confidence to transform lives, leading to better health and income as well as fuller participation in the community” (p. 13). The foundational nature of literacy makes it easy to argue that access to high quality literacy instruction is critical for integration of all people in a literate society. Special education students have long been excluded from general education literacy learning and taught in self-contained environments using modified or alternative curriculum and specialized instruction that typically breaks “literacy” into component parts to be learned separately. More recently, these same students in the U.S. increasingly are being integrated into classrooms with students with and without disabilities in an attempt to educate them in their least restrictive environments as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (2004). This inclusion has brought a host of issues to the forefront concerning instructional practices to support the literacy learning of students with disabilities. These concerns shape what it means to be literate in general education classrooms and even how literacy for students with disabilities is defined.

As of 2013, more than six in every ten school-age students served under IDEIA spent at least 80 percent of their day in regular classrooms (United States Department of Education,
2015). In comparison to the other 49 states, New Jersey ranks second to last for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The national average of students with disabilities included in general education classrooms is 62.6% with New Jersey significantly below this average at 44.9% reported in 2016 (United States Department of Education, 2014). In 2007, a lawsuit was filed against the New Jersey Department of Education by the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, the Arc of New Jersey, Disability Rights New Jersey, and the Education Law Center regarding New Jersey’s failure to implement IDEIA, which requires the provision of a “free and appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment” to all eligible students (DRNJ v. NJDOE, 2004). The plaintiffs alleged that children with disabilities across New Jersey were denied in-class aides, services, and accommodations needed to receive an appropriate education in the general education classroom. In 2014, a settlement was reached to address the over-segregation of preschoolers, school-age, and minority students with disabilities. Within this settlement, over 75 districts, representing up to 30% of all students with disabilities, were slated to receive extensive training and technical assistance for district staff, and regular assessment through compliance training, monitoring, and reporting from approved state and local inclusion facilitators. Among these districts, Newark, a large urban district, has a particularly egregious segregation rate in that only 41% of students with disabilities are included in general education 80% of the day or more.

This study is set in Newark, New Jersey, within schools that are actively participating in inclusive training and technical assistance and with general and special education teachers who are experiencing the transition of students from self-contained to inclusive classrooms. Inclusion is conceived broadly in international settings as a “principled approach to the development of education and society” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 20) that is linked to people’s democratic
participation in all spheres of social life within and beyond education. UNESCO frames inclusion as the enactment of inclusive values in the creation of settings that are responsive to the diverse backgrounds, interests, experiences, knowledge and skills of children identified as disabled so as to overcome exclusion and promote participation in educational experiences with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. Conceptions of inclusion as articulated by UNESCO are problematic in the U.S., where a legal designation of disability is both a requirement for and barrier to inclusion. The disabled designation is contingent upon normalcy paradigms and inclusion is viewed as a potential placement or intervention. Thus, inclusion in general education in the U.S. is not a right and is achieved by invitation only (Taylor, 1988).

There has been increasing interest over the past two decades in the ways students with disabilities are academically and intellectually engaged, resulting in a focus on research that links participation in general education to increased expectations for students with disabilities as academic learners (Bottge, 2001; Jorgensen, 1998; Kliwer, 1998; Kliwer & Biklen, 2001; Kluth & Straut, 2001; UdvariSolner, Villa, & Thousand, 2002). In their book, Access to Academics for All Students, Kluth, Straut and Biklen (2003) outline a vision of inclusion that will serve as the conceptual framework for inclusive practice for this study:

1. Schools adopts a broad range of issues related to the education of students with disabilities, students who are racially and ethnically diverse, students using English as a second language, students labeled at risk, students placed in both high and low academic tracks, and students in urban schools.

2. Critiques schooling as we know it and proposes new ways to view and teach students in our diverse schools.
3. Presumes that diverse students can participate in academic instruction if appropriately and creatively supported.

4. Identifies frameworks, approaches, and strategies that foster access to academic curricula. (p. viii)

This study is concerned with how a small group of teachers’ conceptions of what it means to be “literate” and “disabled” impacts or informs their pedagogical decision-making for students with disabilities in inclusive contexts, with a specific focus on the choices students are afforded for expressing learning, ideas, and thoughts. To keep this study focused on “inclusive literacy” practices, I recruited five general and special educators, who taught in inclusive settings, from schools working with a state-approved organization, the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education, to increase inclusion rates. Inclusion teachers in this study are defined as certified general or special education teachers responsible for planning, instructing, and assessing students with and without disabilities. Students with disabilities are defined as students classified as eligible for Special Education services resulting in the development of Individualized Education Plans.

In order to understand if and how teachers’ conceptions about disability and literacy teachers may inform their practice, I focused on teachers’ discourse as they described expression and expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. Gee (1992, 2004) describes small d discourse (from this point indicated as “d discourse”) as language that is used to establish membership in a group. In this study, the teachers’ discourse conveys their “local understanding” (Kliwer, 2008) about literacy education and disability. The teachers’ discourse also exists in relation to big D (Gee, 1992, 2004) discourse (from this point indicated “Discourse”), or the ways in which people enact and recognize socially significant identities.
through complex and orchestrated combinations of language, action, interaction, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values within social institutions. Thus an examination of teachers’ discourse also reveals discourses that impact students’ literate identities; whether they are perceived literate or not and they ways in which expressive access is offered and denied.

This study concerns the intersection of these inclusion teachers’ conceptions of disability and literacy and the ways in which these conceptions seem to influence pedagogical practices—as far as can be documented—which may either limit/exclude or increase/include students with identified learning needs opportunities for expressive meaning-making. A key element of this study documents inclusion teachers’ own expression of experiences and the kinds of actions they may take as a result of collaborative discussion about expressive opportunities for students with disabilities. These issues are the impetus for my study and help shape the following research question:

In what ways do five general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7), as elicited using photovoice methodology?

Methodological Approach

This inquiry is grounded in qualitative research methodology and foregrounds situated learning as meaningful, relevant inquiry. I used the visual methodology strategy of photovoice as a baseline data generation process and collective analytical process (Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997) to explore a range of literacy perspectives and practices pertaining to the expression of students with disabilities of a small group of teachers in inclusive elementary classrooms. Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997) is a participatory visual methodology in which participants use a camera to produce an image-based account for analysis. Focus groups provide an opportunity for
the collaborative “data generation and initial meaning making of that data” (Latz, 2017, p. 58) through a form of interviewing called photo-elicitation (Collier, 1957) in which participants respond to their images, attributing social and personal meanings and values. In this study, participants also worked to identify themes that arose from the photo-elicitation. As a result of repeated coding, specific issues took on immediate importance, which stimulated the generation of new photography prompts.

I use a thematic and a critical discourse approach to analyzing and interpreting data. Thematic analysis involves the identification of the ways in which participants talk about student expression. Taking a critical interpretive approach to teachers’ discourse—as analyzed via coding—allowed me to focus on the language used to describe students with disabilities, the specific relationship between language and practice and the formation of student identities by teachers, and provided a view to the broader ideologies that surround and influence these teachers’ practice.

**Summary of Findings**

Findings from this study, made visible through teachers’ discourse about expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in five Newark, New Jersey inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7), are captured in five themes: (1) choices increase self-expression; (2) more time is needed for increased expression; (3) expression is visible proof of learning; (4) expression is contextual; and (5) social emotional literacy seems to be foundational for expression of academic learning.

The findings from this study show that these teachers grapple with the complexity of expression as an educational construct and their discourse is evidence of localized discourse that contributes to the pedagogical practices concerning the expression of students with disabilities in
inclusive classrooms. Teachers’ conceptualization of practices that support increased expression for students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms both reaffirm and resist the institutionalized Discourse of disability and literacy education. In particular, teachers’ own expressivity as part of the photovoice process reveals that multiple means of expression is an inclusive practice that allows for individual differences among individuals and their different kinds of meaning-making.

**Significance of the Study**

The findings from this study demonstrate that teachers understanding of and practices concerning increased expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is the result of a local (Newark, New Jersey) and national Discourses related to literacy and disability. The results from this study will help educators better understand the ways that expressive opportunities for students are shaped by the teachers’ discursive literacy practices within the official general education literacy curriculum and students’ special education classifications. This study also shines light on the ways that teachers’ discourse mirrors larger societal Discourse pertaining to literacy and disability. Teachers may gain understanding on the ways discourse are imparted to students through pedagogy that either limits or increases their expressive capabilities.

This study adds to our existing bank of knowledge about and contributes to the literature on inclusive literacy pedagogy. The body of literature discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g., Collins, Griess, Carithers, & Castillo, 2011; Flewitt, Nind, & Taylor, 2009; Kliwer, 1999; Lacey, Miller, Goldbart, and Lawson, 2007; Pandya, Hansuvadha, & Pagdilao, 2016) describes studies of literacy practices for students with disabilities in general education classrooms that provide multiple pathways for meaning-making to include students with disabilities and equally value all
forms of expression, and thus includes all students, including students with disabilities, in literacy learning. While this study was exploratory in nature—it aimed to have teachers examine the range of expressive forms offered to students during instruction and the relationship between pedagogical choices and participating teachers’ conceptions of literacy and disability—the study’s design also enabled teachers to take action by offering their students increased opportunities to express their learning through multiple arts media and modalities and engage in rich discussion about their meaning making. It adds to the field of inclusive pedagogy by documenting teachers’ ideas, action, and reflection about connections between literacy and disability paradigms and practice as it relates to teaching practice for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

This study is unique in that it uses a multimodal process, photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1994), to help teachers interpret their practice and attribute meaning to that practice. The photovoice process enabled teachers to grapple with the relationship between perceptions of literacy and disability and pedagogical decision-making in ways that help them design, implement, and reflect on more inclusive practices for students with disabilities. It also generated rich spoken data for subsequent fine-grained analysis. Thus, I argue, it has great potential as an action-research tool for teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

The second chapter of this dissertation conceptualizes the sociocultural-oriented theoretical frameworks that form the basis of this study, including Multiliteracies, New Literacy Studies, Disability Studies in Education, and identity theory. I also outline the current trends in inclusive pedagogy for literacy learning: multimodality, arts pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning, and productive digital technologies, along with a review of the relevant research
concerning literacy pedagogy, which describes the need for expanded views of disability and literacy as it relates to students’ expressive opportunities during instruction. Chapter Three describes the methodology used to conduct the study, the research setting, the five participants, and the methods of data analysis. In Chapter Four, I describe five critical moments (Fairclough, 1992) and other examples to highlight my thematic interpretation of the data. Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings with a view to the dominant discursive d/Discourse that shape inclusive pedagogy for increased expression. I conclude in Chapter Six with a discussion of the implications from the study’s findings for research and practice.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

UNESCO (“Literacy for All,” n.d., para 1) defines literacy as a “human right and the basis for lifelong learning.” An individual’s literacy is linked to their abilities to successfully navigate the world in which they live, leading Alexander (2005) to suggest that improving literacy is a driving force and, arguably, the most important educational goal in American education. Literacy education must be provided to and supportive of all students, including students with disabilities. Pedagogy that centers primarily on oral and written language significantly limits the educational progress of students with disabilities (Kliewer & Landis, 1999) because it may not regularly afford them opportunities to express what they have learned. This is especially true for students who do not talk with words or reliably communicate verbally. Students who show limited academic achievement when measured by oral and written language assessments have historically been placed in self-contained classroom settings and are often taught using a curricula and methodology different from that found in general education settings.

Access to general education settings and curriculum has increased for students classified for special education services: among all students ages 6–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA), the percentage who spent most of the school day (i.e., 80 percent or more of their time) in general classes in regular schools increased from 33 percent in 1990 to 62 percent in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Despite this increase, there is a limited understanding of the ways to best meet the academic needs of a wide variety of learners in general education (Browder, et al., 2007; Jorgensen & Lambert, 2012; Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Sindelar, et al., 2006). Particularly, there is a significant need to better understand literacy instruction for students with disabilities as it relates to comprehension and learning “content”—knowledge and information that teachers teach and that students are
expected to learn in a given subject or content area, such as English language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies (Browder et al., 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2001; Mims et al., 2012)—because it is typically delivered and assessed using oral and written methods. The goals of this study aim to better understand the range of pedagogical choices for students with disabilities to express their literacy learning in inclusive classrooms.

This chapter is organized around an evolving construct of inclusive literacy instruction. I begin by defining the need for literacy teaching and learning that is inclusive of all students. I situate the study in a sociocultural framework and describe how situated learning theory (Lave, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978), multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies, the field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), and identity theory contribute to a reconceptualization of literate citizenship (Kliwer, 2008) in inclusive classrooms. I argue that teachers’ conceptions about disability and literacy influence pedagogical choices that in turn afford or limit expression of learning and ultimately full participation in classroom learning for students with disabilities. In the second section of this chapter, I present existing and well-established instructional approaches to inclusive education including multimodality, arts pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning, and Productive Digital Technologies in order to describe ways that researchers have conceptualized literacy instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Finally, I review the empirical literature on inclusive literacy pedagogy, which describes the need for expanded views of disability and literacy, as it relates to students’ expressive opportunities during instruction.

**A Sociocultural Theory Framework**

In the first section of this chapter, I define inclusive literacy and situate my study within a sociocultural framework. I explain the important role teachers’ beliefs play in how expression of
students with disabilities is understood and describe the ways teachers’ pedagogical practice may impact the opportunities these students have for expression in inclusive classrooms.

**Inclusive Literacy**

I define inclusive literacy as part of a social practice that values how all students construct meaning in the social worlds they inhabit. This view of literacy focuses, in particular, on teaching and learning a range of sign systems found within the social setting of the classroom. New Literacy Studies scholars use the term *literacy practices* to avoid the notion of literacy as a set of traditional print literacies. Similarly, I use the term *inclusive literacy practices* to describe learning that encompasses a range of multiple modes of communication systems, of which printed language is just one mode (cf. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Within this same orientation, *literacy events* are useful ways of describing activities in which literacy plays a role (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Combinations of literacy events constitute the literacy practices of a given classroom environment and become a source of shared multimodal meaning making.

**Sociocultural Theories of Learning**

This study is strongly influenced by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory which posits that individuals learn through their participation in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). The central tenets of Vygotsky’s (1978) theory—individuals learn through social interactions; language and other semiotic tools (e.g., technology, art) facilitate learning; and the context within which learning takes place impacts the learning that occurs— influence the way this study is designed and what it seeks to do. Consequently, my definition of inclusive literacy practices is predicated on the assertion that social activity is integral to cognition and learning (Lave, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, students interact as members of a particular culture by drawing on available aspects of that culture through communication and use of tools that support
development of thinking. Students learn to understand and use these cultural tools through a process of social construction; that is, meanings are constructed with others and by the means of interacting. Vygotsky’s (1998) theories can be extended to the use of digital technologies, such as computers, in the learning process. Technologies that support collaboration are an important cultural resource. According to Knobel and Lankshear (2014), the use of digital technologies can encourage peer interaction, sharing information, collaboration, and communication within classroom contexts. Indeed, it is easy to argue that these practices occur to a greater extent with technology than with traditional printed text today. Pedagogy that meaningfully incorporates technology engages learners in the authentic, functional language of their worlds.

Sociocultural theories of learning concern the intersection of social interaction and the classroom as a cultural institution and the role it plays in individuals’ learning and development. Pedagogy that is situated within sociocultural theories of learning makes use of tools and practices that promote communication and collaboration among students so as promote learning for all. In the next section, I will discuss sociocultural theories of literacy as they pertain to the ways students use language to communicate and collaborate in classroom contexts.

Sociocultural Theories of Literacy

Rather than understanding literacy as an individual’s cognitive skills that allow them to read and write with proficiency (see critiques of same in Serafini, 2014), a sociocultural perspective views literacy as a social practice in which meanings are shared through diverse symbols in various social contexts and which achieve different social purposes in socially recognized ways (Street, 1998). This view acknowledges that children experience the world in different ways; they engage in different kinds of literacy practices in different contexts, use a variety of symbols systems, and most effectively learn when literacy is used for meaningful
purposes and in authentic contexts (Gee 1996, 2004, 2016). Vygotsky explained that while learning is inherently social in nature, individual development is unique; that is, learning is “a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive process” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 166) and can be applied to the proposed study because literacy development cannot be neatly measured in stages determined by standardized norms typically used in American schools.

**Multiliteracies.** Multiliteracies theory presents a broadened definition of being literate, in which competencies are practiced in accordance with particular settings, identities, and social practices. In keeping with sociocultural theories of literacy described above, multiliteracies theorists posit the importance of linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of expression (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015). Pedagogy informed by multiliteracies theory is designed to better address the confluence of multiple discourses, forms of representation, and linguistically, technologically, and culturally diverse communities (Mills, 2009).

In a pedagogy of multiliteracies, all forms of representation are viewed as “processes of transformation, rather than as processes of reproduction” and “all forms of representation, including language, are valid, not just those which have been sanctioned” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 10). Expression is understood as a creative action on the part of the user. At the heart of multiliteracies theory, then, is the acknowledgement that communication is more than language. This is at odds with U.S. literacy pedagogy in which oral and written language are the primary modes of teaching and learning and students are required to speak and write to communicate with teachers and peers. In contrast, a pedagogy of multiliteracies embraces **multimodality**, a term used to describe the various forms by means of which meaning can be constructed and
communicated. A mode is a socially recognizable verbal, visual, aural, textural or gestural system of communication. Examples of modes include American Sign Language, sculpture, music, color, and written text, to name just a few. Often more than one mode is used in expression. According to Serafini (2014), a “multimodal ensemble” utilizes a “variety of cultural and semiotic resources to articulate, render, represent, and communicate an array of concepts and information” (p. 14). Visual images include drawings, paintings, graphs, photography, and charts, among many others. Texts, in the sense used in this study, are those which use written alphabetic language. Design elements include typography, borders, space, and color.

Multimodality is a theorized way of examining practices that use several modes to create an artifact. Each mode used in a multimodal ensemble contributes to the artifact’s overall meaning; thus, the ways in which modes are used impact how the artifact is understood. For example, a graphic novel is created through a combination of drawn pictures and written text. Image and text are combined in a unique way for unique expression; or as Hull and Nelson (2005) assert, “multimodality can afford, not just a new way to make meaning but a different kind of meaning” (p. 225). Every mode has unique characteristics that can be utilized in different ways and for different purposes. Because each mode does “different semiotic work” (Serafini, 2014, p. 15), no single mode can completely express meaning (Kress, 2010). Multimodality then, increases meaning potentials of different modes. Pedagogy that focuses exclusively (or almost so) on print-based texts privileges a specific form of knowledge and meaning. Multiliteracies pedagogy then, affords increased opportunities for expression and meaning-making for all students, especially for those identified with special learning needs and for whom oral and written means of communication present a significant challenge.
New Literacy Studies. The field of “The New Literacy Studies” grew out of an anthropological and social cognition turn within literacy research in the 1980s that paid close attention to how people made and shared and took up meanings in their everyday lives—even when these people were not “literate” in an encoding and decoding sense (see, for example, the work of Street, 1984; Heath, 1982; Scribner and Cole, 1981; see also Burnett, Merchant, Pahl, & Rowsell, 2014; Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1998, 2005). Scholars in the field of New Literacy Studies roundly critique the traditional psychological approach to literacy, which characterizes the ability to read and write “as something people do inside their heads” (Gee, 2010, p.2). Instead literacy is a “social and cultural achievement” concerning “participation in social and cultural groups” (Gee, 2010, p.3). Literacy is transformed from the singular to the plural: the many “literacies” individuals use are determined by the values and practices of the different social and cultural groups to which they belong. New Literacy Studies theorists contend that we must examine local literacy events, practices, and actions to understand the multiple and contextualized literacies that students experience at the intersection of language, culture, politics, and society (Heath, 1982; Street, 1995). Within this broad orientation, a key branch of the field of New Literacy Studies has emerged and focuses on “new” ways of being literate in current times, especially since the rise of digital technologies in people’s everyday lives. New literacies—within this field of study—focuses on “new socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 65). What is “new” about literacy, from this perspective, is not so much the use of digital technologies as the means of producing, sharing, accessing, and interacting with meaningful content, but the “distinctive ethos” that is created from participation in a digital culture that is highly collaborative (Lankshear & Knobel,
This collaborative participation is critical to inclusive practice, as inclusion in general education is often predicated on assumptions of learning that are chronologically normative. An inclusive pedagogy must embrace the range of values and practices all members hold in order for all students to be participate.

Delpit (2003) writes “We must learn who our children are—their lived culture, their interests, and their intellectual, political and historical legacies…then, we can begin to educate the inheritors of the planet” (p. 20). New literacies are a new norm for U.S. children in 2017. In a national survey conducted by the Erikson Institute (2016), technology used by young children under age 6 was found to be almost universal. In this study of 1,000 parents across the country, 85% of parents reported that they allow their young children to use television, tablets, smartphones, and computers, and over 50% of children under 9 years old use the Internet (Erikson Institute, 2016). It has become clear to many researchers in the field that new literacies research has important implications for the classroom. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) observe, “If we see literacy as ‘simply reading and writing’—whether in the sense of encoding and decoding print, as a tool, a set of skills, or a technology, or as some kind of psychological process—we cannot make sense of our literacy experience. Reading (or writing) is always reading something in particular with understanding” (p. 2). Similarly, Kist (2007) explains how new literacies can be used in classroom settings, providing examples of how teachers are blending new literacies with traditional literacy practices through anime remixing, rap music creation, and digital storytelling. Knobel and Lankshear (2011) argue that that blogging and "affinity spaces" devoted to practices like fan fiction, video game-playing, music and video remixing, and photosharing—to name a few—are ways to integrate old and new literacies into worthwhile classroom learning.
New literacies researchers examine how classrooms create opportunities for all students to learn using digital technology in meaningful—and not just “add on”—ways. With respect to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education curriculum, new literacies offers possibility as a critical pedagogy to disrupt hegemonic paradigms of learning. In the past, the “book mediated social relations of control and power;” traditional “teaching to the book” established the “voice of expert and authority, teacher/expert and student/learner” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 13). Certain methods of instruction were privileged and types of expression were privileged over others within the classroom, while others were regarded as inappropriate and marginalized. Technology affords the potential for great influence on the “institutional space” of classrooms and the norms within those spaces (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011) and opens the door wide to various—and new—modes of expression for students with disabilities. In the next section I will discuss how a sociocultural view of disability builds upon sociocultural theories of learning and literacy to promote pedagogy that is inclusive of all students.

**Sociocultural View of Disability**

In the United States, special education is the prevailing system of practice for educating students identified as disabled in ways that address individual differences and needs. Rooted in a medical model paradigm wherein children are characterized as deficient in ways that are best resolved with remediation, categorizations are created and used to identify and label physical, psychological, and cognitive “conditions” (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Heshusias, 1989; Sleeter, 1986). The traditional belief is that clinical assessments of disability help determine treatments for improved functioning that allows individuals to lead more “normal” lives. Within the traditional framework of disability, then, a just society is treatment or disabled persons.
In contrast, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) scholars promote the understanding of disability from a social model perspective in which social and political structures (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; Baglieri, Valle, & Connor, 2011; Everelles, 2000; Linton, 1998) are deployed “as a means of measuring and categorizing and managing populations” (Baynton, 2013, p. 18) who fall outside socially constructed norms. Dudley-Marling and Gurn (2010) critique special education practice as operating under faulty assumptions: that presume (a) students with disabilities fall outside the boundaries of what is “normal” and function in ways that “normal” students do not; and (b) all students who share a categorical designation share the same characteristics and thus learn in the same ways. DSE scholars are critical of the use of statistical regression as a means for understanding human behavior. They contend that normal curve distribution has been misapplied as a way of assigning average physical and behavioral characteristics to individuals and groups (Gould, 1996; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010). Despite evidence that the normal curve applies only to homogeneous distributions, it is widely used as a representation of variation among the heterogeneous groups (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010). Statistically speaking then, the “wide range of phenomena…do not fit a Gaussian, or normal curve” (Pearson, 1900, as cited by Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010, p. 173-174), and, most especially, the diversity of human experience will not meaningfully distribute along a bell-shaped curve. Nevertheless, within the U.S., statistics continue to be used as a scientific and mathematical justification for categorizing people as average or exceptional, and that which is measured as average is accepted as “normal” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 30).

Special education, conceived as separate and apart from general education, legitimizes “the normal curve and normal people” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 29) as an evaluative benchmark; that is, what is average is considered normal. This rendering of “normal” as scientific fact is firmly
entrenched within educational psychology and research methodology (Baglieri et al., 2010; Baglieri et al., 2011; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010). As a practice, special education is founded on the myth of a “normative center;” children are deemed eligible for special education services and placement by means of standardized curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Baglieri, Valle & Connor, 2011; Gallego et al., 2006). Special education classification often leads to determinations that students with disabilities are best served in separate classes and schools and segregated from general education curriculum and typical peers.

The social construction of the “disabled” label also masks issues of race, class, culture, and gender bias that are deeply embedded in society (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2012; Connor & Gabel, 2013; Sleeter, 1986). For example, the Office of Civil Rights has been documenting patterns of disproportionality since 1968 and The Office of Special Education Programs has found troubling trends (as cited by Hosp & Reschly, 2004) of Black and Hispanic students labeled as “disabled” at higher rates than their White peers. An early study by Dunn (1968) found that between 60-80% of racial and ethnic minority students were classified for special education services, claiming the “establishment of special schools and classes [were used] as a method of transferring these ‘misfits’ out of the regular grades” (p. 5). Sleeter (1986) argued almost twenty years later that special education classes serve a sociopolitical purpose: “to differentiate and protect White middle class children who were failing in school from lower class and minority children, during a time when schools were being called upon to raise standards for economic and military purposes” (p. 212). These trends have persisted since these early studies and critiques and are particularly problematic in New Jersey, which has one of the highest rates in the country of students educated in self-contained settings, and is, therefore, highly relevant to
the study. Students who deviate from the norm, including disabled, racial and ethnic minority students, are removed from general education as a way of protecting the status quo.

**Literate Identity and Students with Disabilities**

Vygotsky viewed cultural artifacts as central to people’s abilities to control their own social identities. From a socio-cultural perspective, literacy and learning are influenced by how people make sense of themselves and others’ identities in a given social context. Identity refers to the ongoing social process of self-making in conjunction with others through interaction (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). The view that identity is part of a social practice suggests that children’s literacy learning is based on the social positions they occupy and the types of participation that those positions or roles afford (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1998). Identities are not inherent or fixed, but emerge when recognized within a relationship or social context. Ideas about what it means to be literate are introduced in home contexts. In school contexts, formal instruction in literacy occurs, and along with it, a “tacit understanding of what it means to be knowledgeable about literacy, what behaviors are valued as well as what it means to be competent” (Beach & Ward, 2013, p. 240). Heath (1983) found that literacy practices used at home do not always coincide with the literacy practices privileged in schools. Children’s interpretations of literacy events and practices within classrooms and their participation in those events and with those practices contribute to the development of their literate identities. For example, what students “know, understand, and can do with [written] texts” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 35) leads teachers (and students themselves) to ascribe identities such as “good reader” or “poor speller.” These one-dimensional interpretations of identity emerge directly from the literacy practices that are valued in schools. As children learn the social and cultural expectations for literacy in their home, school, and community, they learn what counts as literacy (Street,
Identity labels, such as “struggling,” “proficient,” and “deficient” (Moje & Luke, 2009) can impact a student’s learning trajectory as well as their self-concept and peer relations.

Sociocultural perspectives on disability in education examine the ways that educational structures and practices reduce individual complexity to a deficit within the student and obscure our understanding of social processes, policies, and institutions that produce stigmatized social identities and education inequities. Collins (2011) calls this reading of classroom actions and interactions through the lens of deficiency “ability profiling” (p. xiii). In her ethnographic narrative case study analysis of one boy’s experience of marginalization in an elementary inclusive language arts classroom, Collins (2011) describes how deficit thinking (often unconscious), positions teachers to “police the border of ‘normal’ that encourages the ranking, ordering, and classification of students according to perceived differences” (p. 14). Collins (2011) argues that individual identity development is greatly influenced by ability profiling and that the “roles, categories, and storylines” into which students are enculturated in classroom communities contribute to the formation of individual student identities. From a sociocultural perspective, “identities” are inscribed over time as repeated instances of deficit “positioning” (Collins, 2011, p. 14) and result in the disabling of students who deviate from the ideal or norm. With respect to student identity, classroom contexts contribute to how socially recognized identities get built and inscribed over time and how repeated instances of positioning result in recognition of a “type” of student. Thus, teacher perceptions of the “disabled student type” may influence their instructional practices, particularly when those students are placed in general education classrooms.

Lave and Wenger (1991) aptly describe the process of learning in terms of becoming a different person. The reciprocal relationship between literacy and identity is critical to
understanding inclusive pedagogy. Kliewer and Biklen (2007) use the term *local understanding* as a particular way in which teachers perceive and respond to students. Teachers who see beyond special education labels and can envision an “individual’s citizenship or right to full community participation…and craft responsive contexts to which one’s active citizenship might be fostered and realized” (Kliewer, 2008) demonstrates local understanding. A teacher’s lens of local understanding views every student, including those with disabilities, as a full citizen capable and of learning and participating as a literate citizen (Kliewer, 2008).

Teachers’ perceptions and expectations for students with disabilities are integrally tied to access to and progress in general education (Zygouris-Coe, 2014). Many teachers may be unaware that widely-held socially constructed beliefs about disability serve as a lens through which they develop student expectations. Cognitive biases and the use of heuristics directly influence teachers’ interpretations of events in ways that confirm beliefs and experience. Gitomer, Bell, Qim, McCaffrey, Hamre, and Pianta (2014) usefully encapsulate this problem by explaining: “the instructional aspects of classroom practice are particularly difficult for observers to see in similar ways” (p. 5). Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs about their efficacy play a role in their motivation (Bandura, 1977) and many new inclusion teachers do not think they have the ability to teach students with disabilities (Burstein, Cabello, & Hamann, 2009).

The struggles teachers encounter with inclusion may, at least in part, relate to teachers’ beliefs about the education of students with disabilities. Numerous empirical studies and theoretical accounts claim that teachers’ beliefs heavily affect their practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Thompson (1992) claims that “to understand teaching from teachers’ perspectives we have to understand the beliefs with which they define their work” (p. 129). Richardson (1996) also suggested that the study of belief is needed in teacher education.
because beliefs “drive classroom actions and influence the teacher change process” (p. 102). For example, in their case study, Nguyen, Anderson, Waggoner, and Rowel (2007) collaborated with a fourth grade teacher to implement “Collaborative Reasoning” discussions in her classroom over a three-month period. The authors reported that the instructor had difficulty shifting her practice to a more dialogic teaching because she was concerned with the “right” interpretation of the story, allowing few opportunities for students to notice the misinterpretations on their own. Although the teacher was coached and guided, these difficulties were still persistent throughout the study.

Researchers have shown that more teachers support the idea of inclusion than are willing to implement it (Jordan, Glenn, McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Monahan, Marino & Miller, 2000). For example, in their study, Monahan et al. (2000) found that only 41% of the teachers believed that children with disabilities have the right to be in general education classrooms. Along a similar line, Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie (2009) showed that teachers, in general, were not enthusiastic about placing children with disabilities in general education classrooms, due to a perceived lack of pedagogical knowledge needed to meet their students’ needs. Moreover, some general education teachers think that instructing students with special needs would decrease their instruction time for the rest of the class, especially if they engage them in discussions (Jordan, Glenn, McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

To sum up, the literate identities of students with disabilities are built through multiple experiences in home and school; shaped through interactions with caregivers and siblings, and teachers and peers; and interpreted through the lens of individuals’ participation in literacy events and through literacy practices. The narrative that children hear about literacy, and particularly about their literacy within schooling contexts, matters greatly to how they see
themselves. Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that “the most significant stories are often those that imply one's memberships in, or exclusions from, various communities” (p. 16). It is imperative that literacy pedagogy contributes to literate citizenship for all students.

**Summary**

In this section I argued that literacy instruction must be understood as a social practice and critiqued the reliance on developmental models of literacy and skills-based approach that often result in a “functional literacy” curriculum that presents a limited literacy trajectory for students with disabilities. I argued that sociocultural theories of language and literacy development (Multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies), in contrast to the psycholinguistic and basic skills approach to literacy learning, are more inclusive in that they expand what “counts” as literacy in response to the widespread digitization of every life—especially within developed countries like the U.S. If students with disabilities are to become literate citizens, as viewed by themselves, their peers, and by their teachers, literacy pedagogy must recognize, cultivate, and celebrate the myriad ways students’ express themselves.

**Designing Instruction for Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy**

In the past few years, educators and researchers have become increasingly interested in the ways in which students with disabilities are intellectually and academically engaged in the classroom. While there is no single definition of inclusive teaching, it can be described as the collection of teaching approaches used to address the needs of students with diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012) so that all students have access to the general education curriculum and to learning alongside their non-disabled peers. Current trends in literacy instructional practice for inclusive classrooms include the use of “elastic” instructional frameworks that provide multiple
“texts” and the use of technology (Chandler-Olcott, 2003) such as Universal Design for Learning (Rose, Meyer, & Hitchcock, 2005) and Productive Digital Technologies (Pandya & Ávila, 2017). Universal Design for Learning and Productive Digital Technologies are promising frameworks because they help to engineer learning environments that support multimodal meaning-making. In the tradition of multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies, these frameworks serve to reconfigure the range of possible modalities for student expression to include oral and written representation, but also:

- Visual Representation: still or moving image, sculpture, craft (representing meaning to another); view, vista, scene, perspective (representing meaning to oneself).

- Audio Representation: music, ambient sounds, noises, alerts (representing meaning to another); hearing, listening (representing meaning to oneself).

- Tactile Representation: touch, smell and taste: the representation to oneself of bodily sensations and feelings or representations to others which ‘touch’ them bodily. Forms of tactile representation include kinesthetic, physical contact, skin sensations (heat/cold, texture, pressure), grasp, manipulable objects, artifacts, cooking and eating, aromas.

- Gestural Representation: movements of the hands and arms, expressions of the face, eye movements and gaze, demeanors of the body, gait, clothing and fashion, hair style, dance, action sequences (Scollon, 2001), timing, frequency, ceremony and ritual. Here gesture is understood broadly and metaphorically as a physical act of signing (as in ‘a gesture to ...’), rather than the narrower literal meaning of hand and arm movement. Representation to oneself may take the
form of feelings and emotions or rehearsing action sequences in one’s mind’s eye.

Spatial Representation: proximity, spacing, layout, interpersonal distance territoriality, architecture/building, streetscape, cityscape, landscape.

(Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 12-13)

Talking about literacy can be tricky at the best of times, but talking about a wide ranging literacies that extend well beyond alphabetic text can be even more so, especially within the U.S. where “literacy” is so often taken to mean “reading” and “writing” (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Grote-Garcia, 2016). The terms, “Multiliteracies” and “new literacies,” also have drawbacks. While these terms broaden communicative possibilities, the adoption of the term “literacies” may in fact reify traditional conceptions of literacy. For these reasons, I decided to draw upon the arts and adopt the term *multiple arts modalities and media* to refer to the multiple ways teachers can offer their students to express their learning. Art education has a tradition of expanding and enriching our cultural perceptions, ideas, and values and providing multiple, flexible ways for people to learn and interact with the world. They expand our conceptions of how to represent and perceive content and provide rich, diverse, contextual interactive experiences. The arts have much to offer education in terms of engaging and meaningful options for teaching and learning. In short, “these options provide alternative pathways for addressing variability and enabling learners to find their own directions for learning” (Glass, Meyer, & Rose, 2013, p 107).

*Multiple modalities* refer to the communication channel used to convey ideas such as photography, sculpture, and music (Serafini, 2014). They also include various multimodal ensembles (combinations) of any of these modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Glass et al. (2013) use the example of a contemporary dance class to demonstrate the possible range of
expressive modalities for expressing the concept of dreams through movement. An understanding of dreams could be expressed using several other modalities, each with its own affordances and limitations, and none inherently better than another.

*Multiple media* refers to the particular technologies used for the rendering and dissemination of texts, particularly multimodal ensembles (Serafini, 2014). The Internet, Television, and PowerPoint are examples of media that use multimodal ensembles. By nature, the arts encourage and provide multiple options for representation:

The same meaning or emotion can be conveyed through multiple forms of art: through visual art (painting, drawing, collage), movement (dance, pantomime), sound (instrumental music, choral music, sound design), written or oral language (poetry, novels, short stories), physical construction (sculpture, architecture), multimodal combinations (film, video, theater), and so forth. (Glass, Meyer, & Rose, 2013, p. 107)

This study centers on teachers’ conceptions of and practices concerning the expression of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. I view *expression* as both “products and processes” that individuals engage in as they attempt to “capture, understand, and translate” ideas, events, and experiences (Brizuela & Gravel, 2013, p. 1). For example, consider a situation in which a student tries to explain to her teacher the relationship between characters in a novel. By remembering information and events from the story, she creates a representation of how the characters relate to each other. The student may make a mental representation, use a visual map to organize their ideas, talk with a peer, or some combination of these actions. My claim is that expression is more than just the tangible representation of ideas; it is also the constructive act of making-meaning. Multiple arts modalities and media engender what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) call “sign-making:” a process in which makers of signs seek to make a representation that
is culturally, socially, and psychologically situated; that comes together through the efforts of the
sign-maker; that uses forms that are appropriate for the expression of their meaning in the
mediums available to them; and where the sign and the sign-maker are intrinsically related in
that the signmaker’s signs are not arbitrary, but hold meaning for the sign maker. Thus, I also use
the term “meaning-making” to describe expression in this study. It reasonable, then, that
pedagogy centered on multiple arts modalities and media may afford students increased
meaning-making opportunities.

In this study I sought to explore conceptions of teaching that fosters multimodal
expression for students with disabilities. Acknowledging the concern by Kress (2000) of an over-reliance on language-based theories of meaning and communication, two pedagogical
frameworks discussed in depth below, Universal Design for Learning (Meyer, Rose & Gordon,
2014) and Productive Digital Technologies (Pandya and Ávilar, 2015) have potential for
teaching practices that may support increased expression of students with disabilities in inclusive
classrooms. Both frameworks build upon the conception of “design” as articulated by Cope and
Kalantzis (2009): ‘design’ has a double meaning, “simultaneously describing intrinsic structure
or morphology, and the act of construction” (p. 10). Students are able to choose from “Available
Designs” (representational forms); “Design” (the work they do when they express meaning); and
“Redesign” (how, by Designing, they transform themselves and the world).

As students negotiate and demonstrate their own literate identities through interactions
with different texts and different environments, they become literate in a variety of modes of
meaning, knowing which literate practices and resources to use when faced with new and
different contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Thus, a multiliteracies approach supports students
as they build the capacity to consume, produce, and think critically about multimodal (print and
multimedia) texts and using multiple modes of meaning (Cope, Kalantzis, & Cloonan, 2010).

Teachers who employ a multiliteracies pedagogy offer their students ample opportunities to access, evaluate, search, sort, gather, and read information from a variety of multimedia and multimodal sources and invite students to collaborate in real and virtual spaces to produce and publish multimedia and multimodal texts for a variety of audiences and purposes. (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 87)

A multiliteracies approach allows educators to be “designers of learning processes and environments” (Westby, 2010, p. 66) and through increased options for expression, students are active meaning makers. Design refers to how students make use of the resources available to them in order to communicate across social contexts: “how people make use of the resources that are available at a given moment…to realize their interests as sign makers” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 252). In contrast to traditional models of literacy that privilege print and are based on “the acquisition and mastery of sets of established practices, conventions, and rules” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 252), an offering of multiple arts modalities and media can be employed to match the sign-maker’s social purpose and intentions, context, and audience (Kress, 2000). Design offers a flexible framework for literacy instruction in which appropriate resources incorporate students’ interests, motivations and identity, thereby providing inclusion in meaningful and transformative literacy practices within the classroom community.

**Universal Design for Learning**

Universal Design for Learning is an instructional design framework for developing curriculum, lessons, and activities with the purpose of creating access for a diversity of learners (McGuire, 2014). While often touted as a practice for students with disabilities, Universal Design for Learning was conceptualized at the onset as “inclusive, not solely for students who have
disabilities” (Orkwis & McLane, 1998, p. 11). Meyer, Rose and Gordon (2014) assert that “universal” means “every learner - not just those traditionally seen as belonging in the middle of the bell curve (the mythical average student) or just those traditionally seen as belonging ‘in the margins.’” (p. 89). While there are several frameworks for universal design in education (e.g., Universal Design for Learning, Universal Design in Education, Universal Design for Instruction, Universal Design of Instruction, and the Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning), all are conceived of as inclusive pedagogical approaches where teachers plan for a diversity of learners (Bowen, 2000; Burgstahler, 2009; Higbee, 2003; Katz, 2012; Meyer & Rose, 2005).

Universal Design for Learning, as articulated by Rose, Meyer, and Hitchcock (2005), identifies three core components of any lesson or activity as providing access for all learners through: multiple representations of content, multiple forms of expression, and multiple options for engagement. Universal Design for Learning is integral for planning instruction that incorporates opportunity and access for students of all abilities. This definition draws upon the research of the Center for Applied Special Technology (Orkwis & McLane 1998; Rose, Meyer, & Hitchcock, 2005), who claim that Universal Design for Learning is a scientifically valid framework based on brain-imaging experiments that demonstrate diverse patterns of neurological activity across humans and contexts (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). Drawing upon the diverse ways people learn (as evidenced by neurological differences in brain activation), Universal Design for Learning scholars recommend “multiple means” instructional approaches that provide flexibility in the ways teachers motivate students to learn and represent knowledge and the ways students express understanding. Universal Design for Learning complements multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies pedagogy in that it acknowledges intra-individual and inter-individual differences. The trifecta of multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression is a
curriculum framework that holds the promise of “access [to], participation, and progress” (Rose & Meyer, 2002) in the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Thus, Universal Design for Learning curriculum and instruction normalizes difference and promotes inclusive education.

Universal Design for Learning is considered a promising framework for educational policymakers. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) includes Universal Design for Learning in their definition of comprehensive literacy instruction. The Every Student Succeeds Act appropriates the Universal Design for Learning definition found in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 in their recommendation that Universal Design for Learning should be incorporated into the preservice preparation of teachers, in-service teacher training, and in postsecondary instruction:

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) means a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that — (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient. (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015)

The Every Student Succeeds Act encourages States to design assessments using Universal Design for Learning principles, and awards grants to local education agencies who use Universal Design for Learning, and who adopt technologies that align with the framework. In addition, Universal Design for Learning is touted as a “means of personalizing learning” and as a “framework for designing and deploying educational technologies in effective, meaningful
ways” in the 2016 National Technology Plan. The flexibility of Universal Design for Learning components can be used across any standard, curriculum, and assignment to support all students, and makes access to general education literacy instruction for students with disabilities possible.

**Productive Digital Technologies**

There is a growing body of research on technology used to support literacy learning for students with disabilities (Kennedy & Deshler, 2010) such as assistive devices (e.g. iPads) and instructional programs (e.g. Spelling City) designed to help students acquire new skills (Pandya & Ávilar, 2015). There is however a gap in the literature on “productive digital technologies,” defined as “technologies through which students in special education produce digital content” (Pandya & Ávilar, 2017, p. 24). In a systematic literature review of the research published in the years between 2004-2015, Pandya and Ávilar (2015) examine the use of productive digital technologies in special education contexts. The main criterion for inclusion in the review was that students with disabilities were engaged in digital production of some kind, identifying a small core group of 14 studies out of a total of 1,132 initial searches. Technologies in these studies varied and ranged from the use of iPads (Flewitt et al., 2014) to students using videos for storytelling (Snoddon, 2014). The authors also included a range of ages, grades, genders, disability identifiers, and classroom contexts. Nine out of 14 studies occurred in upper elementary and secondary classrooms. Most classroom contexts were inclusive – nine out of 14 studies looked at students with disabilities who were included in general education classrooms for all or part of the day. In addition, the majority of studies (six) were conducted in the U.S., with four in the U.K. Of significance are the theoretical perspectives found in the studies reviewed. Nine researchers drew on socio-cultural theories of language and literacy learning found in multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies research.
The findings from Pandya and Ávilar’s review (2015) are critical to the present study in that they support the need for a view of literacy pedagogy that expands expression of learning for students with disabilities. The most significant and consistent finding was the positive impact of technology on students’ identities as reflected in their ability to be independent and experience feelings of self-esteem, competence, motivate interest in academic work, foster peer interaction, and learn academic content through the production of digital artifacts. The addition of the three quantitative studies yielding statistically significant results led Pandya and Ávilar (2015) to conclude that “digital tools have the potential to change the game so that intelligence becomes relative and dependent upon opportunities and expectation, as well as more traditional, and often more exclusive measures” (p. 128). Productive digital technologies hold promise as an inclusive pedagogy, but given the small number of articles reviewed in this 2017 review, more research clearly is needed.

In this section I discussed the subfields of Disability Studies in Education and Multiliteracies as approaches to pedagogy that allow students with disabilities to engage more authentically and purposefully with literacy curriculum and instruction. Universal Design for Learning (Meyer & Rose, 2005) and productive digital technologies (Pandya & Ávila, 2017) provide flexible frameworks that may increase access to general education curriculum for students with disabilities by broadening the continuum for expression through digital technologies. Because Universal Design for Learning and productive digital technologies take into account multiple pathways by which student can express themselves, these frameworks provided me with rich resources from which to draw upon as I worked with participating teachers in this study.
A Systematic Literature Review of Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy

I conclude this chapter by reviewing the empirical literature on inclusive literacy pedagogy to describe the need for expanded views of disability and literacy as it relates to students’ expressive opportunities during instruction. To explore how literacy pedagogy is conceptualized as inclusive, I searched the following databases: Academic Research Complete, ERIC, and EBSCO host Complete. I also conducted ancestral searches of articles cited in this chapter. The search terms included, but were not limited to: inclusion, literacy, students with special needs, students with disabilities, primary, elementary, expression, Universal Design for Learning, multimodality, technology, and arts education. Thirteen studies fulfilled the selected criteria: (a) published in a peer reviewed journal after Salamanca’s international clarion call for inclusive education in 1994; (b) focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms; (c) focused on a conception of literacy teaching and learning that is multimodal, interactive, and creative; (d) concerned with expression of student learning; and (e) involved teachers and students in English-speaking countries from grades K-8.

The following categories were examined for trends across articles: (a) research methodology; (b) study participants; (c) purpose; and (d) findings. Of the thirteen international studies included in this review, four countries are represented: the United States (7), the United Kingdom (4), Australia (1), and Canada (1). Studies are primarily qualitative (9), two are purely quantitative, and two use mixed-methods. Researchers commonly situated their studies in sociocultural frameworks. Participants were typically general education teachers, although there were two studies that included special educators and co-teachers. Six studies concern early childhood teachers and children. Research purposes can be classified into two categories. Eight researchers sought to understand how teachers’ use of a variety of multimodal tools—including
iPads, digital cameras, visual art medium—would impact literacy learning for students with disabilities. All of these researchers reported some benefit to student learning as a result of multimodal forms of expression. Five researchers sought to explore teachers’ conception of literacy for students with disabilities in inclusive contexts and better understand the relationship between beliefs and practice. See Table 1 for a complete listing of articles by methodology and purpose.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Date</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Study Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Griess, Carithers, &amp; Castillo (2011)</td>
<td>24 students across eight inclusive classrooms in grades 1–5 (USA)</td>
<td>Qualitative - 3 year longitudinal case study including video, audio, and still recordings of children, field notes, instructional notes and reflections recorded by the classroom teacher, planning documents, interviews with students and teachers, and student work.</td>
<td>To investigate the influence of a three-year model for professional development of collaborations between teachers and artists to design instruction that drew on multimodal forms of literacy as tools for constructing and representing meaning</td>
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<td>Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, Cook Smith (2012)</td>
<td>9 general and special education K-2 teachers in both inclusive and substantially separate classrooms; 16 classified students based on significantly subaverage intellectual functioning and deficits in two or more adaptive skills areas (USA)</td>
<td>Quantitative - pre- and posttest data on 11 quantitative reading and language measures including the widely used Woodcock–Johnson Tests of Achievement III</td>
<td>Field test of the Literacy by Design (LBD) instructional approach and accompanying multimedia e-books to learn whether young students with significant intellectual disabilities would benefit from a technology-based universal design for learning (Universal Design for Learning) approach to literacy instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faux (2005)</td>
<td>3 students (2 eleven year olds and 1 twelve year old) identified as having social communication difficulties and dyslexia; dyspraxia; attention deficit and hyperactive disorder) (UK)</td>
<td>Qualitative - 12 video-recorded and transcribed lessons, samples of student work (written and digital), field notes, semi-structured interviews with teachers</td>
<td>To investigate how students with disabilities use an ICT (information and communications technology) multimedia environment to produce stories</td>
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<td>Flewitt, Nind, &amp; Taylor (2009)</td>
<td>Three four-year-old children with identified special educational needs, who attended a combination of early education settings – one “more special” and one “more inclusive” (UK)</td>
<td>Qualitative - ethnographic, video case studies: field observation visits by two researchers to each site; video observations at home and in more inclusive’ and ‘more special’ settings (total 6 hours in each setting); semi-structured interviews and informal ‘chats’ with staff and parents; home diaries of the children’s observed weeks completed by the children’s parents; researcher field and diary notes Multimodal analysis of literacy experiences at home and in the two educational settings and of the collaborative, multimodal nature of the literacy events and practices</td>
<td>To investigate how a multimodal approach to literacy events and practices can help to break through some of the barriers that may prevent children with special educational needs from participating in enjoyable, inclusive literacy practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
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<td>Hall, Cohen, Vue, &amp; Ganley (2015)</td>
<td>284 students in 14, sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade classes across four schools; Ten general and special education co-teachers (USA)</td>
<td>Mixed Methods – Traditional T-tests for differences using the pre- and post-test standardized measures were used for the quantitative data. Qualitative data were coded by themes (computer experience, reading skills, forum dialogues) and then sorted into categories (e.g., navigation, supports, comfort level)</td>
<td>To determine whether Universal Design for Learning and curriculum based measures are embedded directly into an instructional digital environment supported better reading outcomes for all students, particularly those with disabilities, and determine whether providing support for teacher instructional decision making and differentiated instruction for individual students leads to appropriately supported reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katz, Mirenda, &amp; Auerbach (2002)</td>
<td>10 students identified as having developmental disabilities, ages 6 – 10 in 3 inclusive elementary schools – 2 that subscribe to MI and one that has ascribed to no specific education theory or model (CAN)</td>
<td>Quantitative: Descriptive, case study model with 10 participants. MS-CISSAR software, eco-behavioral assessment in mainstream classrooms; 1-minute momentary time sampling procedure that consists of 3, 20-look record rest cycles, one to record student behavior, one to record teacher behavior, and one to record classroom ecology; standard taxonomy modified to reflect study questions (i.e. traditional classroom tasks) to incorporate MI tasks, verbal and nonverbal tasks; observer training and interrater reliability</td>
<td>To examine the engagement and social interaction of students with developmental disabilities in inclusion classrooms that ascribed to multiple intelligences pedagogy curriculum, instruction, and assessment To examine instructional practices in MI classrooms differentiated from practices in TI (typical inclusive) classrooms: small group instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, multimodal instruction, flexible response options, curriculum performance-based instruction, use of technology, community-based instruction</td>
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<td>Kliewer (1999)</td>
<td>14 preschool-primary teachers (some inclusion, some self-contained) 6 families of children identified as moderately to severely mentally disabled (ages preschool through primary) (USA)</td>
<td>Qualitative – interviews, observations, student evaluations and IEPs “Veracity of findings:” “extensive time spent in contexts” focused on curricular individualization; copious amounts of naturalistic and transcribed data; observations and interviews in school settings, discussions of distributed field notes with half of participants</td>
<td>To explore teachers’ perceptions about the meaning of curricular individualization for students identified as moderately to severely mentally disabled (ages preschool through primary)</td>
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<td>Kliewer, Fitzgerald, Meyer-Mork, Hartman, English-Sand, &amp; Raschke (2004)</td>
<td>9 classrooms in 5 separate schools; 213 preschool and K ages children with disabilities (45 identified as having moderate to severe intellectual disabilities) (USA)</td>
<td>Qualitative – Ethnographic field observations conducted in nine classrooms across five programs over two years; observation of 213 children, sixty-two of whom had disabilities, and forty-five of whom were labeled with moderate to severe (i.e., significant) disabilities 226 observations and interviews, detailed in field notes conducted by</td>
<td>To explore literacy development in young children considered to have significant disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Study Description</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
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<td>Lacey, Layton, Miller, Goldbart and Lawson (2007)</td>
<td>122 teachers across 35 schools; 61 interviewed (UK)</td>
<td>Qualitative: observations in schools and interviews of teachers; focus groups of teachers and interviews; consultation with five “expert witnesses” alongside desk-based research designed to locate “good practice”</td>
<td>To identify examples of good practice in teaching and learning literacy that includes students with severe learning difficulties and disseminate them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mason, Steedly, &amp; Thormann (2008)</td>
<td>34 focus groups in 16 states over 2 years (unclear how many actual participants) Teachers, artists in residence and VSA directors (nonprofit, international organization for arts abilities of people with disabilities in urban, suburban, and rural areas); elementary, middle, and high school teachers in inclusive and special education environments (USA)</td>
<td>Qualitative: 60-90 minute sessions using standard protocol and grounded theory approach Focus groups Described their instructional experiences with a wide array of students with disabilities including sensory, physical, emotional/behavioral, cognitive, and learning disabilities First year – descriptions of integrated arts instruction Second year – successful descriptions Stories included planning, teaching, and evaluation</td>
<td>Article describes two studies with two different purposes: 1. To examine teachers’ perceptions of the arts on students with disabilities in terms of social, academic, cognitive, and artistic skill development 2. Implementation of a pilot study to examine efficacy of rubrics in measuring social, academic, cognitive, and artistic skill development</td>
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<td>Miller, Lacey, &amp; Layton (2003)</td>
<td>113 general and special education primary school teachers (UK)</td>
<td>Qualitative – survey of 113 general and special education primary school teachers across the U.K and 30 case studies. The survey asks teachers to identify an individual student with disabilities and provide information on instruction using the general education curriculum for that student. Among the respondents, thirty volunteers were chosen for individual observations and interviews.</td>
<td>To examine the UK’s Framework for Teaching, guidelines for implementing the Literacy Hour for Students with disabilities; evaluate teachers’ inclusive literacy practices; and explore teachers’ definitions of literacy</td>
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<td>Oakley, Howitt, Garwood, &amp; Durack (2013)</td>
<td>Two children with autism, ages 5 and 8 (AUS)</td>
<td>Mixed-methods: Qualitative – case studies, multiple sources of data including observations and anecdotes taken during intervention and analysis of student work during 10-day ICT intervention. Quantitative: diagnostic and summative assessments to determine the effect of the</td>
<td>To examine the effectiveness of 2 10-day classroom-based Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) interventions in assisting young children with autism engage in and learn literacy.</td>
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</table>
Taken together, the studies in this review help paint a somewhat cohesive, even if incomplete, picture of inclusive literacy. Across the fourteen studies, a conceptualization of inclusive literacy emerges as either: (a) teaching interventions for students with disabilities that involve increased expressive modalities for greater access to and participation in traditional literacy learning; (b) instruction for all students that provides multiple pathways for meaning-making to include students with disabilities; or (c) an instructional framework that equally values all forms of expression and thus includes all students, including students with disabilities, in literacy learning, which I will discuss in detail in the following sections (See Table 2).
### Table 2

**Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention for participation in and access to traditional literacy activities for students with disabilities</td>
<td>“As part of their total literacy program, LBD students received 20 to 30 min per day of context-based reading instruction supported by the intervention software” (Coyne et al., 2014, p. 165).</td>
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<td>“Interventions designed during instruction were based on student needs and teacher strengths” (Hall et al., 2014, p. 9).</td>
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<td>“The first case involved an intervention that employed two iPad apps—which were not intended specifically for children with autism—to support the literacy learning and engagement of a five-year-old” (Oakley, Howitt, Garwood, &amp; Durack, 2013, p. 86).</td>
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<td>“The first set of analyses examined the data across the five participants in each type of classroom to determine the differences, if any, in the instructional practices they experienced in MI versus TI classrooms” (Katz, Mirenda, &amp; Auerbach, 2002, p. 232).</td>
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<td>“The study examined whether the Framework for Teaching the Literacy Hour can provide an inclusive learning experience for pupils with SEN” (Miller, Lacey, &amp; Layton, 2003, p. 15).</td>
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<td>Multiple Meaning-Making Pathways</td>
<td>All children benefit from the opportunity to express themselves in a variety of ways including academic English (oral and written), colloquial (oral), and graphic representation” (Collins, Griess, Carithers, &amp; Castillo, 2011, p. 18).</td>
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<td>“This study has shown that, given a choice, students select methods and resources which provide a context of personal relevance and importance” (Faux, 2005, p. 180).</td>
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<td>“Many teachers also make some use of ‘inclusive’ literacy, that is, literacy that is not about learning to read and write text. Many of these activities fit into the new literacies associated with technology and media related to the digital age” (Lacey, Layton, Miller, Goldbart, &amp; Lawson, 2007, p. 159).</td>
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<td>Teachers reported various ways in which the arts increased the voice, choice, and access to learning for students” (Mason, Steedly, &amp; Thormann, 2008, p.44).</td>
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<td>“Cindy used the affordances of multimodal digital composition (MDC) to express herself in ways that went beyond what to her would be the limiting structures of a written essay, or even an oral or written assignment supported with drawings. Though of course traditional writing and drawing skill sets are critical to the MDC process and important in school and life in general, MDC provided Cindy opportunities to express herself creatively in other ways” (Pandya, Hansuvadha, &amp; Pagdilao, 2016, p. 424).</td>
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</table>
Reframing of Literacy Instruction

“Recognizing and valuing the multimodal richness of all children’s communicative competence, whether conventional or idiosyncratic, appears to be fundamental to nurturing all children’s literacy development and to fostering inclusive literacy practices” (Flewitt, Nind, & Taylor, 2009, p. 231).

“As educators, we must surround all children with a symbolic and literate milieu, and facilitate their participation therein with thoughtful resources, activities, and expectations” (Kliwer, 1999, p. 99).

“Inclusive education appeared to be fundamental to the literate citizenship of children with significant disabilities. In its rejection of the status quo of segregated schooling, inclusion immersed students in the wonderfully chaotic patterns, semiotic systems, and narrative forms of the early childhood literate community. Beyond mere presence, however, was the teachers’ active belief that literacy was many things and that all students, including those with the most complex disabilities, were capable sense-makers” (Kliwer, Fitzgerald, Meyer-Mork, Hartman, English-Sand, & Raschke, 2004, p. 398).

Interventions for Access to and Participation in Traditional Literacy Instruction

Five studies center on traditional conceptions of literacy as instruction pertaining to reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, & Cook Smith, 2012; Hall, Cohen, Vue, & Ganley, 2015; Katz, Mirenda, & Auerbach, 2002; Miller, Lacey, and Laynton, 2003; Oakley, Howitt, Garwood, and Durack, 2013). These studies examine teachers’ use of multiple means of expression through technology as a way of increasing the participation of access to standards-based general education literacy curriculum specifically for students with disabilities. Researchers posit that innovative teacher interventions, including technological supports, strategies, and tools, can be employed to support literacy learning for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Four studies in this group use quantitative measures to measure the outcomes of interventions, although two of them also incorporate qualitative data in their analysis. One study uses qualitative research methods.
Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, and Cook Smith’s (2012) quantitative study examined the integration of Universal Design for Learning and technology in the creation of supportive and accessible learning environments for students with disabilities. Specifically, Coyne et al. (2012) investigated the effect of an instructional approach, Literacy by Design, that addressed the five components of balanced literacy recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000), on the reading achievement of 16 students with intellectual disabilities in nine inclusive K-2 classrooms. Of interest to the current study is this study’s focus on providing students multiple means of expression that included varied response options (e.g., visual multiple choice, sentence starters, open responses typed or audio-recorded). Pre- and posttest data on 11 quantitative reading and language measures included the widely used *Woodcock–Johnson Tests of Achievement III*. Researchers found that, on average, the Literacy by Design group made significantly higher gains in comprehension than did the control group, suggesting a strong effect of the intervention. Researchers claimed that Literacy by Design represents “rigorous application of Universal Design for Learning” through multimodal learning (e.g. ebooks and software) and options for expression (e.g. varied student response options). The authors caution over-generalization of the effect given the small size of the sample.

A 2015 study conducted by Hall, Cohen, Vue, & Ganley also investigated the potential of Universal Design for Learning and technology as inclusive instructional methods. Participants included 284 students in 14, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade inclusion classes across four schools and ten general and special education co-teachers. Researchers examined whether Universal Design for Learning principles and curriculum based measurements that are directly embedded into digital environments support better reading outcomes for all students, and particularly those with disabilities in general education settings. Both pre- and post-test
standardized measures (qualitative) and survey (quantitative) measures were employed to evaluate how supports for teachers’ instructional decision making and differentiated instruction for individual students aided reading comprehension. Hall et al. (2015) reported that the results from this experimental study demonstrate (a) the effectiveness of the general approach of using technology to combine Universal Design for Learning and curriculum based measurements for students identified as having learning disabilities and (b) the significant potential of Universal Design for Learning and curriculum based measurements for improving reading comprehension for all students. Researchers cited the built-in flexibility of the Universal Design for Learning/curriculum based measurements technology as allowing for teachers to create tailored interventions for students. They claimed that the innovation is “not the technology per se but rather how teachers effectively use Strategic Reader to spark interactive and meaningful learning” (Hall et al., 2015, p. 10). The researchers described examples to show a range of pedagogies in response to curriculum based measurement data, including reciprocal teaching, conferencing, and video production.

Oakley, Howitt, Garwood, and Durack (2013) described two case studies of classroom-based Information and Communication Technologies literacy interventions for two children with autism (ages 5 and 8). Conducted by Australian pre-service teachers, the 10-day interventions were designed to identify specific learning needs and then implement targeted interventions. The first case involved an intervention that employed two iPad apps (not intended specifically for children with autism) to support the literacy learning and engagement of the five-year-old participant. The second case involved the use of Microsoft PowerPoint on a laptop to develop multimodal non-fiction texts to improve an eight-year-old’s attitude to, and engagement with, reading. Each intervention was found to be effective in improving the participating child’s
literacy achievement and engagement. Each intervention used multisensory and student-centered approaches that acknowledged the children’s strengths and interests, with information and communication technologies being used to transform teaching and learning tasks. In the first case study, comic-making engaged the child in his literacy learning and “enabled his role as an active creator of texts” (Oakley et al., 2013, p. 91). For the second case-study, the generation of multimodal texts that drew upon the child’s interests and strengths helped to improve his motivation and engagement in reading.

Katz, Mirenda, and Auerbach (2002) examined the engagement and social interaction of students with developmental disabilities in inclusion classrooms that ascribe to multiple intelligences pedagogy curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Katz et al. (2002) defined multiple intelligences practices as distinct from “typical inclusive” classrooms in that they include small group instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, multimodal instruction, flexible response options, curriculum performance-based instruction, use of technology, and community-based instruction. The study concerned multiple intelligences as an intervention for ten students identified as having developmental disabilities, ranging in ages from 6 – 10 in three Canadian inclusive elementary schools, two of which identify as subscribing to multiple intelligences theory and practice and one that identifies as subscribing to no specific education theory or model. Katz et al. (2002) used a quantitative study design employing MS-CISSAR software, an eco-behavioral assessment for “mainstream classrooms.” Data was collected using a 1-minute momentary time sampling procedure that consists of 3, 20-look record rest cycles, one to record student behavior, one to record teacher behavior, and one to record classroom ecology; standard taxonomy modified to reflect study questions (i.e., traditional classroom tasks to incorporate multiple intelligences tasks, verbal and nonverbal tasks). Researchers reported a high
level of interrater reliability. Katz et al. (2002) reported that overall, experiences in both multiple intelligences and “typical instruction” classrooms are more similar than different in that instructional activities consisted primarily of “traditional classroom activities” (p. 234) such as listening to lectures and completing worksheets. When not engaged in whole class direct instruction or independent seatwork, participants in multiple intelligences classrooms were observed engaging in multiple response activities more than in “typical instruction” classrooms. Katz et al. (2002) suggested that multiple intelligences classrooms provide “opportunities to engage in activities that allowed for multiple modes of responding or small group activities” (p. 234). They also noted that on average, participants in multiple intelligences classrooms spent more time interacting with peers. Participants were also observed participating in activities different from their peers and in non-instructional activities. Researchers reported limitations including a small sample size and the inability to randomize sampling.

The sole qualitative study in this group is by Miller, Lacey, and Laynton (2003). Miller et al. (2003) examined the Framework for Teaching, national guidelines for implementing the Literacy Hour, for Students with disabilities in the United Kingdom. The Literacy Hour is the United Kingdom’s national literacy curriculum that centers on phonics, spelling and grammar, comprehension, and composition, similar to the Common Core Standards in the United States (and thus comparative to general education curriculum). Miller et al. (2003) expanded the study to include an exploration of “inclusive literacy practices” and to explore definitions of literacy that “tacitly or explicitly guide the approaches that emerge” (p. 15). This study had two phases: an initial survey sent to 206 general and special education primary school teachers across the United Kingdom and 30 case studies. The survey asked teachers to identify an individual student with disabilities and provide information on instruction using the general education curriculum.
for that student. Among the respondents, thirty volunteers were chosen for individual observation and interviews.

Findings from this study indicated that inclusive literacy instruction was viewed as the intentional selection of multimodal materials and activities as a strategic intervention for increasing access to the national Literacy Hour curriculum. The most frequently cited materials and activities included computers, computer software, and other assistive technology such as hearing aids and symbol cards. Only seventeen teachers responded to the question about how the literacy hour could be modified for inclusion and half of those seemed to suggest a broadened conception of literacy was needed. It is clear that teachers viewed inclusive literacy as meeting the “demands of the Literacy Hour tasks within the profiles represented by individual children with their unique patterns of skills and needs” (Miller et. al., 2003). The authors noted that the planning involved in including students in the Literacy Hour is likely to have helped teachers develop alternative instructional approaches and expanded definitions of literacy in general.

Viewed together, the five studies describe the use of multimodal instructional interventions that attempt to improve on traditional literacy activities to enhance or transform learning for students with disabilities. While these studies present a picture of inclusive literacy as a student-centered approach that utilizes multimodality to increase participation and access to traditional literacy learning, they do not specifically address practices that support students’ multimodal expression. To help identify the ways in which teachers understand expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, this study’s framing and analysis is guided by the concept of multiple arts modalities and media, for they provide students with multiple meaning-making pathways. Multiple meaning pathways is the focus of the next section.
Multiple Meaning-Making Pathways

The second group of studies concerns instruction that provides multiple pathways for meaning-making so as to deliberately include students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Collins, Griess, Carithers, & Castillo, 2011; Faux, 2005; Lacey, Miller, Goldbart, and Lawson, 2007; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008; Pandya, Hansuvadha, & Pagdilao, 2016). Researchers of these studies present literacy as more than reading, writing, listening, and speaking and acknowledge the validity of multimodal forms of expression as valuable in their own right. These researchers contend that all children, especially those with disabilities, benefit from the opportunity to express themselves in a variety of ways including academic English (oral and written), colloquial (oral), and graphic forms of representation.

Collins, Griess, Carithers, and Castillo (2011) described a longitudinal case study of 24 students across eight classrooms in grades 1–5 that investigated the influence of a three-year model for professional development of collaborations between teachers and artists to design instruction that drew on multimodal forms of literacy as tools for constructing and representing meaning. This study yielded robust qualitative data including video, audio, still recordings of children, field notes, instructional notes and reflections recorded by the classroom teacher, planning documents, interviews with students and teachers, and student work. Collins, Griess, Carithers, and Castillo (2011) focused on an extended description of one teachers’ pedagogical strategy of having students design and play board games. The authors reported that multimodal mediums of expression allow all students, not just those with disabilities, to express themselves in a variety of ways including academic English (oral and written), colloquial (oral), and graphic representation. The authors ultimately posited the importance for teachers to adopt a
“multiliteracies perspective” (p. 19) in order to “support the full participation of students with
diverse cognitive, linguistic, and socioeconomic profiles in classroom instruction” (p. 19).

Another small qualitative study conducted by Faux (2005) in the United Kingdom
concerns three students (2 eleven-year olds and 1 twelve-year old) identified as having social
communication difficulties, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and/or attention deficit and hyperactive
disorder. Faux investigated how these students use an “information and communications
technology” multimedia environment to produce stories. A wealth of data including 12 video-
recorded and transcribed lessons, samples of student work (written and digital), field notes, and
semi-structured interviews with teachers allowed Faux to conduct a detailed analysis of the
students’ processes when creating stories using multimedia software. Faux reported a plethora of
findings regarding students’ meaning-making, including the importance of personal relevance in
the selection of methods and resources, motivation to engage in the writing process despite the
heavy demands of multimodal literacy, and affordances software allows for the production of
high-quality presentations and the development of an autonomous working style.

Pandya, Hansuvadha, and Pagdilao (2016) sought to expand notions of assistive
technology beyond its use as a vehicle for acquisition and communication of information to
include, “multimodal composing that offer particular creative and academic affordances for
children with autism: engagement with multiple modes and the sensory aspects of composition”
(p. 417). Pandya et al. (2016) examined the process and product of one 8-year old student with
autism in an inclusion class in a dual-immersion, English-Spanish charter school with a
constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Part of a larger design-based study was to
incorporate multimodal, digital composing practices—using iMovie on iPads—into the regular
curriculum, and then to examine the affordances and constraints for students’ creativity and
Researchers had no original intention of looking specifically at students with disabilities. After looking at the data, Pandya et al. (2016) felt compelled to zero-in on one student’s (Cindy) process and work; specifically, they wanted to analyze the meanings she made in each mode in the video, what affordances multimodal, digital composing were exploited, and what lessons teachers could learn from Cindy’s work.

Researchers examined Cindy’s video and accompanying written texts as well as video and field notes from her video-making process. Pandya et al. (2016) claim that the data from this small qualitative case study suggests that digital composition has several benefits for students and is therefore a viable instructional practice. First, they reported that the video and the tablet increased engagement for Cindy and her development of skills (e.g. hand-eye coordination through taking pictures while in iMovie) increased through the process of using it. Second, affordances of multimodal, digital composing practices allowed for expression in ways that went beyond the limiting structures of written and oral assignments. For example, the incorporation of a video of Cindy dancing allowed her to share her talent in a way she would not have otherwise been able. Third, multimodal, digital composing practices served as a motivation for speech: while she did not have many voiceovers, she was able to demonstrate her level of proficiency and to practice her articulation, her speech volume, and her expressions of self. Lastly, the group learning process involved in multimodal, digital composing practices increased social interactions and therefore provided opportunities for Cindy to expand her social skills and build relationships with teachers. Overall, Pandya et al. (2016) successfully demonstrate how technology can be used instructionally to “modify the process, content of instruction, materials, or learning environment so that all students achieve the same concepts or skills.” (p. 426).
Pandya et al. (2016) provided strong evidence that using multimodal, digital composing practices contributes to an inclusive literacy pedagogy.

In another qualitative study, Lacey, Miller, Goldbart, and Lawson (2007) sought to identify examples of “good practice in teaching and learning literacy that include students with severe learning disabilities” (p. 149) in a study of thirty-five schools in United Kingdom. The researchers used the term ‘inclusive literacy’ to mean a broad range of activities that included every student regardless of their knowledge and use of conventional literacy. Lacey et al. (2007) posited that inclusive literacy enables everyone to enjoy literacy activities (e.g., books, stories and other media) in ways that are meaningful to them even if conventional reading and writing are “not achievable” (p. 150).

Lacey et al.’s (2007) study was designed as a survey to find out what happens in literacy lessons for pupils with intellectual/developmental disabilities across the range of schooling (5–16 years), including both “all-age special schools” and “mainstream schools” (Lacey et al., 2007, p. 153) in the United Kingdom. Seeking to understand how teachers promote literacy for students for whom reading and writing skills are a challenge, researchers used an explorative and qualitative design that relied primarily on semi-structured observations (n=122) of literacy lessons and teacher (n=61) interviews as data. Both literacy lessons and lessons in another curriculum area allowed researchers to gather descriptive data about the literacy environment, examples of interactions among students and teachers, literacy activities, and instructional resources. Teacher interviews allowed researchers to probe teachers’ perceptions of what they were teaching, collect information on their training, and collect student work samples and lesson plans. The observational and interview data were analyzed to “build up a picture of good practice” as it relates to inclusive literacy (Lacey et al. 2007, p. 153), leading Lacey et al. (2007)
to characterize “conventional literacy” as traditional text-based reading and writing and “inclusive literacy” as the symbols, pictures, videos, and ‘new literacies’ associated with information and communication technology. A thematic analysis of the findings indicated the following groupings of instructional options: conventional texts (e.g., children’s storybooks, magazines, computer programs); accessible texts (e.g., touch and feel books, ebooks); pictures and photographs (e.g., graphic facilitation, Boardmaker, picture-rich magazines, digital photographs); symbols (e.g. reference objects, symbol books, communication books using symbols); information and communication technology (e.g. educational interactive games, PowerPoint, computer programs and applications such as 2Create a Story); and moving images, drama, and storytelling (e.g. video, filming, multimedia).

Findings from the study by Lacey et al. (2007) indicate that while literacy for all learners is valued by most teachers, as evidenced by the range of literacy-related activities observed in practice and discussed in individual and small group interviews, the majority of those activities involved the teaching of conventional reading and writing skills with the fewest examples being related to information and communication technology. The data suggests that teachers viewed inclusive literacy as an alternative to conventional literacy that enables students with severe learning disabilities access to literacy. While teachers reported conventional literacy acquisition as an “ambition” for students with severe learning disabilities, they viewed “inclusive” literacy as a more viable alternative. In the words of one participant, “We need to make a decision about sticking to literacy for real life rather than teaching to read” (p. 157). This suggests that students who have challenges with oral and written communication are unlikely to be viewed as literate during the majority of “Literacy Hour” instruction. It is important to note that the authors concluded that modalities other than reading and writing (e.g., drama, television, video, and
storytelling) are important in their “own right, even if [they] do not lead to conventional literacy” (p. 152), but fall short of identifying inclusive literacy as a framework that includes traditional and non-traditional literacies for all students.

Taking a similar approach to Lacey et al. (2007), Mason, Steedly, and Thormann (2008) looked to understand how inclusive practice is defined by teachers. In this study, however, the focus is on arts instruction and integration (instruction in music, visual arts, drama, dance, and creative writing). Mason et al. (2008) describe two studies: the first examines teachers’ perceptions of the arts for students with disabilities in terms of social, academic, cognitive, and artistic skill development and the second describes a follow-up pilot study to examine efficacy of rubrics in measuring learning gains for students with disabilities during arts integration curricula. I considered only the first study in this literature review.

Mason et al. (2008) conducted 34 focus groups in 16 states over 2 years. It is unclear how many unique participants were involved in this study. Participants included elementary, middle, and high school inclusion and special education teachers, artists in residence and directors from a nonprofit, international arts organization for people with disabilities in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Study design was qualitative and data included audio and transcriptions of 60-90-minute focus group interview sessions using standard protocol and grounded theory approach. Participants described their instructional experiences with a wide array of students with disabilities including sensory, physical, emotional/behavioral, cognitive, and learning disabilities. While first-year participants focused on descriptions of integrated arts instruction, researchers asked participants to focus on “successful” experiences. Stories included descriptions of planning, teaching, and evaluating.
Mason et al. (2008) conclude that considerable anecdotal evidence supports the inclusion of students with disabilities in arts activities and arts integration across the curriculum. Teachers reported that arts integration increased the voice, choice, and access to learning for students. Voice, described by Mason et al. (2008), is the “unique and individual way [students] use an art form, and the process of creating art, to communicate information about themselves and their understanding of the world” (p. 41). Teachers reported that integrating arts activities allowed students appropriate ways to communicate—a way for students who “fall outside of rigidly defined notions of success, to contribute to the community” (p. 41). Teachers also described the centrality of choice in the arts—where the artist chooses the medium and the message—as important for students with disabilities who are “typically never asked how they view the world are given the opportunity to share their thoughts” (p. 41). Arts activities are viewed as beneficial to the decision-making and problem-solving skills needed for independence and as “an avenue for access” (p. 42) that “level the playing field” and “meet students where they are” (p. 41) because they allow students to meet curricular objectives in ways that students “desired and were able” (p.42). Mason et al. (2008) concluded that teachers and artists overwhelmingly valued the opportunities to use arts to further instruction for students with disabilities.

The studies described in this section present literacy instruction that uses a combination of modalities: from the written word to digital composition to performing arts. All researchers noted the value of various expressive modalities and recognize that providing students with disabilities options to show what they know increases participation in and access to literacy learning in inclusive classrooms. These studies helped to inform the present study in that they showed how a range of multiple arts media and modalities provide students with multiple meaning-making pathways. Still, the studies reviewed in this section present a traditional
conception of literacy. While the researchers recognized the value of multimodality for students’ expression, they do not fully embrace sociocultural theories of learning, literacy, and disability upon which this study is grounded. I will discuss the handful of studies I reviewed which did draw upon these sociocultural theories and thus necessitated a reframing of literacy instruction.

Reframing Literacy Instruction

A small group of studies in this literature review present a re-conceptualization of literacy instruction in inclusive classrooms (Flewitt, Nind & Taylor, 2009; Kliwerer, 1999; Kliwer, Fitzgerald, Meyer-Mork Hartman, English-Sand, & Rasschke, 2004). These researchers collectively viewed “inclusion” as the accessibility of a wide range of meaning-making tools that allows every child greater participation in learning activities. They contended that instructional practices that provide a range of modalities for expression positions students with disabilities as capable meaning-makers and therefore “literate citizens” of the classroom community.

Flewitt, Nind, and Taylor (2009) investigated how a multimodal approach to teaching can help young children with special educational needs participate in meaningful “inclusive literacy practices” (p. 211). The researchers described one of three ethnographic case studies of three, four-year-old children with identified special educational needs, who attend a combination of early education settings – one “more special” and one “more inclusive.” Data was rich and included field observation visits by two researchers to each site; video observations at home and in the two preschool settings (total 6 hours in each setting); semi-structured interviews and informal “chats” with staff and parents; home diaries of the children’s observed weeks completed by the children’s parents; and researcher field notes. Flewitt et al. (2009) adopted a distinct stance on inclusive literacy, describing that effective inclusion in literacy practices includes recognizing and valuing “the multimodal richness of all children’s communicative
competence, whether conventional or idiosyncratic,” (p. 231). They used multimodal analysis to examine the collaborative, multimodal nature of participants’ literacy “events and practices,” understood as how meaning is made through “multiple modes of communication, such as talk, gesture, gaze, movement, body positioning, words, vocalizations and alternative and augmentative communication systems, including sign, symbol and formal programmes” (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 214). Researchers concluded that inclusive settings (e.g., playgroup) were able to offer a wider range of literacy events and practices and contributions were celebrated as making valuable contributions in one-to-one, small group and whole group activities.

Kliwer’s (1999) study explored teachers’ perceptions about the meaning of curricular individualization for students identified as moderately to severely mentally disabled, especially as that individualization “relate[s] to reading and writing” (p. 86). This qualitative study of 14 preschool-primary teachers (some inclusion, some resource, some self-contained) involved interviews, observations, and reviews of student evaluations and Individualized Education Plans. Kliwer (1999) reports a “veracity of findings” due to “extensive time spent in contexts” focused on curricular individualization; copious amounts of naturalistic and transcribed data; observations and interviews in school settings and discussions with half of participants about distributed field notes that were distributed to them. Kliwer (1999) argued that teachers’ approaches to individualized literacy instruction originate from one of two distinct understandings (“institutional” or “local”) about disability. “Institutional understanding” refers to universal assumptions about the capabilities of children with moderate to significant disabilities that “alienates” or “delimits” the participation of students with disabilities in a “literacy community” that lead to decontextualized and segregated instruction (i.e. basic skill instruction in a self-contained setting). “Local understanding,” however, is individualized and contextual
and can be found within the relationships between teachers and students within classrooms. Judgements concerning an individual’s participation are not predicated on their demonstration of “traditional [literacy] readiness skills” because “teachers see human beings first” (Kliewer, 1999, p. 93) and assume that every child belongs in general education classrooms. Most importantly, literacy development is not characterized “along some inflexible path of a priori sequenced stages or skills” (Kliewer, 1999, p. 97) but understood as a social and cultural practice wherein all children are welcomed and supported in classrooms through shared expectations, meaningful activities, and effective teaching.” Kliewer (1999) found that while no single teacher displayed all of one kind of understanding, one or the other was primary, suggesting that instructional decision-making is heavily influenced by beliefs. Further, Kliewer (1999) posited that individualization is typically perceived as one-to-one instruction and thus often excludes students with disabilities from general education literacy instruction. He recommended viewing individualization as “multiple practices” and “arrangements that emphasize participation,” but does not elaborate on specific strategies and techniques.

An ethnographic study conducted by Kliewer, Fitzgerald, Meyer-Mork Hartman, English-Sand, and Rasschke (2004) concerned the literacy development in young children considered to have significant disabilities. This two-year study followed 213 children with disabilities in preschool and Kindergarten in nine inclusive classrooms across five schools; 45 of those children were identified as having moderate to severe disabilities. Data collection was rigorous and included: 226 observations and interviews, detailed in field notes conducted by five researchers; biweekly research meetings attended by four of the five researchers to discuss ongoing data analysis; participating teachers' intimate involvement in data analysis through member checks, and their participation in presentations of the data at international, regional, and
local conferences. Researchers observed teachers emphasizing children's narratives in various symbolic forms, and in so doing effectively “fostering the citizenship of all children in the literate community” of the classroom (Kliwer et al., 2004, p. 381).

Kliwer et al., 2004 identified three themes from their data. First, the fostering of participation in narrative creation through multiple semiotic systems opened opportunities to children who are commonly segregated. Second, multiple symbolic modes of narrative participation improved children’s print-language skills. Third, as children's competencies grew and literate citizenship increased, teachers “generally agreed that creative instruction associated with phonemes, graphemes, or orthography might benefit the printed language skills of any child, including those with significant disabilities” (Kliwer et al., 2004, p. 397).

Kliwer et al. (2004) concluded that the data suggests that a presumption of competence is necessary for the literate citizenship of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Kliwer et al. (2004) evidenced the teachers in their study—who they claim “actively sought to support students with significant disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers in the full range of narrative forms comprising the early childhood literate community” (p. 383)—demonstrate a fundamental belief in capacity of children with significant developmental disabilities to engage in narrative play. This finding is significant in that it contradicts a deeply held professional belief that children with disabilities require more specialized instruction that limits options and opportunities (Kluth, Straut, & Biklen, 2003).

Taken holistically, my review of the literature presents a varied picture of inclusive literacy pedagogy and points to the need for a conceptual rethinking of expression in today’s classrooms. Universal Design for Learning and productive digital technologies may be helpful frameworks for designing instruction that incorporates multimodal expression, but they may not
get at underlying paradigms that shape teachers’ everyday pedagogical practices. My underlying assumption is that the many frameworks described in most of the reviewed studies may not properly recognize conceptions of literacy and disability that contribute to the ways teachers understand expression of students with disabilities. This study seeks to add knowledge to the research discussed regarding inclusive literacy pedagogy and therefore see how teachers understand meaning-making in their inclusive classrooms. To help identify how and why inclusive literacy pedagogy may be more nuanced than any one framework or current research can capture, this study’s framing and analysis is guided by the concept of multiple arts modalities and media, for it provides a conceptual rationale for increased expression of students with disabilities.

**Conclusion to the Chapter**

This chapter provided an overview of the important concepts and theory that guide this study, its analysis, and its presentation. Sociocultural approaches to learning, literacy, and disability were presented as an alternative to traditional views that may limit the ways teachers understand and the opportunities they provide for the expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. I discussed the importance of expression as a critical factor in the shaping of students’ literate identities which can set students up for success or failure:

The need for contexts in which young children can be successful…contexts in which they are supported in constructing meaning…is critical, as children also invent their literate identities. It is from these fragile identities that readers are made and, sadly, sometimes broken. (Martens & Adamson, 2001, p. 46)

The stakes are even higher for students with disabilities for whom the traditional modes of expression (i.e., speaking and writing) are not readily available.
I recognize that the complexities of literacy teaching and learning in inclusive elementary contexts are many and varied. Thus, I drew upon the varied frameworks and pedagogies found in the review of this research for this study—namely Universal Design for Learning and productive digital technologies, multimodality, and arts pedagogy—during focus groups with participating teachers. Through the lens of multiliteracies theory, I presented multiple arts modalities and media as a way of thinking about expression and as a practice to support increased meaning-making for students with disabilities. The next chapter provides an understanding of the methodology, participants, data sources and analysis encompassed in this study.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to document, examine, and help support the development and implementation of teachers’ pedagogical practices that foster the expression of students with disabilities through multiple arts media and modalities in inclusive elementary classrooms. As articulated in Chapter 2, I drew upon the arts and adopted the term multiple arts modalities and media to refer to the variety of options teachers offer students for expression of their learning and to emphasize the arts which provides a rich range of mediums for expression (rather than simply changing font colors or sizes for which multimodality might imply). These “multiple means of expression” are intended to provide alternative “pathways for addressing variability and enabling learners to find their own directions for learning” (Glass, Meyer, & Rose, 2013, p 107). Multiple arts modalities can be described as the communication channels used to convey ideas (e.g., photography, sculpture, etc.) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Multiple arts media refers to the particular technologies used for the rendering and dissemination of texts, particularly multimodal ensembles (Serafini, 2014). The Internet, Television, and PowerPoint are examples of media that use multimodal ensembles.

This chapter presents a detailed overview of the methods I used to address the following research question:

In what ways do 5 general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7) as elicited using photovoice methodology?

In the previous chapter, I described the impact that conceptions of literacy can have on educational experiences typically afforded to students with disabilities and the need for further study of those practices that support a multiliteracies approach to teaching and learning. I use
qualitative methodology utilizing photovoice techniques to generate and help analyze data concerning a small set (n=5) of elementary and middle school inclusion teachers in Newark, New Jersey. I selected photovoice because it has the potential to simultaneously grapple with the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of disability and their pedagogical decision-making while designing, implementing, and reflecting on more inclusive practices for students with disabilities in their classrooms.

**Design**

This inquiry is grounded in qualitative research methodology, which allows the researcher to better understand “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). I take a critical stance with the intent to address issues of disadvantaged and marginalized members of society (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001) by engaging participants in a cyclical, interactive inquiry process that brings together problem solving actions with data-driven analyses to potentially effect changes in pedagogy for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2002).

My study design foregrounds situated learning as meaningful, relevant inquiry and uses the visual methodology strategy of photovoice as a baseline data generation process and collective analytical process (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997) to explore five teachers’ range of literacy perspectives and practices pertaining to students with disabilities in inclusive elementary classrooms. Visual methodology is a qualitative research methodology prevalent across social science fields (Rose, 2016). Visuals, such as photographs, diagrams, and film, are used as research tools in data collection and analysis. Visual media can be used to examine the ways in which knowledge is produced and represented by certain groups of people, as well as the
individuals who created them. Photography, for example, offers potential for analysis of both a momentary “reality” captured in a specific time and place and of the photographer themselves. By employing participant-generated visual data, informed by action research methodology and catalyzed via photovoice, discussions about visual data generated by participants helped them to articulate and design multiple and varied options for expression in literacy-related learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

**Photovoice**

Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997) is a participatory visual method in which participants use a camera to produce an image-based account for analysis. Originally described as photo novella, photovoice methodology was coined by Wang and Burris to describe their research methodology that combined critical analysis of photographs with participant storytelling. In photovoice, photographs stimulate the telling of stories that in turn gives rise to critical questioning, decision-making, action, and further reflection on the part of the participant-researchers. Thus, photovoice engages individuals in sharing stories about their lives through a cyclical structure that promotes collaboration between researchers and participants (Paiewonsky, 2011). Photovoice provides a situated context for learning; that is, it is a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed within a particular environment and for a particular purpose (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In my study, participants were asked to use their phone cameras to take multiple photos of their typical classroom practice across several weeks as related to specific group-generated prompts. We discussed these photos in a series of three focus groups. Focus groups will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Photovoice is rooted in Freirean ideas regarding critical consciousness, feminist theory and, empowerment (Latz, 2017). Self-genesis and selection of photographs serve as both a lens
and a platform for participants to engage in critical dialogue about personal and community issues with the purpose of social change. Photovoice captures the individual’s perspective—at that point in time—as part of the research process. Hergenrather, Rhodes and Bardhoshi (2009) conducted a review of the literature on photovoice as a research methodology used to identify and explore community health and disability priorities. Among 31 studies, they found it to be an effective method for enabling community members to “become co-learners, bridging cultural differences and equitably sharing expertise based on personal experience and professional knowledge” (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 697). In their research study of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms, Kroeger, Embury, Coopera, Brydon-Miller, Laine, and Johnson (2012) credit photovoice as a method for any community (“any group that influences beliefs and practices” p. 185) that can put vision (“a person’s initial and developing conceptualization of what a teacher is and does” (p. 185) into practice (“the capacity for intelligent and adaptive action in an enormously complex context”) (p. 185). Thus in this case of my own study, photovoice seemed an ideal method for (a) investigating teachers’ use of multimodality in their teaching practice and (b) helping teachers experience multimodal meaning-making for themselves.

**The Photovoice Process.** Wang et al. (1997) describe three stages of photovoice development. In the first stage, participants take photographs and select those which they consider to be the most significant (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1997). In the second stage, photographs are contextualized through storytelling by participants. This occurs in the process of group discussion, suggested by the acronym VOICE: “voicing our individual and collective experience” (Wang et al., 1997). This discussion process relies heavily on a form of interviewing called photo-elicitation to draw out information about the photographer. Photo-elicitation
(Collier, 1957) entails participants responding to their own images, attributing their social and personal meanings and values by telling stories about what is happening in photographs. Collier (1957) noted the role of photographs in producing reflection in ways that the interview alone could not: In Collier’s (1957) studies, pictures elicited “a psychological response where the graphic image can stimulate expression of values or release submerged reactions” (p. 858). In this study, eliciting teachers’ personal and social meanings and values about literacy and disability were paramount in my being able to investigate my research question: How do five general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms?

Participants helped to identify themes that arose from the dialogic process during the third stage through participatory diagramming. Specific issues arose as a result of the participatory diagramming and stimulated participants to generate new photography prompts about the expression of students with disabilities. In this study, participants engaged in three iterations of the photovoice process over a six-week period during the months of May and June of the 2018 school year. A detailed explanation of these photovoice iterations will follow my discussion of the study’s site and participants.

Site Selection

Purposeful sampling to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 214) was used to select teachers who had already invested in the broad idea of inclusive practice so as to focus my research project on the discussion of perspectives and practices concerning expressive opportunities for students with identified disabilities. I chose to recruit teachers from Newark, New Jersey for several reasons. First, as one of the 75 districts cited for over-segregation of Pre-K-12 students with disabilities in
a 2014 settlement with the State of New Jersey, it is currently involved in extensive training and technical assistance for inclusion. Second, the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE), an organization in New Jersey whose sole focus is inclusion, has been working with Newark public schools as an inclusion facilitator for the past year to deliver the required technical assistance. NJCIE is a nonprofit established by parents and professionals in 1989, which supports families and schools in the quest to create neighborhood schools where children with disabilities and learning differences are welcomed, valued as learners, and empowered to succeed. The NJCIE-Newark partnership centers on a multi-year systems-wide change initiative that focuses on supporting administrators and teachers in transitioning students out of self-contained classrooms into general education classrooms. In Newark, students identified as having significant cognitive disabilities have been historically educated in self-contained classrooms that are identified by disability label. For example, there are classrooms identified as “Autistic,” “Language and Learning Disabled” classrooms, and “Behavioral Disorder” classrooms.

At the time of data collection, I was an employee of NJCIE and worked as an inclusion facilitator in several of the Newark schools engaged in the NJCIE Inclusion initiative. This multi-year, collaborative, team-driven process was designed to help schools build capacity around supporting all students (those with and without disabilities) in general education classes. Several schools in the district were chosen as “demonstration sites” where the systems change process is implemented. Year one of the process involved team-driven action planning to identify a grade level to target for increasing the number of students with Individualized Education Plans who are included in general education classrooms. During year two teams oversaw the initial implementation of inclusive practices at that targeted grade level. In year three schools will focus
on expanding implementation efforts beyond the targeted grade level. By the end of year three, the goal is for school-based teams to be able to function in its work to continue to expand inclusive practices without the same level of direct support from NJCIE facilitators. Student movement is predicated on capacity-building: students with Individualized Education Plans in the target grade are identified by the degree or level of academic and/or behavioral support (e.g., receive “high”, “medium”, or “low” level of specialized support) that they currently receive in the special education setting. I will return to my roles as a researcher and NJCIE facilitator in this study later in this chapter.

At the time of data collection, my work as an inclusion facilitator for NJCIE included working in schools that were in years one and two of the systems-change process. I regularly facilitated team meetings and supported the transition of students moving from self-contained to general education classrooms. I recruited participants for this study from eleven elementary and middle schools involved in this partnership.

Participants

Five participants from two schools volunteered to be part of this study. While the volunteer pool of participants was limited in terms of providing potential options from which to choose, the five who did volunteer offered diversity in terms of their gender, ethnicity, teaching certifications, teaching experience, and years spent teaching in inclusive classrooms (discussed in more detail below) and were thus selected. All five participants who volunteered and were selected remained dedicated to the data collection process until its end in June, 2018. Four out of five participants were female and one was male. Two identified as White, one as Hispanic, and two as being multiple races (Black/African American and Hispanic). In terms of educational background, two participants held Bachelor’s degrees and three their Master’s. There
was a range of teaching experience with one participant having over 18 years and one for whom this was their first year teaching. At the time of data collection, two of the teachers were in their first year of teaching in an inclusive classroom, one had approximately two years, and two had three or more years. Three teachers held elementary certification and two had middle school certification (1 mathematics and 1 English Language Arts). Four teachers had general education certification only and one was dually certified in general and special education. In addition, two participants also held additional certifications: Early Childhood (1) and Reading Specialist (1). See Table 3 for more complete participant demographics.

All participants were Newark teachers working in general education classrooms in grades three through seven, receiving students transitioning from self-contained classrooms into general education classrooms. While certifications varied, all five teachers were responsible for the planning, instruction, and assessment of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The two middle school teachers shared the same special education co-teacher for the inclusion class periods. The three elementary teachers worked within the same school. Two of them taught third grade. The third participant served as the school’s reading specialist and literacy supervisor. At the time of data collection, she was teaching a fourth grade inclusion class for a teacher who was on medical leave. The two middle school teachers taught at another school in the Inclusion Project and were on the same 7th Grade Team: one taught Math and the other English Language Arts.
**Table 3.**

**Pertinent Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender/Age</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms</th>
<th>School/Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>Female/Early 20s</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>First Year Teacher, Dual Master’s Degree in General and Special Education</td>
<td>Less than 1 Year</td>
<td>Northvale Elementary Grade 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>Female/Late 20s</td>
<td>African American, Spanish American</td>
<td>First Year Teacher, Master’s Degree, P-3 Certification</td>
<td>Less than 1 Year</td>
<td>Northvale Elementary Grade 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>Male/Late 20s</td>
<td>Spanish American</td>
<td>2 Years, Master’s Degree, Middle School ELA Certification</td>
<td>Less than 2 Years</td>
<td>Parkview School Grade 7 ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>Female/Late 20s</td>
<td>African American, Spanish American</td>
<td>5 Years, Bachelor’s Degree, Middle School Mathematics Certification</td>
<td>3-5 Years</td>
<td>Parkview School Grade 7 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>Female/Late 30s</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>15-20 Years, Bachelor’s Degree, Reading Specialist</td>
<td>More than 5 Years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kristen.** Kristen was a first-year teacher who had recently graduated from a local university with her Master’s degree and holds dual certification in general and special education. Her teacher preparation program centered on inclusive education informed by Disability Studies theoretical perspective. Kristen was a former student of mine, as I had taught one of her classes
in this program the prior year. I knew her to be an articulate and passionate believer in inclusive education. Kristen was originally hired to be the special education co-teacher for a third grade class at Northvale Elementary, a K-4 school in Newark. Despite her class being the designated “inclusion classroom,” at the time of data collection (late spring), a general education co-teacher had still not been hired and Kristen had been teaching the class by herself since September. Kristen received some support from another NJCIE inclusion facilitator in the area of developing her understanding and implementation of positive behavioral supports. At the time of this study, Kristen had 18 students in her class, 9 of whom were classified as needing specialized instruction and having Individualized Education Plans. There were three paraprofessionals: two assigned to specific students and one for the class. Kristen identified herself as a White female.

**Mira.** Like Kristen, Mira was a first-year, third grade teacher at Northvale Elementary. A certified general educator with a P-3 certification, Mira did not have any students with Individualized Education Plans in her classroom at the outset of the school year. Given her experience as a teacher’s assistant at an inclusive preschool, the principal asked her to be the “receiving teacher” for students transitioning from the self-contained classroom to general education. Mira agreed and became a member of the implementation team in October of 2017. As part of the team, she received support from myself and another inclusion specialist prior to students’ transition to her classroom in January. At the time of this study, there were 18 students in Mira’s class, three of whom had Individualized Education Plans and had transitioned to Mira’s class from the self-contained classroom in January of 2018. Mira identified herself as a Hispanic female. Mira and Kristen worked together during bi-monthly third-grade level team meetings. They did not report collaboration outside of this time, other than occasional informal conversations about curriculum pacing and school-wide issues.
Neil. Neil was completing his second year as a general education 7th Grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at Parkview School, a K-8 school in Newark. Neil earned his M.A. at a large urban northeastern university and moved to Newark, New Jersey in the fall of 2016. He identified as a Hispanic male and as having “lived his whole life in an urban environment.” Neil taught three different sections of ELA each day; one section was designated as the “inclusion class” and included all students in the grade who have Individualized Education Plans (and are not in a self-contained classroom). The seventh grade team consisted of four teachers: ELA, Math, Science, and a co-teacher who travelled with the inclusion class. In October, the co-teacher was reassigned to an elementary class and a new teacher was hired for the 7th grade co-teaching position. This teacher was a first year special educator. Neil’s inclusion class had 26 students, 8 of whom had Individualized Education Plans. Neil was a member of the school’s implementation team and the seventh grade had been selected as the target grade for the 2017-2018 school year. As a result, several students transitioned from the self-contained classroom over the first few months of school, resulting in a class size of 29 with 11 students with Individualized Education Plans. Neil received support from myself as an inclusion facilitator along with the rest of the seventh grade team with whom I met bi-monthly to discuss strategies for supporting students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Angelica. Angelica was in her fifth year of teaching middle school math. She taught for four of those years in a Newark charter school and at the time of this study was at the end of her first year in the public school system at the Parkview School. Angelica worked closely with Neil, serving as the math teacher of the 7th grade team. Both Angelica and Neil report having developed a close working and personal relationship due to mutual life experiences, teaching philosophy, and shared students. Angelica stated that she and Neil would meet daily after school
to talk about students and their personal lives. Angelica identified as a Hispanic female. Angelica taught three sections of math per day; one of which was the designated “inclusion class” with 29 with 11 students with Individualized Education Plans. Angelica repeatedly reported the high ratio of students with disabilities as being problematic. She spoke often of tensions between students with and without Individualized Education Plans and the difficulties she had balancing the differing needs of students. She described the situation as having two separate classes or “a self-contained class within a general education class” and expressed that she felt she was “failing all” of her students. I spent a significant amount of time observing Angelica teach and her interactions with her students. Despite her feelings of inadequacy, Angelica was adept at utilizing principles of Universal Design for Learning and differentiation in her teaching. She also had developed a strong rapport with all of her students that was evident inside and outside the classroom. Angelica had assumed an unofficial leadership role among the seventh grade team and the implementation team and was looked to by other staff members, including the math coach, as an exemplary teacher and colleague. Angelica was selected as one of NJCIE’s inclusion teachers of the year (2018), an honor given to teachers who have made a commitment and have had an impact on local inclusive education. Angelica was nominated by her principal and chosen by NJCIE because of her support of and impact on all students in her classroom.

**Rosie.** Rosie was the veteran of the group having taught for 18 years. Rosie is a certified general educator and is a reading specialist. A colleague of Kristen and Mira at Northvale Elementary, Rosie serves as the literacy coach for the school but works daily with 24 general and special education students in grades three and four during a remediation literacy block. Students were identified for this remediation on the basis of Scholastic Reading Inventories. Students who were not at grade level, regardless of whether or not they have an Individualized Education Plan,
meet during the period to work in rotations on a variety of literacy skills. Rosie meets with each student as part of a teacher-directed small group to work on targeted reading skills. Rosie has taught at this elementary school for the entirety of her teaching career – she was a general education teacher for sixteen years before being asked to take on the literacy coach role. Rosie served as a member of the school’s implementation team and always voiced support for the inclusion of students’ with disabilities in general education classrooms. She often went toe-to-toe with the team’s child study member and the third grade self-contained special educator as to why students could and should be included. Rosie is highly valued by administration, other teachers, and students, so much so that she was selected as the school’s teacher of the year, an honor that Newark bestows on one teacher per school. Rosie explained that she enjoys working with other teachers and understands the importance of mentoring, but views her role as a teacher to students as the most important one she has. I worked closely with Rosie over the 2017-2018 school year, both on the implementation team and supporting her work as a literacy coach. Rosie identified as a white female.

**Research Facilitator.** My role in this study can best be described as research facilitator as described by Paiewonsky (2011) in her photovoice research study with college students with intellectual disabilities. I took an active role to establish and encourage relationships among all participants, promote effective communication and support, enable productive work, and ensure that all benefitted from the inquiry process. This inquiry included data generated from both participants and the research facilitator. As the research facilitator, I facilitated data collection and analysis during the Pre-Rounds meeting, photovoice Rounds, and Post-Rounds Interviews. I will elaborate further on my positionality later in this chapter.
Data Generation using Photovoice

For this study, data emerged from the photovoice training, photovoice rounds, and Post-Rounds individual interviews. A photovoice “round” consisted of:

1) Participant photographing of regular classroom practice over a two-week period and selecting two or three photos to caption and share with the focus group.

2) A two-hour focus group discussion involving all five participants that followed a three-part protocol including warm-up questions, photo-elicitation and process questions that allowed participants to identify themes, brainstorm ideas about classroom practice, and identify photo prompts for the next round (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Explication of the photovoice Round cycle.

There were three consecutive photovoice Rounds. Focus groups met three consecutive times for two hours each, every two weeks in the second half of the 2017-2018 school year over the months of May and June, at Northvale Elementary School after school hours. In between focus groups, participants used the photography prompt generated during the previous focus
group to take photographs of their regular classroom practice. All focus groups were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for later analysis. Field notes were also taken during each Round. Other data was collected during a Pre-Rounds meeting and from Post-Round individual interviews. I will next describe the aforementioned data I collected in detail.

**Pre-Rounds Meeting.** After participants were selected, I focused on building trust between the research participants and myself, including encouraging them to ask questions as needed and to share their experiences as openly as they felt comfortable doing. A two-hour meeting was held in late April, 2018, with all participants at Northvale Elementary School after school hours. I used materials adapted from Jongeling, Bakker, van Zorge, and van Kakebeeke’s Photovoice Facilitators Guide which was developed through Rutgers University and the Youth Empowerment Alliance. A brief, but descriptive project guide was disseminated to participants with project aims, timeline, guidelines, and expectations. See Appendix C for the meeting agenda based on this guide. We began with setting norms that would be used for all sessions (see Figure 2) to help all participants feel comfortable participating; to be explicit about what would be expected from each other; and to facilitate time management.

![Figure 2. Norms generated by participants for focus groups.](image)

This orienting session consisted of four parts: (a) I gave the participants an overview of the study aims and objectives and an overview of photovoice; (b) I provided participants with
informed consent and ethics information including how participants will protect each other’s privacy (see Appendix B); (c) I provided teachers with basic information on visual storytelling and photography tips; and (d) I explained the photovoice protocol we would be using during our meetings (see Appendix D); and (e) I shared my research questions and the initial photography prompts for the documentation phase. After reviewing the information and answering any questions, I collected signed copies of consent forms. I also distributed and collected a demographics survey.

I also provided participants with an overview of photography basics. I decided to have participants use their own smartphone cameras over other possible photography choices such as disposable cameras. I weighed several factors when making this decision such as the benefits of digital photographs over monochromatic ones and uniformity concerns. Ultimately, I selected camera phones because of their familiarity for most users, functionality, and flexibility. Individuals are most comfortable with what they know and I believed that the use of familiar technology would enhance participation and reduce anxiety around technological issues. Digital cameras do not require film development and impose no limit on the amount of photographs that can be taken, and allow for easy uploading to a communal storage site. Photos can be easily organized and accessed by participants and viewed on a large screen during group discussions. As a way of maintaining a common standard among digital photographs, participants were instructed not to use filters or to alter/edit images once they had been taken. Digital images have a “mutability” that invites “different ways of seeing” (Rose, 2016, p. 7) and photo editing may complicate the already complex process of photovoice. Another benefit of using internet-enabled smartphones is that the photos can easily be uploaded to a secure drive for back-up storage and sharing.
During the session, I also addressed issues of photography that are linked to “ways of seeing” (Berger, 1975). Technical aspects of photography such as framing, point of view, and detail will be discussed in relation to the role positionality plays in “how we see and what we record” (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001, p. 29). To help familiarize participants with how we ‘read’ images and to understand how elements of visual literacy can be utilized in photography, I asked participants to look at several photographs and analyze how line, shape, form, texture, pattern, color, and space were used to make meaning. This exercise was intended to give participants a foundational experience in putting abstract themes into pictures and to able to communicate and express themselves visually.

The second half of this initial session centered on the documentation step of photovoice. I presented my research question to the group. I asked participants to individually explain the research question in their own words and the group discussed their interpretations. This was done to help teachers better understand the research question and to initiate participant-researchers into the inquiry process. At the end of the discussion, we developed a prompt that all participants would use as for taking individual photographs: how do students that have Individualized Education Plans in my class express their learning? How do they “show what they know?” The training was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for later analysis.

The introductory session seemed highly successful as I noted in my field notes: “The training itself went very well. Because I had already built a rapport with each of the participants individually through my work at NJCIE, I felt very comfortable with them right from the start. Three of the teachers are from the same school and the other two are from another, so I think each participant already felt comfortable with talking and sharing ideas. I was impressed with how seriously they took the work and genuinely engaged with it - meaning they asked clarifying
questions and probed for deeper understanding of prompts and questions.”

**Rounds.** I used a form of focus groups—small group interviews—as the primary form of data generation for this study. In photovoice, focus groups provide an opportunity for collaborative “data generation and initial meaning making of that data” (Latz, 2016, p. 58). Data sources included: individual photographs, captions, and descriptions discussed during focus groups; individual photo-elicitation narratives and participant discussion of these narratives; group-generated participatory diagramming, and group-generated photography prompts. Each of these is discussed in turn below (see Table 4).

**Table 4.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rounds Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collected</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually-Generated Photographs, Captions, and Descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Photo-Elicitation Narratives and Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Participatory Diagramming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Photography Prompt Generation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual photographs, captions, and descriptions.* Prior to each focus group, participants photographed personally meaningful items or activities in their typical classroom practice that stemmed from the photo prompt generated during the last focus groups. In the interests of time,
participants selected two photographs for which to caption and write brief descriptions. Writing captions for and descriptions of their photographs was intended to be a reflective exercise that helped teachers process what photographs meant to them and prepared them to talk about the photographs with other participants. See Figure 3 for an example. Photographs, captions, and written descriptions were projected onto a large screen for shared visibility.

![Figure 3. Participant example from Round 2: photograph, caption, and description.](image)

*Photo-elicitation narratives and discussion.* Teacher narratives generated by means of photo-elicitation techniques (Collier, 1957) is a method through which a photograph is inserted into a research interview in order to “elicit” different types of “talk” from other methods, including insights into social phenomena (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2016). Photo-elicitation is also used in photovoice as the focus of data analysis. That is, teachers’ narratives about their photographs and the subsequent discussion among all five participants was the primary data collected for my study.
Focus groups followed an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol (Spradley, 1980) using the SHOWED method (Wallerstein, 1988; Wang et al, 1997) as a photo-elicitation technique. See Figure 4 for a full description of the method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Facilitator’s Prompt</th>
<th>Participant’s Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>What is <strong>seen</strong> here?</td>
<td>Participant describes what the eyes see in the photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>What is really <strong>happening</strong> here?</td>
<td>Participant describes what is happening in the picture that can’t be seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>How does this relate to our inquiry?</td>
<td>Participant describes how the picture relates to the photo prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?</td>
<td>Participant hypothesizes about the internal and external factors that contribute to what is happening in the photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>How does this image <strong>educate</strong> us?</td>
<td>Participant describes how the image helps viewers consider various perspectives and possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>What can I/We do about it?</td>
<td>Participant suggests implications for teaching practice that address concerns and issues raised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. The SHOWED method used for photo-elicitation.*

In each meeting, every participant presented at least one photograph and engaged in a photo-elicitation narration. During this photo-elicitation, participants not presenting had the opportunity to take notes by writing down on paper or Post-it Notes key ideas, questions, and comments that could be used during the group discussion that followed. Figure 5 shows an example of the photo-elicitation and subsequent discussion for Figure 3.
So, what you see there is the mannequin that is dabbing right near my desk. So, I had it with the background the city right outside my room. Just knowing that no matter what’s going on out there we’re all in here. I always think about that. So, what’s really happening there is that, that particular day one of my students wanted to mess with Manny and then I was like alright. If I let you do that then I need to see you focus, then maybe after the lesson if I feel you did alright. I’ll let you change him and so he did! How does it relate to our inquiry? Well, I was thinking about all the ways that I set up a community to value expression and one of things I believe is one my strengths is my relationships with my students. I think the reason I have relationships with them is because I allow for their expression. I allow them to say what their thinking in a way that I’m not going to judge them. It’s not going to come off harshly maybe if it’s something they feel uncomfortable about. So, I was thinking about what are the things in my room. What are some physical manifestations of that? So, why does this exist? Honestly, it exists by accident. I just saw it and I thought it was cool and I just brought it in. I just put him in a pose and I was thinking oh maybe one day we can describe how Manny’s feeling. To get my students to think about adjectives and describing physical language and get them to think about how other people’s body language speaks, and then it just turned into something else. They just wanted to put him which way they want. How does it educate us? I think it educates us because sometimes I forget their still kids. Even though they’re in 7th grade. The things that seem obnoxious just for whatever reason will get them invested. I’ve had students who literally who wouldn’t participate. Who wouldn’t even sit. Standing in the corner of the room. Just shaking his head. And I’m like I’ll let you mess with Manny and he’s like alright. It’s like a switch went off and he went and sat and at least attempted. Just that bargaining chip. That small thing to remind me that they’re not like robots. It’s not like you need to do this so I can see you perform. They have other innate desires and some kind of interests that I need to pay attention to. And what can we do about it? I think we can use it more often than we do. I think the reason a lot of the students enjoy participating is because I do think about that expression because I don’t mind being weird and talking to Manny. If I’m the craziest in the room, nothing else is going to be a big deal. That’s what I think about……

Mira: I love the picture

Rosie: Mmm hmmm…it’s great!

Mira: That’s a great picture and especially the way you explained it. We’re in here, but you can still see what’s going on outside. I think it really sort of supports everything that you just explained. So…I dig it! I like it!

Rosie: I think one of my first take-aways is something you said yourself. That even though they’re 7th graders the older kids, they’re babies at heart. The need the same kind of encouragement, reinforcement, and motivation, and play that our younger babies need.

Kristen: I agree with your experience with how you wanted the student to
focus and something as simple as let them do this and then you can get them back to where they need to be. That happens often to me. As teachers sometimes we fight, and were like you need to do this, you need to do that. And drilling isn’t going to get you anywhere. I’ve had experiences if you let them have that choice it’s going to ease their mind and especially something tactile and in 3rd grade too. And then in five minutes they can get back on task. Those five minutes aren’t going to be the end of the world to you, but sometimes teachers are just like oh the pacing you we have to get through this. I think allowing students to...everyone is different and letting them express what they need to do to get through the day is okay. And you don’t have to be so concerned about them all being robots.

Figure 5. Example from Round 2 - photo-elicitation and subsequent discussion.

**Group participatory diagramming.** Participant notes taken during photo-elicitation were compiled on chart paper and used to help the group identify themes that emerged (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Participant notes taken during Round 1 photo-elicitation.

Participants used participatory diagramming (Kesby, 2000) to assist with the reviewing and cataloguing of themes that arose from the narration. Participatory diagramming allowed participants to work together to visually articulate, organize, and track ideas using a variety of diagramming methods such as flowcharts, Venn diagrams, and tables. See Figure 7 for an example of the process.
Group generation of photography prompts. Each focus group concluded with the generation of a revised or new photography prompt based on the participatory diagramming. Photography prompts are open-ended in photovoice and may take the form of questions, directive statements, and fill-in-the blanks statements (Latz, 2017). In the present study, throughout the process, prompts took on a variety of forms including questions, a phrase, and a list of topics. Photography prompts emerged from the participatory diagramming and were developed and agreed upon by all participants at the end of the focus group. Appendix F provides a list of the three photography prompts and participants’ corresponding photographs that were generated throughout the study.

Post-Round Interviews. A week after the last Round, I individually interviewed each participant. The purpose of these interviews was to give participants an opportunity to review and reflect upon their “portfolio” of photographs, captions, and narratives in response to the photo prompts and the three participatory diagrams generated by the group during focus groups. I also posed a series of reflection questions to participants about the photovoice process (see Appendix E).
Preparation of Data for Analysis

All three focus groups, the Pre-Rounds meeting, and the five individual Post-Rounds interviews were audio recorded. The focus groups and the pre-Rounds meetings were each two-hours long and the individual interviews were each an hour long, resulting in over thirteen hours of audio-recorded data. Each audio recording was transcribed shortly afterwards, resulting in 185 pages of transcribed data. Audio recording and transcriptions allowed me to attend closely to the language used by participant-researchers in individual and focus group interviews. Blommaert and Dong (2010) describe speech as “language-in-society” (p. 10), which situates individuals within larger social traditions and reflects the degree to which an individual has invested in social, cultural, and political norms. Recognizing that how people speak may be as important as what they actually say, transcription followed ethnographic conventions, being careful to note pauses, exclamation, interruptions, stumbles, and other features that may be significant (Blommaert & Dong, 2010). I developed a uniform set of transcription conventions such as italicizing emphasized words, using a dash to indicate an interruption, and three periods for significant pauses. In addition, my notes from focus groups were examined and elaborated upon with notes tracked in the margins.

Photo-elicitation data was considered as a separate source. This data included photography prompts, photographs with their captions and written descriptions, participant notes taken during photo-elicitation and used during participatory diagramming, and participatory diagrams. This data was also reviewed with notes tracked in the margins. It is important to reiterate here that the photographs themselves were analyzed as data in relation to how to make meaning of those images. Each data source was coded separately. There were two forms of all
data—raw data and expanded data with margined-notes—in electronic and hardcopy identified by date and participant.

In summary, photovoice proved to be an effective method for collecting data for this in that it provided rich insights into what the teachers were thinking and saying in response to my research question about the ways five general and special education teachers (grades 3-7) describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms. The various data types enabled a rich analysis that will be discussed in the next section.

**Data Analysis**

Photovoice methodology serves a dual purpose: data is translated into action and adds to knowledge base of the field in which it has its basis (Latz, 2017). The aforementioned purpose occurred through the collaborative process of focus groups as described above and kept teachers’ voices central in meaning-making and action planning. For this study, I also independently analyzed data for the purpose of better understanding of how participants described the expression of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms and the actions they seemed to take as related to these discussions. I used both thematic and a critical discourse approach to analyzing and interpreting data. Thematic data involved the identification of participants’ discourse and practice. Taking a critical approach to this discourse allowed me to focus on the language used to describe students with disabilities, the specific relationship between discourse and practice and the formation of student identities by teachers, and provided a view to the broader ideologies that influence these teachers’ practice.

For this study, I elected to use photographs as a way of bringing classroom practice to life within the shared context of semi-structured group conversations. As noted earlier, visuals
are powerful tools that invite “ways of seeing” (Berger, 1972). Participants will be invited to reflect upon the particular social and pedagogical practices on display within their photographs for the purpose of better understanding and responding to identified inequities. In sum, I seek to identify the discourse found within participants’ discussion in relation to the social construction of their students’ literate identities.

Coding and Analytic Memos

Coding involves the process of “breaking down data into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a, p. 102), and assigning names to units of meanings in the data. Coding is primarily interpretive (Saldaña, 2016) and involves the decoding of participants’ language so that the researcher can encode it for meaning. Data is filtered through the researcher’s perspective. Given my critical discourse approach to data analysis, I used in vivo coding for first cycle coding as a way of keeping participant voices at the forefront of my analysis. In vivo coding uses participants’ own language to code data (Saldaña, 2016). Coding in this way deepened my understanding of the culture of teaching within Newark schools and the individual perspectives and attitudes of participants. My goal was to try and capture, as closely as possible, the meaning behind participants’ words and experiences. Take, for example, the following excerpt from the Round 2 transcript. Mira says, “I truly enjoy seeing that it was sort of an open-ended way for them to self-express but ultimately it was their choice so I think it just brought to my mind student choice when thinking of self-expression.” I coded this excerpt “self-express” because Mira’s choice of language closely captured her meaning of choice.

As I read through the transcripts, therefore, I looked for words or phrases spoken by participants that called out to be emphasized in bold or italicized text. I identified words that
were action-oriented like “seeing,” words and phrases that were reiterated by participants, verbal imagery, and words vocally emphasized by participants. I kept track of participant-generated words by using quotations to keep them distinct from other coding. My first coding pass resulted in over 600 in vivo codes. Some examples include: “I see the learning,” “a tangible product,” “classroom culture is the trunk of the tree” and “trying to express,” “medium for their expression,” and “ways they feel safe to express.”

During coding I also wrote analytic memos: reflections on my coding processes and the emerging patterns, concepts, and themes emerging from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Memoing allowed me to have “conversations with [myself] about the data” (Clarke, 2005, p. 202). I posed theories, asked questions, made connections, had “ah-ha” moments that I revisited later in the process. Analytic memos were extremely useful in generating sub-categories and categories from individual codes. See Table 6 for a snapshot of this process. I continued to keep in vivo codes as a way of preserving participant meaning and action as I analyzed the data. These 114 sub-categories provided “imagery, symbols, and metaphors” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 109) from which I could consolidate meaning and condense into 42 categories. For example, in the following excerpt Kristen said:

what I found interesting was for Mira’s student, she didn't feel comfortable discussing but she liked to write and in my case it's the opposite. These students had a difficult time writing but they felt comfortable to have a discussion and I think that's because in my class they turn and talk on a daily basis, elbow partners, they’re constantly engaging in conversation, so I think that that protocol it's something they are so used to by this time in the year that they feel very comfortable to do it. (Kristen, Round 1, May, 2018)
Sometimes, an excerpt was labeled with multiple codes. For example, the excerpt above had three separate codes: “didn't feel comfortable;” “they felt comfortable,” and “they feel very comfortable.” An analytic memo excerpt based on the coding example read:

Mira repeatedly uses the word *comfortable* (“didn’t feel comfortable,” they felt comfortable,” they feel very comfortable) so this is an important idea for her. I think it relates it to the building of a strong student-teacher relationship. Why is this important? What does this have to do with learning and expression of learning? Mira seems to be relating comfort with a student’s expressive preference: she gives the student the option to write about her thinking in mathematics and because the students is a strong writer and uses a journal regularly for other school subject, Mira believes that the option increases access to learning. Mira also connected increased access to the building of a trusting relationship with this student.

Figure 8 shows my initial coding and analytic memoing processes the above example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Code Superscript and in vivo Codes</th>
<th>Analytic Memos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>102 “It was an option open to all students”</td>
<td>So there was access throughout the process as well which certainly contributed to the successful articulation of meaning. But the process was not evaluated - only the end product. Leads to questions about what is expression in learning? What is valued if only end products are assessed. What if end product is not accessible? And would end-product be accessible if the process was not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>103 “they could speak their notes, they could write their notes”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>104 “The image was what was assessed”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>134 “can take many forms”</td>
<td>Neil chose to speak about form which I think strongly relates to expression. Expression is a way to structure thinking. Structural choices matter – each mode and medium has affordances and limitations. Do teachers think about this when designing expressive opportunities for students with disabilities? If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>138 “a medium for expression”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a student has challenges with written communication, are they providing other options that utilize student strengths? What happens if teachers do not do this? It seems to me that we either build a culture of trust or one of frustration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kristen</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>“keep up with the pacing so I don’t fall behind”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“I felt the pressure to have things done.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>“follow the script and do it with fidelity”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These teachers seem to be talking about the control – or lack thereof – they have over curriculum and instruction due to district demands. They talk about how they don’t have control over curriculum, pacing, and assessment. How does that impact students’ expressive opportunities? There is a very real connection between teachers’ perception of their autonomy in pedagogical decision-making and the options for student expression they can provide.

**Figure 8.** An example of initial coding and analytic memoing.

**From Codes to Categories to Themes**

The process of simultaneously coding and memoing resulted in the development of a coherent coding scheme derived directly from participant discourse. I then developed themes to give meaning to the recurring patterns I found in the data. Saldaña (2016) describes a theme as an “extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 199). I will describe this process by elaborating upon the aforementioned example.

Codes relating to students “feeling comfortable” were categorized as “comfort” which later became a sub-category of a larger one I named “building strong teacher-student relationships.” Other sub-categories for this category included “bridges of communication” and “positive classroom culture.” Reflection of the original codes and analytic memo writing allowed me to produce a coherent coding scheme (Saldaña, 2016, p. 10) rooted in participant discourse but also provide my own perspective on the data. While codes and sub-categories remained in their in vivo form, categories were a mix and match of my and participants’
terminology. I organized in vivo codes by listing them out and then organizing them into clusters. To continue with the example above:

I. COMFORT
   A. “Students feel comfortable”
   B. “Students feel valued and supported”
   C. “Develop a sense of trust”

II. “BRIDGES OF COMMUNICATION”
   A. “Open communication”
   B. “Multiple channels”

III. “POSITIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE”
   A. “A sense of belonging”
   B. “Feel free to express themselves”
   C. “Positivity and togetherness in the classroom.”

Saldaña (2016) explains a theme as an “outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection” (p. 198). Consolidating patterns found among individual datum with written statements that identified what they are about or what they mean helped create a “meaningful whole” (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362) from which I interpreted significant participant discourse. To illustrate this process, I again refer to the earlier example. The three major category headings (COMFORT, BRIDGES OF COMMUNICATION, and POSITIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE) suggested to me that “strong teacher-student relationships” are integral to expression of learning. Other categories fell within this purview as well, ultimately leading me to weave elements together thematically: Teachers describe the development of strong
interpersonal relationships with students as being foundational for student expression. My process is illustrated below:

I. The ability to be expressive involves feeling “comfortable.”
   A. Students “feel valued and supported” and develop a “sense of trust” when expressive preferences are honored by their teacher.
   B. “Bridges of communication” are created through expressive choice through “multiple channels.”
   C. A classroom culture where students feel a sense of “belonging, positivity, and togetherness” is created when students feel free to express themselves in multiple ways.

II. Poor social emotional literacy is a barrier to academic expression.
   A. Social emotional literacy is “learned just as academics are.”
   B. Students haven’t been given the time and space to “express themselves in that way.”
   C. Students express that difficulty containing “what they are feeling” during academic tasks.

III. There is a tension between academic and social emotional literacy that is a barrier to student expression.
   A. Balancing academic and social emotional needs of students is “challenging.”
   B. An expressive “opportunity” for a student can be a “barrier” for a teacher.

The three major themes that emerged from my analysis led me to conclude that these five teachers described the development of strong interpersonal relationships with students as being foundational for student expression. They seemed to assert that social emotional literacy is the
foundation of expression – it is the source of access for students to express their understanding of the academic curriculum. Teachers express that the lack of time for developing this social emotional literacy is highly problematic. There is a distinct discourse around academic and non-academic learning. The barrier to academic expression is often characterized as “non-academic learning” and was rendered visible through a student’s inability to self-regulate, relate to others, and attend to academic tasks. Teachers described a tension within the student-teacher relationship as teachers try to balance expectations of curriculum and assessment with valuing various forms of student expression.

The recursive process of data analysis described in the above example resulted in my identifying seven essential themes that gave the data more holistic meaning. Appendix G provides a complete and detailed description of the analytic process.

**Evaluation of the Process**

To ensure that this study may be considered a credible contribution to the field, I enacted proven research-based protocols to guide my process and decision-making. I carefully attended to considerations of accountability, my own positionality, and trustworthiness including adhering to IRB regulations, assigning pseudonyms, and allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time. I will next explain in detail how I sought to preserve the integrity of the study’s focus while remaining respectful of the ethical concerns of my participants and readers.

**Accountability**

I took to heart the trust in which my participants placed in me as the research facilitator. The sharing of lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom, including the identification of challenges and barriers to access and participation in academic and non-academic arenas are potentially sensitive topics. Given that photovoice rounds occurred in groups and among
colleagues and could possibly cause embarrassment, anxiety, or distress, I worked to create a collaborative and comfortable environment in which participants felt safe to share their experiences and ideas. The design of the study allowed participants freedom to document and express what they wished and control over what they wished to share with the group. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time or continue to participate on an individual basis through one-to-one interviews.

I adhered to all formal accountability measures: I sought and obtained IRB approval; I received voluntary consent from all participants; participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time; I changed participant and school names; and all audio recordings and transcripts were kept confidential. I did however elect to name the school district. This was done with forethought and careful consideration of the possible ramifications for the participants in my study. I obtained approval from the Newark school district to conduct the study and publish the results. During the initial Pre-Rounds meeting, I reviewed the confidentiality measures and carefully explained the informed consent process. Although I explained to participants that I would use pseudonyms, I explained that I could not guarantee complete confidentiality because of the limited number of NJCIE schools and because of the small number of participants. My IRB, Newark memorandum of understanding, and informed consent forms all allow me to name NJCIE and Newark in this dissertation.

In choosing to name Newark in this dissertation, I recognize the potential that schools and teachers could be identified through their association with the NJCIE partnership; but I believe that knowledge of the specific context of this study is necessary for understanding my interpretation of the data I collected and analyzed. It is important for readers to understand that the teachers in this study are situated within a state (New Jersey) that has one of the worst
inclusion rates in the United States and in a school district (Newark) cited in a lawsuit filed against the New Jersey Department of Education for having a particularly egregious segregation rate in that only 41% of students with disabilities are included in general education 80% of the day or more. The tensions Newark teachers experience as a result of the settlement mandate for increased inclusion in general education classrooms for students with disabilities, in addition to pressures concerning accountability to standards, curriculum, and testing, are different from those experienced in more affluent and suburban schools. Furthermore, as a large, unique urban district, the space of Newark is important as it relates to issues of race, class, language, and ability, and the places in which they may intersect. My role as an inclusion facilitator for NJCIE, an organization actively participating in inclusive training and technical assistance for increased inclusion for students with disabilities in Newark mandated by the legal settlement, gave me an insider’s view of the legal, political, and professional ramifications for the teachers who participated in this study. It is therefore imperative that I openly acknowledge my personal investment and positionality in this study.

Positionality

Conducting research requires an awareness of my own positionality; a description of my social, professional, political, and personal location within the personal and professional worlds I inhabit. My position as a researcher requires that I explain my “biases, dispositions, and assumptions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) in relation to this study so that readers can better understand my interpretation of data. It has been argued that researchers are neither fully inside or outside the group they are studying, but I don’t view my position as an either/or dichotomy but on a continuum (Trowler, 2011) that shifts in relation to where I stand in relation to participants. Naples (1996) describes that “insiderness or outsiderness are not fixed or static
positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations” (p. 140). What this perspective suggests is that neither myself, the researcher and outsider, or the participants and insiders, can claim to objectivity. By remaining aware of and making transparent my positionality, my readers can then make critical, informed decisions about my work.

This study was deeply important to me as a mother, a performing artist, a student, a teacher, and teacher educator. Over the course of my life I have been fascinated by human expression and the ability to give voice to inner thoughts, feelings, and ideas. From singing opera in front of a large audience to the pictures I take of my children, from the use of hand signals in my fourth grade classroom to the writing of this dissertation, I have used multiple modes and media to make meaning of my life and the world in which I live. My own expressive capabilities were honed through years of schooling which privileged the modes in which I was most facile – speaking (and later singing) and writing.

My fascination with expression took a different turn after the birth of my first child. Expression as a communicative tool gained new importance as I engaged with my son, Christopher. At two years old, Christopher used a handful of words to label objects, but mostly expressed himself through a range of physical gestures and vocal tones that indicated his emotions, needs, and wants. Shortly thereafter, Christopher was diagnosed as having autism by a developmental pediatrician and began intensive speech, occupational, and physical therapies.

I had little experience with disability as a child myself. I now know that there was a reason it did not enter my consciousness - kids with disabilities were educated separately. They took the “little yellow bus,” and were hidden away from view of us “normal” kids. So as a classroom teacher, I had little preparation for students with diverse needs including emotional, psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and physical disabilities. I did my best to accommodate
those needs, but because I had little knowledge and experience with disability, my support for them was limited. When my son was diagnosed with autism, I was faced with conceiving of disability in a new way as my experiences with him outside of the home and especially those within the public school system were debilitating and restrictive. For one of the first times in my life, I was truly outside of the norm.

My experience raising a son with a significant disability has led me to reject deficit thinking as it “pathologizes individuals, families, communities and cultures” (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012, p. 239). I have experienced first-hand, both with my son’s teachers and the teachers with whom I worked with as a professional developer, that the combination of pathological thinking and a narrow understanding of disability as it affects learning translates into low expectations for children with disabilities. My son’s struggle with oral and written expression has led many teachers to assume he has a limited ability to make meaning, ultimately leading to profoundly negative consequences for his academic learning. Christopher has been increasingly placed in segregated, more restrictive placements because his forms of expression are not understood, appreciated, or accepted within classroom contexts.

The turning point that allowed me to put my son’s identity into the forefront was his preschool placement at Montclair State University’s Ben Samuel’s Children’s Center, a one-of-a-kind inclusive preschool that uses a developmental, individual, relationship-based approach to working with children diagnosed as being on autism spectrum. Through my relationships with the gifted therapists at the Center, I received an education in early childhood development. Using the lens of typical child development, I learned that while there were many things my son couldn’t do, there were many more that he could. This strength-based approach radically changed my perspective on the conception of disability. I worked with the Center’s Director and
School Psychologist to write a developmentally appropriate, inclusive preschool curriculum that allows teachers and parents to recognize and celebrate children’s achievements – no matter how small – and more importantly to see their child’s “norm” as individually rather socially constructed.

I view power as relational in that it exists between people, rather than held by one person or group. This is a freeing notion because acknowledging that I am “born into relations of power from which [I] cannot escape” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492) gives me license to resist and oppose the constraints placed upon me. To be disabled, in our society, is to hold little power and that positioning limits individual agency. I can resist those who limit my son’s potential on the premise that there is the possibility of power transference in doing so.

I am deeply passionate about the role I play as a teacher educator in being part of a solution to the “problem” of disability. It is not enough to mandate inclusion, as teachers are already struggling to balance the competing demands placed upon them. This study is an effort to create opportunities to explore the teachers’ conceptions about literacy and disability and the potential impact those understandings have on teaching practices concerning the expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Given the deeply personal nature of the driving force for this study, I continually examined my positionality in relation to the data I collected.

**Trustworthiness**

Addressing issues of credibility is paramount for establishing trustworthiness in presenting interpretation in a qualitative study. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the significance of my role as an inclusion facilitator in which I directly interacted with participants on supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms on this study. I
worked with all five participants as an NJCIE inclusion facilitator in their classrooms and during inclusion team meetings. My work as an inclusion facilitator (and outside the scope of this study) centered on supporting schools’ “implementation teams” which met one time a month for one and a half hours to discuss whole school and grade level efforts to transition students from self-contained classrooms in to general education classrooms. As part of this transition process, I supported teachers by sharing curricular and instructional strategies and resources for supporting the needs of all students as well as the individual needs of specific students with Individualized Learning Plans included in their general education classrooms. I typically met with these teachers (which included but was not limited to the participants in this study) outside of their classrooms during prep periods for 45 minutes each, on average twice a month.

While it is likely that the pre-existing relationships between myself and participants contributed to their willingness to participate in this study, I made every effort to explain to teachers that participation was voluntary and wholly separate from the Newark/NJCIE partnership to teachers in person and in-writing and at the pre-Rounds meeting. Teachers were also informed, in-person and in writing at the Pre-Rounds meeting, that they could leave the study at any time. This was also stated on the consent form. I attempted to keep the Newark/NJCIE work as separate as possible by way of keeping focus group discussions centered on the study, but it is likely that my pre-existing relationship with teachers and our work together on implementation teams contributed to the nature and shape of conversations. Teachers were certainly aware of my belief in the right of all students to be included within general education classrooms and had prior experience with me talking about inclusive practices to support students with disabilities in inclusion.
Contributions to this study were likely influenced by my existing relationships with participants and their knowledge of my beliefs. My status as an outsider/expert may have informed what happened during photovoice Rounds, but I tried at all times, to avoid leading the conversation and allow teachers direct the flow of conversations. My focus during this study remained on teachers’ discourse and how they were thinking about the expression of students with disabilities and therefore I believe that the classroom support I provided as an NJCIE inclusion facilitator had minimal impact. Further, my support as an inclusion facilitator did not provide the kind of collaborative, reflective space for teachers to unpack assumptions in relation to their own practice as did the design of this study.

Still, my positionality as an NJCIE inclusion facilitator who worked regularly with participants outside the boundaries of this study, required that I play on both sides of the fence: on multiple levels I was both an insider and outsider. I did not participate in the focus groups in the same way as teachers by taking photographs, writing captions and descriptions, and phot-elicitation. I did take part in all discussions and participatory diagramming. When asked about my positionality in Post-Rounds final interviews, teachers all reported that they thought of me as a member of the group. This suggests that my positionality as a researcher was more of an insider, which I believe helped facilitate open and honest discussions.

I made every attempt to keep teachers’ voices at forefront of this research study—from data collection to a discussion of implications for practice and research—but this is in no way a guarantee that all voices have been heard, especially those of students, who were the subject of much discussion and reflection. The complexity of human thought and behavior makes it impossible to identify with certainty that what I have captured is in fact, a truth. I acknowledge that at any given moment in this study there existed a cross-section of many individual truths;
these perspectives were ever-shifting, often contradicting, and occasionally intersected so that collective meaning-making could be made. The data from this study could have been interpreted in multiple ways, and influenced by different analytical decisions at every turn. Using a critical lens situated within my own positionality as a mother of a child with a disability, a former elementary and middle school teacher, inclusion facilitator, and teacher educator, to name a few, most certainly framed my analysis and interpretation of the data.

Photovoice provided me the opportunity to examine the meaning-making process of inclusion teachers as they explored the issue of expression for students with disabilities. More specifically, it allowed for the simplifying and organization of data without destroying context and complexity. The findings of my research are not intended to be statistically significance, but to provide as complete and detailed a portrait of teachers’ thinking with regard to practices concerning the expression of students with disabilities. Therefore, the findings of this study should be seen as an opportunity to learn from teachers’ meaning-making as they experienced it, within a specific time and place, and situated within wider educational discourse.

Limitations

The nature of qualitative research makes the findings and discussion of the data collected for this study most relevant to the participants with whom this study was conducted. Nevertheless, this study’s results contribute to the discussion of inclusive literacy pedagogy, an area of research and practice which warrants further study. Photovoice was used in keeping with qualitative research that emphasizes process as informing the outcomes; the ways participants make meaning of their experience; data interpreted through human instruments; situated fieldwork; and analysis that is descriptive and inductive in nature. Viewed from a critical lens,
these limitations offer possibilities for future research endeavors that investigate more of the various threads of complexity described above.

**Conclusion to the Chapter**

In conclusion, I have provided a detailed explanation of my methodology, site and participant selection, data generation and analysis, and a recognition of my positionality as it relates to this study’s credibility. In the next chapter, I will present this study’s findings and provide a thorough discussion of each theme.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents findings from this study, which were derived from systematically coding the data as described in Chapter Three. The five themes respond to the research question:

In what ways do five general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7) as elicited using photovoice methodology?

Findings resulted from the recursive process of data analysis that occurred both with participants as part of the photovoice methodology and independently after photovoice rounds were completed. As discussed in Chapter 3, I used “in vivo” coding to foreground participants’ voices in my independent analysis of the data. I consolidated meaning by developing sub-categories that were then further refined to broader categories. During a second analytic pass, I developed five essential themes that gave this data a more holistic meaning:

1. Choices increase self-expression.
2. More time is needed for increased expression.
3. Expression is visible proof of learning
4. Expression is contextual.
5. Social-emotional literacy seems to be foundational for expression of academic learning.

Critical Moments

Developing themes to organize meanings of participants’ discourse helps to make visible the normalized practices around the expression of students with disabilities for this small group of teachers (grades 3-7) in inclusive classrooms in Newark, New Jersey. Discussing all five themes in depth would be unwieldy. For this reason, I use “critical moments” (Fairclough, 1992), or instances of “where things are going wrong” (p. 230) from within each themed pattern of data.
These moments of crisis can also be understood as “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 1978), which require participants to construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of an experience that does not fit with their pre-existing meaning structure. Fairclough (1992) describes “critical moments” as those “moments of crisis make visible aspects of practice which might normally be naturalized, and therefore difficult to notice, but they also show change in process, the actual ways in which people deal with the problematization of practices” (p. 230). In keeping with Fairclough’s description, I identify places in the transcripts that highlight the thematic patterns I found in the data in which participants appear to be struggling with their understanding of expression, literacy, and/or students with disabilities. To summarize, I have looked within each theme and used critical moments as an interpretive device. I used the following criteria to identify such critical moments in the data as circumscribed by each theme: (a) participants experienced something that challenged their way of understanding the expression of students with disabilities; (b) participants explicitly articulated their conceptions about literacy and/or disability; and (c) participants engaged in reflection of personal knowledge and professional practice.

Due to the richness of my data, discussing each theme through one carefully selected critical moment makes the data manageable for reporting purposes. Thus, I selected five critical moments to highlight each of the five themes. I recognize that many of the critical moments capture aspects of multiple themes, but I primarily discuss one theme per critical moment. These critical moments occurred during the three focus groups (Rounds 1, 2, and 3) and span the continuum of data sources including individual photographs, captions, and written descriptions; photo-elicitation and discussion; group participatory diagramming and group generated photography prompts.
In this chapter, I identify each theme and provide a critical moment through which I both illustrate and interpret my thematic analysis. I thus systematically address all five themes using five critical moments. Transcripts for all five critical moments can be found in Appendix H. Additionally, I provide salient examples beyond the critical moment to give a robust description of teachers’ discourse found in the entirety of the data.

**Theme One: Choices Increase Self-Expression**

This theme foregrounds the importance all five teachers ascribed to providing choices in expression to students with disabilities. The concept of “choice” is visible repeatedly in teachers’ discourse in words they use, including “self-expression” and “multiple means.” Participants explicitly defined “self-expression” as when students’ self-select the mode of expression they use. In contrast, teachers in this study defined “expression” as when teachers choose the expressive mode for students. The teachers believe that when students with disabilities can use multiple modalities they experience increased access to meaning-making. Participants see choice (i.e., self-expression and multiple modalities) as giving “voice” to students with disabilities because it increases their ability to participate in academic learning. This “voice,” my interpretation suggests, fosters students’ abilities to express their needs and advocate for themselves.

**Critical Moment One: “Who has power and who has voice” (Round 3 Focus Group – June 7, 2018).** At the beginning of the first focus group discussion during the first Round, Mira introduced the term, “self-expression,” while reading her photograph description: “self-expression and learning can be presented in a variety of ways” and “writing and other forms of self-expression.” The photograph was a picture of her student working on a “Do Now,” an introductory activity she used to engage students by activating their prior knowledge and
familiarizing them with the lesson’s vocabulary. During her narrative, Mira used the term, “self-expression” four times. She used the phrase three more times during the focus group when talking about other participant’s photographs. Each time she used the phrase, it referred to students’ selection of expressive modalities. For example, she said, “I truly enjoy seeing that it was sort of an open-ended way for them to self-express but ultimately it was their choice so I think it just brought to my mind student choice when thinking of self-expression” (Round 1, May 3, 2018). In the second Round, (May 17, 2018), Mira again used the term “self-expression,” distinguishing it from “expression:” “I think self-expression to me, is sort of your choice, how you choose to express, self-express, whereas expression might be sort of like, when someone asks you to express yourself, whether it be in a certain format or in a certain way.”

The following critical moment occurs in Round Three (June 7, 2018), during Mira’s photo-elicitation narrative. Mira’s photo about which she speaks is actually composed of two photographs, diametrically opposed in format and content (Figure 9). One depicts a student with her hands covering her face and the other shows the same student raising her hand high in the air. Mira introduces the photo by explaining that she “wanted to show the contrast” (Lines 6-7) between expression that is dictated by others and students’ own choices in expression.
Figure 9. Mira’s photograph from Round 3 captioned “Power & Voice.”

Thematic Interpretation. This moment in Mira’s narrative is a critical moment because it shows how teachers have, over the course of four meetings together, created and adopted specific terminology to express their understanding of the complex concept of student expression. In comparing two images of the same student, Mira shows her conception of “self-expression:” “So, in one picture I feel the student is sort of being held back not free to express themselves. Whereas the other picture shows self-expression” (Lines 8-9). She refers to her experience with respect to “allowing those students the opportunity to “self-express.” “There’s times during the day when I give them the choice” (Lines 19-21). Another participant, Kristen, uses the term of “self-expression” to describe student’s choice in expression. She agrees with Mira that students need more opportunities to self-select modes of expression, saying, “If you
don’t give them the opportunity to self-express how are they going to?” (Lines 53-54). Rosie, a third participant, also adopts the language of “self-expression:” “when we allow students to self-express, we give them a share in that power” (Lines 67-68). This critical moment clearly shows the adoption of specific terminology—“self-express” and “self-expression”—by three of the five participants to establish a shared understanding about the concept of students’ selection of their expressive modality.

This critical moment also shows how teachers perceive choice in expression as integral to giving students a say in their own learning. This agency is referred to as “voice” and “power” and participants believe that it comes in large part due to “self-expression.” Mira seeks to describe how giving students choices allows them “freedom of expression” (Line 10). For Mira, choice is related to comfort in that students will more readily express themselves if they “feel they are free to express their opinions, ideas, feelings, thoughts” (Lines 10-11). Mira believes that providing expressive choices to students gives them “freedom” and thus increased “voice” and “power” in the classroom. Mira explains that typically teachers hold the decision-making power when it comes to how students express their learning: “usually it is decided for students what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how long it will take (Lines 12-13) and argues that “including students in the decision making of their learning” (Line 15) increases their motivation and participation. Kristen points to the importance of teachers providing students with “opportunities” to self-express. Rosie and Mira discuss teachers’ sharing the power with student, by means of enabling “self-expression.” Rosie says, “at the beginning it can become chaotic if you give all the power. You get to a point of shared power after you know who they are” (Lines 56-57) and Rosie says, “you don’t use the power in a way that means absolute control” (Lines 59-60). Mira posits that a teacher’s “mindset” (Line 64) where he or she does not
hold all of the decision-making leads to a shared power of expression, leading Rosie to conclude that “self-expression” gives students “a share in that power” (Lines 67-68). This exchange suggests that teachers see a reciprocal relationship between “self-expression” and student agency.

Other Examples. “Self-expression” is also used to refer to student choice by other participants throughout the study, beginning in Round 2 (May 17, 2018). Angelica is reflecting on Neil’s photograph which depicts a small mannequin (Manny) that he allows students to position. In the photo, one of Neil’s students has positioned “Manny” so that he is “dabbing,” (a simple dance move or gesture in which a person drops the head into the bent crook of a slanted, upwardly angled arm, while raising the opposite arm out straight in a parallel direction).

Angelica says, “I think looking at the image it’s sort of like if you were to tell them I want you to put Manny to dab they can express that, but is it their self-expression? Not really because it didn’t come from them.” Later during this round, Kristen reflects on “self-expression,” remarking that “the idea of self-expression and just expression stood out to me.” In Round 3 (June 7, 2018) Rosie reflects on self-expression as giving students’ voice that would have gone unheard if they had not had the opportunity. She says, “How would we have known that’s the way he is feeling or that’s him showing growth because obviously in the beginning he is saying he didn’t read very well and now…so, you can visibly see how self-expression can shed insight into something we would have never known about that student.” The adoption of Mira’s language by the other participants is a strong indication of the importance they place on expressive choice.

Participants also discuss “choice” as multiple ways of expressing oneself. During Round 1 (May 3, 2018), Rosie calls it “entry points” and Kristen describes multiple ways of “allowing
your student to express herself in the way that she feels the most comfortable.” She also views a lack of choice as a potential barrier to expression: “the boy [a student with a disability] particularly got so frustrated that he was like punching the paper with a pen, a pencil and he was saying ‘I can tell you things’ and he can whether it be in a small group or one-to-one, but it, the struggle for them is getting the thoughts onto the paper, that’s kind of like the barrier.” Mira describes “multiple means” as giving students “access to be able to be expressive about what they’ve learned.” In her Round 1 (May 3, 2018), reflection, Kristen notes that she is “beginning to think about multiple means of expression.” In Round 2 (May 17, 2018), Angelica talks about using multiple means of expression in her mathematics classroom. She says they can “draw it out. They can write a number sentence.” For Angelica adds on that multiple means is more than just multiple modalities: “there’s different forms of it too. Their writing or they’re sharing with a group of peers or they’re sharing with the class…whether you express it to the entire class or to the small group or on the paper you expressed it and that’s good enough.” Collectively, this suggests that teachers in this study see multiple modalities as related to students’ expressive “choice.”

In Round Three (June 7, 2018), “multiple means” seems to mean that students can express themselves competently and confidently; providing them opportunities to position themselves as other than they have typically been viewed as students with disabilities. During the photo-elicitation portion of the third focus group, Rosie shared a photograph titled “Competence or Confidence.” The photograph juxtaposed a student’s positive message to himself against his formal failing report card (see Figure 10).
COMPETENCE: the ability to do something successfully or efficiently
OR...

COMPETENCE: The idea that a student’s ongoing self-reflection of whether he or she can, or has, succeed in a task.

Students were asked to write themselves a positive message acknowledging how far they have come this year. I have juxtaposed this student’s response against his formal report card. His message reads ‘My age is 9. My smartness is 10 out of 0. I can read better than before. I couldn’t read before. And now I can read.’

He is a 3rd grade student. He finished K at a DRA level 2. He finished 1st grade at a DRA level 2. He finished 2nd grade at a DRA level 4. He has been a BR Lexile Level all year. So which shows his competence—the report card or the self-reflection?

Figure 10. Rosie’s photograph captioned, “Competence” and its accompanying written description from Round 3.

Rosie explains that she had students write positive messages “about how far they’ve come this year and he wrote, “my age is nine and my smartness is 10 out of 0. I can read better than before. I couldn’t read before and now I can read.” Rosie poses the question of which shows the child’s competence—the report card or his self-reflection—and explains that the multiple means of expressing competence available to this child allowed him to express his ideas and her to see what she would have never known “unless we gave them that opportunity.” Rosie notes that this is the same child pictured dancing in her other photograph: “how many opportunities in a day is he given the opportunity to express himself that way?” Kristen later reflects, “If you don’t give them the opportunity to express how are they going to?” neatly summarizing the impact multiple means of expression seems to have on students’ expression and on these teachers’ understanding of their meaning-making.
Summary. The language used by all five teachers suggests that they believe in the value of providing expressive choices (i.e., “multiple means”) for their students. “Multiple means” included expressive modes not commonly associated with academic performance such as dance. Together, teachers named “self-expression” to be taking-up choice to make meaning when students choose it for themselves. They seemed to place a higher value on this kind of choice take-up than when they, as teachers, offer students a set menu of modalities by which to express themselves. Interestingly, it seems that when it concerns choice, teachers in this study do not distinguish between academic and social emotional expression. In short, it seems as though “expression” is understood as writ large, applying to academic and social emotional meaning-making. Thus, in terms of this particular theme running across the data, it is the choice of modality—preferably student-selected—that participants believe contributes to students having more of a “voice” to participate in learning and leads to the demonstration of learning as perhaps more “recognizable” by teachers themselves.

Theme Two: More Time is Needed for Increased Expression

The second theme I constructed from the data is that teachers repeatedly describe the importance of increased instructional time for supporting the expression of students with disabilities. Participants define a need for more time within the school day and space within the academic curriculum in order for students with disabilities to express themselves in ways they feel comfortable. This is unsurprising, given the demands regarding increased instructional time that Newark’s mandated curriculum requires. Teachers also describe the use of regular classroom structures (i.e., routines) that foster “self-expression.” Teachers assert that these routines serve to increase students’ comfort level by providing multiple opportunities and means for expression and therefore increase expressive opportunities.
Critical Moment Two: “They’re entitled to that space and time” (Round 2 Focus Group – May 17, 2018). This critical moment occurred during the second focus group after Angelica presented her photograph, captioned, “Notices and Wonders *Motivation” (See Figure 11).

A rich task is given to the class. Without much thought, four hands spring up with excitement. These are the same four hands that always go up. The rest of the students wait and stare as those students carry the conversation. But no one has been given the opportunity to process their thinking or given the chance to fine tune their ideas. In this photo, a pair of glasses and a thought bubble symbolizes the I Notice and I Wonder protocol. Students need a place and space to think as well as time to let those ideas grow. This photo depicts all of those elements; students in my math class are asked to search for words that look familiar or a pattern they’ve observed in the pass and write them down. Students also include what confuses them or questions about what they see. Everybody writes and share their ideas with group members. This practice creates meaningful conversations and helps students realize that everyone can contribute to the class discussion. Students are given the space to notice and wonder.

Figure 11. Angelica’s photograph captioned “Notices and Wonders *Motivation” and its accompanying written description from Round 2.

Thematic Interpretation. This critical moment brings to the fore that participants believe more time is needed in order to increase expressive opportunities for students with disabilities. Angelica mentions that students are using a protocol in order to work on a “rich task” which is an instructional activity from Newark’s mandated mathematics curriculum. Mathematics teachers are expected to open their lesson with an open-ended mathematics problem that students work in small groups to solve. Students’ answers and problem-solving strategies become the basis of later explicit instruction. Angelica’s “Notices and Wonder” protocol is a routine she has developed (prior to this study) and uses regularly during the “rich task” to increase expressive opportunities for students with disabilities. Angelica remarks that
this protocol helps all students express something about the rich task, even if they “don’t have a complete understanding. They’re so used to thinking, “I’m just going to quickly jump into it” (Lines 31-32). Angelica believes that time constraints present a significant barrier to student expression that manifests itself in expressive outbursts, task refusal, or limited output. She claims that despite the limited instructional time, teachers can and should find small moments to give students a “moment to write, a moment to process, and then a moment to talk about it before diving in” (Lines 20-21). She says it doesn’t take much time at and that this “protocol usually takes five minutes of my lesson and it’s meaningful” (Lines 22-23). Rosie also feels the time constraints (“that clock is what really stood out. Just how everything is time,”) but also sees the importance of “carve[ing] out those five powerful minutes to allow for expression to happen in the chaos of everything else that has to be done” (Lines 51-56).

During the Pre-Rounds introductory meeting (April 19, 2019), Angelica shared that she has always struggled to express herself verbally and in writing. In the critical moment, Angelica refers to her challenges with oral and written expression by saying she needs the time to “think” and “process” (Lines 11-12). In response to my note-taking during photo-elicitation narratives, she says, “You [Francesca] draw, but I need time. It took me hours to think about this” (Lines 12-13). Angelica is a gifted artist and her point here is that expression is not always immediate – that time to think and process is a necessary ingredient in its creation. Neil affirms Angelica’s assertion that expression can’t be rushed, saying that students are “entitled to that time and space” (Line 57).

Angelica believes that the “Notice and Wonder” protocol is effective because it gives students “the space and the opportunity to be a part of the community as opposed to just waiting for some people to take charge” and is a constructive way to participate instead of “interrupting
the lesson” (Lines 16-18). Angelica says that the protocol is “differentiated” (Line 32) and gives all students equal opportunities to express their thinking: “It helps all students in the classroom. Not just the students that struggle with it” (Lines 32-33). Kristen comments that she thinks the protocol would help reduce time barriers to expression by allowing students to collaborate: “maybe that eager student will start off, but then the other students will catch on or they may relate to a small part. Even if they just make one comment it leads to another student it kind of builds that learning experience” (Lines 41-44). Angelica agrees that the collaborative “connections” that occur “within their small conversations” of the Notice and Wonder Protocol allow “that child that struggled in the beginning” to become “that child that raises their hand” (Lines 47-48). Mira sees the protocol as powerful because it provides regular opportunities for “self-expression.” Teachers seem to agree that this protocol is effective because it is used routinely to give all students access to expressive voice, power, and agency.

**Other Examples.** There are many examples of the teachers describing the need for more instructional time and space to support increased student expression. The teachers talk at length about time constraints and the need for “space” within the academic curriculum that allows students with disabilities to express themselves in ways that they feel comfortable. In Round 1, (May 3, 2018), Kristen introduces the issue of curriculum pacing in relation to providing students with opportunities to express. She says, “As teachers sometimes we fight, and we’re like you need to do this, you need to do that. And drilling isn’t going to get you anywhere.” Kristen explains that it is important to let students have some choice in expression and that those “five minutes aren’t going to be the end of the world to you” but “letting them express what they need to do to get through the day is okay.” In Round 2 (May 17, 2018), Rosie says that the environment teachers “set-up for the students to be able to move and find resources as they need”
allowed her student to productively express his frustration. This allowed her student an alternative to “act[ing] out or get[ting] that negative attention or walk[ing] out of a room” and he “he finally just went and found that quiet space and used that paper and wrote.” Still Rosie complains that “time is always the enemy.”

Time constraints were a central topic of discussion in Round 3 (June 7, 2018). At the beginning of the third focus group, I again presented some of the recurring themes I had found from reviewing the transcript. This time, I did not organize the quotes by themes, but listed them. I asked participants to select a few quotes that were most significant to them or that they would like to probe further. Mira relates her chosen quote from Round 2 (May 17, 2018): “I think that expression and who gets to express is always changing in the room. It’s not just about me in the room…it went from my classroom to our classroom” to the importance of time in helping her students feel comfortable expressing themselves. She says, “…not rushing them to participate. Sort of waiting for them to feel comfortable. Once you allow for that time to sort of happen, then I feel they feel respected, empowered, and then you see them expressing themselves more.” Kristen adds on that she is troubled by the external demands of pacing and assessment and teachers having to “move on.” She says, “You want to just keep moving, but how do we expect students especially students with disabilities who have trouble working at that pace. How do you expect them to feel powerful or to express if you’re not giving them the time that they need to be able to work with what’s best for them?” These examples reflect that teachers view limited time—both for themselves and their students with disabilities—for what they name as “self-expression” as problematic to student expression in general.

This theme concerning the need for increased instructional time for supporting the expression of students with disabilities is also reflected in teachers’ descriptions of classroom
routines and protocols as a way of making the most of instructional time for increasing student expression (as with Angelica’s Notices and Wonders protocol above). In Round 2 (May 17, 2018), as another example, Kristen shares her photograph of a red teddy bear in a classroom (see Figure 12). She explains that the bear is used as part of a classroom routine of daily circles when students meet to share something out. Only the person holding the bear can speak and the bear is passed around until everyone has had an opportunity to share. Kristen explains that she developed and introduced this routine early in the school year and practiced it daily and that students were very comfortable with it.

Figure 12. Kristen’s photograph captioned “Speaker Power” and its accompanying written description from Round 2.

Kristen describes a classroom culture where students are given regular opportunities to express themselves during a classroom sharing routine. She says, “And I think it’s just built our culture where students maybe in the beginning of the year would not share, but now every time I do a circle, every student will have something to say.” Kristen credits the culture of choice with
creating access to expression for students with disabilities: “I like that it’s more of an equal opportunity for everyone to kind of come together.” Neil talks about the bear as a symbol of the nurturing, positive culture Kristen has created. He thinks “the fact that is a bear. It’s smiling, it’s friendly, it’s bright” conveys to students that they can choose or not choose to contribute because all voices matter. It is powerful, he says, that the red bear is highly visible (“it’s not like you’re going to lose the red bear in the room”) and that it “bears the power of speech” (Lines 27-28) when a student holds it.

Kristen and the other participants view the “speaker power” routine as an accessibility measure because it builds rapport between students, creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable to share. By calling the routine “speaker power” and having students refer to themselves and others as having “speaker power,” Kristen acknowledges that opportunities to express matter with respect to whose voices are heard. Rosie says that “power comes from speaking and how do we help all students find their voice?” She equates “voice” or speaking as holding a position of power within the classroom and thus asserts the importance of all students having access to the power to express. Teachers see voice as integral to being a stakeholder in the inclusive classroom: “creating opportunities for everyone to share in that power is powerful.”

Participants also describe instructional structures they utilize to foster “self-expression.” These protocols and routines provide both multiple opportunities for expression and multiple means of expression, thereby reducing anxiety and discomfort which can serve as barriers to expression. For example, in Round 1 (May 3, 2018), Kristen says that routines help her students feel comfortable with expressing themselves: “they turn and talk on a daily basis, elbow partners, they’re constantly engaging in conversation, so I think that that protocol it's something they are
so used to by this time in the year that they feel very comfortable to do it.” Angelica explains that giving students multiple forms of expressing themselves allowed students to express themselves in ways in which they felt comfortable: “You are allowing your student to express herself in the way that she feels the most comfortable. Raising her hand might feel intimidating but writing it down might not.” Later in the round, Kristen comments that participants have been saying, “we don’t have much time with them all day,” but that routines allow teachers to “build in those little moments” and she tries “every day.”

During the second round (May 17, 2018), Mira comments that finding time for students to choose among multiple forms of expression is important for them to “have the conversations, to feel comfortable and you know ask questions and sort of express yourself and get it.” She says that routines “cultivated and helped create” those opportunities to express. When asked when she makes the time for this, Mira’s response is emphatic, “When we found time, period!” and seems to indicate her frustration with the limited time she has with her students. Neil talks about his own routine in response to Angelica’s “Notice and Wonder” protocol. He describes a protocol he uses for conflict resolution between students called “the circle of power and respect.” It provides sentence “stems” such as, “I feel…,” and, “I understand that you feel…,” to help students explain how they are feeling and negotiate difficult conversations. Neil remarks that students love the routine and “always want to do it again…because they’re not used to having that space where they can be kind and listen to each other. It’s not like a structure that they have all the time.” Neil places great importance on this routine for giving his students “the structure and the space” for social-emotional literacy. Later in the round, Kristen described the value in giving students more time for “self-expression” and that “when students have choice in their expression, a lot more can happen.”
Summary. The teachers seemed to recognize that expression and time are related in several ways. For one, they articulate that all methods to increase student expression are not equal – some take more time than others. Secondly, they understand that children have different preferences and capabilities in the ways that they express and that time plays a large role in the selection of modalities offered to students. Thirdly, teachers describe that instructional time constraints contribute to the expectations they set for student expression. Speaking and writing are the norm. They have to actively find time to create more opportunities for children to use other expressive modalities through instructional routines and protocols. The teachers’ discourse conveys their belief in the power of protocols and routine; the structure and regularity of using routines increases opportunities to express in multiple forms. This is neatly summarized by Mira in Round 3 (June 7, 2018), when she says, “I gave them the time they needed and once I gave them the time they needed I saw the self-expression come out more.” It seems that teachers’ descriptions about protocols and routines that increase time needed for the multimodal expression for students with disabilities are a response to Newark’s mandated literacy curriculum.

Theme Three: Expression is Visible Proof of Learning

Throughout the study, teachers regularly describe the expression of students with disabilities as that which can be seen. Teachers use sight-related language to describe how they understand (e.g., “seeing”) what students are expressing (e.g., “showing”). Teachers regularly employ the use of imagery and metaphors as tools to explain how students are learning. Participants describe expression as resulting in a tangible end-product of learning for the purposes of assessing students and holding them accountable for their own learning. Teachers describe a dichotomy between internalized learning, which is not outwardly visible, and
expressed learning: the inability to “see” tangible evidence of student learning does not correlate with non-learning. However, teachers do describe the need to “see” some evidence as a way of assessing student’s progress towards specific learning objectives and goal. In what follows, I will describe the third critical moment to highlight the second theme I constructed from the data – that one of the ways teachers in this study conceptualize expression is as visible proof of learning.

**Critical Moment Three: “I see my students’ learning.” (Round 1 Focus Group – May 3, 2018).** During the first round focus group, Neil shares his photo captioned, “P.S. I tried” (see Figure 13), which depicts a math assignment completed by a student with an Individualized Education Plan. Neil introduces this picture as a “letter to the teacher.” He then explains the context in which this work occurred. Due to standardized testing, Neil spent the majority of the school day proctoring students in the inclusion class. During an independent work period following the testing session, Neil describes watching this particular student struggle to complete a math assignment. Although Neil was this student’s English Language Arts teacher and not this student’s math teacher, he attempted to help the student. The student refused his help and Neil observed the student “trying and trying again” despite spending the majority of the work time visibly frustrated with the assignment. At the end of the period, the student turned in the assignment which had a note on the bottom of the paper that read, “P.S. I tried.” Neil calls the work a “letter of effort,” through which the student’s effort was made visible through the traced shapes in blue marker to show what was attempted and the written note of “P.S. I tried.”
Thematic Interpretation. This critical moment neatly captures the theme of student expression as visible proof of student learning. Neil describes this student’s expression in visual terms: as that which can be seen as concrete proof of learning. Neil grapples with what matters in student’s expression, or rather how teacher should evaluate it. While the student has not shown “proof” that she has learned the mathematical concepts and processes taught in the lesson, she is showing a “full effort” (Line 3). Angelica points out the smiley face next to the written statement of “P.S. I tried,” calling attention to it as integral to the message the student wanted to communicate. She homed in on it as a message of positivity – interpreting it as the student “celebrating” what they believed was a successful expression of learning (Lines 53-56). Angelica believes this is of great importance and something that teachers often fail to take into account.
when evaluating student expression of learning. Rosie confirms that she too sees the importance of teacher’s “recognition” (Line 8) of student effort with respect to their acts of expression.

Neil, Angelica, and Rosie experience something that challenges their understanding and they engage in reflection of professional practice. Neil explicitly articulates his conception about disability. Neil says that had he not witnessed the student’s persistent efforts, he would have questioned their effort, which in his view, is part of how students with disabilities are viewed in inclusive classrooms. In Lines 37-39, Neil says it “force[d] me to question my assumptions about each individual students’ effort” and considers what he might have done to provide “another scaffold, another entry into the task.” Angelica points out the smiley face and reflects that teachers, herself included, “tend to forget” the ways that students express “celebrating their own successes” (Lines 53-54). Rosie posits that although students’ struggle is expressed differently for children and adolescents, that communication is “the key to everything” (Lines 61-62).

This critical moment highlights the teachers’ attempt to define the concept of expression as it relates to learning. Angelica explicitly names her struggle as “confusion” (Line 63). She struggles to understand expression as visible proof of learning, describing that students who express misunderstanding are showing “some retention” (and therefore some learning) but not the “learning objective” she has set for them (Lines 63-69). Angelica is perplexed about the relationship between learning and expression. This struggle is taken up by Neil in line 70 when he talks about the “functional aspect” of a given lesson. He seems to be alluding to learning as multi-dimensional: there are “layers of understanding” and students learn “in the moment,” over
the course of a lesson, and over their years of schooling (Lines 71-72). Neil describes in colorful detail how his students express their momentary and long-term “learning” in both verbal and nonverbal ways (Lines 72-79). Like Angelica, Neil names this tension, calling it “a challenge.” Angelica adds that in her view, students’ passivity with “showing their learning” is an expression of learned helplessness. In Lines 86-87, she says, “it’s showing that they’ve learned that, that if I can’t contribute, I can just sit here and they’ll yes and nod and everything, but they know.” It is clear that both Angelica and Neil view student expression as their ability to see what students know or do not know or what they have or have not learned.

**Other Examples.** The data from this study is rich with teacher’s sight-related language concerning what is visible (e.g., “see,” “seeing”, “saw,” “shows,” and “viewed”) from students’ expression. The link between expression and assessment as that which can be “seen” is a recurring concept throughout the study, and one that emerged almost immediately. Issues concerning expression and assessment of learning were found in several other points during the first round. When Mira was presenting her photograph that showed a student’s math journal entry (Figure 14), she said, “I’ve noticed her progression and her learning have come a long way” and “this shows me that she is understanding the instruction that is taking place in the classroom.” During Kristen’s narrative, she says, “In my classroom, I think the most valuable piece of evidence is when I see them talk and engage in conversation.” Kristen is arguing that because she can “see” the expression (students talking to each other), she feels confident that they are learning. Later she confirms her belief that student expression and teachers’ assessment are inextricably linked. She wrote in her description of the photo: “I think this photo represents our students’ ability in the classroom. “How could I not hold these students accountable, when in fact, they were able to express to me what they know.”
In Round 2 (May 17, 2018), participants again grapple with the distinction between what a student knows and what they express. Neil says that “unless it’s really genuine, in terms of like, like, when they are able to express genuine learning, then it’s different, it’s easy to see and it’s easy to pull out, and it’s easy for them to express.” When asked specifically about this distinction for students with disabilities, Rosie explains that visible expression leads to issues of how to “grade fairly.” Angelica agrees that a lack of tangible proof of learning “creates some tension” between her middle schoolers with and without disabilities: “they’ll see a child who doesn’t have much on their paper, and they’re over here with pages and pages and have been working hard but there’s no consequence.” Mira sees this tension with her third graders, as well, and explains that they have conversations about being “fair verses being equal.”

In Round 3, again participants describe expression as making learning visible. Kristen’s
photograph, captioned “two is better than one” (see Figure 15), is a metaphor for her belief that an inclusive classroom provides learning that can be seen by the teacher: “I think the biggest thing that I’ve seen is from inclusion is that the gen ed and special ed students learn from each other.” She goes on to describe regular interactions where she, “Often times see[s] a student struggling maybe its related to an academic prompt, writing or math assignment but maybe they are partnered up with a very strong student.” It is this interaction between students, Kristen claims, that allows the student who was struggling to become “excited to express and share the answer.” Kristen claims that assessment data is, in itself, a form of student expression and proof that inclusion is effective: “The data shows us that they’re growing…personally I was about to cry because I was so excited to see how much they moved.” In sum, these examples demonstrate some of the many times participants’ photographs, descriptions, narratives, and conversation centered on what I refer to as a theme of expression as visible evidence of student learning.

Figure 15. Kristen’s photograph captioned, “Two is better than one” from Round 3.

Summary. Throughout the study, teachers regularly use sight-related language (i.e., “seeing” and “showing”) to describe their understanding of student expression. As seen in
Critical Moment 1, presented earlier, teachers grapple with the expression of learning as it relates to assessment and often describe expression in terms of what students produce to “show what they know.” The teachers describe a difference between internalized learning and expressed learning but seem to be more focused on expression that can be observed and measured, of which they seemed to be aware given the number of times accountability was raised during discussion. Furthermore, the teachers view student expression as tangible “effort” and report that this effort is valid and valuable information for assessing learning.

**Theme Four: Expression is Contextual**

The fourth theme I developed from the data is that the teachers discuss contextual factors as playing a pivotal role in the modalities that students use to express. Teachers describe a dichotomy between students’ capabilities to express and the modalities that are sanctioned in academic classrooms. For example, students who face challenges with expressing themselves in written language do not have the same opportunity for expression as those who do not have such challenges. Because oral and written language are the primary modes for teaching and learning, teachers identify this as problematic for those students with disabilities who have difficulty communicating through verbal and written modes. The specific context of inclusive classrooms seems to factor into how teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities to express their knowledge in their classrooms. They typically do not make a distinction between expression for students with and without disabilities during discussions. Rather, teachers in this study regularly refer to the impact of the urban environment on student expression. In particular, participants describe nonverbal expression as a legitimate, but misunderstood and undervalued form of student expression in Newark schools.
Critical Moment Four: “I don’t think you see that in many other places.” (Round 2 Focus Group – May 17, 2018). After the first focus group, I immediately transcribed the audio recording of our talk and examined it for recurring ideas. I organized participant quotes into a graphic organizer (see Figure 16) and I began the second focus group (Round 2) by disseminating individual copies of this organizer and having participants read through them and starring those they would like to talk about further. Neil was one of three participants who wanted to further discuss the idea of nonverbal communication.

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<th>Visible Learning</th>
<th>Accountability for Learning</th>
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<td>“…shows me that she is understanding the instruction that is taking place in the classroom”</td>
<td>“…it is difficult to gauge if she really is understanding but through this writing I am sort able to get confirmation of her learning.”</td>
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<td>“So what’s really happening for me as a teacher is I’ve noticed her progression and her learning have come a long way.”</td>
<td>“How could I not all the students accountable, when in fact, they were able to express to me what they know”</td>
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<td>“seen in her work” and “see this in my conversations with her”</td>
<td>“When it’s time to give an assessment so that they can show or express their learning…”</td>
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<td>“The student wants me to see everything that could be done was attempted.”</td>
<td>“…how do we assess if we are looking at a product, an end product, are we just assessing that product in isolation?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is a tacking in blue marker to make that effort more visible.”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities or Barriers</th>
<th>Non-Verbal Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“She chose that method of showing you something instead of verbalizing…”</td>
<td>“She would just put her head down and look distressed a little bit, where he had a more explosive reaction, but you could tell that they were both frustrated with the same task.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The struggle for them is getting the thoughts on to the paper—that’s like the barrier.”</td>
<td>“They are choosing the image and they’re expressing themselves within that image.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Why as a teacher would I not account that? Why would I not find that a valid piece just because they are so frustrated that they can’t write it?”</td>
<td>“…that is what the student has learned—to express it in their body and to express their frustration and kind of apprehension at the thought of having to do something to show learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…especially because I’m in inclusion, you know, what works for this student does not work for another student.”</td>
<td>“We don’t really know—we can only interpret that smiley face.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When it’s time to give an assessment so that they can show or express their learning, we think of…some kind of worksheet or it’s almost the same for all of them.”</td>
<td>“I think one way that students show how they learn is through their attitude.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The assessments that we’re always given, may not work for some students but if I can find some other way to get to that goal”</td>
<td>“I am one of those people who struggle with expression whether it’s verbally or written in so taking a picture with such a relief.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…so they were still expressing what they learned, but everyone had different accountability levels from where they would start.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“When this option was given, you are able to see that they were able to internalize it and that they were really excited about it as well”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“…open-ended way for them to self-express”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…having that access and feeling as a student that you are able to express in any which way you want. It’s really powerful.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 16.** Selected quotes from Round 1 transcript used as a discussion prompt in Round 2.

**Thematic Interpretation.** This critical moment captures the theme of how teachers seemed to view student expression as situational in nature. In this critical moment, Neil states
that student expression, specifically the use of communication that is not language related (e.g., facial expressions, physical gestures), is unique to Newark and other similar urban environments: “The fact that we’re in an urban environment, the nonverbal communication is specific to that type of learning” (Lines 1-2). Neil explains that his students use nonverbal modes of communication in contrast to students who use language in non-urban contexts. He says, “and in a different environment, it’s very different, they’re like “that person is making me feel uncomfortable, why are they looking at me?” During the Round 1 (May 3, 2018), Neil had described how he grew up and has lived most of his life in large cities. Neil seems to be drawing upon his own experience when he says, “so I capitalize on that so when you know when I’m looking at you for a certain amount of time, I’m telling you something, because I know that you understand the eyes speak” (Lines 7-9). Neil believes that he can credibly make such a claim because of his own prior experience: “this is the kind of environment we’ve grown up in. Other environments are different. So I don’t think you see that in many other places.” Angelica seems to agree with Neil that students’ modality choices are context dependent. Angelica explains that in her “experience growing up in that same [urban] environment” (Line 12) that expression is characterized as pithy in that “everything needs to be quick and clear. It can’t, you can’t go on rattling on about stuff, it has to be quick and clear, whether it’s language or a quick word.” She uses the phrase, “you know what I’m saying?” to capture the succinctness with which she seems to view as characteristic of urban expression. Neil and Angelica, by acknowledging themselves as “insiders,” present an understanding of expression as directly related to context.

What makes this moment “critical,” is when Kristen, through this discussion, becomes aware, for the first time of the nonverbal expression from her students with disabilities: “this is something I have in my room every day but I guess I never really bring much attention to it”
(Lines 16-17). She ruminates that “a lot” (Line 17) of her students express themselves in nonverbal ways all the time. There is awe in her voice when she says, “until you sit down and think about it, it just became apparent to me, like wow. Like I can think of six incidents, instances today that this happened” (Lines 19-21). The fact that Kristen identifies as a White woman who grew up in the suburbs and that this is both her first year teaching in urban school, seems to be a factor in the new level of consciousness this discussion has brought to her about the prevalence of students’ nonverbal expression.

While the urban context is integral in understanding my interpretation of this moment as “critical,” it is also important to recognize the role that an inclusive classroom context plays in Kristen’s understanding of students’ expression. Kristen seems to attribute students’ non-language related actions to their disabilities. She says that they “will show me how they feel about something through their body, through anything but telling me” (Lines 18-19). She describes how one student expressed his frustration with a math activity: “like he couldn’t manipulate the hands of the clock and he just started sitting there. I asked him what was bothering him. What was wrong? Can I help? He wouldn’t talk to me he just started kicking his desk and huffing and puffing and but wouldn’t talk to me.” (Lines 23-26). Kristen then goes on to describe another interaction with a student with a disability in her inclusion class who was working on a math assignment on the computer, “and his Chromebook wasn’t working, but he didn’t tell me and he started slamming the Chromebook, but he wouldn’t tell us what was wrong.” (Lines 28-30). Kristen says that this nonverbal communication made her “realize that he couldn’t express well.” It seems that the context of inclusion contributes to how Kristen views the expression of students with disabilities; she views students with
disabilities as choosing different modes of expression (i.e. nonverbal) to communicate their feelings of frustration with learning tasks.

**Other Examples.** Participants in this study regularly referred to contextual factors as important in the ways their students with and without disabilities express themselves. This theme emerged early on during the Pre-Round meeting. When asked about expression for students with disabilities in her classroom, Mira responds, “we’re all different, we all can express it in different ways especially if we work in an inclusive setting.” Thus, from the onset, the context of the inclusive classroom became important for participants’ understanding of student expression. Referencing “the inclusion setting” was often used in lieu of participants specifically talking about students with disabilities. At the Pre-Rounds meeting, Mira directly asked if she was required to take photos “that have to be one, or let’s say that must include a child with an individualized education plan?” We established that due to their teaching contexts of inclusive classrooms, “whatever that picture is, it is going to come out” or in other words whether or not students with Individualized Education Plans are engaged in the expression depicted. In other words, the inclusive context was presumed to naturally keep the discussion focused on students with disabilities. Teachers did not typically refer to the students they were discussing in specific examples as “students with disabilities” and more often they said “students with Individualized Education Plans.” Given the research study, my work as an NJCIE inclusion facilitator, and their roles as inclusion teachers, it seemed that the participants clearly understood they would be photographing and communicating their ideas about the expression of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

The inclusive setting often came up during focus group discussions. The teachers have various interpretations of how the context of inclusion impacts student expression. Kristen, Mira,
and Rosie describe inclusion as primarily beneficial to all students, specifically in regards to their “behavior.” It appears that these teachers adopt a behavioral approach to understanding the important role context plays in the outward actions of students. These teachers seem to directly tie to the inclusion setting, the opportunity to see and learn more “appropriate” ways of expressing themselves. This is best shown when Mira says in Round 2 (May, 17, 2018), “so I can say from my perspective we did have students that had behavioral challenges that once they were in the inclusion setting with the teachers they were with, no longer. So, again situational.”

Neil and Angelica conversely saw the inclusive setting as contributing to student expression in more negative ways. The fact that their students are in middle school seems to contribute to Neil and Angelica’s interpretation of student expression. These two teachers describe students’ behaviors as communicating negative “attitudes.” During the critical moment selected for Theme 1 (Round 1, May 17, 2018), Neil refers to the context of inclusion in Newark in negative terms: “At this point the student is in seventh grade and so accustomed to teachers believing that this work was less than their best, the student expressed that this was, indeed, a full effort.” Neil and Angelica view inclusion as complex and problematic. Indeed, Neil goes so far as to describe inclusion as contributing to students’ expression of themselves as failures: “At this point the student is in seventh grade year after year of struggling to express themselves or being told that their expressions aren’t up to par or not being able to express themselves in a way that they feel, you know, is adequate for their age group.” Angelica echoed Neil’s sentiments during her narration in her Round 1 (May 3, 2018) photo (Figure 17). She describes this picture as purposefully showing that context impacts how students express themselves. By having the “focus of the picture to be not on a specific child, but kind of on the center of the entire room” she wanted to convey that “one way that students show how they learn is through their attitude.”
In capturing this moment (which she had staged for the purpose of taking the photograph), Angelica explains that the inclusion setting leads to distinct forms of student expression. She says, “What is seen here is a student having a moment in which he is expressing his frustration in the classroom…so this child is expressing that he can express himself in the middle of the room…and the [other] students have learned that they need to stop what they’re doing and give it that moment.” In this case, Angelica refers explicitly to the behavioral expression of students without disabilities: “I think from what I noticed in my room and in the inclusion classroom is that the attitudes are becoming negative towards the students and peers with cognitive disabilities because it is more visual in the center of the room, but also the attitudes of the students.” Thus, for Neil and Angelica, the inclusive context seems to contribute in negative ways to the expression of students with and without disabilities.

All five participants describe nonverbal communication as central to the expression of students with disabilities. Conversation was rife with descriptions of students’ nonverbal communication. These include: “Door slamming,” “Walking out,” “[Finger]Snapping,” “Expressing their...
learning in the bodies,” “sit, sink, hands crossed,” “looking at me,” and “staring at me,” and “kicking his desk.” Teachers explain that students regularly express themselves in “behavioral” ways to show how they are feeling about academic learning. In Round 1 (May 3, 2018), Neil says that students “express their learning in their bodies” Angelica describes students who will “sit and kind of look around in almost this kind of apologetic face like: ‘Sorry I can’t help right now.’” Rosie points out that body language is expression that is always present: “It’s just there and you don’t even realize how you’re sitting or the expression you have. You know those learned behaviors are so hard to be aware of and change.” Teachers describe that students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms often feel they “cannot orally express their efforts” and thus “needed to show it” it in nonverbal ways. Mira encapsulates what teachers believe about the power of nonverbal communication in Round 3 (June 7, 2018): “it speaks volumes. Can say more and provide deeper insight than verbal communication.”

**Summary.** The data shows that the teachers seem to believe that student expression is situational in nature. The teachers do not often specifically refer to students with Individualized Education Plans in their classes as students with disabilities, perhaps because of the inclusive setting, but they do make regular reference to their personal knowledge and experiences of larger urban contexts as integral to understanding how students express themselves. The teachers view nonverbal expression as characteristic of urban students and it is unclear if they believe the same is true about urban students without Individualized Education Plans or suburban or rural students with Individualized Education Plans. There is an understanding among teachers that nonverbal expression is a way for students to communicate their frustration with academic learning tasks and situations.
Theme Five: Social Emotional Literacy Seems Foundational for Expression of Academic Learning

The fifth theme I interpreted from the data concerns teachers’ descriptions about the development of students’ social emotional literacy as foundational to academic expression. Social emotional literacy is defined as the ability to “read” or decode one’s own emotions or those of others; to use decoded information to solve social emotional problems; and to be creative, helpful learners (Cohen, 2001). While participants do not adopt the term “social emotional literacy,” they do explicitly refer to students’ “social emotional” abilities to self-regulate and work cooperatively with peers. Teachers make a distinction between expression of a social-emotional nature as distinct from academic learning for students with Individualized Education Plans. Teachers describe student behaviors as a form of expression particular to students with Individualized Education Plans and find that there is a correlation between their behavior and their social emotional literacy. Teachers seem to assert that the more social emotionally “literate” a student is, the more academically literate he or she will be: they claim that the fostering of positive interpersonal relationships is imperative to increasing students’ academic expression. Teachers view the limited time for teaching social-emotional literacy—the processes and methods used to promote social emotional competencies—problematic and a barrier to academic expression, describing the tension they feel as they try to balance their professional duties and appropriately attend to students’ social emotional needs.

Critical Moment Five: “Social Stuff” (Round 2 Focus Group – May 17, 2018). This critical moment occurred during Rosie’s photo-elicitation. Rosie’s photograph (see Figure 18) depicts a handwritten note made by one of her fourth grade students. Although Rosie serves as the literacy coach for her school, she was called upon to fill in for a teacher on medical leave. She became
the classroom teacher for a fourth grade class in March until the teacher returned in mid-May. Rosie was visibly upset as she went through the SHOWED protocol. During photo-elicitation, participants were encouraged to jot down notes and often did. Yet, Rosie so captivated participants that no notes were taken during her narration. There was a brief moment of silence when Rosie finished speaking and she took a minute to compose herself. Rosie began her narration by explaining that one of her students, who is identified as having a behavioral and emotional disorder, walked into class but did not participate in the lesson. She reported that he walked to the back of the classroom and began writing.

Rosie shares that this student has been classified for special education services as behaviorally and emotionally disabled. He has been the subject of adult concern for the majority of the school year due to his physical outbursts such as pushing chairs, stomping his feet, knocking his classwork off his desk, and slamming doors. Rosie explained that her experience with this student has been profoundly different. After two months together, the student utilized a class-wide routine for self-regulation and managing frustration by entering the class and quietly going to the back to write down a letter to the teacher about his feelings. This critical moment conveys the central importance teachers believe the development of strong interpersonal relationships has on the expression of students with disabilities. From the beginning of the narrative, it is clear that there is a mutual trust between Rosie and the student evidenced by the student’s behavior.
This student walked in on this particular day feeling "some kind of way." As I engaged the class in the day’s lesson, he took a seat in the swivel chair and proceeded to write. Once the students were working independently I was able to read his message and ask a few clarifying questions. The hard part was remaining neutral—it would be so easy to point out how smart he is how student X always likes to work with him, etc—but that was not what he was looking for or what he needed. Instead, I asked him, "What would you like to happen next?" Independently, he decided what he wanted to happen, made it happen, accepted what happened and changed from what happened (what happened will be what I discuss in the protocol).

Figure 18. Rosie’s photograph captioned “Social Stuff” and its accompanying written description from Round 2.

**Thematic Interpretation.** Rosie’s narrative reveals her belief that social emotional literacy is foundational for academic expression. It is evident that Rosie views social emotional learning as important to her students’ academic development. Rosie allowed her student to engage in a problem-solving routine—a conflict resolution class meeting—and in doing so supported his social emotional literacy by using knowledge of his own emotions and those of his peers to solve a social emotional problem. Rosie captioned the picture “Social Stuff,” and said, “so it really spoke to what behaviors are important and valued in the classroom and that all this social stuff that he was bringing in that was triggering him that day was really important for him to learn how to self-regulate” (Lines 27-30). Her providing time and space for students to express their feelings and resolve conflicts is testament to her belief in the importance of social emotional learning. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this belief is when she says, “What you’re seeing here is an expression of what he was feeling. I feel what was really happening here is he
was recognizing he was not part of the classroom culture and that he was asking for help to become part of that culture” (Lines 9-12).

Mira commends Rosie for nurturing social emotional learning in her classroom: “it becomes our norm to want to save our students when they’re in distress or might feel uncomfortable, but the fact that you could step back in that moment and allow him the opportunity to choose. That’s a tool, right...I think it was excellent that you provided him with that opportunity. So, great job?” (Lines 57-65). Angelica viewed Rosie’s actions as promoting the student’s self-advocacy, in that it allowed him “to take charge and self-reflect” (Lines 57-58). She remarks that this pedagogical choice is “powerful” and that she was “getting goosebumps” (Lines 58-59) as Rosie narrated. Angelina says that “letting the children take charge of their own learning and allowing them to fix it” (Line 63) is “something that needs to happen more often” (Line 62), revealing that she too sees the value of social emotional learning in the classroom. Neil goes a step further and describes Rosie’s time and attention to social emotional learning as student advocacy. He says, “The fact that the student has agency and you allowed the student to build his strength and then to share that” (Lines 73-74) and points to the value of the collective experience on the social emotional learning of all students: and then have that classroom as a group experience of what it’s like to forgive and reaccept someone is also important so that from that point in their life they can say, I’ve thought about the experience of someone else and considered it…I think that’s really valuable to build at a young age because that’s something you have to practice. (Lines 74-80). Mira, Angelina, and Neil all commend Rosie on her choice to “remain neutral and keep that ‘I’m not going to fix this. I’m not going to infer from this until I hear from you’” (Lines 4-5). Teachers in this study regularly use the term “behavior” and “behavioral” to refer to student expression that they consider unacceptable within
the classroom environment. In turn, these teachers understand student “behavior” as a form of poor social emotional literacy. By making time for social emotional learning, teachers view emotional literacy as increasing students’ agency. Rosie sums this up: “And he kind of just asked for help. Which I felt like was a huge step and all of a sudden...the kids were immediately not judging at all. They were all like, we all make mistakes and that happens and when we’re outside you can play with me” (Lines 35-38).

This critical moment also shows how teachers in this study make a connection between the expression of students with disabilities and how they are viewed by other teachers. Rosie describes teachers’ weekly conversations in which this student’s expression positions him outside the norm again and again: “we were in our weekly meeting and everyone was saying how they haven’t heard about him. You know his name was the name that always came up in every meeting for behavior” (Lines 52-55). Rosie goes on to say, “and they haven’t heard in over a month about this student’s name coming up so that was a positive thing,” (Line 56) demonstrating that she is aware of the power of that positioning on this student’s identity within her classroom and the school. She describes the adverse effects this positioning had on the student’s self-image: “a lot of people were seeing those behaviors and these patterns he had set for himself to be the kid in the office. The kid in trouble. The kid nobody likes, but he was really asking for help and how to fit in. He was new to our school this year and we only go to 4th grade so he’s leaving next year. He never felt like he had that opportunity to fit in.” (Lines 39-43).

Perhaps most poignant, is when Rosie reads the students own words aloud, giving credence to his expression: “His words were, ‘no one likes me because I’ve done all these things. I’ve annoyed people, bothered people, I interrupt their conversations, make silly noises. Sometimes I say mean things. Sometimes when people tell me to do the right thing I get angry cause I don’t
know what I’m doing. People just tell me to stop but I don’t know how to do that. I don’t know how to stop” (Lines 17-21). Rosie is highlighting that the child’s expression mirrored that of his relationships with adults and peers. When he felt valued, the child expressed himself constructively, using the written and spoken word to convey his feelings. When he perceived he was not understood or appreciated, the child engaged in physically aggressive behavior. This excerpt demonstrates how teachers’ interpretations of expression positions students as insiders or outsiders to what is considerate acceptable expression. Rosie’s approach focuses on providing the student with social emotional literacy skills she views as acceptable in order to increase his ability to participate in the academic learning community.

**Other Examples.** Participants in this study often distinguished between academic and social emotional literacy. This distinction was first raised in the Pre-Rounds meeting by Neil when he said of student outbursts during his class: “They’re expressing. But that’s not like learning. That’s not the lesson.” Neil appears to conflate students’ socially unacceptable behavior (described as “outbursts”) with poor social emotional literacy. In fact, all of the teachers in this study seemed to link “poor” behavior with poor social emotional literacy. Further, teachers explicitly linked students’ social emotional literacy and their academic literacy. During Round 1 (May 3, 2018) participatory diagramming, Rosie says that building a social emotional literacy “amongst all learners” is necessary so that “the rest [academics] can exist.”

Participants grapple with managing students’ academic and social emotional demands and needs, but always acknowledge that social emotional and academic literacy are interrelated. Mira says, “Behavior challenges have a result of academic challenges.” Rosie adds on, “When the academics become challenging for some the behaviors pop-up and then time is spent there. For others, the behaviors are not allowing them to settle into their day to receive the academics.”
Participants argue repeatedly that poor social emotional literacy serves as a barrier to academic expression. Angelica describes her frustration with how “instruction is often interrupted… waiting for it [the social emotional issue] to settle” and finding the time to support students’ social emotional learning: “We’ll talk about the feelings. We will come up with a solution for next time. And they’ll say I’m getting better. Yeah, it’s getting better but it’s a constant reminder that the lesson is not happening and it’s getting in the way of other people’s learning. Angelica seems more concerned in this case with how the student's “poor” social emotional literacy disrupts the academic learning of other students. Rosie also laments the impact of poor social emotional literacy: “I do know that usually that when there are big behavioral problems so much time is spent on getting those [social emotional] learning behaviors down that academic time is lost.”

The teachers describe the tension they feel as they struggle to make the time they think is necessary to promote social emotional literacy. Mira sums this up in Round 3 (June 7, 2018) when she says, “I think it keeps going back to this socio-emotional component. The soil. You know in order to build confidence we have to address those things. The models, the peers, the reciprocity that it all nurtures that soil to build the confidence that can lead to expression.” It is clear from the data that teachers believe the development of a positive classroom culture is integral to fostering student expression. Some examples of the language teachers use to describe this culture are: “student-teacher relationships,” “positive, strong relationships we’ve built,” “bridges of communication, “coming together,” and “togetherness in the classroom.” Teachers describe the value of these positive relationships in allowing students to feel “comfortable” expressing themselves. In Round 1 (May 3, 2017), Mira says, “If she’s that comfortable to share that entry with me and express her thoughts it shows me that we have a positive, strong
relationship that we’ve built” and again in Round 2 (May 17, 2018), she credits students’ feeling “comfortable” to “express yourself and get it out” to the cultivation of positive classroom culture; “I think that like, that sort of cultivated and helped create that.” Similarly, Neil attributes his strong relationships with students to the fact that he “allow[s] for their expression. I allow them to say what they’re thinking in a way that I’m not going to judge them.” Kristen comments on the importance of Neil’s willingness to relate to his adolescent students, saying, “the fact that you understand the latest dance or that song they’re listening to…when you can share in that moment and have that common experience, I think that goes a long way in building the culture and relationships in the classroom” (Round 2, May, 17, 2018). This also relates positive relationships to increased student expressiveness, particularly as it relates to peer-to-peer interaction. In Round 3 (June 7, 2018), Kristen describes a student with a disability who “is very shy to come up and talk.” After working in a group with his peers, “he was jumping out of his seat and he was able to tell me what they worked on together.” These positive interactions, Kristen believes, builds the self-confidence necessary for expression. Neil agrees and expands upon Kristen’s assertion, saying, “social emotional considerations rooted in classroom culture allows communication, student effort, motivation as well as student expression to flourish.” All students’ self-confidence grows. He believes that such an environment positively impacts the self-confidence of all students, thereby also increasing their expressivity.

**Summary.** To summarize, the data shows that teachers believe that social emotional learning is a literacy in its own right and plays a significant role in the academic expression of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Teachers regularly distinguish between academic and social emotional learning and express frustration about the lack of time for teaching the skills of social emotional literacy. These teachers also seem to describe the behavior
of students with Individualized Education Plans in negative terms (e.g., disruptive) and equate it with their having poor social emotional literacy. Teachers’ assertion that social emotional learning increases the academic expression of students with disabilities seems to be rooted in medical or deficit ways of thinking, thus they appear to be framing some expression of students with disabilities as “behavioral” and requiring remediation.

**Conclusion to the Chapter**

This chapter highlights five teachers’ local understanding (Kliwer, 2008) of expression for students with disabilities in their own inclusive classrooms. This study’s findings are described through providing examples of teachers’ discourse and are explicated in the five “critical moments” that show how teachers conceptualize practices that foster expression for students with disabilities. Inclusive literacy pedagogy for teachers in this study consists of creating classroom cultures and contexts that allow students to “show what they know” using regular routines and protocols that encourage students’ choice of modalities for expression. Viewed holistically, the themes found in teachers’ discourse shows the complexity of thinking about student expression. The way that their discourse both reaffirms and resists normalized paradigms about disability and literacy will be fully explored in the following and final chapter.
Chapter Five: Interpretation and Discussion

This chapter uses theoretical contributions from the literature on inclusive literacy to provide a framework for interpretation and discussion of the thematic analysis and critical discourse approach used in my interpretation of data. A small qualitative study such as this one is not undertaken with the intent to make broad, generalizable claims; instead, it is designed to add thoughtful and informed insight into the complexity of the human constructs of disability, literacy, and expression. Thus, an understanding of literacy and disability that is shaped by sociocultural theory and the investigation of “in vivo” data that forefronts participant expression forms the basis for my analyzing how teachers describe the expression of students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. I will discuss how my interpretation of teachers’ discourse in the critical moments and other examples described in Chapter Four both support and inhibit inclusive literacy pedagogy regarding the expression of students with disabilities in participants’ classrooms.

Within the context of this study, “inclusive literacy” is part of a social practice for all students and for all participants that asserts the ways in which the meaning of social worlds teachers experienced are constructed. “Inclusive literacy practices” describe the teaching and learning activities and routines that encompass a range of multiple modes of communication systems and extend well beyond the oral and printed language typical of classroom instruction. Although my review of the literature concerning inclusive literacy practices in Chapter Two describes inclusive instructional strategies and frameworks (e.g., Universal Design for Learning and Productive Digital Technologies), patterns across the data collected in this study centered on teachers’ conceptions about literacy and disability, suggesting that these two areas are significant factors in the pedagogical choices these teachers make concerning the expression of students’ with disabilities.
Discourse Analysis Approach to Interpretation of Data

In order to understand how teachers’ conceptions about disability and literacy may inform their practice, I looked to examine five teachers’ discourse as they described expression and expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. Discourse analysis is concerned with what Gee (2010) calls “language-in-use” to refer to how individuals use language for personal, social, and political aims. Language is a system of arbitrary signs that have meaning through shared, mutually agreed upon use. Thus, language serves a dual purpose of helping us to share and make meaning. Language also defines social roles and serves as a primary means of enacting identity (Gee, 2010). Careful analysis of language can give insight into how individual and group identities are constructed and social norms are created, maintained, and challenged.

A critical approach to discourse analysis—and developing codes, categories and themes out of the data—may be an effective approach for the discernment of medical and social models found in educational policies and practices. A Disability Studies in Education lens requires that language be viewed as a form of social practice that reproduces or resists social and political inequality; scholars working within this approach investigate how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. A critical approach to discourse analysis may identify the “combined and integrated language, action, ways of thinking and believing, and the use of symbols, tools, and object that “enact a socially recognizable identity’” (Gee, 2010, p. 28). This level of criticality is necessary to discern the paradigms of thought about disability that serve to shape how teachers make meaning about the literate citizenship of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.
The themes I interpreted from the data are not discourse per se, but rather different discourses about the expression of students with disabilities in participants’ inclusive classrooms that cross my themes transversely. The themes (choices increase self-expression; more time is needed for increased expression; expression is visible proof of learning; expression is contextual; and social-emotional literacy seems to be foundational for expression of academic learning), however, can be viewed in light of larger educational paradigms concerning literacy and special education: namely those that define literacy learning as the process of acquiring and demonstrating levels of specified competency in “school” reading and writing. With respect to discourse, Gee (1992, 2004) delineates between the language that people use (discourse with a little “d”) and socially and historically recognized Discourse (spelled with a capital “D”). In this study, I adopt Gee’s little and big “d/Discourses” as a way of understanding of teachers’ language describing the expression of students with disabilities. From this point forward, little “d” discourse is indicated as \textit{discourse}: the lowercase “d” is bolded and underlined to draw attention to teachers’ language as their “local understanding” (Kliwer, 2008) about literacy education and disability. Big “D” Discourse is indicated as \textbf{Discourse}: the bolded, capital “D” is meant to convey that teachers’ discourse exists in relation to larger, socially situated ways of understanding literacy and disability. The little “d” is underlined in \textit{discourse} to draw the reader’s attention to the relationship between the localized use of language by five general and special educators of grades 3-7 who teach in Newark, NJ inclusive classrooms and the socially recognizable ways students with disabilities are identified through well-integrated combinations of language, interactions, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values (Gee, 2015). \textit{d}/\textbf{Discourse} provides a useful framework for examining teachers’ \textit{discourse} with respect to the \textbf{Discourse} that
may impact students’ literate identities; whether they are perceived literate or not and they ways in which expressive access is offered and denied.

In what follows, I use the d/Discourse distinction to describe the ways in which I understand how teachers’ thinking about expression is influenced by dominant paradigms about literacy education for students with disabilities and the degree to which these Discourses seem to impact descriptions of practice (see Figure 19). The Discourses position students with disabilities as functionally literate depending upon the degree to which they are able to use expressive norms of speaking and writing. Participating teachers’ discourse show the multiple ways that teachers both comply with and resist the institutionalized, dominant Discourse prevalent in literacy education for students with disabilities. These discourse also shed light on the ways Discourse may contribute to the teachers’ pedagogical actions that either contribute to the support of or serve as a barrier to inclusive literacy pedagogy.

Figure 19. The d/Discourse distinction used as an interpretive lens to describe the ways in which teachers’ thinking about expression may be influenced by dominant paradigms about literacy education for students with disabilities.
During my analysis it became clear that photovoice methodology played a role in how teachers’ expressed meaning over the course of the three Rounds. For one, the multimodal nature of the photovoice process allowed teachers to express their ideas in a variety of ways, using multiple modalities and media. Second, teachers recognized the visible impact of multimodality on their meaning-making. Third, participatory diagramming allowed participants to construct meaning together in a way that was different from that made during discussion. I have come to see the photovoice process as inclusive literacy pedagogy. More than a set of practices to be utilized for increased expression, photovoice embodies sociocultural theories of learning in which individuals learn in social contexts, through social interactions, and with language and other semiotic tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the design of this study, in which participants used multiple arts media and modalities (discussion, photographs, captions, and written descriptions, photo-elicitation, and participatory diagramming) seemed to increase teachers’ access to and participation in the expression of ideas and in the active construction of new learning.

In the following section, I describe how the themes found in the data show the ways in which five Newark, New Jersey, teachers (working in grades 3-7) seem to conceptualize opportunities for students with disabilities to express in their inclusive classrooms as elicited using photovoice methodology. Teachers’ conceptualizations were made visible via the photovoice process and include individual and collective expressions that are oral, written, and visual. These expressions describe teachers’ thinking about their pedagogical practices, some of which seem to be related to focus group conversations. At the forefront of this discussion is my research question:
In what ways do five general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7) as elicited using photovoice methodology?

**Teachers’ Thinking Within and Across Categorical Boundaries**

The data from this study shows the varied and complex ways teachers in this study understand and struggle to define expression, especially as it relates to the expressive opportunities they provide students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. The teachers’ discourse seems to centers on categorical thinking (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010) that reflects traditional educational literacy and Special Education Discourse. However, the themes found in the data also show that teachers sometimes look across these categorizations and view expression as a complex, sociocultural construct. For example, teachers in this study grappled with defining expression as solely a product of student learning. While categorizations seem to help teachers make sense of and communicate their ideas about the complexity of expression, they also push conceptualized boundaries in ways that may support increased expressive opportunities for students with disabilities.

**Expression as either academic or social emotional in nature.** As teachers tried to make sense of expression, they seemed to develop a classification system to help them articulate their understanding. Teachers described students’ expression as academic or non-academic and classify non-academic expression as social emotional in nature. The teachers viewed academic literacy as how students express their learning of standards-related knowledge and skills and they understood social emotional literacy to be the expression of emotions and the ability to self-regulate emotions and positively interact with peers and adults. This is a significant finding of my study as evidenced by the amount of data related to social emotional literacy.
Social emotional learning is a broad term used to describe the broad range of mental, behavioral, and self-regulatory skills needed for normative social interaction and the accomplishments of social goals in accordance with social norms (McKown, 2017). The skills of social emotional learning (referred most often to as “emotional literacy”) are understood as the multidimensional ability to understand one’s feelings, monitor and regulate one’s emotional state and manage oneself in group situations in accordance with the expectations of the culture’s norms (Willis and Schiller, 2011). Social emotional literacy plays an important role in schooling as students are expected to productively interact with peers and teachers. Teachers in this study consistently argued the importance of social emotional learning. The distinct characterization of expression as either academic or social emotional emerged out of the first participatory diagramming session during the first Round (May 3, 2018). As teachers worked through the different ideas discussed during photo-elicitation, Rosie remarked, “Maybe social emotional is the everything.” Neil picked up on this line of thinking and used a plant-care metaphor to describe a classroom culture in which “the teacher kind of sets that, or is the groundskeeper in a sense. Nurturing that plant…What are you cutting off? Because if you cut off social and emotional aspects all these other things start to fail.” This metaphor seemed to lead to Angelica drawing a tree and from there the group created a visual image that expressed the importance of social emotional aspects of teaching and learning. The tree metaphor was used several times during subsequent focus groups, showing the importance to which participants held social emotional learning and characterizing it as a discourse in their discussions about expression.

Categorizing student expression as “social emotional” or “academic” seemed to help allow participants to describe the significant relationship between social emotional and academic literacy. This relationship is confirmed in research about the significant role emotions play in
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children’s learning outcomes (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2006). Furthermore, researchers have studied academic-related emotions, or what Pekrun et al. (2002), call “academic emotions.” It is unclear whether teachers in this study make a distinction between academic emotions and emotions “in general,” but they do see that academic and social emotional expression as inextricably linked: “When the academics become challenging for some the [negative social emotional] behaviors pop-up and then time is spent there [resolving them]. For others, the [negative social emotional] behaviors are not allowing them to settle into their day to receive the academics” (Rosie, Round 3). It is important to consider teachers’ discourse in light of their local context. Many Newark schools, including the two schools in which participants in this study teach, have adopted social emotional learning programs that provide curricula aligned with the state of New Jersey’s definition of social emotional literacy. Social emotional learning is identified as “SEL” and defined as having five core competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, each with their own sub-competencies (https://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/sandp/sel/). The teachers’ discourse is reflective of the State’s claim that student participation in “SEL” programming results in better grades and less conduct problems.

Participants blur the boundaries of their categorizations as they describe social emotional literacy as foundational for academic literacy and make a direct correlation between social emotional and academic expression. Interestingly, Kwon, Hanrahan, and Kupzyk (2016) examined “emotional expressivity and emotion regulation” as they relate to student academic performance and found that children who were perceived as happier by their peers also reported higher levels of academic motivation, were viewed by teachers as having higher levels of engagement, and performed better on standardized assessments. The greater degree to which a
student is seen as socially emotionally literate (i.e., expression that is socially acceptable), the more teachers in this study argue that this student will be able to access and participate in traditional literacy activities. That teachers in this study ascribe a complementary relationship between social emotional and academic expression confirms what researchers have found about the role of emotions in children’s learning outcomes (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2006). Further, researchers have studied academic-related emotions, or what Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry (2002) call “academic emotions.” It is unclear whether teachers in this study make a distinction between academic emotions and emotions “in general,” but they do see that academic and social emotional literacy as inextricably linked: “When the academics become challenging for some the behaviors pop up and then time is spent there. For others, the behaviors are not allowing them to settle into their day to receive the academics” (Rosie, Round 3). Like Rosie, the other four teachers in this study frequently characterized students’ behavioral expression in terms of poor social emotional literacy which contributed to their limited academic expression. This finding is consistent with special education research that argues that students with disabilities struggle with social emotional learning; as a group, they are reported to have difficulty with peer relationships, reading nonverbal and complex, subtle social cues, and with regulating emotions (Elias, 2004).

Indeed, some researchers specifically link language related difficulties and “problem behaviors.” For example, Nelson, Benner, and Rogers-Adkinson (2003) identify the co-occurrence of language-related difficulties and formally identified emotional disorders within the research. The majority of students with Individualized Education Plans discussed by participants were students identified as emotionally disturbed. Emotional Disturbance is one of the thirteen disability categories identified under IDEIA (2004) and is defined in part as a “condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a
marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.” Emotional Disturbance is more loosely understood as a condition related to mental health and severe behavioral issues, the prevalence of Emotional Disturbance classifications may well explain these teachers’ emphasis on social emotional learning and literacy and likely influenced how they characterized students’ expression as either academic or social emotional. For example, Neil and Angelica both describes student behavior as an expression of their lack of social emotional learning.

Within the Special Education paradigm, the characterization of expression as either academic or social emotional in nature serves to further position students with disabilities as outside the norm. Once individual students are assigned to categories, they cease to belong to other categories, “most specifically the category understood to be ‘normal’” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 36). Categorical thinking of “either/or” distinctions can lead to exclusion and segregation (Gallagher, 2010). In Critical Moment Four, Rosie describes how many teachers have characterized her student as social emotionally illiterate. This student’s disability classification of Emotional Disturbance reaffirms teachers’ characterizations of this students’ behavior as inappropriate and “not normal.” It seems like a game of chicken or the egg; both his behavior and his disability categorization label him, in his teachers’ eyes, socially emotionally illiterate. Due to his poor social emotional literacy skills, Rosie believes that her student was unable to access much academic learning. In other words, the Emotionally Disturbed label seems to influence how teachers in this study view academic ability. Thus, Rosie’s student was disabled both by his Special Education label and by how his expression was interpreted by teachers. This
study confirms that Special Education discourse presents “a dialectical relationship between normal and abnormal’” (Macedo and Sordé Martí, 2010, p. 54) that may lead teachers to view expression in binaries; as either appropriate or inappropriate and functional or dysfunctional.

**Context matters.** Teachers in this study describe expression as more than a discrete set of skills and processes by which students communicate their academic and social emotional learning. In this way, participants adopt a broader view of literacy than is historically seen in schooling. Students’ expression is largely understood as a sociocultural literacy practice. The data shows that teachers view students expressions, particularly those they identify as social emotional ones, as deeply contextual. Teachers describe interactions between and among each other as situated within their urban classroom learning community and as such students draw upon available tools (including traditional, multimodal, and technological) in order to make and communicate meaning (Vygotsky, 1998). From a socio-cultural perspective, students’ expression is also influenced by how students see themselves and others’ identities within the classroom context. Teachers’ discourse reveal, however, that participants sometimes ascribe identities to learners based on how well students express themselves in oral and written language. That these modalities are most valued aligns with traditional conceptions of literacy and may have a significant impact on students’ learning, self-concept, and peer relationships (c.f. Moje & Luke, 2009).

Historically, students with disabilities—those with Emotional Disturbance classifications in particular—have been educated in self-contained classrooms and schools (Niesyn, 2009). These politically constructed identities originally served to segregate students on the basis of the “poor behavior”, employing a “deficit-based understanding of difference,” (Annammma, Ferri, & Connor, 2018, p. 48). More recently, students with disabilities, including those classified as
having Emotional Disturbance have been included in general educations settings as a way to “ensure their normalized community participation by providing them with systematic instruction in the skills that are essential to their success in the social and environmental contexts in which they will ultimately use these skills” (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, p. 386). The increasing inclusion of students classified as having Emotional Disturbance, or those who have other classifications but deviate from standards of expected behavior, is an issue that underlies some of the discussions in this study about student expression. Participants describe the challenges in regards to disruptive behavior they have to manage. Angelica and Neil are particularly vocal about the dramatic effect students’ poor social emotional literacy has on the overall atmosphere of the classroom. Their descriptions of students’ behavior are consistent with how special education researchers describe students with classifications of Emotional Disturbance as “frequently verbally and physically aggressive, hyperactive, and oppositional…they can also exhibit depression, restlessness, poor impulse control, frustration, and a lack of self-control” (Abrams, 2005, p. 40). Teachers in this study seem to have replaced classifications of Emotional Disturbance and other behavior-related concerns pertaining to students with disabilities with “poor social emotional literacy.” Further to this point, teachers seem to suggest that improved social emotional literacy can “remediate” behavioral concerns.

The teachers in this study clearly identify the urban educational setting as an important contextual factor in students’ expressivity. In Round 1 (May, 3, 2018), Neil describes his student as “sitting there staring at it [the assignment], frustrated” and “wouldn’t talk to” him. Neil places great emphasis on the fact that this student was “persistent” in her nonverbal communication throughout the class which he interpreted as conveying to him that she couldn’t “orally express her efforts.” As I explained in the third critical moment in Chapter 4, Neil and Angelica make a
clear distinction between “urban” (referring to places where people of color live) and “other” school settings. Neil and Angelica explicitly acknowledge their own positionality as people of color and draw upon their own experiences growing up in similar environments. The importance of these teachers’ “urban” discourse is that it reveals assumptions about why and how people are perceived as having difficulty in learning: examination of what is meant by “disability” suggests that students so identified are thought to be somehow “different.” Race and class become an identifying feature of disability that is legitimized by practices intended for “urban” populations,” adding to the existing body of research documenting the overrepresentation of poor, Black and Latino students in special education (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2012; Dunn 1968; Sleeter, 2010). Having what they believe to be an “insider’s” understanding of how students of color use nonverbal expression, Angelica and Neil seem to validate students’ nonverbal expression as a communicative mode. This discourse resists normalized Discourse of literacy and disability which privilege oral and written forms of communication, if only as an expression of social emotional learning. It also reflects a sociocultural approach to literacy where expressive “meanings are ultimately rooted in negotiation between different social practices with different interests by people who share or seek to share some common ground (Gee, 2010, p.12).

Not all participants share Neil and Angelica’s insider view of nonverbal expression, however. Kristen explains that her response to a student’s nonverbal expression was to question him: “I asked him what was bothering him. What was wrong? Can I help?” Her positionality as White woman, who says she has little experience of urban environments and schooling (this is her first year teaching), on face value might appear to render her disconnected from the students she teaches. However, Kristen’s questioning shows an understanding of nonverbal expression as a valid form of communication that challenges Neil and Angelica’s conception that non-verbal
communication is characteristically “urban.” The discussion seemed to bring Kristen a new consciousness of how much students with disabilities use nonverbal expression in her classroom, remarking, “like wow, like I can think of six incidents today that this happened… a student was trying to tell me something but they weren’t speaking to me.” It is unclear if Kristen’s newfound awareness of the prevalence of nonverbal expression of students is related to the context of inclusion or the urban setting or a combination of both, and may position her to recognize and validate expression that has been unseen/unheard by her, thereby increasing expressive opportunities of students with disabilities in her classroom.

Nonverbal language is also viewed by some as a form of student agency. For example, Neil interprets that one of his student’s proclivity for using nonverbal language was due to her years as a special education student that gave her the message that her “expressions aren’t up to par” and that she has not been able to express herself “in a way” that is “adequate for her each group.” For Rosie’s student, many teachers identified his being “at-risk” for academic failure (“his name was the name that always came up at every meeting for behavior”); teachers described the student’s inability to express emotions in socially acceptable ways (“act out, or get negative attention, or walk out of a room”), which impeded his academic learning. This perception changed when the student expressed himself appropriately by “writing it down” and “run[ning] a meeting.” While the student’s original actions were productive for him in his gaining attention and being removed from / enabled to leave situations he found undesirable, these expressive acts were not accepted by his teachers or conducive to his position as belonging in a general education classroom. These two examples demonstrate that it is teachers’ interpretation of students’ expression, rather than the expressions themselves that determine whether students with disabilities are viewed as socially emotionally literate within their
inclusive classrooms. This finding affirms research regarding the very important impact teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion have on the educational experiences of children. In particular, the nature and type of the disability plays an important role (Ryan, 2009). Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden (2000) explain, “multiple interpretations of labels occur when teachers attribute different characteristics to a label based on their experience which could be positive or negative” (p. 282), which may influence educators’ opinions towards these students and willingness to enact practices to support their learning. It is important to view these teachers’ discourse from the perspective of their “local understanding” (Kliwer, 2007) as Newark inclusion teachers. That the participants in this study view the urban setting as meaningful to the expressive choices students with disabilities make, is not a “Truth,” but my interpretation of the data.

**Inclusive classrooms mask wider disability Discourse.** As discussed in my findings, teachers most often referred to students with disabilities as “students,” which on face value might indicate that teachers’ are not using disability classifications as identity markers. However, teachers’ discourse reveals elements of the dominant Discourse of Special Education, which uses disability labels to classify, categorize, and segregate students as a coordinated response to the differing individual educational learning needs of children. The inclusion setting appears to be the central feature that highlights Discourse within the context of this study. It is also evident that while participating teachers’ discourse reify binary thinking about students’ identity (e.g. “gen ed kids” and “special ed” kids), they also describe the need for increased opportunities that give “voice” to students with disabilities and promote their independence and agency.

The teachers in this study seemed to have polarized views on the impact of the inclusive classroom on the academic expression of students with disabilities. Three of the participants (Mira, Kristen, and Rosie) who teach in the same elementary school, view inclusion as more than
just beneficial: they see it as in integral to increased expressiveness. In the second “critical moment” described in chapter 4, Kristen describes, peer to peer expression has allowed students with and without disabilities to express their learning in different, but mutually beneficial ways. Inclusion is seen as such a positive force that all three of these teachers took photographs that they described as symbolizing the power of inclusion with the respect to promoting student expression. Later, in Round 3, Kristen is describing her photograph, captioned “Two are better than one” in which she has captured two students sitting at a table working together. She is describing that the inclusive setting has benefitted all students, academically, socially, and emotionally. She then says:

“I think the biggest thing that I’ve gotten from inclusion is that the gen ed students and special ed students learn from each other. So, maybe the special ed students are learning academically from the gen ed students, and I have gen ed students who are not the nicest or kindest, but I have special ed students who try to teach them how to be good people. How to be kind. I feel like it’s not just academic…I feel like they learn how to express themselves socially, emotionally. When it comes to expression I will often times see a student struggling maybe it’s related to academic prompt, writing, or math assignment but maybe they are partnered up with a very strong student. They will have an interaction and it will build so much confidence because they’ll work with that student who has really got it. Then they’ll take that and be the first one to raise their hand and because they had the opportunity to kind of listen. Not that they’re necessarily taken their answers, but I feel like the students’ kind of get their thoughts to discuss. They get to work together and then that student who was distressed and struggling is excited to express and share the answer. Normally with a turn and talk they won’t be the first ones
to answer. It’s actually been happening a lot with this student. He’s not in the picture, but he is very shy to come up and talk. He was doing a very challenging math rich task a few weeks ago and it was even challenging for my top students. They worked together in groups and then I said who would like to share out. He was jumping out of his seat and he was able to tell me what they worked on together. He had so much confidence. Which goes back to if you feel confident you’re going to have the power to be able to express yourself. I think this really educates us about inclusion. So, me specially I went for inclusion. So, I have a lot of knowledge about inclusion and I’m a big advocate for inclusion, but I think sometimes people don’t see the positives to it, but for me I got to see how it helps all the students. I just want people to experience inclusion because like Rosie said a lot of these special ed students they show growth in the inclusion classroom. The data shows us that there growing. I mean personally for me I got my end of the year data and personally I was about to cry because I was so excited to see how much they moved.”

Kristen is clearly passionate about inclusion and cares deeply for her students. However, she repeatedly uses special education categorizations to describe students as either “gen ed” or “special ed,” based on their disability labels and her perceptions of academic ability. In this excerpt, Kristen seems to show a tacit acceptance of normalized disability paradigms. While it is possible that she is using language that she thinks others will understand, using a critical discourse approach leads me to interpret that Kristen views students with disabilities as needing wholesale academic remediation. Kristen describes inclusion as an opportunity for “special ed” students to learn academically from their “typical” peers and “gen ed” students the chance to learn tolerance and acceptance of “difference.” Kristen does not show evidence of critical self-
reflection of personal knowledge and practice, but conveys a simplistic conception of inclusion, one that belies an understanding that individuals possess many identities which overlap and intersect in response to changing contexts. Further, she argues that academic data is a form of student expression, that as visible proof of academic growth, justifies inclusion. Neil goes a step further in Round 2:

“I was looking at the language that kept coming up. Like struggle for them [students with disabilities], what works for this does not work, may not work, this idea, things needing to be some measure of success and constantly as teachers, we’re like, is this working? Is what I’m doing working for them? And then sometimes it works for them, but it’s not feasible for me to do this every day, like it won’t work in the long term for me. And that question, that comment, that idea coming up is what works and what doesn’t – that’s what drew me to this. Is like, how often, just that question that decides if it’s an opportunity or a barrier. An opportunity for them is a barrier for us - that we constantly have to go through.

The data presents two divergent discourse related to student expression in an inclusive classroom setting. The former aligns with the Inclusive Literacy Discourse that views the most appropriate education setting for students with disabilities to be general education classrooms due to higher expectations for student learning and access to more academic curriculum and typically developing peers (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2007; Kliewer, 2008; Kluth, 2010 Jorgensen & Lambert, 2012). The latter is a confirmation of how students with disabilities are viewed as far from the “normative center” and their forms of expression position them as “other” than and separate from their peers (Baglieri, Valle & Connor, 2011). While not explicitly stated, the implication is present that these students might be best served in separate classrooms.
What counts as expression. From the outset of the study, teachers grappled with how to define expression. While they described expression as visible proof of student learning, they also recognized the limitations of expressive “outputs,” particularly with respect to aspects of learning that cannot be easily observed or measured. For example, in the third “critical moment,” in Chapter 4, Neil describes his student’s note of “P.S. I tried” as an expression of their effort and motivation. Neil’s discourse reveals a resistance to the Discourse of accountability common in today’s schools. This Discourse, the result of the proliferation of national and state policies that emphasize students’ “performance” of literacy standards influences the ways teachers in this study think about expression. The pressure of increased accountability seems to factor into their conceptualization of students’ expression as the “production of ‘evidence’ of quality” instruction and learning (Tuinamuana, 2011, p. 77). In a culture of accountability and evaluation, participants grapple with the notion that expression is solely a function for assessment. Certainly teachers struggle with what Neil calls the “functional aspect” of lessons, but they also consider the relationship between internalized learning and that which is expressed in visible terms. This seems to play out in Neil wondering about the “layers of understanding…their learning in a given moment.” He seems to be trying to articulate that expression is only a part of the “complex dialectical process” (Vygotsky, 1998) of learning.

Rosie’s photograph, “Confidence or Competence?,” from Round 3 (June 3, 2018) is another example of how teachers in this study resisted the Discourse of accountability. Rosie’s photograph and written description feels like a challenge to the absoluteness of performative standards to which teachers are expected to hold their student. Rosie’s juxtaposition of the teacher’s poor evaluation of her student’s academic expression measured according to district and state standards against that of the student’s positive self-assessment is powerful. This
discourse resonates with what Comber and Nixon (2009) found in their study in which teacher discuss the work of middle school teachers in the Standards era from their perspectives:

The teacher argues that policy texts and directives produced by the state-wide education department filter down into schools, and also mediate and shape the texts provided to teachers at the micro level of the school, guiding them to produce yet further texts that report on student achievement in documents that enter the public domain. These latter texts in turn mediate information to parents and others outside the school about students’ achievements at school. However, these locally produced texts also organize teachers’ work in particular ways, sometimes changing teachers’ professional practices in unpredictable ways and producing flow-on effects in their relationships with students and parents. At the same time…what can and cannot be said in reports can cause teachers to experience a diminished sense of agency and a challenge to what they hold to be ethical and responsible professional practice (p. 8).

In response to the disequilibrium Rosie feels, and perhaps as part of the photovoice process, Rosie does take pedagogical action. She gives her student an opportunity to self-reflect in which the child claims a literate identity other than that which has been assigned to him: “my age is nine and my smartness is 10 out of 10. I can read better than before. I couldn’t read before and now I can read.” In sum, while the student’s “official” report card remained the same, Rosie’s practice validated multiple forms of expression, which in turn impacted her overall assessment of the student as a learner; thereby, resisting the dominant Discourse of what constitutes “quality” (i.e., valid) expression of academic learning.

At times, teachers in this study characterized expression as either social emotional or academic in nature. I believe the Discourse of accountability contributed to these teachers’
descriptions of frustration and concern with respect to evaluating students with disabilities according to general education standards as they are articulated in Newark’s mandated curriculum. While participants’ discourse did seem to focus on social emotional expression, it was often linked to students’ academic expression. This was seen in the fifth “critical moment” in Chapter 4 when Rosie described how the reading of her students’ social emotional literacy contributed to an evaluation of his academic potential. In other words, Rosie’s student’s poor social-emotional literacy impacted his ability to engage in academic learning activities requiring academic expression, and thus put him “at-risk” for academic failure.

Time and again teachers in this study referred to students’ poor social emotional literacy as impacting their academic learning and that of others. Teachers often pointed to the need for more time to spend on improving students’ social emotional literacy skills so that they could express themselves appropriately. Teachers voiced their frustration about the tension they feel between having to “keep moving” with the district’s pacing guides for the general education curriculum and the lack of support with specialized instruction. Teachers in this study reported that the inflexibility of curricular pacing presents a significant barrier to more inclusive pedagogy such as increased instructional time for social emotional learning and providing students with multiple options for expression. As Rosie aptly said, “Time is always the enemy.” The discourse of social emotional expression was sometimes rooted in talk about making more “time;” how teachers circumvented or negotiated the prescribed curriculum using regular structured routines and protocols, “finding those five minutes every day” or “whenever they found time. Period” and cultivating positive classroom environments. Participants see giving students with disabilities “time and “space” as absolutely necessary for their academic and social-emotional literacy development. Kristen summarizes it as, “How could I not hold these
students accountable, when in fact, they were able to express to me what they know?” In sum, the barrier to students’ expression was not their disability, but the pacing of the mandated curriculum.

Summary. Teachers discourse, I argue, ultimately suggests that interpretations of expression are influenced by a wider professional Discourse of literacy and Special Education. Categorical thinking about expression as either academic or social emotional may have a significant impact on the expressive opportunities teachers afford to students with disabilities in both positive and negative ways. For the former, teachers’ accounting of the importance of social emotional literacy leads them to resist traditional literacy Discourse by “making space and time” within officially sanctioned curriculum mandates for opportunities to express that support social emotional literacy learning. Accountability concerns weigh heavy on teachers as they grapple with using mandated curriculum, supporting students’ social-emotional and academic needs, and measuring students’ progress towards specific learning objectives and goals. Placing such emphasis on the distinction between literacies, however, can serve to position students with disabilities who cannot express their academic and social emotional needs in socially acceptable ways as being less “literate” or “illiterate.”

For teachers in this study, context can change how students are seen and heard and ultimately identified as literate or not. Within the inclusion classrooms of these teachers, literacy seems to be defined by the binaries of appropriate and inappropriate and functional or dysfunctional. From a localized context, these teachers appear to view nonverbal expression as both valid and meaningful. Most significant to this study is the way that the inclusive context positions the expression of students with disabilities as contributive or disruptive. All of the characterizations contribute to the literacy identities of students with disabilities.
Teachers’ Thinking Beyond Categorical Boundaries

There is a plethora of data collected in this study concerning the teachers’ descriptions of how multimodality affords students with disabilities increased opportunities for expression. This data supports the research on inclusive literacy pedagogy that allows students to express themselves through a combination of modalities from the written word to digital composition to performing arts. Teachers, like researchers, describe the value of various modalities for expression and recognize that providing students with disabilities options to show what they know increases participation in and access to literacy learning in inclusive classrooms. The teachers’ discourse also reveals thinking that pushes the boundaries of traditional Discourse so as to offer students with disabilities increased opportunities for meaning making.

Teachers’ multimodal expression. An unexpected outcome of this study was the degree to which teachers’ own expression is at the heart of their discourse. The data provides clear evidence that multimodality via photovoice provided alternative ways to make meaning beyond that of speaking and writing. This supports the literature on inclusive literacy pedagogy. The multimodality of the photovoice process combined a participant-centered approach that acknowledged individual strengths and interests with the communication technology of digital photography that encouraged them to be “active creator[s] of texts” (Oakley et. al., 2013, p. 91). The affordances of “multimodal digital composition” (Pandya, Hansuvadha, & Pagdilao, 2016, p.424) encouraged participants to express themselves in ways beyond the structures of oral discussion and written reflection. Multimodality also seemed to increase participants’ engagement in exploring definitions of literacy that “tacitly or explicitly guide” (Miller et. al., 2003, p. 15) their teaching practices.
Throughout the study, participants were given regular opportunities to express their thinking in multimodal ways and this theme is about their expression and not about their students’ expression. Teachers most often chose to express ideas using familiar forms of expression—oral and written language—despite the presence of other semiotic resources (e.g., technology, art supplies), but did create many individual and collaborative multimodal ensembles as part of the photovoice process. Their expressive outputs can be interpreted as falling into one of two categories: representational and metaphorical. Most often, the teachers’ expression sought to reproduce, capture, or copy that which they wanted to represent (e.g., a photograph of student work or a detailed description of an event). Sometimes the teachers constructed meaning using symbolic or metaphorical connections between objects or concepts and their representation (e.g., anagram, using props in photographs). The data shows that teachers’ regularly made use of multimodality via photovoice led to express and communicate complex ideas.

Participatory diagramming from Round 1 (May 7, 2018) illustrates how the teachers used multimodality to collaboratively express their thinking. Teachers gathered around the white board and alternately moved between reviewing the charts containing individual post-it notes from the photo-elicitation narratives to identify themes that emerged from their discussion and developing ideas verbally, in writing, and by drawing. What emerged was a collaborative effort in multimodal meaning-making (see Figure 20).
Initially responses that were spoken were recorded as short phrases and words, such as “student expression” and “motivation.” Focusing on visual representation of ideas led the teachers to describe student expression in ways that are different from their typical use of descriptive language; the visual mode necessitated explanation in visual terms. When I posed a probing question asking participants to think about how effort and motivation were different from each other, Kristen asked, “how do we show that?,” leading Rosie and Mira to suggest using a “slash” and “arrow,” respectively. When thinking in visual terms, participants’ verbal language contained visual imagery. Within minutes of the start of the participatory diagramming, participants began to use images and metaphors to talk about concepts. Rosie said, “classroom culture is the trunk and then all these branches come up.” Neil reintroduced the image moments later, asking, “Which branch is that?” Neil extended the image to a metaphor when he compares the teachers to a “groundskeeper…nurturing that plant.” I suggested that participants should start afresh using the image, offering to take a picture so they did not lose the recorded ideas. Rosie
erased some of the words leaving room on the board ("Is that enough space?")

Up until this point in the discussion, ideas had been recorded using solely written language. The image of a tree to represent their ideas about student expression had taken a firm hold and Angelica asked, “Am I drawing a trunk?”, before drawing it. The actualized visual representation became a way for participants to process and articulate their collective ideas about a complex construct. After negotiating ideas, teachers settled on “classroom culture” as “the dirt and social emotional” as “the trunk.” The visual metaphor elicited complementary verbal language: “we nurture that emotional,” “if you’re not rooted in that, then you can’t grow.” When participants veered from the concrete image into the abstract, they seemed to grapple more with articulating their ideas (e.g., “I’m a little iffy on this”). Neil reintroduced the shared image, “so maybe it’s like multiple trees,” leading to many responses that used the concrete metaphor as a common language to negotiate the complexity of the concept they were trying to understand. Angelica verbalized this complexity when she said, “My tree is becoming a little weird.” Soon, participants decided to create multiple branches with multiple leaves to represent aspects of their conception of student expression (see Figure 21). That the end result of the collective brainstorm was a “very weird looking tree” is unsurprising: rather than simply representing ideas with words, teachers constructed meaning using metaphorical connections between concepts and their representation. These expressions might look “weird” to those outside the group, but had significant meaning for how participants interpreted them in relation to the expression of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.
Despite being offered different modes of expression such as recording individual reflection on their smartphones and blank unlined paper for drawing, teachers in the study most often chose the familiar modes of expression: oral and written language. This is in direct contrast to the emphasis teachers’ placed on students’ choosing their own modalities to express. When directly asked to produce multimodal ensembles (photographs, captions, written descriptions and oral narratives), I counted 30 instances. This number increases to 32 when taking into account participatory diagrams (2).
Figure 22. Group generated participatory diagram from Round 2.

Figure 23. Group generated participatory diagram from Round 3.
Teachers’ multimodal expression (n=46) falls into one of two categories: representational and metaphorical. Most often (39), teacher’s expressions attempted to reproduce what they tried to represent, but there are a robust number (15) of expressions that are symbolic or metaphorical connections between objects or concepts to make meaning. For example, Mira’s “Do Now” (Figure 24) is representational because it replicates the actual experience she seeks to convey: the daily “Do Now” in which students regularly express their understanding of mathematical concepts and processes.

![Figure 24. Mira’s photograph captioned “Do Now” from Round 1.](image)

In Figure 25, “The Best Seat in the House,” Neil photographs his actual chair, but it served as a metaphor for students’ expressive voice. In his written description, Neil describes the chair as a medium for students’ expression, especially students with disabilities who were often
reluctant to express themselves. Metaphorically, the teacher’s chair is “the best seat in the house.”

*Figure 25.* Neil’s photograph captioned “The Best Seat in the House” from Round 2.

Three notable examples of written metaphors were created by Mira and Rosie. Figure 26 shows the written description that accompanies Mira’s representational photo seen in Figure 24. It is an acrostic poem that describes the “Do Now” as a pedagogical tool for student expression.
Decipher and identify common errors.

Observe for understanding.

No more than ten minutes.

Over time, reinforce a wide array of skills across subject areas.

Written product to hold students accountable and make learning engaging.

Figure 26. Mira’s written description accompanying her photograph caption “Do Now” from Round 1.

Figure 27 was created by Rosie in Round 3. She wrote a letter in the form of a poem to her students.

GROW
When things don’t make sense, ask questions
Keep growing
When something excites you, run with it....
Find a way to share it
Keep growing
When friends don’t value your heart
Keep growing (and make new friends)
When challenges weigh you down, lean on me
I will help you keep growing
Follow the status quo or spin it on its head
Just keep growing
When doors close, look for the windows or cracks in the walls
Just keep growing
Make life all YOU want it to be
Keep growing
And when you get there, come find me
Let me know all about it
Because I will still be here growing too!

Figure 27. Rosie’s written description from Round 3.
Although the photovoice process resulted in increased multimodal expression for participants, and could well be simply an artifact of the process itself rather than a conceptual shift towards practicing multimodality more in their lives, the data shows that teachers heavily relied on traditional expressive modes, particularly verbal and written language. This is unsurprising given that teachers themselves are products of schools, which are predicated on the ruling definition of literacy, which teach speaking and writing as primary modes of communication. The teachers preferred to express in ways that are most “familiar” and “comfortable” and report that they observe a similar pattern with their students. Mira’s description of her attempt at providing students with multimodal choices for expression as less than successful due in part to their not knowing “what else to do but write” exemplifies how entrenched is the Discourse of literacy.

The use of imagery and symbolism helped teachers describe their ideas about the expression of students with disabilities. The teachers’ verbal discussions were often rooted in and supported by their photographs. Visual representations helped ground discussion about abstract and complex ideas. Teachers’ multimodal expressions were mostly representations of their thinking about the expression of student with disabilities. Many photographs captured students in the moment or were a photographic reproduction of student work. There were however, several constructive expressions in which teachers constructed their own meaning, using symbols and metaphor to make connections between their understanding of student expression and concrete objects and events. Angelica’s photograph in Critical Moment Two is an example of a constructive multimodal expression. Angelica uses props (eyeglasses, a clock, and though bubbles) to represent the importance of giving students more time to express themselves. Two out of the three expressions were multimodal and representational, leading me to conclude that
participatory diagramming often served as a multimodal “bridge” in that it provided participants
greater access to and participation in traditional discussions. This is encapsulated best in
Angelica’s admission to the groups that she has always struggled with verbal and written
expression. She described multimodal expression as “such a relief” because it is easier for her to
convey her ideas through visual language.

“It’s my biggest struggle and it’s my biggest insecurity…I don’t know, I just have
difficulty saying what I want to say and so I understand that when my kids are coming
into the classroom and they’re struggling to get it out and I’m like, let’s find a different
way and it just relieves this, this anxiety, ‘cause I have it and I know it.” (Angelica:
Round 2, May 17, 2018)

Given multimodal opportunities, teachers did sometimes engage in constructive meaning-
making, using symbols and metaphors to make connections between their understanding of
student expression and concrete objects and events. This finding supports a pedagogy of
multiliteracies, in which meaning is made in multimodal ways (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Further
to this point, participatory diagramming particularly appears to promote multimodal, constructive
expression. Two out of the three of the participatory diagrams were multimodal and constructive,
confirming evidence to support Kesby’s (2000) finding that participants “are greatly assisted by
the immediate availability and visual nature” of the meaning-making that allows for an
incorporation of individual’s analysis, recognition of the multiplicity of accounts and the
building of “a narrative ‘between’ the perspectives of participants and those of researchers” (p.
432). In this way, photovoice and participatory diagramming worked together to create a situated
practice focused on the learner, the direct teaching of expressive design, explicit connection to
the social and cultural context of their expressions, and transformation and recontextualization of meaning across contexts.

**Student-Driven Modes of Expression.** Teachers’ experiences with multimodal composition in photovoice seemed to have fostered discussion about inclusive literacy practices that provided expressive options to students with disabilities. They refer to multimodal expression as “choices,” “options for students,” “taking many forms,” and “differentiation,” a discourse that aligns with the Universal Design for Learning principle of “multiple means of expression” which seeks to “equalize opportunities for expression” beyond the narrow means and “privileged modes” (Glass, Meyer, and Rose, 2013, p. 110) found in traditional instruction by offering students options for expression. The flexibility of choice found in the Universal Design for Learning framework is what researchers believe accounts for individual differences between learners and between instructional modes and media (Rose, 2000). While most teachers in this study (with the exception of Kristen) never explicitly refer to Universal Design for Learning, their discourse confirms their understanding that “multiple means of expression” is a form of inclusive practice that better meets the needs and preferences of individual students.

Of significance is the term participants used to describe what they see is a distinction between teacher and student-driven expressive modalities: that is, “self-expression.” With respect to the latter, this term was coined by Mira during the first Round and quickly adopted by all participants to discuss the value of affording students opportunities to self-select their expressive modality. For teachers in this study, “self-expression” is *powerful*. They believe that when students are allowed to “voice” their preference for how to express, they are given “a share in” decision-making power that affords them with what Mira referred to in the first “critical
moment” as “freedom of expression.” It is clear that teachers in this study conceive of multimodal choices as a way to give more of a “voice” to students with disabilities.

Within the teachers’ discourse on student-driven multimodality is the idea that choice leads to voice and thus promotes students’ agency. The concept of student agency is rooted in the philosophy that a principle goal of education should be the development of democratic ideals and capabilities (Dewey, 1916) in which having a voice is a prerequisite. Voice can be understood as a student’s ability to “express their ideas, opinions, perspectives, and needs” and to have a say in the methods and direction of their learning” (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015, p.3). This voice should empower students to wholly participate within their classroom communities that contribute to the shaping of their educational identities. Voice, then, is more than simply having the ability to express oneself; it has the power to empower and transform.

Agency—that is, the ability to express oneself—is especially important for students with disabilities for whom access and participation in oral and written expression may be a challenge. Teachers in this study report that traditional forms of expression are often a barrier for these students and that multimodal choices enable students to act according to their own preferences. Teachers often talk of the importance of students’ feeling “comfortable” to successfully express their feelings and ideas, and “self-expression,” they believe, is integral to removing that as a barrier to students’ expression:

I thought student voice and choice really stood out to me, cause you’re giving them, they're choosing the image and they’re expressing themselves within that image. And that I thought that gave them access to be able to be expressive about what they've learned and a lot of times I think when you say, you know, write this or do this this way, it feels
constricting and so having that access and feeling as a student that your able to express in any which way you want. It's really powerful. (Neil: Round 1, Lines 98-101)

The teachers’ discourse supports what research tells us about the use of technology as an inclusive literacy practice. Researchers point to the use of multiple means of expression through technology as a way of increasing access to standards-based general education literacy curriculum specifically for students with disabilities to (Coyne et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2015; Katz, Mirenda, & Auerbach, 2002; Miller, Lacey, and Laynton, 2003; Oakley, Howitt et al., 2013). Likewise, teachers view students’ access to technology as a multimodal option that gives students “voice” for increased expression: “We have choices and using the technology that is within the four walls of this building to go beyond the classroom. That’s when they have tools that can assist them. Like speech to text and images and all sorts of things that can remove that fear from I have to sit here with a blank piece of paper and come up with four paragraphs.” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 22-23).

Further, teachers view accessibility as providing a fuller range of meaning-making tools that allow every child fuller participation in learning activities. Similar to researchers who view a range of modalities as positioning students with disabilities as capable meaning-makers (Kliewer, 1999; Kliewer et al., 2004), multimodal expression allows teachers in this study to see student expression in new ways. In the fourth “critical moment,” Rosie says, “I’m just thinking how self-expression can shed light. It can give you insight. How would we have known that’s the way he is feeling or that’s him showing growth because obviously in the beginning he is saying he didn’t read very well and now…so, you can visibly see how self-expression can shed insight into something we would have never known about that student.” (Round 3, June 3, 2018). Rosie also points to the ways that the arts promote expression through a wider range of modes and
media, thereby increasing potential opportunities for student expression (Glass, Meyer, Rose, 2000).

These dances they were doing and every single song that came on he was doing move for move. He’s a student with an Individualized Education Plan and a student who is academically failing, socio-economic, attendance is terrible. All these things, but he can create. I saw him in that moment and I snapped that picture, but how many opportunities in a day is he given the opportunity to express himself that way?” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 55-59)

Rosie’s conclusions echo those of Mason et al. (2008); that expressive arts increase choice, voice, and agency for students with disabilities.

**Practices that support “self-expression.”** The teachers’ discourse is rife with talk about the importance of teaching practices that support multimodal self-expression. Teachers talk about instructional structures such as “daily circles or meetings” that “become a staple” of instruction. Within discourse, teachers describe time as the primary obstacle to these inclusive practices. The second “critical moment” is a prime example of how teachers use routines and protocols to (as they see it) circumvent time constraints that impede increased expression. Angelica’s “Notice and Wonder” provides regular, structured opportunities that foster expression. She reports that the protocol gives all of her students “the opportunity on a daily basis to have the time not only to think, but discuss it and conversations with students in their small groups before going into the big class group discussion.” It should be noted that Newark’s mandated mathematics curriculum centers on open-ended problem-solving. Routines and protocols like Angelica’s “notice and wonder” are considered standard practices for “active” and collaborative learning. Angelica complies with the mandated curriculum, with the positive effect on fostering student expression.
Teachers’ discussions about routines and protocols have a regular refrain of providing students a space to feel “comfortable” enough to express themselves. “Comfort” in this sense is used to refer to a positive classroom culture that promotes students’ expression and students’ familiarity with and their freedom to choose different modalities to express. The teachers’ participatory diagramming during Round 1 (May 3, 2018) centers on “a really weird looking tree” that represents their collective thinking about the importance of student comfort: “social emotional considerations are rooted in classroom culture allows communication, student effort, motivation as well as student expression to flourish.” This sentiment is echoed during the third focus group’s participatory diagramming, in which a circle is used to draw the head of a person to represent “a sense of belonging that brings out the confidence of the voice.” The teachers repeatedly express confidence that students with disabilities can successfully express themselves through the regular use of time-effective routines and protocols.

**Summary.** As inclusion teachers struggle to help all students meet the demands of Newark’s mandated curriculum, they must also support access to and participation in general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Teachers are mostly on their own with how to enact access in their practice and have defined for themselves practices that they believe are the best option given their constraints: more time and more choice in expression. If it means straying from the curriculum just a little bit, that is fine with them. Ultimately, the teachers’ discourse serves to support the literature of inclusive literacy pedagogy—especially that which concerns the benefits of multimodality and a universal design for learning approach—in describing protocols and routines that provide comfortable learning environments and multimodal choices for increased expressivity for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.
Conclusion to the Chapter

The findings from this study demonstrate that the ways teachers describe expression reflects the impact of institutionalized Discourse on teachers’ localized discourse that influence opportunities for students with disabilities to express learning and social emotional communication in inclusive classrooms. Within this analysis, teachers interpreted students’ expressivity and their pedagogy both in conjunction with and in opposition to institutionalized Discourse.
Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusion

This dissertation’s qualitative study was designed to answer the following question:

In what ways do five general and special education teachers describe opportunities for students with disabilities’ expression of learning in inclusive classrooms (grades 3-7) as elicited using photovoice methodology?

To address this question, I conducted systematic data collection and analysis to identify salient and compelling evidence. In response, I identified five critical moments that served as identification markers for the themes developed to make sense of the ways teachers in this study describe the expression of students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. The themes I constructed from the data include: (1) choices increase self-expression; (2) more time is needed for increased expression; (3) expression is visible proof of learning; (4) expression is contextual; and (5) social emotional literacy seems to be foundational for expression of academic learning.

The development of these themes is evidence of what was learned from this study concerning the inclusive literacy practices that may support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

I believe that this study helps problematize the intersection between conceptions about literacy and disability and teachers’ practices that attempt to support increased expressivity in inclusive classroom contexts. Inclusive literacy pedagogical frameworks typically focus on the specific practices that may support increased access to and participation in expression, but most do not take into account the role that normalized paradigms of disability play in the pedagogical choices teachers make. As stated by Pandya and Avila (2018), “authors in this field are concerned with complex questions about critical media literacy, social justice, and social reproduction; however, they seldom focus on the inclusion of students with special needs in their projects or in their theorising” (p. 2). This study adds to the research base by providing evidence
of how inclusive practices may be shaped by teachers’ conceptions of expression that are situated within institutionalized disability Discourse. For example, Neil and Angelica often describe expression of students with disabilities as both socially inappropriate and disruptive to other students’ learning. This view is largely reflective of the Special Education paradigm which positions students with non-normative expressions as problematic and needing remediation. The teachers’ practices, as evidenced in the data, do not center only on accessibility, but also on practices conceived as interventions such as routines and protocols that either teach or shape students’ methods of expression to be socially acceptable. This suggests that more research is needed to explore the relationship between the widely held Special Education Discourse, which positions students with disabilities as outside of the norm and requiring remediation, and teachers’ pedagogical decision-making for students who participate in Special Education.

This study contributes to the fields of inclusive pedagogy and teacher education because it is research that draws upon multiple arts modalities and media for data collection and analysis. This study’s design offered a unique opportunity to consider the complexity of teachers’ thinking and pedagogical decision-making. The photovoice process provided participants the opportunity to engage in regular, structured multiple means of expression. This study was intentionally designed to have teacher express themselves in multimodal ways. The plethora of multimodal evidence—photographs, captions, written descriptions, photo-elicitation, and participatory diagramming—helps validate the process as a method for increasing data points related to the research questions. Participants’ multimodal expression significantly contributed to this study’s purpose: to understand the ways in which inclusion teachers provide expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The centrality of visual expression in photovoice made visible to teachers aspects of their thinking that may or may not contribute to
opportunities to express for students with disabilities. Thus, from the insights I gained specifically from conducting a photovoice study, I will discuss the conclusions I have drawn, their implications for research and practice, and discuss possible recommendations for research and practice that take into consideration the limitations of this study. Finally, I will share my final thoughts for teacher development.

**Different Insights Into Teaching Practice**

In this study, photovoice became a means for reflection on “ways of seeing”: inviting participants to take photographs and respond to the particular social and pedagogical practices on display for the purpose of better understanding and responding to identified inequities. For example, Mira asks, “If you continually ask them to express themselves in a way they can’t, what happens?” (Round 3, June 7, 2018). Mira’s question was asked during photo-elicitation of her picture, captioned “Power and Voice,” and reveals how photovoice allowed participants to “mine deeper shafts” into participants’ meaning-making than words alone (Harper, 2002, p. 23). The photo-elicitation process seems to have allowed for: (a) different insights into practice of teaching than oral and written data alone; (b) exploration of every-day, taken for granted aspects of teaching that led to a consideration of implicit beliefs concerning access and equity; and (c) a clear and central role of participants in the research process as they took photographs, explained their images, and collaboratively made meaning of inclusive teaching practices for students with disabilities.

The findings from this study show that the photovoice process engaged participants in a cyclical, interactive inquiry process that brought together problem solving actions with data-driven analyses to potentially effect changes in pedagogy for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2002). Photovoice seems an ideal tool for engaging teachers in communicating their concerns and practices
regarding their socially constructed conceptions of disability and how it impacts pedagogical practices for students with disabilities. Visual methodology has great potential to highlight how social categories are constructed and not made: “a [photographic] depiction is never just an illustration…it is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference” (Fyfe & Law, 1998, p. 1). After Mira’s photo-elicitation, Rosie says,

“I think even the caption that you gave it, “speaker power,” spoke a lot because power comes from speaking and how do we help all students find their voice so that they find their way and they’re not afraid to share their thoughts and feelings or to be taken advantage of. As hard as it is, it’s so important for all of them to have their voice. So, I think…and then creating opportunities for everyone to share in that power is powerful.”

This quote demonstrates how it is not just the images themselves that are important, but their interpretation and analyses; what John Berger (1972) describes as the “ways of seeing” that render social difference visible or invisible. Through several iterations of photovoice, participants held their practices “up to the light,” and that examination often led teachers to “see” what might have been invisible through discussion alone.

**Consideration of Implicit Beliefs About Access and Equity**

Photovoice also provided participants with a regular structure for their own expression in multiple ways and using multiple modes. This offers a unique opportunity to examine participants’ expressive meaning-making when provided multiple opportunities and means towards a view to understanding teaching practices that support increased expression for students with disabilities. As Rosie explained it, photovoice “really gave me that chance to look at myself and say, am I truly practicing everything I believe is good practice? And I think this process really helped me to zone in on that and say, maybe I created that experience for one student but am I doing that for everybody? Am I willing to change? If I am going to look that critically into
my practice and see something that isn’t there, do I have the willingness to change things and do better?”

Multimodal perspectives on literacy are predicated on the idea that meanings are made through resources, of which language is but one (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). That meaning is both represented and communicated to others across a variety of forms makes it part of an inclusive literacy pedagogy. Multimodality provides enormous potential for students with disabilities, especially those for whom the conventional and primary modes of writing and speaking are a challenge. Flewitt’s (2006) multimodal study of classroom interaction argues against “pathologizing the absence of talk” through an “analysis of children’s uses of different semiotic modes as intentional, socially organized activity in the construction of meaning” (p. 47). This study offers a different perspective of valid and valuable forms of expression in classrooms that is made visible through participant engagement with multimodality. Angelica’s “admission” to the group that she has “always struggled with verbal and written expression” and that the opportunity to express herself through multiple arts media and modalities was such a “such a relief” speaks to the potential of multimodal expression as part of an inclusive literacy pedagogy for students with disabilities. This study gives convincing evidence of the ways that the “narrow means” of traditional instruction, speech and written text for expression, “privilege some students and raise barriers for others” (Glass, Meyer, and Rose, 2013, p. 110) and leads me to conclude that further research is needed on the ways multiple arts modalities and media support expression for students with disabilities.

To say that multiple arts modalities and media are part of a broader conception of multiliteracies that may increase expressivity for students with disabilities is insufficient; this study offers insight for future research on bridging sociocultural theories with more inclusive
practices. Scholars in the field of NLS in particular, describe a wide range of literacy practices both in and out of school that are not necessarily pegged to being able to encode and decode written text. This conception of “literacy” or, rather, “literacies,” recognizes the significance of sociocultural contexts, the varied mediums of meaning-making, and socially recognized ways of using literacy to get things done in the world and defines literacy as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). The data from this study evidences that expression is deeply contextual, affirming how UNESCO defines literacy as how we communicate in society, and as social practices and relationships that encompass knowledge, language and culture (UNESCO, 2003). In this study, teachers were themselves given access to and encouraged to use a wider range of modalities and media for expression and over the course of three photovoice Rounds, visual literacy became one of several literacies part of the larger social practice of communicating ideas. In Round 2, Mira spoke about the importance of increased opportunities for the expression of students with disabilities beyond the classroom. She said, “thinking beyond fourth grade, beyond fifth grade, beyond schooling. It’s about being a citizen the rest of your life.” Mira described expression as a communicative “tool,” and that multiple means or, to use her discourse, “self-expression” leads to “voice and voice leads to power.”

A Potential Practice for Action Research

The findings from this study also suggest that when teachers critically reflect on practice via photovoice, they also describe practice in ways that seem to support expressive opportunities for students with disabilities and enhanced literate citizenship for all students. The taking of and examination of photographs of their own classroom practice gave participants a concrete way of engaging critical reflection which could lead to action; specifically, inclusive practices that help
to increase opportunities for the expression of students with disabilities through multiple means. In her post-rounds interview, Rosie said, “so my second photo came out of, we were discussing in our first meeting I believe was where some teachers were sharing their experiences asking students to give positive feedback to each other…kind of led me to try that activity where they were supposed to give each other positive feedback and then went and wrote a letter to themselves. So I went back and implemented it in the very next day or two after we met.” Mira described how she gets “stuck in this writing, writing, writing” and that she wants to “remind them that if they wanna draw a picture, or if they want to tell their peer” and “not be tied to this idea that we have to write it down on a piece paper.” Kristen described how the photovoice process allowed her to “tweak some things. For example, when I had put the photo of the students discussing, I realized after our discussion that turn and talk is great but what if a student is nonverbal or doesn’t feel comfortable speaking to express, so I have actually had opportunities instead of turning and talking. You don't have to turn and talk - like let me give little Post-it or let me give cut up scrap paper - like you can have your discussion in any way that you want.” Neil said that the photovoice process allowed him to take “snapshots” that allowed him to conceptualize students’ expression as more than just a “product” but as a “social interaction” that communicated actionable information about his practice and his students. Angelina explained:

   ever since starting this journey with you, I kind of have been thinking how can I incorporate this into my classroom. And as I have been taking things down in my classroom, I’ve been thinking about that Universal Design for Learning method of teaching and how in my math class maybe what I can do is instead of giving them a problem that is some kind of culminating task, maybe I could give them that back board for each class and ask them to express something they’ve learned in whatever way they
would like and just creating that environment in the back of the room where they can look at consistently throughout the chapters. So it was kind of a big aha for me.

A move towards more critical reflection by teachers suggests potential opportunities for increased expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

The development of these contributions had much to do with this qualitative study’s design, specifically with my use of photovoice as a data collection method. The photovoice process allowed for the identification of ways that teachers describe expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms and the actions they seemed to take as a result of conversations related to expressive opportunities. In doing so, I was able to locate teachers’ d/Discourse about literacy and pedagogy and examine the relationships between this d/Discourse and description of teaching practices that may impact expressive opportunities for students with disabilities. I next expand upon these contributions and explain how my study design afforded their identification.

**Recommendations for Research Regarding Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy**

The implications of this study for future research include more studies that are informed by a pluralized notion of literacy, as theorized by the New London Group (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and center on expression beyond that which is verbal and written. Multiliteracies theory engages students in literacy and literate practices in a socially and culturally diverse, globalized, digital world. As the definition of literacy has changed and expanded in many academic and pedagogical circles, so have the contexts for learning, the pedagogies associated with literacy, and the resources used. A multiliteracies conception of literacy actively recognizes that meaning making can be conveyed through multiple modes—or vehicles—of expression. These include, for example, the “tenor” of a text, it’s medium of
production, the design choices made in producing a form of expression, and so on. Even the idea of a “text” is expanded to include visuals and non-print-based stretches of language. As a concept, multimodal design, in particular, offers educators ways of thinking about meaning-making in relation to diverse forms of representation and communication (i.e., texts) that can support teachers to implement strategies as students develop their literate identities for the contemporary digital world (Jewitt, 2012; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005). A key point to be made here is that the production of diverse “texts” by students is critical to their participation in inclusive contexts. That is, recognizing students’ learning as expressed through images or musical sounds may lead teachers to different views of what counts as learning, and to positive perceptions of students as literate, valued members of the classroom community. This, in turn, can expand students’ opportunities to learn in classrooms. Teachers’ pedagogical choices matter with respect to the individual and collective schooling experiences of children. Therefore, increased opportunities for expression—multiple ways or modes—ultimately will lead to greater literate citizenship for all students.

**Beyond frameworks.** Research pertaining to the facilitation of teachers’ awareness of the impact that multiple art modalities and media opportunities may have on the expression of students with disabilities, and the potential that presents for allowing students to be seen as literate member of classroom communities, is recommended. The successful study and documentation of teacher learning that conceptualizes literacy instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, as Kliwer, Biklen, and Petersen (2015) did in their work with inclusion teachers, may provide teachers with both the critical awareness of and pedagogical practices that provide a range of modalities that positions students with disabilities as capable meaning-makers and “literate citizens” of the classroom community. For example, in
her post-Rounds interview, Mira articulated that her experience with multimodal expression via photovoice helped her to simultaneously examine her beliefs and practices while also adding to her pedagogical repertoire: “I knew expression could take on different forms, but this sort of helped me see the meaning underlying that particular expression… I think that’s what I learned from this study…but I think too this process also helped me to see to that this process is sort of a practice too.” The participation in, experience with, and problematizing of multimodality seems to be a necessary component of inclusive literacy pedagogy.

This study’s design offers more than a conceptual framework for inclusive literacy pedagogy. Frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning offer teachers a structure for thinking about multiple means of expression, but this study provides evidence to support teachers’ own meaning-making in professional learning. The centrality of visual expression in photovoice makes visible to teachers aspects of their thinking that provided opportunities to challenge normative and limiting practices for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms and actually experience literacy practices that value the expression of all students. Much of the research of inclusive literacy pedagogy speaks to practices as interventions for students with disabilities and mostly concern students’ responses to these interventions, such as in the studies of by Coyne et. al. (2012) and Hall, Cohen, Vue, & Ganley (2015). The data from this study gives me reason to believe that shifting attention to teachers’ own experiences may actually translate to more inclusive practices, as Mira did when she provided post-its instead of lined paper for her students’ expression of ideas during a learning activity or Rosie gave students an option to use digital photography for what would have been a traditional informational essay. Both of these pedagogical decisions were practiced as part of teachers’ experiences to practice and reflect on multiple arts modalities and media. As teachers are guided to think about practices
to support their students with disabilities, beyond their classrooms, in terms of the sociopolitical
dimensions of their own language beliefs, researchers and teacher educators can better foster
teachers’ inclusive literacy pedagogy by moving beyond frameworks and providing them with
experiences with and reflection about multiple arts modalities and media.

**Beyond Interviews.** Interviews and focus groups are stalwart qualitative research
methods that help give insight about participant perceptions and behavior with reference to a
particular topic. This study has helped me to see that visual methodologies are an underutilized
research methodology that offer tremendous potential for educational researchers and teacher
educators. I have come to understand that visual methodologies are particularly suited to
sociocultural research because visual imagery is “never innocent,” and “is always constructed
through various practices, technologies, and knowledges” (Rose, 2016, p. 23). Thus, researchers
who apply a critical approach to visual images allows participants to think about the social
practices that are embedded within and social messaging it conveys to others.

The participants in this study went beyond viewing images and were involved in the
creation of visual representations of their own conceptualizations and practices. Visual
methodologies afford robust opportunities for critical reflection on teachers’ thinking and
decision-making that is made visible through image-making. Further, these visual images help
uncover implicit biases and conceptions rooted in institutionalized Discourse. Teachers’
depictions are not just illustrations, but “site[s] for the construction and depiction of social
difference” (Fyfe and Law, 1998, p. 1). Having personally seen the ways in which visual images
invited “ways of seeing” about the expression of students with disabilities and about social
practices through how these images were created and shared, I believe that visual methodologies
are extremely well-suited to studies that are influenced by critical analysis of discourse. This
study gives convincing evidence (as outlined earlier in this chapter) of the benefits of the photovoice process as a visual methodology and I recommend that more researchers capitalize on the opportunities it affords.

**Beyond Academic Literacy.** This study presents significant findings regarding the ways teachers understand literacy and, more specifically, what constitutes opportunities to express for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Research on social emotional literacy (Cohen, 2001) has added to the ways researchers and teacher educators understand literacy. It seems that there is room within research rooted in sociocultural theories of learning, especially that of multiliteracies and inclusive pedagogies, for a closer examination of social emotional literacy. That teachers in this study view literacy as more than “one thing” in nature is strongly evidenced in the data; they clearly delineate between academic and social emotional literacy, learning, and expression. That they define students’ social emotional literacy as foundational for successful academic expression was a significant finding. It is, in my opinion, insufficient to study children’s social emotional expressivity without considering the impact that teachers’ practices and their relationship to understanding of literacy and disability have on those practices. This study presents one such research design that could be utilized to gain further insight into these ideas.

The importance teachers placed on students’ social emotional expressions and the degree to which they are deemed appropriate within inclusive classroom contexts was an unexpected finding from the study. It is unsurprising in light of the wide range of emotions children experience on a daily basis that expressions of those emotions contribute to the development of social relationships and academic learning. While there is research concerning the relationship between emotional expressivity and social functioning (Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, & Fabes,
2004) and that of academic outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), more research is needed to better understand the intersection of these concepts. Teachers in this study report that students with disabilities often exhibit what Pekrun et. al. (2002) call “academic emotions” as a conceptual construct for understanding the emotions students may experience during academic learning tasks. Further, Pekrun et. al. (2002) found that so-called “academic emotions” are significantly associated with learning outcomes. My own data shows that teachers find a correlation between social emotional literacy of students with disabilities and their academic expression. It is evident that teachers’ discourse reflects the district’s “SEL” initiatives that are part of broader Discourse on social emotional learning as defined by the New Jersey Department of Education, warranting further study.

While I am hopeful that these recommendations for research will be considered, I also have recommendations for teacher educators who work with pre-service and practicing educators. Several of these recommendations are drawn directly from the above described recommendations for further research and will be briefly described in the next section.

**Recommendations for Practice Regarding Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy**

*Provide opportunities for the critical reflection of teaching knowledge and practice.*

From a multiple literacies perspective, there is much that photovoice offers teachers. This study was not about training teachers in established frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning or specific technologies that support inclusive literacy practices. Instead, the photovoice process was designed to deeply engage teachers in the examination of their conceptual understanding of complex constructs and in critical reflection of their teaching practices concerning those constructs. Photovoice encompasses the four elements proposed in Cope and Kalantzis” (2000) pedagogy of multiliteracies schema: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and
CHOICE, VOICE, AND AGENCY

transformed practices. Ultimately it usefulness lies in provide “angles and ideas with which to supplement what teachers do” (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 239). Rosie spoke about this in her post-Rounds interview:

I think as our community grew, it became easier because the feedback was always so insightful that I think I just came to accept that whatever I put up there, we’re going to find out, we’ll make meaning together. Even if what I was hoping to get across, or what I was thinking, maybe it wasn’t the best way to show it, but I could talk to it, I could express it, and we could ask each other questions, and really get to the heart of it. And then what was powerful, was then seeing those connections, you know, that everybody kind of, that there were these underlying connections in all of our talks, in all of our images that it made it easy for us to piggyback off of each other.

Photovoice rounds, ideally those that are used over an extended period of time, can be used by teacher educators and those involved in professional development to both help pre-service and practicing teachers in the field become more reflective practitioners.

Provide experiences with multimodal expression. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways teachers understand expression for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms and to examine the relationship between pedagogical choices and participating teachers’ conceptions of literacy and disability. There is a clear need for broadened conceptualizations of literacy and a recognition that meaning is communicated using a variety of modes. Understanding how meaning is made through different modes is crucial if multimodality is to be used effectively. Multimodality requires an acceptance of multiliteracies as a way of addressing the diversity of expression and communication in human beings. If teachers are to meet the needs of learners who have a wide range of communicative and expressive abilities and
preferences, they will need to embrace that literacy is more than the reading, writing, and speaking of written language.

This study has shown me the critical importance that teachers themselves be “multiliterate.” The exclusive use of particular modalities of expression and communication in classrooms can have significant consequences for all students. We need to prepare students with the skills and competencies for making sense of various modalities, including multimodal ensembles. In addition, students have a range of capabilities and interest in different modalities. Teachers too must have a wide range of knowledge and competency in multiliteracies in order to acknowledge, embrace, and foster multimodality in teaching and learning. This study reinforces my belief that we need to advance multiliteracies in curriculum, pedagogy, and preservice education.

If we understand that students’ learning involves the active making of meaning (Vygotsky, 1998), the same is true for pre-service and practicing teachers. Photovoice provided teachers experience with multimodal expression. This, I believe, was foundational for teachers’ learning that may more likely lead to changes in their actual teaching practices to increase students’ access to multiliteracies. Teachers’ multimodal expressions and the discussions that arose from them demonstrate the importance of experiential learning. This study has shown me that a “do as I say” approach to teacher development is not enough.

**Preparation that supports the complexity of social emotional literacy.** Teachers in this study spoke of the ways in which they, in the words of Rosie, “made time and space” for social emotional literacy learning. Cohen (2001) suggests that teacher education programs should address: the role of emotion in learning and in creating; emotional “decoding” skills; and ways of using decoded emotions to solve real-world social emotional problems. While I agree with
Cohen that teacher educators need to focus more time on social emotional literacy, it is important that it is addressed in ways that acknowledge their complexity as a sociocultural construct. The interpretation of social emotional expressions, as seen in this study, matters with respect to how students are perceived both by their teachers and peers in ways that may include or exclude them from the literate world of the classroom.

**Final Thoughts for Teacher Development**

“He drew a circle that shut me out-
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle and took him In! (Edwin Markham)

Teachers have the power to shut students out or take them in by widening the circle so that everyone is included. Disability paradigms and approaches to literacy education play a significant role in how teachers view children’s expression at school. These paradigms are enacted in teachers’ everyday discourse and discursive practices that may keep students with disabilities outside of the literate circle.

Exclusion from general education is often caused by prevailing assumptions made about the abilities of students with disabilities to attain literacy skills (Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Kliewer & Biklen, 2001). Students labeled as “emergent” or “early” literacy learners are often perceived as incapable of learning content-related curriculum and instruction typically introduced in upper elementary and secondary grades. This was true in my son, Christopher’s, case: although his verbal and written expressive language has steadily progressed, he is still viewed by his teachers as significantly below “grade level” and it is continually recommended he receive “specialized” language arts and social studies instruction in a self-contained setting. Modifications to the general education curriculum consist primarily of adjustments made to
pacing and the Lexile level of texts. Christopher is always expected to express his learning through speaking and writing.

The privileging of language that is print-based has most certainly shaped the expressive opportunities teachers have offered Christopher and other students who have disabilities. The discourse and discursive practices concerning literacy and disability have most likely played a role in limiting their expression. This “outside” positioning extends beyond students for whom oral and written language is not a readily available mode of communication, but to all learners who do not fit into normative learning paradigms. Adding the conception that teaching students with disabilities requires specialized knowledge and skills that are steeped in the philosophical tradition of special education in which those with disabilities are conceived as having problems that require remediation (cf. critiques of this paradigm in Baglieri, Valle, & Connor, 2011; Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010) means that students with disabilities are further denied access to inclusive literacy. Together, mainstream literacy and disability paradigms serve to frame and enact a particular and recognizable literate identity for students that largely is determined by students’ ability classifications founded on the teaching of “non-normal” students within normalized settings. Thus the literal and conceptual identification of “special education students” has a real-world impact on the literacy instruction afforded, or not, to students with disabilities.

The teachers who participated in this study shared their experiences and their learning through multimodal ways. They used written words, photographs, diagrams, and verbal narration and discussion to give their ideas individual and collective meaning in similar ways to their students. These life experiences provided them with a repertoire of literacy resources and literate practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000) for the expression of ideas within the focus group.
As Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest, teachers (like their students) draw on two areas to construct meaning: the lifeworld (everything that exists outside the focus group) and the school-based world. Teachers specifically drew on the literacy practices occurring in these worlds (via photovoice) in order to make meaning and, in turn, create their own discourse concerning the expression of students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. Literacy then, is something that teachers in this study did (Barton and Hamilton, 1998); it did not reside within the mind as a set of skills to be learned, but was located within the social interaction between people and the social practices in which they engaged. It is my hope that teachers made the connection between their photovoice experience and that of their students; that expressive choice contributed to increased voice and greater agency. I hope that the critical reflection on expression inspires them to broaden their definitions of literacy so that the circle is wide enough to draw all their students inside.
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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Teacher:

My name is Francesca Ciotoli and I am a doctoral student in the Teacher Education and Teacher Preparation Program at Montclair State University. My dissertation study concerns inclusive teaching practices that foster the expression of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in general education classrooms. Specifically, I am hoping learn about how teachers help students show their learning in different ways. To this end, I am seeking your participation in a photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997, 1998) research study that combines photography with participant storytelling. In photovoice, photographs stimulate the telling of stories that in turn gives rise to critical questioning, decision-making, action, and further reflection on the part of the participant-researchers.

Participation in this study involves one two-hour training session, the individual taking of photographs of your regular classroom practice (e.g. students work, classroom set-up) and three, two-hour focus groups where we will explore a range of literacy perspectives and practices pertaining to the expression of students with IEPs.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. All data gathered from this study is strictly confidential. Research data will be collected in the forms of audio transcriptions of conversations, group-generated diagrams and photography prompts from the photovoice training session and three focus groups. Analysis resulting from this study will be shared with other researchers and elementary school teachers through presentations and publications. They may help improve teachers’ literacy related instructional practices in a classroom for students with disabilities.

If you are interested in participating, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form. You may withdraw from the study at any time. All information is confidential and your name or school's name will not be identified in any material or publication. Because of policy, I have to keep video audiotapes for three years, but will destroy the tapes them after three years.

If you would like to participate or have questions about the project, please respond to this email or email me at ciotolif1@mail.montclair.edu. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, MSU IRB-FY17-18-951. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you can contact the Montclair State University IRB chair, Katrina Bulkley (reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu or 973-655-5189). I hope that you will consider participating in this project, and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you so much!
Francesca Ciotoli, Doctoral Candidate
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

**Title:** Expression of Multiple Means of Expression in Inclusive Classrooms

**Study Number:** FY17-18-951

**Why is this study being done?** This study concerns inclusive teaching practices that foster the expression of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The purpose of this study is to examine, document, and help support teachers of students with IEPs in general education classrooms. Specifically, I am hoping to learn about your understanding of literacy development for students with disabilities and the ways that these students are included in expressive literacy activities.

**What will happen while you are in the study?**

- **Individual Taking of Photographs:** Individually, you will take photographs in response to prompts about your regular teaching practices as they relate to the inclusion of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in general education settings. You may use either a camera phone or digital camera. You will select 1-3 photographs to caption and share with other participants during focus groups sessions. You will upload the photographs to a secure Google Drive folder for which only you and the researcher have access. You are required not to take identifiable pictures, to mask names on student work and to obscure student identities in photographs before uploading to shared drive and sharing with the focus group.

- **Focus Groups:** All participants and the researcher will meet three times to collaboratively discuss your photographs. During each focus group, you will collaboratively generate a photography prompt to help guide your picture-taking. The focus group will meet either at Montclair State University, one of the participants’ schools, or a communally agreed upon convenient location.

During the focus groups, I will take notes, audio and visual recordings. You can ask me to stop recording any time. I will also keep documentation of any email or online discussions. This does not include correspondence about personal matters. These files will be safely stored on my computer. Files will be kept for three years after the study is completed. I may ask to make copies of publicly available papers. Those items are activity calendars, schedules, and agreements, as well as other things you use, such as lesson plans and student work.
**Time:** This study will take approximately 10-15 hours. Each of the three focus groups will take approximately 2 hours. Additional time will be needed for you to take photographs and upload them to the shared drive.

**Risks:** The risks are not much greater than those in ordinary life. You may feel uncomfortable being watched, recorded, or photographed. You may become distressed if you become concerned about what has been recorded. If you seem to be uncomfortable, I will remind you that you do not have to participate in the study. I will also ask if anyone wants to opt out or to turn a recording device off. You may tell me to stop including you in the research at any time.

Since this is a small project, some people may know you were part of the study. When I present the study, it is possible that you will be known to people who know you, especially other participants. You may be identifiable through the photographs you share. You may also recognize yourself in the written reports. I will mask the identities of the participants in study results. Your name will not be used. Information about you and the study will be told as broadly as possible.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for being in this study. You may benefit from this study by talking and thinking about your experiences as part of the photovoice process. Such reflection may help you improve your practice and college participation. You may feel pride in talking about your teaching practice and sharing your perspective. By participating in this study, you may be affecting the discovery of valuable knowledge regarding the development of effective inclusive practice.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participating in the study.

**Who will know that you are in this study?** I will keep who you are private by not using your real name, age or physical description. Since the research project is small, other participants may know you are in this study.

If you are okay with other people knowing you are in the study, then check off “YES” for any of the questions in #4 at the end of this paper. #4 states that it is okay to use the following data that includes me in presentations that other people will see.

Although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Please do not share anything in the focus group, you are not comfortable sharing.
Do you have to be in the study? You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer. It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing negative will happen to you. You will continue in your usual activities. If you decide to not be in the study, or to drop out after you agree to be in the study, nothing will happen to you.

Do you have any questions about this study? Contact Francesca Ciotoli at (973)699-7146 or ciotolif1@mail.montclair.edu with any questions you have about this study.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, MSU IRB-FY17-18-951. Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu.

Please indicate in which activities you will participate. PLEASE SIGN THE FORM AT THE BOTTOM (even if you respond “no” to everything):

(1) Please check the box that applies:
   I agree to be part of this study. _____ Yes _____ No

(2) It is okay to write notes about me while in this study
   Please initial:  ________________ Yes  ______________ No

(3) It is okay to collect the following data that includes me while in this study. No one else will see them.
   a. Copies of documents I choose to share  ____ Yes  ____ No
   b. Video recordings  ____ Yes  ____ No
   c. Audio recordings  ____ Yes  ____ No
   d. Emails or messages about the project that you send to the researcher  ____ Yes  ____ No

(4) It is okay to use the following data that includes me in presentations that other people will see.
   IF you mark yes below, other people will know you are in the study.
   a. Copies of documents I choose to share  ____ Yes  __________ No
   b. Video recordings  ____ Yes  __________ No
   c. Audio recordings  ____ Yes  __________ No
   d. Emails or messages about the project that you send to a researcher  ____ Yes  __________ No

(5) It is okay to use my data in other studies:
   Please initial:  _____ Yes  _____ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.
**Statement of Consent**

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

Print your name here  Sign your name here  Date

Name of Principal Investigator  Signature  Date
Appendix C

Photovoice Training Agenda

**Time frame:** 2 – 3 hours

**Objectives**

Participants will:

- Get to know each other in the group.
- To understand the basic concepts of photovoice.
- To get an overview of the activities and timeline of the photovoice Project.
- Understand informed consent and ethical concerns related to the project.
- Understand the purpose of the research inquiry.
- Generate photovoice prompt(s) for the first focus group.

**Materials**

- Handouts (agenda, training documents, consent forms)
- Name tags
- Pens, paper, writing surfaces
- Flip chart and markers
- LCD Projector, PowerPoint, laptop
- Digital camera and camera phone
- Audio recording device

**Activities**

1. **Introductions:** *Welcome participants. Engage in an ice-breaker activity.*
2. **Ground Rules and Setting Norms:** *“Forming Ground Rules” Protocol from the National School Reform Faculty*
3. **Study Aim/Objectives and Overview of Photovoice Methodology:** *PowerPoint and Discussion*
4. **Consent and Ethics Information:** *PowerPoint and Discussion; distribute and explain forms*
5. **Photography Basics and Visual Storytelling:** *PowerPoint and 2 Photography Exercises*
6. **Collaborative Photography Prompts:** *Review the research questions and brainstorm related photography prompts. Select one/two prompts for the first round of photo generation and focus group.*
7. Next Steps and Questions: Review timeline for consent forms, establish focus group dates and places, review the photo prompt(s) and tips for taking pictures; review methods of communication and photo-sharing platform
Appendix D

Photovoice Focus Group Protocol

Part 1: Opening (10 minutes)

- Welcome, make introductions and thank participants.
- Review the purpose of the focus group interview.
- Review confidentiality issues, audio recording, and note-taking.
- Review the focus group norms and protocol.
- Clarify and questions and concerns.
- Review the photo prompt that guides this week’s photo generation and elicitation. If applicable, begin with a review of the actionable steps and revised photograph prompts from the prior focus group.

Part 2: Photo-Elicitation (60 minutes)

Using the acronym “SHOWED,” the facilitator guides each participant through a narration of their chosen photograph(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Facilitator’s Prompt</th>
<th>Participant’s Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>What is seen here?</td>
<td>Participant describes what the eyes see in the photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>What is really happening here?</td>
<td>Participant describes what is happening in the picture that can’t be seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>How does the relate to our inquiry?</td>
<td>Participant describes how the picture relates to the photo prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?</td>
<td>Participant hypothesize about the internal and external factors that contribute to what is happening in the photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>How does this image educate us?</td>
<td>Participant describes how the image helps viewers consider various perspectives and possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>What can I/We do about it?</td>
<td>Participant suggests implications for teaching practice that address concerns and issues raised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 3: Ideation (30 minutes)

The facilitator guides participants in the identification of recurring ideas (themes) that emerged across participant narratives. Participatory diagramming will be used to visually articulate, organize, and track ideation.

Participatory diagramming choices:
Part 4: Photo Prompt Generation* (20 minutes)

Each focus group will conclude with step that participants will take based on the emergence of identified themes. They may also be specific changes or additions to classroom practice pertaining the expression of students with disabilities. These steps will be recorded and considered for the subsequent photovoice focus group and will therefore necessitate the revision, addition, or deletion of photograph prompts.

*At the final focus group, participants will reflect on the photovoice process. Sample questions include:

- What was being a part of this project like?
- Was the project difficult for you? Why or why not?
- Did you enjoy being a part of this project? Why or why not?
- What was it like for you to talk about your images?
- What did you gain or learn, if anything, from being a part of this project?
- Would you consider using photovoice with your students? Why or why not?
- May I contact you again in the future if I have questions or need clarification about your images or our interview?
Appendix E

Post-Rounds Individual Interview Questions

- What have you learned through this process? What new knowledge have you gained as a result of the photovoice process? Explain how the process resulted in this learning.
- Have you taken any specific pedagogical actions or made any changes in your practice as a result of your learning during the photovoice process? Explain how the process resulted in this action-taking.
- What types of skills did you develop by learning about photovoice, taking photographs and sharing your thoughts and opinions with others?
- Do you feel like your knowledge and experiences were valued by the rest of the group?
- Do you feel like you have gained confidence and/or comfort by participating in social change activities?
- What did you like/dislike about the photovoice process?
- How would you change this project if you were to participate again?
- Is there anything else you’d like to add?
### Appendix F

**Photography Prompts and Photographs, Captions, and Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Photography Prompt</th>
<th>Photographs Presented in Subsequent Round</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1     | How do students with disabilities (students that have IEPs) in your class express their learning? How do they “show what they know?” (researcher generated) | Kristen:  
I think this photo represents our student’s ability in the classroom. What you can see is two students sitting at a desk, possibly talking to each other. In my classroom, I think the most valuable piece of evidence I can gain from my students is when they talk and engage in conversation. These two students were not able to complete the writing assessment on a piece of paper like the rest of the class. These students stared at the blank piece of paper, minutes after minutes. One of these students began to get so frustrated that he kept saying “I can’t, I give up.” I had an idea. As soon as I allowed them to answer the question out loud, discussing with a partner, they could answer the writing prompt vividly, including details. Now could I not hold these students accountable, when in fact they were able to express to me what they know.  

Mira:  
I have found that the best way to teach students with disabilities is to use visuals. In this photo, I showed my students examples of different plants and animals. By using these visuals, they were able to understand the lesson better.  

Neil:  
The sharpener has become a symbol of the classroom. It is an invitation to take a tour, a journey into the minds of the students. The sharpener itself is a symbol of the students’ desire to learn. It is a reminder of the importance of learning and the need to always strive for improvement.  

Angelica:  
This photo shows the students in our classroom. They are all engaged in a discussion about the importance of writing.  

**Discussions Lead the Way**

**Do Now**

**P.S. I Tried**
| 1 | Open-ended: “Classroom Culture” in relation to student expression for students with disabilities (students that have IEPs) in inclusive classrooms. | Kristen: |

- When you look at this photo, you will see a red teddy bear in a classroom. This bear plays a big role in my classroom. This bear is something we call the “speaker ball”. In my classroom, we have daily circles or “meetings”. When students gather in the circle, this is the object that is passed around. Only the person who is holding it has the power to speak, or share. The bear will be passed around until every student has had an opportunity to share something out. This bear ultimately helps us facilitate community in our class.

Mira: |

- The idea that everyone has qualities about them that are unique and appreciated should be celebrated and acknowledged. Post-it notes are a random, unexpected way to express how we feel about one another. This act of kindness can hopefully increase classroom climate, student behavior, and teacher morale. The power of a handwritten note can be a starting point to promote positivity and togetherness in the classroom.
Neil:

This is Manny the mannequin. He is a permanent fixture in my classroom; a local resident that my students love to manipulate. He can take many forms: a conversation piece, a recipient for my thick-noodles, a bargaining chip, or a reminder that the path to understanding is not necessarily grounded in linear processing. Sometimes a bit of madness is needed to unlock genius. Or learning, of any kind. My students have an understanding of this as well; Manny is a medium for their expression as well. A chance to manipulate his form is sometimes all it takes to get a student engaged in the community or in their own learning. This photo is proof of that. Manny is diluting. But he is diluting because my students envisioned him doing so. And maybe, just to get one of my kids to learn for a day; it matters that an inanimate wooden figure does something silly. They know that they are also entitled to using him as a medium for their expression. Because, like Manny himself, their expression is a permanent fixture in our classroom.

Angelica:

A rich task is given to the class. Without much thought, four hands spring up with excitement. The rest of the students wait and stare as those students carry the conversation. But no one has been given the opportunity to process their thinking or given the chance to fine tune their ideas. This photo, a pair of glasses and a thought bubble symbolizes the I Notice and I Wonder protocol. Students need a place and space to think as well as time to let those ideas grow. This photo depicts all of those elements; students in my math class are asked to search for words that look familiar or a pattern they’ve observed in the data and write them down. Students also include what confuses them or questions about what they see. Everybody writes and shares their ideas with group members. This practice creates meaningful conversations and helps students realize that everyone can contribute to the class discussion. Students are given the space to notice and wonder.

Rosie:

This student walked in on this particular day feeling "some kind of way." As I engaged the class in the day’s lesson, he took a seat in the swivel chair and proceeded to write. Once the students were working independently I was able to read his messages and ask a few clarifying questions. The hard part was remaining neutral—it would be so easy to point out how smart he is. But student X always likes to work with him, etc—but that was not what he was looking for or what he needed. Instead I asked him, “What would you like to happen next?” Independently, he decided what he wanted to happen, made it happen, accepted what happened and changed from what happened (what happened will be what I discuss in the protocol).

Open ended: List of topics from participatory diagramming in relation to student expression for students with disabilities (students that
have IEPs) in inclusive classrooms.

- Student barriers
- Teacher barriers
- Self-expression
- Teacher-expression
- Opportunity and time
- Making learning meaningful
- Power and choice-options for voice
- Ability
- Accountability
- Differentiation of expression
- Intentional design

Kristen:

![Two is better than one](image)

In this photo you will see two students working on a math assignment. One of the students is a General Education student and one student has an IEP. In my opinion, I believe one of the biggest positives that come from inclusion, is the interactions between students. Not only do the students learn from me, the teacher, but, they also learn from their peers. In my classroom, I encourage students to work with each other and learn from one another. Many of the students in my classroom serve as role models to other students in the room. The inclusive setting has benefited all groups of students not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. This photo represents the beauty of and inclusive classroom.

Mira:

![Power & Voice](image)

Usually it is decided for students what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how long it will take. As teachers, it can be difficult to give or share control of our classrooms. Being open minded and flexible in including all students in the decision making of their learning can help them become more motivated and active participants. Giving students opportunities to move around and letting students disagree and criticize are some ways of helping them feel safe expressing their opinions and feelings.

Neil:

![The Best Seat in the House](image)

This is my chair. It didn’t always look this nice. It used to be an old, red stool. That chair didn’t fully descend and when it did actually sink, it did so in a random. Its pleather upholstery was peeling off. The yellow foam underneath looked defeated. Despite these facts, it was always the seat that my students wanted to sit in the most. But since it was my chair, the hallowed “Teacher’s Chair,” no one of my students were allowed to sit in it. There was one exception to this rule. Any student presenting a project was allowed to sit on the chair. Those projects were designed to allow students to choose the medium of their expression; not all required a presentation. I saw the number of students choosing to present swell. This number stayed consistent and even grew, when I got a new chair. Ultimately, this small incentive pushed my students to share their voice. It was in this chair that they finally felt comfortable sharing their ideas.
Angelica:

For this assignment, students worked in groups of three to recreate the United States map using scale factors. Each group had a small part of the map and in the end, the class put these scale drawings together like a puzzle to create one LARGE accurate representation of the United States. Students were initially nervous but expressed their excitement being able to collaborate with the entire class to create one big map. In this process, I saw how students struggled with their knowledge of ratios and proportions to increase the grid. With the guidance of the third member, the students were able to progress through their understanding and continue on to the next phase of the project. As I continued to monitor the group throughout the class period, I realized that as time passed the students moved closer and closer together. They learned in deeper to measure as accurately as possible. Gone were the concerns about misconceptions. All that remained was focus. They were truly impressed. The project had successfully incorporated teamwork, careful calculation, critical thinking, and problem solving. The blend of these elements gave each student a different entry to the problem at hand and provided me with multiple means of assessing their understanding. Not only were the students pushed closer, but I, myself, could now get the closest measure possible of their learning.

Rosie:

COMPETENCE: the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. 

COMPETENCE: The idea that a student’s ongoing self-reflection of whether he or she can, or has, succeeded in a task.

Students were asked to write themselves a positive message acknowledging how far they have come this year. I have juxtaposed this student’s response against his formal report card. His message reads: “My age is 9. My math score is 10 out of 10. I can read better than before. I couldn’t read before. And now I can read.”

He is a 3rd grade student. He finished K at a DRA level 2. He finished 1st grade at a DRA level 2. He finished 2nd grade at a DRA level 4. He has been a BR Leslie Level all year. So which shows his competence—the report card or the self-reflection?
### Theme: Teachers describe student expression as visible proof of student learning.

Throughout the study, teachers regularly describe the expression of students with disabilities as that which can be seen. They use sight-related language to describe how they (e.g. “seeing”) understand what students are expressing (e.g. “showing”). They regularly employ the use of imagery and metaphors to explain their understanding of expression. Teachers describe expression as a tangible end-product of learning for the purposes of assessing students and holding them accountable for their own learning. Teachers describe a dichotomy between what they view as internalized learning and expressed learning: just because they cannot “see” tangible evidence of student learning through expressive means, does not correlate with non-learning. However, teachers do describe the need to “see it” as a way of measuring student’s progress towards specific learning objectives and goals.

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<tr>
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<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sight-Related Language</td>
<td>“Seen in her work”</td>
<td>“I was seeing”</td>
<td>“I’ve noticed her progression and her learning have come a long way. She’s gained confidence in herself.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Represents our student’s ability”</td>
<td>“I saw”</td>
<td>“I think this photo represents our student’s ability in the classroom.”</td>
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<td>“Shows me she is understanding”</td>
<td>“I see/you see”</td>
<td>“This shows me that she is understanding the instruction that is taking place in the classroom.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Make that thinking more visible”</td>
<td>“This is seen in her work”</td>
<td>“There is a tracing in blue marker to make that thinking more visible.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>“Evidence”</td>
<td>“She internalized”</td>
<td>“There’s all those different times for them to show what they know” (Rosie: Pre-Rounds, Line 68)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Accountability”</td>
<td>“Show what they know”</td>
<td>I don’t get a true understanding of how much she really captured during the lesson or at the end of the chapter. (Mira: Round 1, Line 34)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Assessment”</td>
<td>“I don’t her a true understanding”</td>
<td>How could I not hold these students accountable, when in fact, they were able to express to me what they know.” (Kristen: Round 1, Lines 44-45)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“End-product”</td>
<td>“the most valuable piece of evidence”</td>
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<td>Internalized Learning vs. Expressed Learning</td>
<td>“two different things”</td>
<td>“Showing me there’s a misconception…so me retention”</td>
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<td>“genuine learning”</td>
<td>“Seems like different things to me”</td>
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<td>“what shows competence?”</td>
<td>“SWBAT – students will be able to”</td>
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<td>“SWBAT”</td>
<td>“Layers of understanding”</td>
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“A lot of these special ed students they show growth in the inclusion classroom. The data shows us that there growing.” (Kristen: Round 2, Line 40).

“And I’m just thinking of those students that um are struggling with that lesson, they showing me there’s a misconception, they will revert back to something that we’ve discussed in the past, so you’ll see them flipping back through the book so they’re showing me there is some retention in this experience that they’ve had.” (Angelica: Pre-Rounds, Lines 70-73)

“Express their learning and what they know - that seems like different things to me.” (Rosie: Pre-Rounds, Line 100)

“It is difficult to gauge if she really is understanding but through this writing I am sorta
“Learning in a given moment”
“How do I show what I know”
“Sorta able to get confirmation of her learning.”
“See that they were able to internalize it”
“Genuine learning”
“What shows competence?”

able to get confirmation of her learning.” (Mira: Round 1, Line 10)

“Unless it’s really genuine, in terms of like, Like when (unintelligible) they are able to express genuine learning, then it’s different, it’s easy to see and it’s easy to pull out, and it’s easy for them to express.” (Neil: Round 2, Line 31)

“The question I was left with is what shows a competence? Is it his report card or self-reflection?” (Rosie: Round 3, Line 47)

Imagery
“Symbol”
“Metaphor”
“Image”

“Another spin in the cycle”
“Can I use a symbol or a metaphor?”
“Pictures say a thousand words”
“A bridge of communication”
“Tree of expression”
“Culture is the dirt and social-emotional is the trunk”
“A metaphor for”
“As a symbol”
“It bears the power of speech”
“Used to symbolize”
“Different avenues to express”
“Symbolizes”
“Pen is mightier than the sword”
“The future is really his whether

“The United States, speaks to democracy, kids have choice. It’s a metaphor!” (Rosie: Round 1, Line 76)

“Pictures say a thousand words I guess!” (Kristen: Round 1, Line 77)

“I like the bear as a symbol. I was think that even though we don’t really think things through nothing is like unintentional. Right? So, like the fact that is a bear. It’s smiling, it’s friendly, it’s bright. It’s not like you’re going to lose the red bear in the room. And I like the idea that it bears the power of speech.” (Neil: Round 1, Lines 100-102)

“In this photo, a pair of glasses and a thought bubble symbolizes the I Notice and I Wonder protocol.” (Angelica: Round 2, Line 207)

“…the pen is mightier than the sword. So, thinking of her as I was going through I kind of left the pencil there. The future is really his whether he is going to write or draw or dance with it.” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 48-49)
Theme: Teachers describe student expression as situational. Teachers discuss contextual factors as playing a pivotal role in the expressive modalities students use. They describe a dichotomy between students’ expressive capabilities and the modalities that are sanctioned in academic classrooms. For example, students who have challenges expressing themselves in written language do not have the same opportunity for expression as those who do. Because oral and written communication are the primary modes for teaching and learning, teachers identify this as problematic for students with disabilities. The specific context of inclusive classrooms does seem to factor into how teachers describe expressive opportunities for students with disabilities in their classrooms and they typically do not make a distinction between expression for students with and without disabilities in their own expression. Rather, teachers in this study did regularly refer to the impact of an urban environment on student expression. In particular, participants describe nonverbal expression as a legitimate, but misunderstood and undervalued form of student expression in Newark schools.

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<td>Context</td>
<td>“Don’t do it here”</td>
<td>“For their age group”</td>
<td>“The student is in seventh grade and year after year of struggling to express themselves or being told that their expressions aren’t up to par or not being able to express themselves in a way that they feel, you know, is adequate for their age group.” (Neil: Round 1, Line 132-133)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Situational”</td>
<td>“Year after year of struggling to express themselves”</td>
<td>“My kids know that I hate dabbing and so they do it on purpose to make me cringe. Cause I hate it so much. So, he’s like do it in my class. And I’m like don’t do it in here.” (Angelica: Round 2, Line 167)</td>
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<td>“Different expectations for different environments”</td>
<td>“The students are very aware”</td>
<td>“There are different expectations for different environments.” (Kristen: Round 3, Line 32)</td>
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<td>“In middle school”</td>
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<td>“Don’t do it here”</td>
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<td>“Situational”</td>
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<td>“If they do it my room I’m like God bless you!”</td>
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<td>“It’s not just happening in school”</td>
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<td>“Something different at home”</td>
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| Inclusion | “Inclusion setting” | “Inclusive setting” | “I thought of we’re all different, we all can express it in different ways especially if we work in an inclusive setting.” (Mira: Pre-Rounds, Line 63) |
| “Especially because I’m in inclusion” | “So accustomed to teachers believing that this work was less than their best, the student expressed that this was, indeed, a full effort.” (Neil: Round 1, Line 118) |
| “So many different kinds of students coming together” | “I have so many students on varying levels that there is no way in one subject that one thing is going to fit all of them.” (Kristen: Round 2, Line 16) |
| “The ratio” | “So I can say from my perspective we did have students that had behavioral challenges that once they were in the inclusion setting with the teachers they were with no longer. So, again situational.” (Mira: Round 3, Lines 34-35) |

<p>| Urban environment | “I think at our school what happens a lot” |
| Other environments are different | “The fact that we’re in an urban environment, the nonverbal communication is specific to that type of learning.” (Neil: Round 2, Line 72) |
| | “An urban environment” |
| | “Growing up in that same environment” |
| | “just my experience growing up in that same environment, everything needs to be quick and clear. It can’t, you can’t go on rattling on about stuff, it has to be quick and clear, whether it’s language or a quick word, “you know what I’m saying.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 74-75) |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Language</th>
<th>“Body language”</th>
<th>“Door slamming”</th>
<th>“They’ll sit there and kind of look around in almost this kind of apologetic face, like sorry I can’t help right now.” (Angelica: Pre-Rounds Meeting, Lines 86-88)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Nonverbal”</td>
<td>“Walking out’”</td>
<td>“The body language is not the same. It’s just there and you don’t even realize how your sitting or the expression you have. You know those learned behaviors are so hard to be aware of and change.” (Rosie: Round 1, Lines 186-187)</td>
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<td>“Snapping”</td>
<td>“The fact that we’re in an urban environment, the nonverbal communication is specific to that type of learning. It’s just like, so I talk to my kids about this all the time. When they look at each other, it’s like in middle school, “Why are you looking at me? Why are you staring? What’s the problem?” And in a different environment, it’s very different, they’re like “that person is making me feel uncomfortable, why are they looking at me?” (Neil: Round 1, Lines 72-73)</td>
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<td>“Expressing their learning in the bodies”</td>
<td>“Nonverbal communication speaks volumes. Can say more and provide deeper insight than verbal communication.” (Mira: Round 3, Line 12)</td>
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<td>“sit, sink, hands crossed”</td>
<td>“They don’t see that in many other places”</td>
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<td>“They’ll sit there”</td>
<td>“The message from the district was just do it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“look around”</td>
<td>“They end of spending more time out of their classroom then in”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“apologetic face”</td>
<td>“Socioeconomic challenges”</td>
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<td>“I can just sit here”</td>
<td>“Socioeconomic challenges”</td>
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<td>“Needed to show it”</td>
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Theme: Teachers describe the development of students’ social-emotional literacy as foundational to academic expression.

Participants made a clear distinction between academic and non-academic learning. Nonacademic learning is described as social emotional literacy in terms of a student’s ability to self-regulate and work cooperatively with their peers. Teachers also believe that students’ behavior is a form of expression and there is a correlation between student behavior and social-emotional literacy. Teachers assert that the more social-emotionally literate a student is, the more academically literate he or she will be. Thus, they claim the fostering of positive interpersonal relationships imperative to increased academic expression. Teachers view the limited time for teaching social-emotional literacy as problematic and a barrier to academic expression, describing the tension they feel as they try to balance their professional duties and appropriately attend to students’ social-emotional needs.

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<td></td>
<td>“When they look at each other”</td>
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<td>“Looking at me”</td>
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<td>“Staring at me”</td>
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<td>“Show me how they feel about something through their body”</td>
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<td>“Trying to tell me something but they weren’t speaking”</td>
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<td>“Sitting there”</td>
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<td>“Wouldn’t talk to me”</td>
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<td>“Kicking his desk”</td>
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<td>“Huffing and puffing”</td>
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<td>“He didn’t tell me”</td>
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<td>“Slamming the chrome book”</td>
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<td>“Wouldn’t tell us”</td>
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<td>“Wouldn’t participate”</td>
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<td>“Wouldn’t even sit”</td>
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<td>“Standing in the corner of the room”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Shaking his head”</td>
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Participants made a clear distinction between academic and non-academic learning. Nonacademic learning is described as social emotional literacy in terms of a student’s ability to self-regulate and work cooperatively with their peers. Teachers also believe that students’ behavior is a form of expression and there is a correlation between student behavior and social-emotional literacy. Teachers assert that the more social-emotionally literate a student is, the more academically literate he or she will be. Thus, they claim the fostering of positive interpersonal relationships imperative to increased academic expression. Teachers view the limited time for teaching social-emotional literacy as problematic and a barrier to academic expression, describing the tension they feel as they try to balance their professional duties and appropriately attend to students’ social-emotional needs.
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<th>“School is not somewhere they succeed”</th>
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<td>“Can a student function out in the real world without that social-emotional piece”</td>
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<td>“Behavior”</td>
<td>“Teaching students how to manage their frustration”</td>
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<td>“A whole other layer of community building”</td>
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<td>“Feel important”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Students who struggle emotionally”</td>
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<td>“We’ll talk about the feelings”</td>
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| “Social-emotional part of it” |
| “Teaching students how to manage their frustration” |
| “A whole other layer of community building” |
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| “Behavior is learned” |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Literacy vs. Social-emotional Literacy</th>
<th>“Beyond academics”</th>
<th>“That’s not the lesson”</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>“Academic challenges”</td>
<td>“That’s not learning”</td>
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<td>“Behavioral challenges”</td>
<td>“It’s beyond academics”</td>
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<td>“Time I use to build community”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Academic time is lost”</td>
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</table>

| “The reality of it is can a student function out in the real world without that social-emotional piece. No, you could be a genius, but if you don’t know how to deal with your emotions, manage your emotions, be respectful, be responsible.” (Neil: Round 1, Line 182) |
| “To feel important, to feel like they belong and get these positive messages is very powerful.” (Rosie: Round 2, Lines 228-230) |
| “Behavior is learned just like academics are learned.” (Mira: Round 3, Line 29) |
| “I think it keeps going back to this socio-emotional component. The soil. You know in order to build confidence we have to address those things. The models, the peers, the reciprocity that it all nurtures that soil to build the confidence that can lead to expression.” (Mira: Round 3, Lines 45-46). |

| “sometimes my students express that they don’t know how to control their emotion, but that’s not learning” (Neil: Pre-Rounds Meeting, Line 52) |
| “The classroom culture piece is something to do you represent building that amongst all learners so the rest can exist.” (Rosie: Round 1, Line 281) |
| “Time I use to grow understanding versus time I use to grow community.” (Neil: Round 2, Line 20) |
| “Behavior challenges have a result of academic challenges. If were only focusing on the academic, but we’re not back tracking to address behavior, teach behavior, correct behavior… not correct, but
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Academic Learning</th>
<th>“Getting in the way”</th>
<th>“Behaviors pop-up”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The time to communicate”</td>
<td>“Behavior challenges have a result of academic challenges”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Barriers”</td>
<td>“Building that amongst all learners so the rest can exist”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

you know fix that then that’s kind of the domino that pushes” (Mira: Round 3, Lines 30-32)

“I can see a student express I’m having trouble containing this right now. They’re expressing, “I know this.” But that’s not like learning. That’s not the lesson. That’s not what we’re doing. But that’s getting in the way of all those things.” (Neil: Pre-Rounds Meeting, Lines 54-57)

“I think the frustration with many of my students is that they don’t really have a moment to speak to those students who struggle emotionally. So they create an image of them and the other student doesn’t have the time or the space to defend their emotions and so there is a barrier. (Angelica: Round 1, Lines 183-184)

“That is what the student has learned - to express it in their body and to express their frustration and kind of apprehension at the thought of having to do something to show learning.” (Neil: Round 1, Line 211)

“These students haven’t been given the time or space to express their emotions in a constructive way.” (Angelica: Round 2, Line 3)

“When the academics become challenging for some the behaviors pop-up and then time is spent there. For others, the behaviors are not allowing them to settle into their day to receive the academics.” (Rosie: Round 3, Line 30)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Interpersonal Relationships</th>
<th>“Positive, strong relationships”</th>
<th>“The student-teacher relationship”</th>
<th>“If she’s that comfortable to share that entry with me and express her thoughts it shows me that we have a positive, strong relationship that we’ve built.” (Mira: Round 1, Lines 16-17)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Bridges of communication”</td>
<td>“Positive, strong relationship we’ve built”</td>
<td>“Rooted in classroom culture”</td>
<td>“Social emotional considerations are rooted in classroom culture allows communication, student effort, motivation as well as student expression to flourish.” (Neil: Round 1, Line 262)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Classroom Culture”</td>
<td>“Brings a connection to you and her”</td>
<td>“Communication is key to everything”</td>
<td>“But I think sort of the openness to have the conversations, to feel comfortable and you know ask questions and sort of express yourself and get it - out I think that like that sort of cultivated and helped create that.” (Mira: Round 2, Line 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Students Build Relationships”</td>
<td>“That’s evidence of a great relationship”</td>
<td>“It’s a great relationship”</td>
<td>“I think the reason I have relationships with them is because I allow for their expression. I allow them to say what their thinking in a way that I’m not going to judge them” (Neil: Round 2, Lines 65-66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Create a bridge of communication”</td>
<td>“It goes back to relationships”</td>
<td>“I will often times see a student struggling with expression related to academic prompt, writing, or math assignment but maybe they are partnered up with a very strong student. They will have an interaction and it will build so much confidence because they’ll work with that student who has really got it. Then they’ll take that and be the first one to raise their hand and because they had the opportunity to kind of listen. They get to work together and then that student who was distressed and struggling is excited to express and share the answer.” (Kristen: Round 3, Lines 39-43)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Openness to have conversations”</td>
<td>“They form these relationships”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They were kind of coming together”</td>
<td>“Communication is key to everything”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Were able to say something positive and work with that student”</td>
<td>“It’s a great relationship”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We’re all in a room together, right”</td>
<td>“It goes back to relationships”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I allow for their expression”</td>
<td>“They form these relationships”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Just that bargaining chip”</td>
<td>“Openness to have conversations”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Goes a long way in building the culture and relationships in the classroom.”</td>
<td>“Brings a connection to you and her”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“A starting point to promote positivity and togetherness in the classroom.”

“Students build relationships”

“They will have an interaction and it will build so much confidence”

“The fact that he or she shared the noted with you also speaks to the relationship”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension</th>
<th>“teacher expectations vs. student expectations”</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Opportunities vs. barriers”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Pressure”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Battle between the two”</td>
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</table>

“Why would I not find that a valid piece”

“Teacher expectations versus student expectations”

“With the pressure to keep up with pacing”

“It’s challenging”

“It’s exhausting”

“It just blew up”

“Sometimes it works for them, but it’s not feasible for me to do this every day”

“An opportunity for them is a barrier for us”

“That tension is more just moving down the chain”

“There is definitely that tension”

“That grading system also creates some tension between some students”

“It comes down to teacher expectations versus student expectations. And I feel like many times we get the work and we’re sort of like this is not like exactly what I asked or what I was expecting but going back to what Angelica said, it’s the best this student could do and I think that the note at the bottom is telling of her expectations - a smiley face tells you, like she said, she’s proud of her work, that was what she could do.” (Mira: Round 1, Lines 149-151)

“I think it is a challenge because sometimes with the pressure to keep up with pacing or to keep up with deadlines…You just kind of get into that mode of you have to do what you have to do. (Rosie: Round 2, Line 10)

“With that pressure that’s coming on us, how are they learning, show me what they’re learning so we go to the kids show me what you’re learning because they’re asking me what you’re learning, so it’s more like that tension is more just moving down the chain and that’s where it ends up, is between us and the students” (Neil: Round 2, Lines 29-30)

“When I think about day to day experiences sometimes you’re thinking about pacing and this and that. And you have to get the assessment and move on. You want to just keep moving, but how do we expect students especially students with disabilities who have trouble working at that pace.” (Kristen: Round 3, Lines 5-9)
“As teachers sometimes we fight, and were like you need to do this, you need to do that.”

“My instincts as an educator versus my responsibilities as a teacher”

“Is what we expect of students actually what they can express?”

“You want to just keep moving”

“I kind of have the battle between the two”

“That pressure part of it”

“I have to get to this and if I don’t”

“Felt the pressure of having things done”

“How do we evaluate these kids to be competent?”

“See the grades that have to be given”

“He won’t pass PARRC”

**Theme:** Teachers describe the importance of providing students expressive choices to students. Participants view “self-expression” as different from “expression.” “Self-expression” is described as how a student chooses to express themselves as opposed to having the teachers choose for them. Teachers also refer to self-expression as providing “multiple means” for student expression. Participants say that self-expression (i.e. “choice” and “multiple means”) increase access to expressive meaning-making. Participants see self-expression as giving “voice” to students with disabilities because it gives them more access to academic learning. In turn, teachers describe expressive access as fostering students’ ability to advocate for themselves.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression vs.</td>
<td>“Expression”</td>
<td>“Open ended way for them to self-express”</td>
<td>“I truly enjoy seeing that it was sort of an open-ended way for them to self-express but ultimately it was their choice so I think it just brought to my</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>“Self-expression”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“Brought to my mind student choice when thinking of self-expression.”

“I think self-expression to me, is sort of your choice, how you choose to express, self-express, whereas expression might be sort of like, when someone asks you to express yourself, whether it be in a certain format or in a certain way, so that’s the difference to me.” (Mira: Round 2, Line 23)

“The idea of self-expression and just expression stood out to me.” (Kristen: Round 2, Line 16).

“I think looking at the image it’s sort of like if you were to tell them I want you to put Manny to dab they can express that, but is it their self-expression? Not really because it didn’t come from them.” (Angelica: Round 2, Line 165-166)

“I’m just thinking how self-expression can shed light. It can give you insight. How would we have known that’s the way he is feeling or that’s him showing growth because obviously in the beginning he is saying he didn’t read very well and now…so, you can visibly see how self-expression can shed insight into something we would have never known about that student.” (Rosie: Round 3, Line 51-53).
“Different forms, different ways”
“Options for students”
“Expression has a structure”
“Open-ended”
“Multiple means of expression”

“Entry points”
Students express themselves in different forms, in different ways.”
“The struggle for them is getting the thoughts onto the paper”
“It shouldn’t really matter how they get there”
“An option for students”
“Different ways to express their learning”
“You were able to find a way”
“Taking a picture was such a relief”
“Having to write down what I wanted to capture was so difficult”
“A medium for their expression as well”
“Expression has a structure to it”
“They all expressed it in writing”
“How they will express themselves”
“Sets up the expectation that you have to write”
“Where you start on the field is a little bit different”
“Express herself in the way that she feels the most

“They sat there staring at this piece of paper, the lines...the boy particularly got so frustrated that he was like punching the paper with a pen, a pencil and he was saying ‘I can tell you things,’ and he can whether it be in a small group or one-to-one, but it, the struggle for them is getting the thoughts onto the paper, that’s kind of like the barrier.” (Kristen: Round 1, Lines 46-47)

“I wonder if the post it note sets up the expectation that you have to write. I don’t know if that’s the kind of culture we are building in the classroom. You have a post it, you write it, and you post it on to a sheet. Where anytime I’ve given my students scrap paper if they’re lines on there - it’s very structured, but when I give them a piece of paper that’s blank I’ll start seeing drawings and notes and it’s kind of all over the place but it shows their thinking as oppose to something like this. I find that very interesting.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 229-232)

“This is Manny the mannequin. He is a permanent fixture in my classroom; a local resident that my students love to manipulate. He can take many forms: a conversation piece, a recipient for my think-alouds, a bargaining chip, or a reminder that the path to understanding is not necessarily grounded in linear processing. Sometimes a bit of madness is needed to unlock genius. Or learning, of any kind. My students have an understanding of this as well; Manny is a medium for their expression as well. A chance to manipulate his form is sometimes all it takes to get a student engaged in the community or in their own learning.” (Neil: Round 2, Lines 34-40)

“These dances they were doing and every single song that came on he was doing move for move. He’s a student with an Individualized Education Plan and a student who is academically failing, socio-economic, attendance is terrible. All these things, but he can create. I saw him in that moment and I snapped that picture, but how many opportunities in a day is he given the opportunity to express himself that way?” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 54-59)
comfortable”

“Allowed them to answer the question out loud”

“An option for students struggling to write”

“How they show what they’ve learned is up to us”

“Open-ended way for them to self-express”

“Creative ways for students to express”

“Another scaffold”

“Another entry into the task”

“Multiple means of expression”

“A medium for their expression”

“He can take many forms”

“A chance to manipulate his form”

“Just one structured way everyone is doing it”

“Choices to express”

“It can be anything, but just so they have something to say and contribute”

“There’s different forms of it too”

“Differentiation in expression.”

“When students have choice in their
expression, a lot more can happen.”
“When you give him that opportunity”
“How many opportunities in a day is he given”
“If you don’t give them the opportunity to express how are they going to.”

“Student voice and choice”
“Access to be expressive”
“Choice leads to voice”

“I thought student voice and choice really stood out to me, cause you’re giving them, they’re choosing the image and they’re expressing themselves within that image. And that I thought that gave them access to be able to be expressive about what they've learned and a lot if times I think when you say, you know, write this or do this this way, it feels constricting and so having that access and feeling as a student that your able to express in any which way you want. It’s really powerful.” (Neil: Round 1, Lines 98-101)

I think even the caption that you gave it, speaker power. Spoke a lot because power comes from speaking and how do we help all students find their voice so that they find their way and they’re not afraid to share their thoughts and feelings or to be taken advantage of. As hard as it is, it’s so important for all of them to have their voice. So, I think…and then creating opportunities for everyone to share in that power is powerful. (Rosie: Round 2, Lines 104-106)

“We have choices and using the technology that is within the four walls of this building to go beyond the classroom. That’s when they have tools that can assist them. Like speech to text and images and all sorts of things that can remove that fear from I have to sit here with a blank piece of paper and come up with four paragraphs.” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 22-23)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>“Choice, voice, and power”</th>
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<td>“Taking charge”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Free individuals”</td>
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<td>“Speaker power”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Who has speaker power”</td>
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<td>“I have speaker power if I am holding it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Creating opportunities for everyone to share in that power”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Voice leads to power”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Who has power and who has voice”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Catch and release of power in order to foster expression.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There has to be some kind of shared power”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Power leads to expression”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Take charge and self-reflect”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Taking charge of their own learning”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Allowing them to fix it”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“You can take charge too”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“When people feel like their power has to be the only power is when you stop seeing some of that expression.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Power really becomes that mindset”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I wanna let you know that I struggle, but I’m not giving up”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“Choice, voice, and power”

“Taking charge”

“Free individuals”

“Student agency”

She wanted to communicate that to you. I wanna let you know that I know I struggle, but I’m not giving up” (Neil: Round 1, Line 30)

“Maybe choice leads to voice and voice leads to power.” (Rosie: Round 2, Line 236)

I really appreciated the fact that you allowed this child to take charge and self-reflect. I think that was one of the most powerful things. I was getting goosebumps as you were saying those things. Because he knows he’s contributing and he knows that he wants to contribute more, but he doesn’t know how to and he came to you for assistance, and although he didn’t say it verbally, he wrote it down and you picked up on it. I think that’s something that needs to happen more often. Letting the children take charge of their own learning and allowing them to fix it. That we don’t always have to fix the challenges that are going in our community. You can take charge too. That was really powerful.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 194-198)

We’ve spoken before about control and who has power and who has voice. So, in one picture I feel the student is sort of being held back not free to express themselves. Whereas the other picture shows a level of comfort, a level of belonging where they feel they are free to express their opinion, ideas, feelings, thoughts. (Mira: Round 3, Lines 59-60)
“Seeing our students as free individuals”
“Free to express themselves in varied ways”
“Free to break expectations set on them”
“Let me get through this and whatever I give you, it’s good.”
“I’ll let you know I tried at the end”
“P.S. I tried”
“They molded it that way”
“It’s representative of them”
“We want to step in”
“It’s hard to let go”
“Student agency”
“What am I doing in my practice to empower them?”
“The future is really his”
“Those five minutes”

**Theme: Teachers describe the importance of time in increasing student expression.** They define a need for time within the school day and space within the academic curriculum in order for students with disabilities to express themselves in ways they feel comfortable. Teachers describe the use of regular classroom structures that foster “self-expression.” Teachers assert that these structures serve to increase students’ comfort level by providing multiple opportunities and means for expression and therefore increase expressive opportunities.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>“Takes time”</td>
<td>They don’t really have a moment”</td>
<td>It really gave me the opportunity to see my kids in a long-term thing, just to see what they do when given something and time” (Neil: Round 1, Lines 120-121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Don’t have the time”</td>
<td>“Student doesn’t have the time”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Need time”</td>
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</table>
“Entitled to time”

“Your taking up my time”
“Time to have the conversations”
“Was that during a morning period or morning block of time?”
“When we found time period!”
“We don’t have that much time with them”
“I try every day”
“They need this time”
“The pacing”
“We have to get through this”
“Just giving it a moment”
“A moment to process”
“A moment to talk”
“We should allow that time”
“Doesn’t have to take up the entire time”
“Takes five minutes of my lesson”
“They are just rushing”
“Carve out those five minutes”
“In the chaos of everything else that has to be done on time.”
“It can be so hard to do that”

“I think we need to remember that just giving it a moment to write, a moment to process, and them a moment to talk about it before diving in is just as important as educators that we should allow that time and it doesn’t have to take up the entire time. This protocol usually takes five minutes of my lesson and it’s meaningful.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 211-213)

“Even if we could just carve out those five powerful minutes to allow for expression to happen in the chaos of everything else that has to be done on time. It can be so hard to do that.” (Rosie: Round 2, Lines 216-218)

“I think it connects to time also. So, giving them time and not rushing them through anything. Not rushing them to participate. Sort of waiting for them to feel comfortable. Once you allow for that time to sort of happen. Then I feel they feel respected, empowered, and then you see them expressing themselves more.” (Mira: Round 3, Lines 2-4)

“Yeah, I feel like time is always the enemy. Yeah, I feel like you are always watching the clock and checking things. (Rosie: Round 3, Line 14)
“They’re entitled to this space and time”
“Are entitled to this time”
“You need to take a moment”
“A moment to speak”
“Having an actual moment”
“Having a moment”
“Giving students time and space to express”
“Have students spend more time”
“it connects to time also”
“Giving them time and not rushing them”
“Yes, not rushing them to participate”
“Waiting for them to feel comfortable”
“When you allow for that time”
“Pushing that is not going to help”
“When they feel rushed”
“When they feel the pressure’s on me.”
“Time to let those ideas grow”
“Don’t want to hold anyone back”
| Space | “Classroom culture”  
|       | “Environment”  
|       | “Space”  
|       | “In the moment” | “Doesn’t have the time or the space”  
|       |                 | “Created this culture and allowed it to develop”  
|       |                 | “You didn’t force it”  
|       |                 | “The center of the entire room”  
|       |                 | “In that moment”  
|       |                 | “In the room”  
|       |                 | “In the middle of the room”  
|       |                 | “Leaving the environment”  
|       |                 | “A permanent fixture in my classroom”  
|       |                 | “Always changing in the room”  
|       |                 | “Once it entered the room”  
|       |                 | “From my classroom to our classroom”  
|       |                 | “It’s in the room”  
|       |                 | “No longer just mine”  
|       |                 | “It’s ours”  
|       |                 | “In the present it’s always going to be in a different form”  
|       |                 | “The environment”  

| “Don’t want to push those other students forward”  
| “Time’s always the enemy”  
| “Always watching the clock”  
| “It takes time”  
| “Takes time” | “This child is showing that he can express himself in the middle of the room that it would not make him comfortable leaving the environment. That he needs to be surrounded by his peers at this moment. The students have also learned that they need to stop what they’re doing and give it that moment.” (Angelica: Round 1, Lines 161-162)  
| | “When you introduced the bear it didn’t quite work, but you created this culture and allowed it to develop. You didn’t force it and say well it’s not working I’m going to remove it now.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 99-100)  
| | I think that expression and who gets to express is always changing in the room. It’s not just about me in the room. It started off about something I thought about. I was like, oh I like this! But once it entered that room it went from…even how I started that paragraph. It went from my classroom to our classroom. Once it’s in the room. It’s no longer just mine. Or any one of us. It’s ours. So, in the present it always going to be a different form. (Neil: Round 2, Lines 156-159)  
| | “Giving students opportunities to move around and letting students disagree and criticize are some ways of helping them feel safe expressing their opinions and feelings.” (Mira: Round 3, Line 64).
“The class was set up for student’s to be able to move”
“rather than walk out of the room”
“Went and found that quiet space”
“Entitled to that space”
“Share it around the room”
“A casual setting”
“Circle of power and respect”
“Not used to having that space”
“Giving them a platform”
“A space for it”
“Need a place and space to think”
“Giving students time and space”
“A level of belonging”
“Opportunities to move around”
“Classroom culture”

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<th>“Plays a big role in my classroom”</th>
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<td>“Daily Meetings”</td>
<td>“Daily circles or meetings”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Protocols”</td>
<td>“This is the object to be passed around”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Structures”</td>
<td>“Only the person holding it has the power to speak”</td>
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<td>“Until every student has had an opportunity”</td>
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</table>

“This bear plays a big role in my classroom. This bear is something we call the “speaker ball”. In my classroom, we have daily circles or “meetings” When students gather in the circle; this is the object that is passed around. Only the person who is holding it has the power to speak, or share. The bear will be passed around until every student has had an opportunity to share something out.”

(Kristen: Round 1, Line 82-84)

“So, when I asked him “how do you want to leave this”? He wanted to run a meeting. And so, I told him to go home and think about it. And he asked me the next day, can I have that meeting today?”

(Rosie: Round 2, Lines 183-184)
The students are given the opportunity on a daily basis to have the time not only to think, but discuss it and conversations with students in their small groups before going into the big class group discussion.” (Angelica: Round 2, Line 210)

“So, I’ve done something that is like the circle of power and respect and we have very specific stems that we use. Every single time we’ve done it they always want to do it again. That same question. Like when are we going to that again? Because they’re not used to having that space where they can be kind and listen to each other. It’s not like a structure that they have all the time. So, given them a platform you know where kindness is a choice. It’s okay to make that choice. I think it’s important to remind them that’s possible and to give them the structure and the space for it.” (Neil: Round 2, Lines 226-229)

“The bear share is providing opportunities” (Mira: Round 3, Line 73)

“We do daily”
“Turn and talk on a daily basis”
“Constantly engaging in conversation”
“That protocol is something there used to”
“A circle or like a morning meeting”
“This system”
“Every time I do a circle”
“I use it for everything”
“It’s become a staple”
“We can build in those little things”
“Every day”
“Something we created as a group”
“The I Notice and I Wonder protocol”
“This practice creates and helps”
“Knowing how to start with ‘I agree with’ or ‘I disagree’”
“Blank I haven’t heard from you what do you think?”
“Sentence starters”
“Modeling”
“Permanent fixture”
“Can take many forms”
| Comfort | “Comfortable” | “Discomfort” | “Let students express themselves in whatever ways they feel comfortable and whatever forms they feel comfortable because their needs are different and they’re all different.” (Mira: Round 1, Line 17-18)

“It’s my biggest struggle and it’s my biggest insecurity. I talk with Neil every day about this insecurity. It’s just something I’ve struggled with my entire life. I just did not have the functioning in the household that I needed to cultivate that…I don’t know, I just have difficulty saying what I want to say and so I understand that when my kids are coming into the classroom and they’re struggling to get it out and I’m like, let’s find a different way and it just relieves this, this anxiety, cause I have it and I know it.” (Angelica: Round 2, Lines 60-63)

“It’s like breaking that discomfort because I know this is an option and I would like to do it, but if it’s going to presented next to someone who doesn’t have that and that usually is the norm then I don’t want to do that.” (Rosie: Round 3, Lines 47-48) | “The opportunity on a daily basis”
“Are providing opportunities”
“Wanted to run a meeting”
“Can I have that meeting today”
“Lead the meeting”
“Providing them with the tools”
“In the meeting”
“Needs that structure again”
“Is something we do
“Circle of power and respect”
“Specific stems”
“Structures”
“Those things are built by us and chosen by design”
“She feels comfortable”
“Is comfortable to her”
“She’s that comfortable”
“Ways they feel comfortable”
“Feels most comfortable”
“Feels”
“Didn’t feel comfortable”
“Felt comfortable to have a discussion”
“Feel very comfortable to do it” | | |
“To feel comfortable”
“My biggest struggle”
“My biggest insecurity”
“I just have difficulty saying what I want to say”
“They’re struggling”
“This anxiety”
“Friendly”
“Their comfortability”
“Breaking that discomfort”
“The anxiety”
“Frustration for like five minutes”
“A level of comfort”
“Confidence”

**Theme: Teachers describe student expression in multimodal ways that are both memetic and constructive.** Throughout the study, teachers were given regular opportunities to express their thinking using different modalities. Teachers most often chose to express themselves in familiar forms of expression—oral and written language—despite the presence of other semiotic resources (e.g., technology, art supplies). They rarely used a single mode of expression and almost always made multimodal ensembles, utilizing more than one mode. Their expressive outputs can be interpreted as falling into one of two categories: representational and metaphorical. Most often, teacher’s expression sought to reproduce, capture, or copy that which they wanted to represent (i.e., a photograph of student work or a detailed description of an event). Sometimes teacher constructed meaning, using symbolic or metaphorical connections between objects or concepts and their representation (i.e., anagram, using props in photographs). These expressive choices have meaning for how the maker and the viewer interpret them and contributed to the group’s overall meaning-making about the expression of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

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<td>Teachers</td>
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“Many Options” (Kristen, Round 1)
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3) “Huddle Up” (Angelica, Round 3)
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Reflections (All, Round 1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Personal Communication”</strong> (Mira, Round 1)</td>
<td><strong>This photo represents what I think student expression looks like. It’s a known fact that students are diverse learners, and that not every child is going to have the ability to learn in the same way. However, a teacher has the ability to make sure that the students can express their understandings in their own unique ways. This photo shows an Exit Ticket based on a chapter of the novel, Peter Pan. As you can see, students can express what they know through three different types of questions. Multiple Choice, Writing, or an Illustration. Students have the choice. Ultimately, here students are given options.</strong> – “Many Options” Written Description (Kristen, Round 1)</td>
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<td>Participant Reflections</td>
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| Metaphorical Expression - Written | Metaphor Written Description | 3) “Huddle Up” (Angelica, Round 3)  
Participant Reflections (Mira, Round 3)  
Participant Reflection (Mira, Angelica, Kristen, Post-Rounds) | "DO NOW" (Mira, Round 1)  
“A Sharpened Excuse” (Neil, Round 1)  
“The Present Form” (Neil, Round 2)  
Participant Reflection (Rosie, Post-Rounds) | **Decipher and identify common errors.**  
**Observe for understanding.**  
**N o more than ten minutes.**  
**O ver time, reinforce a wide array of skills across subject areas.**  
**W ritten product to hold students accountable and make learning engaging.**  
(Mira, Round 1) |
Appendix H

“Critical Moments” Transcripts

Critical Moment One: “Who has power and who has voice” (Round 3 Focus Group – June 7, 2018).

Mira: Okay. Alright, so in this picture what you see here is the same student. In one of the portraits her hands are covering her face and I related this back to…well I’ll explain that. In one picture, she’s covering her face with both of her hands so you can’t really see much. The other picture is the same student facing the board raising their hand. So, I related these two pictures. They reminded me of one of our topics which was power and voice. And what’s really happening for me… I wanted to show the contrast. We’ve spoken before about control and who has power and who has voice. So, in one picture I feel the student is sort of being held back not free to express themselves, whereas the other picture shows self-expression, a level of comfort and freedom of expression. A level of belonging where they feel they are free to express their opinion, ideas, feelings, thoughts. And this relates to our inquiry. My caption read: “Power & Voice: Usually it is decided for students what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how long it will take. As teachers, it can be difficult to give or share control of our classrooms. Being open minded and flexible in including all students in the decision making of their learning can help them become more motivated and active participants. Giving students opportunities to move around and letting students disagree and criticize are some ways of helping them feel safe expressing their opinions and feelings.” Again, I feel this related
back to our inquiry and I relate it back to my own experience in allowing those
students the opportunity to self-express. There’s times during the day when I give
them the choice. I say I was thinking about doing this this way, but what do you
think? And they sometimes come up with ideas that I didn’t think of, but in that
moment, it somehow works and I go with it. A lot of times we think the students are
checked out, or their really not on task or focused, but when we allow them to self-
express in different ways we see that the in fact are. It may not look how we expect
it to look or how it looks for other students. It ties back to having an open mind and
although I might have an idea for that day that doesn’t necessarily mean that’s what
it’s going to be. There has to be some flexibility. This strength exists and it relates
to our practice. Again, I relate it back to myself. For me I have seen the benefits of
what happens when you allow students to have the power. It’s not easy. I wrote in
the beginning it’s difficult because you have to trust the process and you don’t
always know the outcome. And again, sometimes the outcome may not be what you
desire. For me I take it as a learning experience and maybe next time I can do it this
way or maybe next time I’ll try this other method. The image educates us because it
shows you two ends of the spectrum. What can happen when we give the students
power and voice. Their comfortable and free to express and what can happen when
we don’t. What can I and we do about it? I just think we need to be more open-
minded.

Francesca: So, just in terms of your picture. I think it was lovely how you created
the symbol. It’s a symbolic of power, but specifically around giving voice through
choice. One of the quotes from last time… “Maybe choice leads to voice and voice
leads to power.” So, my big question is, because you said it’s not easy, right, what pedagogically do we need to do in order to give students more choice? Like what support and strategies do you have to had that will actually enable choice to be a conduit for expression?

Mira: In my classroom, I think it’s been the behavior expectations that I created. There has to be this underlying soil. The classroom culture. It has to be respect. Students have to feel safe. I think when all that lines up and it’s practiced and nourished over time then you see the power sort of over to them. They have the voice, but I definitely think it takes time. It takes time.

Kristen: I even wrote for that quote, “letting go of the control and having the ability for students to build more opportunity.” If you don’t give them the opportunity. Opportunity came up a lot in my mind while she was talking. If you don’t give them the opportunity to self-express how are they going to?

Mira: I think you need to know your students and that takes time. Like I don’t think at the beginning it can become chaotic if you give all the power. You get to a point of shared power after you know who they are. After you know their learning styles. So, I think you have to know who your students are and your class as a whole.

Rosie: Something I took away as you were talking is you don’t use the power in a way that means absolute control.

Mira: Yeah. Power is the ability to open yourself up and say that we’re all going to learn here and make everybody feel like they are part of it. When you own it you are more willing to participate, and protect it and keep it safe, and keep it going. So that power really becomes that mindset of saying “you know what guys, why don’t
you help me make this decision today because I don’t have to make every decision every minute.”

Rosie: And when we allow student to self-express, we give them a share in that power.

Critical Moment Two: “They’re entitled to that space and time” (Round 2 Focus Group – May 17, 2018).

Angelica: What is seen here is a clock that is used to symbolize the time needed to process notices and wonders. I know a lot of times with math it can be things they can relate to. They can draw it out. They can write a number sentence. It can be anything, but just so they have something to say and contribute to the classroom has created such a positive dynamic. The kids feel comfortable discussing the math and even if it’s like. “I notice that the word area is in there. Good. Can anyone add to that?” So that’s really what’s happening here is that the students are given the opportunity on a daily basis to have the time not only to think, but discuss it and conversations with students in their small groups before going into the big class group discussion. How does this relate to our inquiry? Just as expressing in the past, this is something I have some personal connections too. I need the time to think. I need the time to process. I mean there are people who are just gifted. You draw, but I need time. It took me hours to think about this, but I wanted it to be perfect. The kids are the same way. There is a form of pride when they express certain things. They want to make sure it’s the right thing. Why does this situation or concern exist? Like I said it’s just important to give them the space and the opportunity to be a part of the community as opposed to just waiting for some
people to take charge. How does this image educate us? The time doesn’t necessarily have to mean that it’s interrupting the lesson. I think we need to remember that just giving it a moment to write, a moment to process, and then a moment to talk about it before diving in is just as important as educators that we should allow that time and it doesn’t have to take up the entire time. This protocol usually takes five minutes of my lesson and it’s meaningful. And what can we do about it? I think is just addressing it ad making sure we allow it to occur.

Francesca: So, I think for me the main thing I took away from this picture is what you were saying was instead we always say all voices in, but it’s like all eyes in. So, and that equals all voices in. So, there’s this relationship between given all students time to process and formulate ideas, talk about ideas prior to a larger discussion is going to give them more opportunities to express then if you just initially go to those first kids that have an idea like that.

Angelica: And even those students don’t have a complete understanding. They’re so used to thinking, “I’m just going to quickly jump into it.” It’s differentiated. It helps all students in the classroom. Not just the students that struggle with it.

Kristen: I have a similar situation in my class. I have the same two students who…I don’t even finish the question or the prompt and I feel like it’s me, me, me, me. And you’re right. Sometimes they are just rushing and if we always just call on those students for correct responses it doesn’t give any of the other students. Not only to get their thinking together, but if they are always hearing correct responses how do we build any kind of learning experiences between students. The rich task is something we do too for the math and I think that I’ve known in
inclusion it does build upon each other. Maybe that eager student will start off, but
then the other students will catch on or they may relate to a small part. Even if they
just make one comment it leads to another student it kind of builds that learning
experience.

Angelica: I’ll notice that some students will connect whatever that child said-

Kristen: -Yeah, that’s what I wrote. Making connections.

Angelica: -Yeah, they’ll make a connection and then sometimes within their small
cconversations that child that struggled in the beginning is now that child that raises
their hand.

Kristen: Now, they feel confident to bring it out to the whole group.

Rosie: For me that clock is what really stood out. Just how everything is time.

From the minute you wake up you have to wake up on time. You know, if I can’t
find parking I’m not going to be on time. Time to get to lunch, everything. But
then you said it just takes five minutes. Even if we could just carve out those five
powerful minutes to allow for expression to happen in the chaos of everything else
that has to be done on time. It can be so hard to do that.

Neil: That’s what I wrote. They’re entitled to that space and time. So that you can
think that you are entitled to this time. Another thing is it values those initial steps.
Those students that raise their hand they think they have an idea about what they
see, but no you need to take a moment to really understand what you think you
know you see and really begin those steps of thinking.

Mira: Just adding cause again there will be instances where everyone won’t want
to share out, but what stuck. May want to share out, but may be a little hesitant.
But what stuck out to me is it goes back to self-expression and being given the choice. So, in your classroom everyone is given that choice if they want. So the opportunity is always there, the routine-

Angelica: -Right, and there’s different forms of it too. Their writing or they’re sharing with a group of peers or they’re sharing with the class. That’s why I think it works so well because whether you express it to the entire class or to the small group or on the paper you expressed it and that’s good enough.


* Bolded text indicates teachers use sight-related language to describe how they understand (e.g., “seeing”) what students are expressing (e.g., “showing”).

Neil: The student did not want my help; the work would have then been a product of our combined efforts instead of just theirs. Instead, the student wanted me to let the effort stand on its own. More to that fact, the student felt compelled to let me know that it was reflective of a genuine effort. So accustomed to teachers believing that this work was less than their best, the student expressed that this was, indeed, a full effort. So in the image, so we’ve just finished PARCC testing, so what we're seeing is the result of kids being packed in our class for the whole day, which is not something as a middle school teacher we are quite used to. So that’s why it’s sounds like two hours but that’s cuz we were just sitting in the room trying to be as quiet as we can. Um and it really gave me the opportunity to see my kids in a long-term thing, just to see what they do when given something to do and time. So that's what we see here is the product of the student’s effort. What I think is really
happening here is that the student really tried and that's what I got to see in the long run. A lot of times you give an assignment and they come back and this this doesn’t look like it’s your best. But I saw the student just sitting there staring at it, frustrated, not having the tools and once I gave them those things to see them try to put an effort into it and then give that to me...the other thing is it's a math assignment because we traded work. I saw the student just sitting there staring at it, frustrated, not having the…and once I gave them those things to see them try to put an effort into it and then give that to me I can judge it on a different merit cuz I'm trying to see did the student really try? That's why they wrote the “p.s. I tried” at the bottom. Cuz the student wouldn't talk to me. That was the one thing, like the first thing she said to me the whole time. Um and how does it relate to our inquiry? It relates in the fact that the student didn't feel like they could orally express their efforts - they needed to show it, then write it. Um this is, that is what the student has learned - to express it in their body and to express their frustration and kind of apprehension at the thought of having to do something to show learning. Why it exists I feel like is a big question. Um at this point the student is in seventh grade and year after year of struggling to express themselves or being told that their expressions aren’t up to par or not being able to express themselves in a way that they feel, you know, is adequate for their age group because all of the students are very aware of what each other is capable of. And so that can be frustrating. I think this image educates us in the sense that it made me question how often I really look at, how I evaluate effort because I saw the effort there. And I realize that had it been given to me and I hadn’t seen it, I would have questioned
it. But in this moment, I was like I can’t say that she didn’t try. I saw the student trying again and again. Um I think that is the way it educates me, is to force me to question my assumptions about what each individual students’ effort, like um and what I could’ve done to give them another scaffold, another entry into the task. I think that the fact that the student tried to communicate with me, um, says that they want to, right, it’s just a matter of figuring out, how do I create a bridge of communication to let this student know that I am here to help, besides saying it because clearly saying it didn’t make a difference. They wanted to do something on their own so and to figure out other ways and means to communicate that.

Francesca: (to the group) So take a minute to jot some thoughts down.

Neil: One thing I did say, when the student brought it, I looked at it, and I was gonna say, is this, and I thought about it and called her back up and said, can you just color this for me and she ran away happily, very excited to do that.

Francesca: Did she write, “I tried” or did you?

Neil: She did.

Francesca: She wrote that. Ok. That’s really powerful to me that she that she that was included and that she felt compelled to write that.

Angelina: I just wanna add on that there’s a smiley face on it. And it’s things that we tend to forget. That they’re celebrating their own successes. This is what she can give and she’s proud of it and that’s why I guess she didn’t want the help. It’s like “let me get through this and whatever I give you, it’s good.”

Rosie: I found so many connections to your student as well (to Mira) who in third grade could journal and speak about her feelings but the mind and body of a
seventh grader is different, like “you can’t help me, I gotta struggle through this, but I’ll let you know I tried at the end.” That self-awareness changes so much in these grades um but that recognition, that communication is just the key to everything, even if it is a “p.s. I tried.”

Angelica: “I don’t know I’m a bit confused by it, just because sometimes what the objective of the lesson is, is not exactly what they’re showing me at the end of that lesson. And I’m just thinking of those students that um are struggling with that lesson, they showing me there’s a misconception, they will revert back to something that we’ve discussed in the past, so you’ll see them flipping back through the book so they’re showing me there is some retention in this experience that they’ve had but I also am confused as to how they are expressing that learning.

Neil: I’m like torn by behind that functional aspect of it of that what did you learn in this lesson? Um and then the like the layers of understanding how, what their learning is in a given moment. So like sometimes I see my students’ learning, um, like I can see that they learn that school is not somewhere they succeed. I see that conception in their mind. So and you see that expressed in like door slamming, “fuck this school!” walking out (snapping) that’s an expression of that learning. Or I can see them expressing their learning in their bodies when they just sit, sink, hands crossed, and they’re done...um so like those expressions of learning. Or, you know, or learning about the world around them and their relationship to it. And it’s a struggle.

Angelica: I would like to add onto that because I’ve also seen students, um, specifically when we’re working in small groups, where they’ll sit there and kind
of look around and go I’m, almost this apologetic face, like sorry I can’t help right
now to their peers. It’s like not this defeat but just acceptance that there’s no
contribution from me. Um and you know I don’t challenge that as much. What I do
is come in and support really quickly. And so that is something I, I feel we can
work on...um, but it’s showing that they’ve learned that, that if I can’t contribute, I
can just sit here and they’ll yes and nod and everything, but they know.

Critical Moment Four: “I don’t think you see that in many other places.”” (Round 2 Focus
Group – May 17, 2018).

Neil: The fact that we’re in an urban environment, the nonverbal communication
is specific to that type of learning. It’s just like, so I talk to my kids about this all
the time. When they look at each other, it’s like in middle school, “Why are you
looking at me? Why are you staring? What’s the problem?” And in a different
environment, it’s very different, they’re like “that person is making me feel
uncomfortable, why are they looking at me?” And like I understand that, when you
guys are looking at me, when you understand, so I capitalize on that so when you
know when I’m looking at you for a certain amount of time, I’m telling you
something, because I know that you understand the eyes speak, you get that
because this is the kind of environment we’ve grown up in. Other environments
are different. So I don’t think you see that in many other places.

Angelica: And just to add on, just my experience growing up in that same
environment, everything needs to be quick and clear. It can’t, you can’t go on
rattling on about stuff, it has to be quick and clear, whether it’s language or a quick
word, “you know what I’m saying?”
Kristen: I think for me it just stood out because this is something I have in my room every day but I guess I never really bring much attention to it. Like a lot of my students will show me how they feel about something through their body, through anything but telling me. I guess, until you sit down and think about it, it just became apparent to me, like wow, like I can think of six incidents, instances today that this happened. A student was trying to tell me something but they weren’t speaking to me. Like, a student today we were doing time in math for example and he got frustrated with his clock and he felt like he couldn’t manipulate the hands of the clock and he just started sitting there. I asked him what was bothering him. What was wrong? Can I help? He wouldn’t talk to me he just started kicking his desk and huffing and puffing and but wouldn’t talk to me. And then an hour later a student was on the Chromebook doing a math program we do the iReady and his Chromebook wasn’t working, but he didn’t tell me and he started slamming the Chromebook, but he wouldn’t tell us what was wrong. So, we went over there looked and realized he couldn’t express well. So, it’s just different incidents throughout the day that happen.


Rosie: He’s learned how to remove himself from the situation and I’m going to let him do that and continue with the lesson. Once students were working independently I was able to review his message and ask him a few questions. The hard part was remaining neutral and keeping that “I’m not going to fix this.” I’m
not going to infer from this until I hear from you.” And it would be just so easy for me to say, “you are smart and this student likes to be with you,” but that was the path that he had been on. So, I wanted to see. You know I clearly felt like this was a cry for help in a way. So, instead I just asked him what he would like to happen next. So, I sat down with him and I asked him. What you’re seeing here is an expression of what he was feeling. I feel what was really happening here is he was recognizing he was not part of the classroom culture and that he was asking for help to become part of that culture. So, how does this relate into our inquiry? For me it’s that we are a community and no matter who you are we all belong here and it’s my job to do my best to make sure you fit in. So, when I saw lines like “I don’t feel safe here.” Right away red flags went up. I didn’t want to insinuate anything. So, I said, I’m going to write and you just tell me line by line what you meant. His words were: “No one likes me because I’ve done all these things. I’ve annoyed people, bothered people, I interrupt their conversations, make silly noises. Sometimes I say mean things. Sometimes when people tell me to do the right thing I get angry cause I don’t know what I’m doing. People just tell me to stop but I don’t know how to do that. I don’t know how to stop.” So, then that’s when I just asked, “what would you like to see happen next”? So, in the environment the classroom was set-up for the students to be able to move and find resources as they need. So, the first thing that I took away from that was he finally rather than act out or get that negative attention or walk out of a room he finally just went and found that quiet space and used that paper and wrote, but rules had been established and rules need to be followed. Right, so it really spoke to what behaviors are important
and valued in the classroom and that all this social stuff that he was bringing in that was triggering him that day was really important for him to learn how to self-regulate. So, when I asked him “how do you want to leave this”? He wanted to run a meeting. And so, I told him to go home and think about it. And he asked me the next day, can I have that meeting today? “Can I just go get some water first and come back”? And he, we had all the students sit in a circle and he lead the meeting. And he put himself out there with these are all the things I’ve done and these are all the ways I’m feeling. And he kind of just asked for help. Which I felt like was a huge step and all of a sudden…the kids were immediately not judging at all. They were all like we all make mistakes and that happens and when we’re outside you can play with me. So, it just became their thing to own. And, so how does this educate us? So I think just realizing. I think you said something about it. That kids bring in everything with them and you’ll never know what will be that trigger or what’s happening at home or how a lot of people were seeing those behaviors and these patterns he had set for himself to be the kid in the office. The kid in trouble. The kid nobody likes, but he was really asking for help and how to fit in. He was new to our school this year and we only go to 4th grade so he’s leaving next year. He never felt like he had that opportunity to fit in. And then the implications for practice. This is where I struggle because… (wipes eyes) so I’ll try to express some of my thoughts here. The key to management is engaging or what I always thought is if learning is fun and engaging if you don’t have all those management pieces, but you can’t engage all the students without assessing where they are all mentally and academically. And then you can’t assess all the students without
engaging them from that starting point. So, it’s like all those pieces fall apart if you
don’t have one. I don’t know if I’m expressing that clearly enough, but we were in
our weekly meeting and everyone was saying how they haven’t heard about him.
You know his name was the name that always came up in every meeting for
behavior and they haven’t heard in over a month about this students’ name coming
up. So that was a positive thing.

Mira: I think again, we do it without realizing we’re doing it because it becomes
our norm to want to save our students when they’re in distress or might feel
uncomfortable, but the fact that you could step back in that moment and allow him
the opportunity to choose. That’s a tool, right? And again, last week when we
talked about classroom culture and expression it’s thinking beyond fourth grade,
beyond fifth grade, beyond schooling. It’s about being a citizen the rest of your
life. You’re going to need the tool. You know someone is not always going to be
there to help or save you. So, I think it was excellent that you provided him with
that opportunity. So, great job!

Angelica: I really appreciated the fact that you allowed this child to take charge
and self-reflect. I think that was one of the most powerful things. I was getting
goosebumps as you were saying those things. Because he knows he’s contributing
and he knows that he wants to contribute more, but he doesn’t know how to and he
came to you for assistance, and although he didn’t say it verbally, he wrote it down
and you picked up on it. I think that’s something that needs to happen more often.
Letting the children take charge of their own learning and allowing them to fix it.
That we don’t always have to fix the challenges that are going in our community.
You can take charge too. That was really powerful.

Mira: The fact that he shared the noted with you also speaks to the relationship, right? Because students can express themselves or journal, but they may not necessarily share their expressions with other individuals. So, the fact that this student shared this note with you, speaks to the relationship and maybe sort of the culture you built in that classroom for the time that you were there.

Neil: It’s hard to let go. I would have had the same instinct. If I would’ve read this and I would have been first off, what is it that I’m not doing that someone in me room is feeling this way? And the student agency. The fact that the student has agency and you allowed the student to build his strength and then to share that and be exposed to the room and then have that classroom as a group experience what it’s like to forgive and reaccept someone is also important so that from that point of view. They can say ‘I’ve thought about the experience of someone else and considered it’ and allow them to forgive them in a nonjudgmental way and I think that’s really valuable to build at a young age because that’s something you have to practice.

Critical Moment Six: “It’s a really weird looking tree” (Round 1 Focus Group – May 3, 2018). Angelica: (Charting while speaking.) Forms of expression

1. Neil: Student expression…community

2. Rosie: Motivation, too.

3. Neil: Mmm hmmm

4. Angelica: Yes.
5. **Francesca:** I wonder if that’s somehow related to student effort. Effort, motivation. Are they the same thing? Are they different?

6. **Kristen:** How do we show that?

7. **Rosie:** We could put motivation as a slash.

8. **Mira:** I think I’m going to make an arrow for peer to peer relationships. *(Charts.)*

9. **Neil:** I think that connects to the communication *(Mira charts.)*

10. **Francesca:** I feel like we were seeing a lot and talking about these different forms. Written, oral, visual.

11. **Angelica:** Physical?

12. **Mira:** You think assessment would be one thing? Because under assessment we could put accountability-

13. **Angelica:** How do you measure student effort?

14. **Mira:** On the corner there?

15. **Angelica:** Yeah. How…how is it assessed?

*(Silence for 25 seconds)*

16. **Mira:** Did I spell that correctly?

17. **Angelica:** Yes

*(Group laughter)*

18. **Mira:** Okay. Thank you. And where are we putting accountability?

19. **Neil:** I think it's a part of that effort and motivation. Cause assessment—

20. **Rosie:** There’s something to about…I don’t know it goes with accountability too.

21. Whether it’s the discussion, journaling, it’s meaningfulness.

22. **Mira:** The accountability or the effort? What do you think?
26. **Rosie:** Yes!

27. **Francesca:** Are you talking about like what’s valued and what’s –

28. **Rosie:** By the student-

29. **Francesca:** - And sanctioned. And-

30. **Rosie:** -Yes.

31. **Francesca:** By the student? Or by both?

32. **Rosie:** I think it definitely came up as both.

33. **Angelica:** So the student’s values aren’t necessarily the same.

34. **Rosie:** So maybe accountability because it’s the student who is holding himself accountable, but it’s also what we value.

35. **Mira:** So should we link accountability to this? *Draws arrow leading away from “motivation.”*

36. **Angelica:** Yeah. I think it’s all a part of the culture.

37. **Neil:** The classroom. Classroom teacher-

38. **Rosie:** -Student. Teacher.

39. **Mira:** Do it this way? *Attempts to draw, then stops.*

40. **Rosie:** Classroom culture is this trunk and then all these branches come up.

41. **Angelica:** Yeah.

42. **Mira:** Do we wanna add the social emotional component? Was that a reoccurring theme?

43. **Angelica:** Well, yeah. I know that they. I think that-

44. **Neil:** -That would be related to their expression, right? How we allow them.

45. Because it’s a part of communication. Are we allowing for their expression? Are
49. we valuing their expression?

50. **Rosie:** A part of their effort?

51. **Neil:** So, would that be…Which branch is that? Everyone has much better handwriting than me. *Participants laugh.*

52. **Francesca:** I’m thinking that might relate social emotional to student effort too. What do you guys think? *Participant affirmative sounds.*

53. **Angelica:** To Rosie. I think that’s what you were saying right?

54. **Rosie:** Yeah. Maybe social emotional is the everything. Because if you're not emotionally and socially happy then your students aren’t. You’ll have bad peer relationships, the students will not respond to you. The motivation won’t be there.

55. **Neil:** So then I think that is coming off of classroom culture—*Rosie charts.*

56. **Angelica:** -Yeah.-

57. **Neil:** - The teacher kind of sets that, or is the groundskeeper in a sense. Nurturing that plant. Are you growing that. *Participant affirmative sounds.* What are you cutting off? Because if you cut off social and emotional aspects all these other things start to fail.

58. **Francesca:** So, what I’m wondering is, should we now wipe this and reformulate it with that image? With that different structure with the leaves. So I can take a picture?

59. **Rosie:** Yeah, yeah. Take a picture. I can take this down and we can put another image here if that works.

60. **Francesca:** Oh, sure!

61. **Rosie:** Yeah?
71. **Francesca:** If you think, sure! That way we don’t have to lose it all.

72. **Rosie:** Is that enough space?

73. **Francesca:** Yes.

74. **Angelica:** Am I drawing a trunk? *Sounds of affirmation from the group.* She *draws.* And we said this is our classroom culture-

75. **Mira:** - And social and emotional-

76. **Neil:** So maybe classroom culture is the dirt and social and emotional is the trunk.

77. **Francesca:** So why? Why are we thinking classroom culture is the dirt?

78. **Angelica:** Because we nurture that emotional-

79. **Neil:** - Yeah-

80. **Rosie:** -If you’re not rooted in that then –

81. **Neil:** - Right-

82. **Rosie:** - Then you can’t grow

83. **Angelica:** So this is classroom culture? And this is social emotional?

84. **Francesca:** So I’m just going to dig a little more at classroom culture. What does that mean?

85. **Angelica:** Having standards in the room. *Silence 25 seconds.*

86. **Francesca:** What else can go into classroom culture?

87. **Mira:** Community. Definitely I think…How about…I don’t know I’m a little iffy on this so you guys let me know. I was thinking more like a shared understanding,

88. **Neil:** but I don’t know if that’s the same standards.

89. **Angelica:** Norms?

90. **Neil:** Expectations.
94. **Rosie:** Maybe like shared expectations. So it’s not just the teachers’ expectations, but that they expectations are set by all.

96. **Francesca:** And I’m thinking that in order to do some of those things to you need like procedures, protocols, routines that are underlining

97. **Neil:** So maybe it’s multiple trees. Am I right? *Participants laugh.* Because that sounds like management. Like a structure –

98. **Angelica:** So, the second one?

99. **Neil:** Because they could also intertwine at different points.

100. **Angelica:** That’s true. They’re related.

101. **Neil:** Yeah.

102. **Kristen:** I like that.

103. **Angelica:** So, what is this called?

104. **Neil:** I was thinking management. Because that would be the expectations, standards-

106. **Francesca:** -I’m gonna challenge you on management and say maybe it’s about environment. Because I feel like management… to me it has a negative connotation-

108. **Neil:** -Right.-

110. **Francesca:** -It has this…I have to keep everyone-

111. **Kristen:** -What popped into my head was feeling safe and comfortable –

112. **Neil:** So, like caretaking? That’s what I think. I’m trying to think of other synonyms.

114. **Kristen:** Your social emotional can’t grow if you don’t feel safe and comfortable
115. too.

116. **Angelica:** But isn’t that kind of down here because we are setting up the environment.

117. **Francesca:** That’s what I was thinking, but I can see how you were thinking of it as another almost like strand or tree. So maybe we can look at social and emotional and define some of the components of social and emotional that will help us.

118. **Angelica:** Okay, so……

119. **Francesca:** Cut down that tree! *Participants laugh.*

120. **Angelica:** Branches-

121. **Neil:** Communication comes off-

122. **Rosie:** -And then off of the communication branch there is peer and maybe teacher-

123. **Angelica:** -Or should that be a leaf?

124. **Neil:** Just right there.

125. **Angelica:** That’s really teacher to student right?

126. **Mira:** And then student effort would be another. Student effort/motivation would be another branch

127. **Angelica:** What is it? Motivation.

128. **Neil:** And then we want to go into accountability would come off of that.

129. **Mira:** Then assessment.

130. **Angelica:** My tree is becoming a little weird.

131. **Mira:** No at the end you can-
137. Angelica: What’s going here?
139. Francesca: Maybe independence.
140. Angelica: You said independence-
141. Francesca: - Independence. I’m also think persistence.
142. Rosie: Engagement
143. Angelica: That’s really not looking good. Participants laugh.
144. Neil: It’s a weird looking tree.
145. Angelica: It’s a very weird looking tree.