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USING PRACTICES SHAPED BY THE SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

Gina Gonnella
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Joseph M. Valente
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education
Thesis Supervisor

David Lee
Professor of Special Education
Honors Advisor

*Signatures are on file in the Honors College School

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes the implementation of educational practices rooted in the sociocultural perspective within the special education classroom. Sociocultural practices stand in direct contrast to the current dominant deficit perspective and offer an alternative way to approach special education and teaching practices. Suggestions on how to implement such practices in the special education classroom include setting up appropriate conditions of learning, optimal opportunities to learn, and teaching within the zone of proximal development. Using qualitative research methods including field notes, narratives, and document analysis, I describe the implementation of sociocultural practices within a summer reading camp practicum experience at the Pennsylvania State University. By triangulating the collected date, I analyze and discuss how inclusive practices borrowed from sociocultural perspectives may be incorporated in the special education classroom.

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Chapter 1

Rationale

The field of special education is primarily driven by principles of behaviorism and this "arithmetic concept of handicap" or the "sum of negative characteristics" of a student (Gindis, 1999, p. 335). At large the focus is on student deficits and areas of improvement rather than strengths. Common phrases such as "underdeveloped" and "developmentally delayed" are used to refer to those qualitative differences between typically developing peers and those with disabilities. This dominant deficit perspective of disability has brought about a great deal of negative societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities as well as the field of special education altogether. This dominating view in American culture has fueled my research into the field where I examine ways in which teachers, administrators, and society as a whole can recognize all students, particularly students with disabilities as competent learners with a set of unique characteristics just as any typically developing student as well as explore strong alternative methods of special education.

Despite a dominating deficit view, special education in the United States can take on multiple perspectives. Those invested in educating children with disabilities view the country as a whole to be "morally obligated to educate to the fullest extent possible" and "identify causes for disability that might lead to ameliorative instructional interventions and therapies" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 282). On the other hand, special education can also be "used as means to segregate children on the basis of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status as it has in the past (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 282). Given the disconnect and reoccurring problems faced in the field, "special education researchers and practitioners began to advocate for a paradigmatic shift that would transcend deficit thinking and promote a more fluid, contextual framework for

examining disability, teaching, and learning in special education" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 283). Despite the overrepresentation of minority groups in special education, there has been a greater movement toward finding alternative instructional approaches than using the field as a means of segregation for personal school gain as it has been utilized in the past.

The development of special education in the United States began in Europe. There was no American tradition prior to the 19th century regarding public care and education for persons with disabilities (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 1). Therefore, the United States adopted practices used in European countries to foster in the U.S. education system. The French Enlightenment and "culture of revolutionary France" has "dominated the discourse of special education for the last 200 years (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 2). Children with disabilities were "cared for mainly by family in the home" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 4) and were not given the option of any other facility of care or even funding. In the 1800's "public custodial care for mentally ill and disabled populations" began to increase in number of enrollment in institutions and specialized schools (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 4).This became a "catch-all" for those who were "unable". Such places became "convenient laboratories for the great Enlightenment experiment" with a focus on "improving people via education and moral treatment" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 4). Researchers had students and their "problems" localized and controlled therefore giving way to implementing experimental practices based in the medical model of disability. Interventions were focused around therapeutic placements and a "cure could be found through careful arrangement of a specialized environment"(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 4). It was understood that if one can "control the setting" then "you can control the mind"(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 4). Experimenters and researchers sought to control all aspects of the environment using seclusionary methods and exclusionary techniques from mainstream society and educational opportunities. Setting and location "single-handedly act[ed] as both a social reform and an individual remedy

(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 5). During the first half of the 19th century most cases of people with disabilities were treated in specialized intuitions of "self contained" or an "out of the way setting" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 5). Disabilities prior to the Enlightenment were considered "pre-destined, and innate distortion of nature" and those "people were incurable"(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 5) directly reflecting the views of the medical model of disability.

Psychiatrists in the early 19th century "concentrated on perfecting those with disabilities via sense education and moral treatment" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 5). Disability was perceived as something that could be treated and cured, not a characteristic of difference. It became a "responsibility of uplifting the weak and disadvantaged" to cure the biomedical cause of insanity and idiocracy (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 5). Disability was viewed as an individual's internal problem that required medical attention and care to treat and cure. A shift in purpose occurred in the 1850's "toward a collectively oriented moral treatment that stressed surveillance and conformity to moral norms rather than activist therapy" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 6). Jean-Marc Itard, Edouard Seguin, and Samuel Gridly Howe were early professionals who influenced the field of working with people with disabilities (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 6).

In America, the 19th century "was an age of mechanical intervention" and a "time when application of scientific principles to the control of the physical environment yielded astounding results (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 11). Institutions became "healing agents for those with disabilities" during the earlier half of the 19th century (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 9). Medical intervention was the only reasonable technique to address disability at this time. Education of people with disabilities was not documented. Not until 1896 was the first special education classroom for mental deficiencies founded in Providence, Rhode Island (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 12). The focus was a "top down approach" or a "system of speed that

sorted students on the basis of psychological measures and placed inferior students in separate classrooms and school" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 12). Ultimately, students were sorted "based on academic ability or moral standing" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 12). With the reliance on psychological measures at the time, the number of students expanded. "133 school systems provided classes for over 23,000 students" by 1922(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 12).

The purpose of special education became a "clearing house where students could be screened for possible relocation to institutions and hospitals" and as a "slower simpler version of the general education curriculum" which offered vocational programs for job training (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 15). It appeared as if students had a ceiling for which they could perform. They were not held to high standards nor perceived as able. Despite the move toward access to the general education curriculum, "districts placed more emphasis on the existence of the special classes than on students achievement in those classes (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 15-16). It was thought that by separating students with disabilities and "clearing out the weak and disruptive students, schools could become more efficient in the deliver of curriculum to the nondisabled students" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 15). Unfortunately, today this way of thinking still exists.

The 1960s and 1970's showed greater advocacy initiatives for educating people with disabilities. Parent lead advocacy groups "sought access and equity for their children who had been denied enrollment in public school settings as a results of physical, mental, or emotional disabilities"(Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 282). These actions lead to legislation enactment of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) of 1975 currently reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1997 (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 282). Several policies involving the least restrictive environment (LRE), individualized education program(IEP), and due process were safeguards built into the law. However, despite these

safeguards, "schools made special education placements based on norm-referenced deficit model" as the "major tool for identification and placement" of students with disabilities (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 282). The deficit model still reins U.S policy and educational decision-making.

The surfacing of the disability rights movement in the last quarter of the 20th century, proved to be a dramatic change for people with disabilities. The disabilities rights movement called for the "deinstitutionalization of large numbers of people with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities" as well as the "passage of significant anti-discrimination legislation in the fields of employment transportation, and community accessibility" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 16). Similar to movements of minority groups before them, African Americans and women, this movement called for a change. People with disabilities were recognized by legislation and acts of anti-discrimination were made illegal. Despite this movement, prior to the passage of IDEA in 1997, "most states continued to exclude significant numbers of children from attending public school programs of any kind"(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 17). The passage of IDEA "represented a federal recognition and consolidation of changes that had been emerging"(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 16) and "a new federal mandate that states must provide a free appropriate public education to all children regardless of the type or severity of the disability "(Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 17). One year after implementation, 3,919,000 children between 3 and 21 were serviced by the special education system (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 17). That number grew to 6,254,000 students by 2000 (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 17). The number of people being servicesd was rapidly increasing.

With the number of students being serviced under special education in the United States, it is important to re-address the question of curriculum for students with disabilities and how they should be taught. The field is "moving toward the unification of special education and general education" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 22) practices and the "key is to further

illuminate the fundamental nature of existing tensions and facilitate a shift from static and destructive toward dynamic and less antagonistic" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 22).

The dominating view in traditional special education continues to be the deficit perspective that "emphasizes deficits over strengths and focus[es] on teaching of discrete task analyzed skills in the absence of context, meaning, and relevance" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 283). The deficit perspective stresses "etiology, diagnosis, assessment instructional/treatment, and goals" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 283) and serves as the dominant perspective of special education practices in America today as "deficit theories influenced educational policies and practices" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 281). Overall, it is evident that student weaknesses are touched upon more frequently than their strengths and instructional decisions are made based on areas needing improvement. However, parties who do hold tight to the belief of explicit instruction in the classroom based on the deficit model, view their role much differently than those looking from the outside inward (Heward, 2003).

"Special education has relied too heavily on deficit thinking" therefore "educators, policymakers, and researchers now argue for changes in how students with disabilities are educated"(Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 277). This overreliance has resulted in "incompatible policies designed to meet the needs of children who previously had not experienced appropriate and equitable treatment in public schools" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 281). As a result, "social constructivism has emerged as a theory that has the potential to make instruction in special education more holistic and relevant and emphasize more the strengths and knowledge that children bring to the classroom setting" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 277). Such methods act to "inform instructional practices and can contribute to improve learning and outcomes for children with disabilities" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 277). While the deficit model continues to reign the field today, those who push back against the stagnant views of traditional

educational methods are seeing much increased improvement and performance in students in grades K-12.

It is important to note that not all people in the field agree with this dominant deficit approach toward educating students with disabilities. For instance, alternative views are often implemented by those holding perspectives in disability studies offering up pedagogy for the universal design of learning and in critical special education in which relationships are built between teaching and learning. A combination of the two and other alternative approaches are seen in many special education classrooms throughout the country. However, the deficit approach is the most utilized.

Despite the disconnect in the field itself there is a further divide between practices based on disability perspectives which in some instances drives instructional practices. As suggested by Baglieri et. al (2011), there are two reigning conceptualizations of disability; incrementalists and reconceptualists. Incrementalists base practices out of the medical model of disability and have a focus on deficits that exist within the individual as something to fix, cure, accommodate, or endure (267). Incrementalists see special education as a means to changing the individual through performance-enhancing interventions that are driven by scientifically proven practices aimed at strategies specific to deficiencies. This perspective parallels traditional practices of special education today. However, reconceptualists situate disability as being constructed by society and address disability as it gains meaning in social and cultural contexts (Baglieri et al, 2011, p. 267). Reconceptualists value individual performance, however have a greater focus on limitations in the environment and seek improvements in special education through self-reflective, ethical decision making responsibilities for teachers (Baglieri et al, 2011, p. 268)**.** These conceptualizations reveal the ongoing disconnect between educators, researchers, and practices in the field. The philosophies of the groups do not align and rather act as a representation of difference between cultural discourses. Conceptualizations are based on cultural discourses in

which society situates itself. Therefore, dominant cultural discourse and incrementalistic practices coincide with traditional methods of special education,

Given the American people are primarily language learners we have adopted as a whole this individual phenomena of medical diagnosis and individualistic fixing of a child For example, if a child is born deaf the immediate common societal reaction is to emerge the child in the hearing world, consider medical interventions such as cochlear implants, and make the student more like typical language learners. The major issue lies in "how culture views individual difference and how to tolerate non-normative behaviors"(Danforth & Navarro, 2001, p. 184). It is found that "language users draw heavily from dominant cultural discourse that pose moral problems of child activities as individual phenomena subject to medical diagnosis and intervention" (Danforth & Navarro, 2001, p. 186). However, there are still many who stand in direct contrast to the dominant deficit view and push back against the need for medical attention and rather pose society is the one to blame, not the individual. Using the previous example of the child who was born deaf, in this instance, society has constructed deafness as a disability given the lack of environmental support. Those who value this perspective question whether deafness would even be a disability if all people could access American Sign Language. Instead of conforming to a dominant medical discourse, one should "investigate and explore the moral implications of the way we and other speakers and writers use language to fabricate problems, solutions, dead-ends, hope, suffering and social identities" (Danforth & Navarro, 2001, p. 185) of people especially children with disabilities.

The deficit perspective, the dominant American discourse, favors practices of behaviorism that examine student needs using objective measures of testing and quantifying a student to make comparisons to "typically developing peers" rather than depicting them as having abilities and their own set of unique characteristics. This view holds a greater emphasis on student deficient rather than strengths and is observed nationwide as the dominant practice of special

education and the traditional view of "fixing" disability. However, the sociocultural ideas of Vygotsky are contributing to a higher influence in the general education field but have had minimal impact in the domain of special education. General education teachers and classrooms across America are recognizing and implementing learning as a shared interactive process where a student's competence is at their highest when scaffolds are in place whether from a more capable peer or adult in a particular context. Those who value these methods agree that "education leads to development" and that development is not linear or an equivalent path for all students (Gindis, 1999, p. 335).

In this paper, I aim to counterbalance the traditional use of the principles of behaviorism and the deficit model dominating the field of special education and suggest an alternative approach of the current dominant pedagogy to change societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities and demonstrate positive use in the special education classroom today.

Thesis Statement

In this essay, I discuss how the dominant practices of special education when coupled with the medical model of disability suggests the need for shaping of a curriculum based the sociocultural theory currently found in the general education curriculum. Given the current Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education reporting of ongoing use of physical restraints and seclusionary techniques to control student behaviors, there is an immediate need for reshaping of practices dealing with students who are the most at risk for such intrusive techniques. Students with disabilities are the most at risk population subject to the highest rate of restraint procedures nationwide. Students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, ensuring services to students with disabilities, represent 12% of the school age population. Of this percentage, 75% of students with disabilities nationwide are subject to physical restraints and

58% subject to seclusion techniques in public schools. In fact, 25% of U.S states actually had higher percentages than the national averages. Only three of the fifty states, Mississippi (40%), Arkansas (41%), and Louisiana (43%) had fewer than 50% of the student population subject to physical restraints. Nevada (96%), Florida (95%), and Wyoming (93%) had more than 90% of students who were physically restrained reporting the highest U.S percentages of unethical techniques used toward students with disabilities. This procedure is in direct violation of individual rights under both the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. The Eighth Amendment prohibits cruel or unusual punishment and the Fourteenth Amendment provides freedom of movement and personal security (Lichtenstein, 2014). Given this infringement of civil rights on students with disabilities, the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education needs to take massive and immediate action in addressing this unethical nationwide issue. While there have been efforts on the government's part to take responsibility and uphold standards and legal recommendations for the practices of such techniques, there has been minimal reporting (Lichtenstein, 2014).

In this paper, I propose that teachers can use techniques rooted in the sociocultural theory that stand in contrast to traditional views of education to address educating students with disability in special education classrooms as a societal responsibility, rather than means of fixing an individual. I aim to discuss that implementation of teacher practices learned from my coursework in curriculum and instruction, language and literacy education and disability studies to demonstrate a greater understanding of disability and offer practices to restructure society by using field notes, personal narratives and course assignments to prove the need for shaping a curriculum based on practices rooted in this alternative theory. I seek to answer the following questions.

1. How can we as teachers use the sociocultural theory to shape experiences to create a positive differential approach toward special education rather than a traditional special education curriculum based on principles of behaviorism?

2. How can we as teachers implement this approach to change educational practices to impact the learner and teacher in the special education classroom?

Background/Context

As a graduate student I have had the opportunity to experience both practices rooted in the sociocultural theory as well as methods based on the principles of behaviorism. My introduction to sociocultural perspectives and implementation of practices within the classroom was first observed at the Pennsylvania State University Summer Reading Camp within the College of Education. I was enrolled in a graduate level college course and my role in the course was to immerse myself in a practicum experience based on the guiding principles of my language and literacy coursework. The Summer Reading Camp was designed to provide a curriculum using teaching practices rooted in language and literacy under the sociocultural perspective. The goal was to assist students in acquiring an identity as a reader and writer despite deficits and difficulties. The Summer Reading Camp was co-taught by pre-service teachers in the Curriculum and Instruction program with a focus on Reading Specialist certification, a cohort program that includes coursework under faculty supervision in language and literacy, curriculum and instruction, and educational psychology. Camp coordinator, Dr. Patrick Shannon oversees the camp each year. This program was implemented to assist pre-service teachers seeking certification in Special Education in Pennsylvania to meet the updated law requirements of dual certification. This served as the cohort practicum experience to implement the techniques and practices learned in the coursework. The Summer Reading Camp implemented practices rooted in

the sociocultural theory as a means to approach special education and deficit learners in an alternative way.

My classmates and I were responsible for arranging the classroom environment, creating and implementing lesson plans, documenting and reporting on specific events, observing students, and reflexively looking at our own practices throughout the four-week experience. The camp was held in the Chambers Building at the

Pennsylvania State University Park Main Campus with children ranging from pre-kindergarten to middle school. Typically this classroom serviced adult learners, specifically pre-service teachers; therefore most furniture was oversized and inaccessible to children. However, as a cohort under the guidance and supply of Dr. Patrick Shannon, we were able to create an appropriate classroom environment for a child-centered classroom design by incorporating rugs, circle time on the floor, bookcases and shelving at child height levels and hung student work to display around the room.

The theme for the summer was Transportation. However, the skills of focus were on language and literacy as a means of producing a museum at the end of the four-week experience. There was much greater focus on the process of learning rather than an end product. The students were to use text sources to research and discover information about transportation throughout history including types of transportation, how it worked, and who or what it carried.
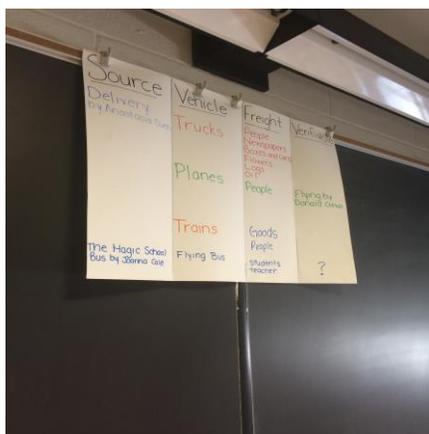
During the summer of 2014, I had the opportunity to be a part of the Summer Reading Camp

experience in which inclusive practices were utilized to teach literacy skills to emerging and becoming readers. As a co-teacher of this camp, I not only collaborated with my pre-service teacher cohort to brainstorm and communicate practices learned throughout our coursework, but I also acted as an observer and documenter of the experience. Walk with me through a typical day at camp. Students arrive curbside each morning and are greeted by a handful of their teachers. Interactions begin immediately with a polite greeting and or high-five welcoming them to camp. Teachers accompany campers to their designated classrooms and engagement with literacy tasks begin immediately. Word games, reading puzzles, and other literacy tasks such as crossword activities or computer games matching the skills learned were set up in stations for the children to utilize as they were waiting for the start of camp. Most activities were not independent but rather involved collaborative processes between other campers or teachers. As you walk into the room you see student artwork displayed everywhere, on the walls, on the bookcases, on the tables, even hanging from the ceilings. This is not your typical type of artwork, however. There is meaning and research behind it all with every hanging piece of information displaying competency of the students and their abilities. Teacher and student generated poems, graphic organizers, and bulletin boards are all displayed throughout the room. To an outsider this may appear as just an ordinarily colorfully decorated room, however to those involved it was a representation of success, research, and overall student learning. The day begins each morning with whole group instruction in with co-teachers collaborate to teach a literacy skill. Lessons on prosody, prediction, text in everyday context, how to use context clues are just a few of the lessons performed. Groups then further divided into teacher-designed groups based on readability levels and age. The two different groups were designated the "smalls" and "talls". After whole group instruction, typically a mini lesson would occur. This could either look like small group teaching, pair or buddy research, or individual instruction. All instructional material was central to the common theme of transportation. Grade level texts were selected for the teacher to model how to research about

types of transportation. Throughout, think-alouds were utilized to display thought processes.

Students then were given a task related to the mini-lesson whether it was research based or

literacy based; they were engaged and enthusiastic throughout. Given my observation with the

"smalls" group, breaks were often built into the day to allow for some down time as well as time

to utilize restroom and drinking facilities. Breaks often required transitions from the room to

another facility. That time was even utilized for instruction. Students acted as forms of

transportation as they traveled between rooms in the building. The campers laughed and enjoyed

the transition time. They made noises of the vehicles like the "choo,choo" of a train or "beep,

beep" of a car. Next students would participate in an art activity lead by the art specialist brought

in to facilitate the process and help in coming up with ideas for the campers final products to be

displayed in the camp museum. Co-teachers assisted in all art skills and helped students when

appropriate. Students appear eager as they run and grab their works in progress, trains, bridges,

boats, airplanes, rockets and even guide dogs, to work on and finish. The children shared amongst

themselves as well as with teachers enthusiastically, naming off parts of their self-created types of

transportation and even giving their artwork titles. Students used literacy and research based text

 to guide their designs. Recycled materials of everyday household items such as cardboard boxes, plastic bottles, toothpicks, newspaper, and art supplies like paint, pipe cleaners, decorative pom poms etc. were used to create all of the camper's projects that were to be displayed at an end museum. The day concluded with a clean up of

the craft activities and a final independent reading session. Typically an independent thirty-

minute session of reading would occur. Students would select books as teachers scanned their

selections to make sure they were reading appropriate texts on their level. However, as camp

developed, this time often became utilized for informal assessments of reading, of buddy or

mentor reading. It became the most prominent time, at least for the smalls to demonstrate that they were capable readers. Finally, the day concluded with a riddle or joke about transportation. The kids gathered around the chalkboard in a circle on the carpet to try and decipher that day's riddle. They discussed amongst themselves, quietly shouting out answers and collaborating until they were able to come across an answer. Students were dismissed and teachers accompanied them to their vehicles for pick up. The day concluded with smiles, waves, and even hugs good-bye. Co-teachers debriefed at the end of the day recognizing students for their progress and working through solutions to problems collaboratively.

Given my means to utilizing an alternative approach toward special education against traditional methods of the deficit perspective, I began to document my experiences within this alternative setting with proven success in using sociocultural practices as a mode of instruction. Throughout this experience I used methods of qualitative research and triangulation as suggested by Brantlinger, to "search for convergence of or consistency among evidence from multiple and varied data sources" (p. 27) including field notes, narratives, and document analysis. In doing so, I found three common implications amongst practice within the reading camp that can translate to special education classrooms as a means to approach special education and the dominant deficit perspective in an alternative way rather than practices rooted in traditional special education methods derived from principles of behaviorism.

Valle suggests traditional "behaviorist instructional practices actually construct students with disabilities as passive and dependent learners (Valle, 2011, p. 69). Therefore, incrementalist, or majority society believe in the deficit model. However, those rooted in the ground work of Vygotsky and practices in Disability Studies in Education (DSE) "promote research, policy, and/or actions" (Valle, 2011, p. 32) that stand in direct contrast to the dominant deficit model of special education today. DSE views disability within a social and political context, includes and believes in the importance of the voices of those labeled with disabilities, promotes inclusive

educational practices, and rejects the deficit model by assuming competence of all learners

(Valle, 2011, p. 32). Valle presents concrete examples of how implementation of DSE

perspectives and practices work in real life classroom situations by transcribing several

observations of the 2002-2003 New York City weekly study on how inclusive practices were

implemented in a co-taught fourth-grade classroom. She defines an inclusive classroom practice

as "a nurturing learning community where everyone belongs and everyone benefits" (Valle, 2011,

pg. 68) from education and the collaborative process. Her transcriptions provides rich detail and

evidence for the ways in which the environment should be set, how teachers can adopt and

implement such practices, as well as student responses toward this alternative approach to

education. Valle describes the environment upon walking into her first observation attending to

the evidence of learning given displays of student projects, original writings, and posters that

document student thinking (Valle, 2011, p. 64). Shared and collaborative discussions were

utilized and together teachers and students "confront differences, learn to think and work in new

ways, dispel misconceptions about one another, negotiate and renegotiate what works best for the

learning community, struggle through challenges that diversity can present, and come to

understand themselves and others more deeply (Valle, 2011, p. 64). Instead of conforming to the

dominant deficit model it is suggested that teachers ask, "Who am I going to teach?" and

investigate as much about students as possible as to "inform all aspects of their practice, planning,

instruction, activities, and evaluations" (Valle, 2011, p. 76).

Comments documented from observations such as "smiles abound", "the joy of learning

is contagious", "everyone belongs", 'palpable energy" (Valle, 2011, p. 64) all provide evidence

for an alternative approach of instruction. Unfortunately, inclusion does not just happen. It needs

to be "enacted daily by particular people in particular contexts learning to live and work together

meaningfully" (Valle, 2011, p. 64). This is where we as teachers come into play. It is important

that we as teachers incorporate or at least consider practices rooted in DSE in our classrooms that

follow sociocultural practices. "Disability studies can be infused quite naturally into curriculum according to Valle, 2011, pg. 195) and introduced in similar ways as other oppressed people such as women or people of color have been introduced. Teachers must act as advocates for bringing this perspective to the special education classroom.

Several popular methods have proven successful in K-12 classrooms that were also utilized during my experiences in the Pennsylvania State University Summer Reading Camp. Methods such as use of graphic organizers, brainstorming, story mapping, drawing, and interactive journals were utilized at the individualized level (Valle, 2011, p. 118). Buddy reading, read aloud/think aloud model, and reciprocal teaching were all methods of instruction either by teacher and or with peers. Also, songs, predictions, and classification through data charting were utilized during whole group instructional times.

Ultimately, I aim to seek ways in which we as teachers can use the sociocultural theory to shape student and teacher experiences to create a positive differential approach toward special education despite the dominating traditional view of special education methods based on the principles of behaviorism. My experiences in past coursework, practicum placements, as well as research will describe how we as teachers can implement this alternative approach to modify educational practices to impact the special education classroom in a positive way.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Disability is not equally defined nor understood as a singular phenomenon. Dependent upon ones discourses, cultural perspectives, and views, disability can be defined and understood in countless ways, especially among varying cultures and discourses. The various ways in which disability is understood assists in shaping and "influenc[ing] the way in which people with disabilities are treated" (Marianne, 2009, p. 6). For example, those who favor the medical model treat the individual to cure the problem. However, those who favor a social model, blame society and the environment for generating a disability. The complexity of not having a universal understanding of disability is further complicated by the differing administrative services created for people with disabilities, given they must qualify for services and protection against discrimination under specific measures. No singular model of disability has the capacity to represent the whole experience of having a disability. However, disability today can act as an overrepresented term or "catch-all category for different phenomena and different types of challenges that exist in society"(Marianne, 2009, p. 6). It is important to depict disability more specifically rather than categorize all learners under one broad context.

Garland-Thomson (2001) argues that disability can be understood as the marker of differences in the traits, experiences, and desires of people who may share a particular marker can be vast, this diverse set of people is typically identified as a group based on the perceived "abnormality" (Boldt & Valente, 2014, p. 201). Therefore, differences amongst "normalcy" or ableism are what categorize disability within a broad context. Despite this, it is important to understand the numerous definitions of disability as to ensure rights for those with disabilities are being met and protected under administrative laws and regulations as well as understand how society has shaped and molded such views of disability. By better being able to understand

disability and the multiple models, we as teachers will better be able to understand how to educate students with disabilities and the practices that may accompany educational instruction.

Models of Disability

Understanding the different models of disability will help to identify how others view and interpret disability based on differing aspects of approach, problems and solutions in support of those with disabilities. "Instruments and methods of assisting a person with a disability are likely to be based on different underlying interpretations of what constitutes the problem of a disability"(Marianne, 2009, p. 8). Therefore it is important to look at each underlying interpretation. Different models offer different perspectives of how to best service students with disabilities and all act as unique viewpoints and frameworks. Ultimately, "concepts of dis/ability play a central, if latent, role in contemporary understandings of normality, the body and intelligence. It is therefore crucial to be respectful of the national contexts and historical times in which these new disability studies perspectives have emerged" (Goodley, 2010, p. 11).

There are four dominant models of disability, medical model, social model, relative model and cultural minority model, all of which will be discussed in greater detail below. Ultimately, the models offer definitions of disability, assist in identifying the location of the "problem" or the casual attribution, identify the responsibility attribution or who is to be held responsible for the solution, determine the needs of those with disabilities, guide the formulation and implementation of policy, determine academic disciplines, study and learn about the experience of disability, shape the self identity of those with disabilities, cause prejudice and discrimination, and act as theories on disability.

The Medical Model

The medical model is the most familiar model to society with the longest history and therefore is the best understood model of the four. There is an immense focus on anatomy and physiology as well as standardized procedures to make a diagnosis of disability. The main priority of this model is to "fix" the problem that exists solely within the individual without taking the environment into consideration.

The medical model views disability as being caused by medical illness, injury, disease, or other forms of health issues and therefore aims to remove or repair any and all of those limitations. This model relies upon medical interventions as a solution to this problem and addresses disability much like epidemics are approached in attempts to contain disability. Services such as treatment methods, medicine, rehabilitation of the individual through social security systems, labor market measures or social service arrangements are viewed as ways to resolve the medical problems of disability under this model (Marianne, 2009, p. 10).

The Social Model

"Up until the 1990s, disability was broadly conceived in terms of rehabilitation, medicine, psychology, special educational needs and social work" (Goodley, 2010, p. 11) and was very much so adherent to the medical model of disability. Today, this deficit model continues to dominate special education practices and views of disability. However, with the shift toward inclusive practices the social model was developed by scholars who" turned attention away from a preoccupation with people's impairments to a focus on the causes of exclusion through social, economic, political, cultural, relational and psychological barriers" Goodley, 2010, p. 11) rather than only physical ones. The social model is in direct contrast to the medical model of disability.

This model emphasizes the social aspects of the why and how disability comes into being. Therefore, as a counterpoint to the medical view, disability is not something given to people by nature but rather is constructed and created through human interaction and the creation of disability. The environment both social and physical can cause, define, or exaggerate disability (Smart, 2008). Through this model disability is viewed as a "by-product of the social environment resulting from a lack of response to the need to make adaptations, including adjustments to the physical environment"(Marianne, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, "disability is a consequence of man-made conditions and a society that is poorly adapted and organized" (Marianne, 2009, p. 12). The social model presented a "view of disability in which functional limitation was viewed as an expression of failure of environments to accommodate disability characteristics" (Goodley, 2010, p. 12) rather than an innate problem within the individual.

The social model blames society for the exclusion of people with disabilities rather than placing emphasis on biological or physiological defects of an individual. "Disability is not located within the individual" but rather constructed "within the social and physical environment" (Marianne, 2009, p. 11). The social model stands in opposition to the medical view of "fixing" an individual and aims to reshape and reorganize society as a solution to the problem. It is important to note that the social model never does define disability but rather looks at it based on consequences of the disability. "Society must provide instruments to reshape social barriers and enable people with disabilities to participate" in order to overcome "constructions of disability" and avoid segregation of participation in general social life (Marianne, 2009.) Therefore all prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization of disability are constructed by means of society and the environment (Smart, 2008).

The Relative Model

The relative model offers both a medical and socially created view of disability and therefore can be looked at as a negotiation of the medical and social models in which the goals is to bridge the gap between the two. Disability is a result of a breach between abilities such as "capacities, competencies or resources" and individual premise (Marianne, 2009, p. 12). "Disability arises because there is disharmony between demands to engage in some way and the opportunity of meeting these demands" (Marianne, 2009, p. 12). Under this model one cannot simply look at the physical environment or explain disability in biological or medical terms. Instead, this model "provides a reasonable representation of what people usually recognize as obstacles for people with various impairments to participate on equal terms in social life" (Marianne, 2009, p. 12). This model can also be referred to as the Functional Model where "functions of the individual influence the definition of disability" (Smart, 2008). Intervention methods designed to provide adaptive function of the individual or funding the individual or environment to reduce the gap between demands and preconditions is the solution to this problem under this model.

The Cultural Minority Model

While society plays a part in causing disability under the cultural minority model, the focus is directed toward the experiences of the person(s) with a disability. Those whose practices are atypical of mainstream societal views or majority society are discriminated against. A common example of this is the Deaf community and those who do not use conventional means of communication. As a group they do not view themselves as defective and restrictive in communication and life functions, however "representatives of the deaf community feel that they

are a cultural minority, disabled because sign language is uncommon in society at large"

(Marianne, 2009, p. 13) and are "discriminated against by the surrounding society that practices

hearing norms, values, and means of communicating that are uncommon among people with a

hearing impairment"(Marianne, 2009, p. 14).

The cultural minority model does not view disability as having medical or biological

causes and it certainly does not aim to repair or fix individuals who are labeled as having a

disability. Under this model, society focuses on integrating people with disabilities into the

majority world, but as a consequence is stripping others of their identity, culture and language. A

greater focus is on minority culture development and a societal respect for diversity and self

created norms within differing groups.

Each model assists in contributing an understanding and unique viewpoint of disability.

At the same time, shedding light into the differences amongst models, these models more

importantly provide guidelines for action for those who defend each perspective. Biological or

physiological change within the individual is the necessary action required under the medical

model. Transformation of social and physical environments is the means to addressing disability

under the social model. The relative model aims to reduce the gap by using intervention methods

aimed at adaptive function or funding of the individual or society. Lastly, the cultural minority

model seeks to recognize, respect, and celebrate differences among cultures with differing norms.

Understanding each specific model and values held about disability within each, can help

better shape a perspective of how disability is approached in educational settings, particularly

public schools. Given majority society adheres to the medical model of disability and clings to the

deficit perspective, it is safe to assume that educating students based on their weaknesses is the

dominating educational view in the special education classroom today. While these models do not

directly coincide with theories on learning or means of education, multiple perspectives overlap

and parallel between the models of disability and theories of learning. By recognizing these

similarities and differences one can help foster an environment for instruction as well as offer strong alternatives to the dominating traditional view of education.

Theories of Learning

Given my background in coursework grounded in the fields of special education, curriculum and instruction, language and literacy, and educational psychology, I have experienced and come to learn about the ways in which learning occurs through many different perspectives. Depending upon the perspective or theory in which one values and supports, the way in which learning is approached varies. I will address three leading perspectives in the field, behaviorism, the socio-cognitive theory, and the sociocultural theory to further expand my understanding of the approaches to learning as well as compare them against the models of disability to create a cohesive understanding of the differing unique viewpoints and how they come to play upon one another in the field of special education.

Behaviorism

Behaviorists like Watson, Skinner, Pavlov and Thorndike view learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior. Stimulus-Response bonds or associations are formed when a behavior is changed and therefore behavior is evidence of learning. These theorists believe that all species learn in the same way. The environment influences learning by controlling behavior. However, the learner does not influence the environment. Several characteristics influence learning such as the law of readiness and prerequisite skills needed in order to perform the behavior. Classical and operant conditioning, act as means of learning with a focus on concrete, observable, and measurable behavior. This perspective is action-based looking at what people do

rather than how they think and feel. Desirable behaviors to be increased are reinforced and less desirable behaviors with a need to be decreased are punished or put on an extinction schedule to rid the behavior entirely. Ultimately, behaviorists seek to determine the best reinforcer for each individual learner (Schunk, 2004).

A major dilemma in special education is that the curriculum "fosters the idea that disability is an individual's or at most a family's problem and presents "an overemphasis on intervention at the individual level" considering "person-fixing rather than context changing" (Linton, 1998, p. 526). With such a high focus on individual interventions and rehabilitation services to "fix" the person, a "holistic approach to treatment including the social, economic, political, cultural, and legal contexts in which people with disabilities find themselves"(Linton, 1998, p. 527) should be taken into consideration as well.

Given this perspective, behaviorists seek to reinforce and punish individual behaviors and offer services to correct and control undesirable or unfavorable behaviors to meet a societal norm rather than review the context or delivery of teacher instruction. While this paradigm does not directly reflect the views of the medical model of disability, there are several similarities among the theory of behaviorism and the medical model allowing for greater comparison. A high focus on identifying pathological causes, quantifiable data that can be easily observed and agreed upon by experts in the field, and emphasis on rehabilitation services offer similarity to a common means of "fixing" an individual.

The Socio-Cognitive Theory

Bandura's socio-cognitive theory defines learning as a means of acquisition of internal codes and representations that serve as guidelines for future behavior. Similar to behaviorism, behavior reflects learning. However, internal states are considered the learners choice and their

decisions for doing something are contributing factors of learning. Ultimately, behavior provides opportunities for feedback and reinforcement. In the socio-cognitive theory, environment, ones internal processes, and behaviors all affect and influence one another. This is called triadic reciprocity. Bandura and socio-cognitivists alike believe that learning occurs in a process of attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation. Self-efficacy or the learner's perception of their ability and confidence in their ability to perform tasks affect the choices and efforts that they put forth. For example, a student with high self-efficacy has high persistence. However, a student with low self-efficacy has low persistence, which leads to avoidant behaviors.

While this model builds on the characteristics of behaviorism stating learning can have enactivity, it also suggests that learning occurs through the direct or vicarious observation of others. Demonstrations in a steps process, mental or cognitive think-alouds, coping mechanisms and mastery of skills are all types of learning supports suggested by this theory. Bandura, further expands the idea of having specific, measurable goals as stated in the Behaviorist perspective but extends it to include the learner in goal setting and self observation. This is where self-regulation and self-monitoring come into effect (Schunk, 2004).

The Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory ascertains learning as the development through internalization of the content and tools of thinking within a cultural context. Tools can be external physical objects used to act on the world or internal knowledge constructed within a person. The sociocultural theory highlights higher mental processes and believes it is necessary for the understanding of human development and learning. Behaviorists exclusively study lower-order processes. Learners are active constructs of knowledge building understanding within the person. As the teacher, one creates an environment to give tools to facilitate learning but cannot transmit

knowledge. Learners therefore, must be especially active in the process. Learning occurs in situations that actively involve the learner with materials and social interactions.

Similar to the socio-cognitive theory, the environment, internal person and, behavior all interact to influence learning. However, the cultural context one is in emerged contains the tools and opportunities one has to internalize and construct ones own meaning. Characteristics of Interpersonal Learning or the learning between two people greatly influence the learning process. While interacting with another, the learner encounters content and tools of thinking of that culture and perceives the world as a source of learning. In short, social interactions yield social development. Ultimately, the sociocultural theory seeks to change the way in which one looks at the world by viewing learning as a means of internalization in which one absorbs and constructs their own meaning of tools to make it their own (Schunk, 2004).

Vygotsky is known for his theory on the zone of proximal development or the space where dialectical processes take place and learning occurs. Learning occurs as individuals interact with more competent members of the culture within a specific context. Processes of incremental scaffolding are utilized and gradually released as the learner develops an understanding. Under the sociocultural perspective learning occurs in situations that actively involve the learners with materials and social interactions, both hands on and minds on, leading to cognitive autonomy. Students demonstrate learning has occurred when they can use knowledge to problem solve and think on their own (Schunk, 2004).

The main priority in both is to reorganize society and provide opportunities within the environment and everyday context for learners to actively construct meaning. There is a great deal of emphasis on culture and the responsibility of the society or more capable other in the community in both paradigms. Therefore, if society creates many of the problems people with disabilities face, society has the responsibly to address those problems.

There is no one correct theory of learning. It is important as an educator to recognize the differences and similarities amongst theories as to best shape ones own views and methods of practice. Principles of behaviorism dominate special education services today and continue to lead the field because it is the most understood and most talked about theory. While general education classes have seen benefits in utilizing the sociocultural theory, the field of special education has had little discussion with the implementation of such a practices. Perhaps the solution is not to alter the curriculum or methods altogether, but rather offer an alternative approach toward educating students that is in contrast to what customarily is in place today. As an advocate for implementing alternative practices in the special education classroom, I seek to utilize my experiences within a summer reading camp context that employed practices rooted in the sociocutlrual theory with diverse groups of learners, including those with disabilities, and proved successful for the learner, teachers, and overall learning experience.

Chapter 3
Methods of Data Collection

During the summer of 2014, I participated in a Summer Reading Camp four-week experience hosted in the Chambers Building in the Pennsylvania State University Park Main Campus location. Myself, and the rest of the M.Ed Curriculum and Instruction cohort with a focus on Reading Specialist certification pre-service teachers were responsible for leading and implementing instructional practices learned in our coursework in curriculum and instruction, educational psychology, and language and literacy. I employed sociocultural practices and approaches toward learning with a goal of each student leaving the four-week camp with an able literacy identity. Throughout camp I collected data from both formal and informal observations in the field, reported on everyday experiences in narrative form, as well as submitted documentation as suggested by the course syllabus. To offer evidence for the use of alternative practices and their success with non-traditional learners, I utilize field notes, personal narratives, and documented course assignments to depict a positive picture of implementation and offer suggestions for use in the traditional educational setting.

Field Notes

Through the use of qualitative fieldwork I was able to generate field notes both descriptive and reflective in information during my 2014 Summer Reading Camp practicum. I was able to collect factual data as well as record my own thoughts and ideas about the experience. I used descriptive information to document factual details such as dates, times, settings, conversations and interactions observed. Physical setting, social environment, patterns of interaction and communication, conflicts, decision making processes, roles of participants, and

specific scenarios or quotes related to the purpose of the research were included as well.

Reflective information such as my thoughts, questions, and ideas are also documented. I noted

any impressions or criticisms I had about what I observed including questions of concern or

misunderstandings. In using field notes I attempted to remain organized, accurate and detailed. I

later recorded my thoughts and insight on what I had just observed. Specific field notes include

observational journals along with daily running records detailing specific events and how they

interact on the learner and teacher. There were endless opportunities for observation. However,

the concentration will be on the fifty-seven specific observations of the four-week experience.

Field notes were recorded as a means of evidence to demonstrate understanding the environment,

social situation, and dynamics of the Reading Camp as well as my role and ideas surrounding the

culture (Schwandt, 2015).

Personal Narratives

Personal narratives were utilized to depict and illustrate a day in the life of three campers

throughout the 2014 Summer Reading Camp. Their experiences will be examined and specific

details will be described to help the reader understand what had occurred. To facilitate the process

of writing personal narratives, I utilized all five senses to add details about what I saw, heard, and

felt during specific events. Narratives will be inspected and analyzed to emphasis student

transformation throughout the Camp. I will detail and describe three personal camper

experiences, their struggles, triumphs, and how they transformed from fixed to dynamic learners

during our four-week interaction in an environment rooted in sociocultural practices.

Course Assignments

Through the use of course assignments aimed to develop a sociocultural approach to working with students who are experiencing difficulty learning to read and write at school I was able to gather information about what learners already know about reading and writing, develop literacy environments and events for optimal engagement, and respond appropriately to approximations of reading and writing. Lecture, class notes, my teacher profile, course assignments and weekly write ups are utilized to better access how each practice was employed within the camp setting. Course documentation has allowed me to further identify patterns among preferred, dominant, and necessary practices through my experience.

Data Analysis

In reviewing my qualitative research of field notes, personal narratives, and course assignments from the four week 2014 Summer Reading Camp, I used triangulation to search for convergence or consistency of reoccurring implications between my multiple sources of data. Analysis of my field notes was simultaneous to my observations. I looked for ways in which conditions of learning affected the way children saw themselves as learners, how students experienced learning, and lastly how they interacted within the environment. I continued to explore the multiple opportunities for learning throughout the camp experience and under which conditions students appeared most engaged. I investigated further to determine that learners were best able to demonstrate their competency, strengths, and abilities when interacting with a more knowledgeable other as well as within a zone of proximal development specific to the learner and context. After making these connections and comparisons, three specific themes emerged as most important for fostering an alternative approach toward special education and how to

implement these practices rooted in the sociocultural theory to change the negative societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Conditions of learning, the opportunity to learn, and constructing knowledge within a zone of proximal development best represent the patterns found within my data sources.

Chapter 4

Discussion: Shaping a Curriculum Based on Sociocultural Practices

In agreement with the need to change society in order to address the problems students with disabilities face in the field of education, especially special education, I argue that despite the dominant deficit practices corresponding to principles of behaviorism, that we as teachers need to reexamine our classrooms, practices, beliefs and values in order to truly create a positive alternative approach to the field. By shaping a curriculum to parallel the practices suggested by the sociocultural theorist below, one is able to foster change to the governing negative societal attitudes toward disability and the deficit perspective and offer students an opportunity to learn in challenging yet encouraging environments. We as teachers can use such practices to shape experiences in the classroom to create a positive differential approach toward special education rather than the traditional special education curriculum rooted in principles of behaviorism. The following theorist and description of my personal experiences and implementation of practices of the sociocultural model can lend hand in implementing this approach in educational practices to impact both the learner and teacher in the special education classroom.

My summer camp experience directly aligns with practices of the sociocultural theory and can suggest ways in which teachers in traditional special education classrooms can take on this alternative approach toward curriculum as well as form ideas on how to embed and incorporate practices from this alternative approach into classrooms today. I will make connections between my personal summer reading camp experience to successful programs researched, documented, and written about in the field.

Just as in the Early Literacy Project, daily literacy instruction was embedded in "meaningful and contextual activities" with a desire to "emphasize students' membership in

communities" of practice (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 289). Students "regardless of reading

and writing skills were perceived as readers and writers"(Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 290) and

were provided "social and dialogic interactions that support student performance in their ZPD"

(Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 289) and were taught "strategies for self-regulated learning in

order to apprentice students" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 289). Despite a portion of the

students suggested for the program given their difficulty with literacy tasks, each were set up with

a positive attribution and expectation of learning. Similar activities include among programs

include "choral reading, partner reading, journal writing, chair sharing, morning news, story

discussion/literature responses"(Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 289). In both projects, "students

read expository and narrative texts as part of the thematic unit and engaged in a process of inquiry

as they used the strategies related to gathering, integrating, synthesizing, and constructing

information as part of a process of building and communicating new meanings"(Trent, Artiles, &

Englert, 1998, p. 290). Activities based on the theme of transportation "were related throughout

the use of the thematic unit that engaged students in studying a variety of topics" (Trent, Artiles, &

Englert, 1998, p. 290). One specific incident including a student who had trouble with

conventional reading was given a pattern of "I like" books just as "students who lacked

conventional reading skills were given predictable books to read" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p.

290) in the Early Literacy Project. The projects success and "recent literacy instruction research

based on social constructivist theory, has enormous potential to enrich special education

knowledge base" (295).

Despite evidence indicating literacy instruction and practices based in the social

constructivist theory have proven academic student success, "special educators are still in conflict

over which paradigm should guide instruction in special education" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998,

p. 295). However, the greater issue lies in those "pre-occupied with extreme views that leave no

room for integration" of practices (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 295). In order to be an

effective teacher one must "learn to integrate strategically instructional models based on the needs of their students" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 295).

The following paragraphs will further detail suggestions by main theorist leading the field of the sociocultural approach. Information about conditions of learning and what environmental aspects should be considered prior to and during instruction will be discussed as suggested by Camborune. Johnston talks about learned expectations and the student's ability to see themselves as a fixed or dynamic learner and how that affects learning and relationships within the classroom. The opportunity to learn or equity of quality experiences as noted by Gee suggests means for providing equivalent incidences for all learners. Lastly, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal development and how it relates to a particular student and context to shape the instructional needs as well as challenge the student under the scaffolds of a more knowledgeable other all help to shape and develop practices and means of implementing into the traditional special education classroom today. I will highlight use of suggested practices throughout.

Cambourne: Conditions of Learning

Cambourne suggests that as teachers, we are responsible for providing an environment that is most conducive for student learning as the student is at the center of instruction. He discusses the conditions, as states of "being, doing, behaving, and creating" (Cambourne, 1995, p. 51). These conditions allow teachers to enhance opportunities to learn in his model displaying conditions of learning and connecting areas of the classroom. Immersion, Demonstration, Engagement, Expectations, Responsibility, Employment, Approximations, and Response all interact to make a rich learning environment and maximize student opportunity to learn. If a teacher pays attention to the necessary conditions of learning it will increase the likelihood that these students will engage and attempt to learn something.

Immersion refers to the condition of complete envelopment in what a student is learning. Demonstration involves the ability to see, hear, witness, experience, feel and explore. All learning begins by modeling given this perspective. Learners must first make an Engagement with demonstrations that Immersion provides. An array of active participation and student attention are crucial to engagement. Expectations are stated to be "subtle but powerful coercers of behavior"(Cambourne, 1995, p. 52). Teachers must provide clear expectations for their students to set them up with an obvious message that they are not only expected to perform such behaviors, but they are capable of doing so. Responsibility refers to the learner's choice about what to engage in or with. The learner ultimately decides the nature of the engagement. Approximations refer to the student's immature attempts toward a desired behavior. Approximations are meaningful and mistakes are necessary for learning to occur. Employment refers to the condition of use or the opportunity to practice what is being taught inside and outside of the teaching context. Lastly, Response refers to feedback received as a consequence of the behavior.

Cambourne (1995) suggests "learners are more likely to engage in demonstrations if they believe they are capable of ultimately learning or doing whatever is being demonstrated"(p. 52). As a teacher, one should hold high expectations of performance for their students in order to convey the message that they are expected to learn but are also capable of doing so. One should never set any condition so high as to set a student up for failure. As teachers we should aim to make learning as much like everyday implicit learning as possible, especially for those who see themselves as Johnston & Costello's (2005) idea of fixed learners and are attached to false learned expectations of themselves. Expectations are necessary as students fight the fixed view of learned assumptions and help prove competence, ability, and success for each student.

Johnston: Learned Expectations

Children's thinking evolves from the discourses in which they are immersed. Johnston (2012) suggests that what we choose to say to children when they are successful or unsuccessful plays a larger role in student identity of themselves as learners. Too often students with disabilities get trapped in this fixed state of mind. For example referring to themselves as "not a good reader" or "not good at math". Once "identified," with having a disability, children remain entangled in this problematic discursive web, partly because the problem is represented as a trait of the child rather than as in the instructional environment.

A Fixed Theory suggests characteristics are permanent, unmoving, and incapable of change. To foster confidence and raise awareness of student abilities, teachers are encouraged to highlight accomplishments and strengths of student work and to acknowledge them as dynamic learners. The Dynamic Theory refers to something that grows with learning and depends upon the situation. Students can refer to themselves in that moment in time as inadequate, but can see the potential for themselves in the future. (Johnston, 2012, pg 17)

The problem with children, especially students with disabilities, is that too often they hold a fixed performance mind frame in which they lack strategies and are helpless when they run into a problem. Because of this, their difficulties with tasks are blamed on the efforts of others. Eventually, continued fixed helplessness leads to failure. A Fixed Theory mindset focuses on ends goals and outcomes whereas the Dynamic perspective focuses on the process. Johnson & Costello suggest that educators uphold a Dynamic Theory instilling confidence in their students and providing them with strategies and self-instruction techniques when they run into problems (Johnston, 2012, p. 17).

Gee: Opportunity to Learn

Gee theorizes that there are other ways to assess student learning and challenges the traditional assessments such as standardized social practices that are in place to imply success or failure of students and teachers. Gee focuses on equity or having equivalent opportunities and experiences to learn among all students. Gee's Fourth Principle states, "people have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences not just with texts, but with embodied experiences in a given semiotic domain that allows them to situate meanings for words and phrases in that domain" (Gee, 2003, p. 22). Educators can see the importance of supplying the range of necessary experiences with which student can build good and useful simulations for understanding subjects that they may not have had equivalent opportunities in.

Gee (2003) expresses "embodiment experiences" as actions and simulations and suggests "the more the better"(p. 23). Embodiment experiences help us give meaning to any task. It is not all about meaning in the head. "Abstract systems require meaning through embodiment experiences" according to Gee. Embodied experiences involve actions in the domain as well as experiences with talk and dialogue in the domain. Gee touches upon the ideas of distributed knowledge or knowledge obtained from a variety of sources such as teachers, peers, parents etc. Ultimately, a large community of practice helps to shape and mold the learner.

Vygotsky: Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky, the father of the sociocultural perspective, suggests that learning occurs in situations that actively involve the learner with materials and social interactions. Cultural and historical factors assist the learner in developing within this context. Essentially, the learner inherits tools and symbols of the culture and internalizes them. These tools influence the manner

in which we think about things. Most learning occurs interpersonally or between two people in which a learner encounters content and tools of thinking of the culture that leads to cognitive development. Therefore, the social world acts as the source of learning and social interactions assist in social development.

The major mechanism through which learning occurs is through internalization of meaning or making it your own. This method involves higher learning processes and higher order thinking, which stands in contrast to behaviorism points of view. The process of learning occurs two-fold in that it must pass through both the interpsychological plane of the dialectical processes of interacting with others as well as the intrapsychological plane of internalizing within oneself to make independent use of information. The Dialectic Process involves the interaction between a learner and a more knowledgeable other in which meaning is negotiated and knowledge is constructed (Schunk, 2004).

The Zone of Proximal Development is the space where those dialectical processes take place and learning occurs (Schunk, 2004). The "ZDP has a direct bearing on practice" and "school instruction" (Gindis, 1999, p. 336) and learning occurs as individuals interact with more competent members of the culture and as individuals move past current levels and develop abilities of knowledge. First the learner interacts with a more competent member. The learner then moves past current levels and develops new knowledge completing aspects of the task they can already do. The more competent other completes tasks the learner cannot do, even with assistance, and provides support in aspects that they learner is capable of doing. This can also be referred to as incremental learning. When students can demonstrate the use of knowledge to problem solve and think on their own, we know they have learned. (Schunk, 2004).

In order to "transcend the overemphasis on instructional strategies" that have characterized the field of special education, Vygotsky father of the sociocultural theory focused on "cognitive practices" that challenged the traditional emphasis on "memorization and rote

learning of skills and strategies in setting detached from the functional and authentic contexts in which they are to be used" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285). The field has "relied too heavily on deficit thinking and must now enhance existing practices with alternative approaches that consider sociocultural context in which children with disabilities learn (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 277). Vygotsky suggests four practices of apprenticeship in applied settings, access to empowering modes of discourse, guided instruction leading to self-regulated learning, and learning in cultural-historical context (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285). Social interactions are a major practice of this theory as "children acquire complex skills through social interactions in situated context which allows them to see how the various parts of the process fit together. Social interactions with "more knowledgeable members" allow students to be "acculturated into cognitive practices and strategies of skills problem solvers in the content areas in which the strategies are used" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285). Vygotsky suggests, "through cognitive apprenticeship, children are given access to modes of discourse not available naturally" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285). Secondary discourses guided by schools "include ways of talking and ways of acting". Student "knowledge of these discourses can inform the members regarding the intellectual activities related to what it means to do reading, writing, mathematics, science or social studies (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285).

As a result several teacher practices have been developed to outline how to implement these strategies in the classroom. One suggestion is that "teachers must explicitly teach children with disabilities at a higher cognitive level that makes visible the meta-level strategies that are valued and privileged in schools and other spheres of life"((Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 285). Instructors of such strategies must "constantly adapt their behavior as the learner, progresses adding and removing support in relation to the emergent goals and learner's performance in academic content" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 286). Errors and "mistakes are inevitable and can provide occasion for the restructuring of knowledge" therefore "teachers must lead students

to adopt more sophisticated approaches and tactics for solving complex problems"((Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 286). Lastly, "teachers should mediate performance in ways that enable a child to solve a problem or achieve a goal that would be beyond his or her unassisted efforts" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 286). This perspective is favorable over the discrete trial method formed on the basis of principles of behaviorism and dominant in the field today as it allows for student participation from the beginning of instruction.

In implementing these practices suggested by Vygotsky, teachers should implement both verbal and signed based mediation. Verbal scaffolds such as "teacher modeling, instructing, and question" should be utilized in addition to "schematics, diagrams, and maps" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 286). All instruction should occur within the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZDP is the "distance between what children can do without assistance and what they can accomplish with the assistance of a capable other"((Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 286). The zone of proximal development is unique to each learner and context. With the paradigm shift has come "several research programs based on principles of social constructivism" that have proven "highly successful in enhancing academic learning and achievement of students with mild disabilities" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 288). Practices such as the early literacy model have provided a framework for implementation in special education classrooms.

While each of the theorists above, Cambourne, Johnston, Gee, and Vygotsky provide the framework, practices, and methods in which to embed sociocultural practices in the special education classroom, they are not the extent of theorists invested in this approach. There is countless research out there that suggests and offers additional alternative methods of practice. It is important to recognize that the view presented here is but a narrow view of special education. Ultimately, educators invested in explicit instruction believe "effective research based instruction is overlooked and underused in special education" (Heward, 199). However, for purposes of reflecting on my own experiences that helped shape my understanding of the alternative

approach, I situate this paper using the theorists and the ideas that most frequented the summer

reading camp.

Chapter 5

Findings/Results

After reviewing the data collected, the three themes that were most consistent across methods were conditions of learning, opportunities to learn, and construction of knowledge within the zone of proximal development. Conditions of learning depict teaching through the concepts of immersion, demonstration, expectations, employment, approximations, and response. Opportunities to learn provide optimal possibilities for student engagement and for learning to occur. Lastly, negotiating learning experiences within a student's zone of proximal development with the scaffold of a more capable other helps understand the student strengths as well as push them to perform beyond what they could simply do independently. I will now look at each theme and make connections between my own personal experiences at the Summer Reading camp and the literature cited.

Implication One: Cambourne's Conditions of Learning

In order to maintain an optimal learning environment, teachers must be responsible for keeping students engaged. Engagement is the ultimate goal of any learning environment. Camp teachers were to encourage learners to be "potential doers" and foster an environment in which they could take risks without fear of assessment or mistake. The following conditions set the dynamic of the four-week camp experience and further purpose in life for these students and teachers involved. Campers of all ability levels were accepted into the program and several students were even labeled as having a disability.

Immersion:

Students should always be immersed in what they are learning. Each morning, teachers anticipated the arrival of the students to greet and escort each to their designated classrooms within the building. Light, playful, and informal conversations were held during travel time. The day begins with a "Survey of Self" and games to identify student abilities. Survey questions often followed a pattern of "My favorite…" and games varied from BINGO, to word searches, hangman, sentence starter prompts and much more. Students were encouraged to step away from independent activities and engage in interactive conversations and activities with their teachers and peers. Students were then dismissed to their designated groups that were separated based on grade level and ability. Four groups, kindergarten through first grade, first to third grade, third to fifth grade, and fifth grade and up were the selected groups. Students in the K-3 group were considered the "Smalls" who often interacted together during whole group instruction and students in the 3 and up were all considered the Talls. The Smalls began each lesson with whole group instruction involving a language or literacy skill. Often times Big Books were used and instruction was differentiated to better engage those at the kindergarten and third grade levels. All students gathered on the carpet as teachers demonstrated the skill. Students were enthusiastically asked to participate in the whole group lesson. After whole group instruction concluded, groups were further divided for small group and or one on one instruction. During this time, groups worked on finding and researching information based on the theme of the museum, transportation. Literacy skills were required for finding information, however very little formal instruction was given. On select days at the beginning of camp and all days toward the end, students would put their research information to use constructing forms of transportation.

For example, my Small group (K-1) demonstrated their knowledge of transportation in space, the sky, and in the water by creating a giant spaceship as a class, as well as individual boats and planes out of used and recycled materials. By making reading tasks more purposeful and accompanying learning with something they would create and display, students appeared

more engaged and eager to learn about different forms of transportation. We had our students enveloped in the theme and participating in literacy tasks throughout the day. My group often sang songs and read poems about transportation during "down time" or "wait time". The last thirty minutes of the day were spent independently reading. Books on transportation were available for student selection. Interactive Reading between teachers and students and often between peers began to emerge as the students became more comfortable with one another. The day would always conclude with a riddle or joke about transportation. The whole group would gather around the board and read the prompt and try and decipher it together. For dismissal, students were accompanied to the designated pick up area, located at the side of the building, where we waiting as a group for each individual camper's parents. It was exciting to see campers often telling each other the jokes or stumping their parents with a riddle upon arrival.

Demonstration

Engagement requires both immersion and demonstration. In order for engagement to occur, learners must be immersed in text of all kinds as well as have many opportunities for demonstration of how texts are constructed and used by a more knowledgeable other. Teachers must ensure that immersion and demonstrations are available if they want to reach the ultimate goal of engagement with their students.

As teachers we need to demonstrate how we interact and use text so that we can produce competent, able, dynamic users of literacy. Teachers must state processes aloud and include students in questions as they demonstrate. It is important to make sure to show student what to do, not simply just tell them what to do. By doing this, learners get a direct model of a more knowledgeable other performing a task or creating a product which is necessary for the learning process. Learners need information in order to be able to do something. It was suggested to think about the delivery of instruction and the process naturally when teaching and diverge from

scripted lessons teachers were most familiar with. With demonstrations, there is some control and limitations but there is a need for collaboration and negotiation amongst possible options.

Expectations

Dr. Shannon demonstrated successful use of Expectations during our first class. He had the class of teacher repeat the phrase, "I am dynamic. I am capable. I am brave" setting the tempo for the course and his expectations that we are expected to learn something from this camp experience and that we are capable, active agents in doing so. Learning from Dr. Shannon's model, I proceeded to create an environment in which my campers would see themselves as capable individuals as well as readers and writers.

In the beginning, my expression of expectation was more obvious. I had to interact with specific individuals to prove to them that they were in fact readers. Each experience with the three campers was different. However all ended with them stating, "I can read"! I was animated at first, with one student especially making comments like "Did you just read that? So what your telling me is you can read?, You just read that!, You read that all by yourself! What do you mean you can't read, you just read this whole page to me!" While at times it was playful, I could tell that each camper felt accomplished after realizing their ability to read, whether it was a few words, the whole page or demonstrating strategy use for those who were more advanced in the literacy process. No matter what his or her level of reading, I engaged and mediate with each student. Makin him or her feel competent, capable, and able to read.

Expectations were set for other literacy tasks such as writing where similar methods were used to prove competency. In setting the tone for one of the first traditional writing pieces, a boat caption, I started off Small Group Instruction with "You are all writers, you write your name everyday, you write about vacations, you write in thought bubbles, you write stories and jokes, you write your answers to our survey everyday. You are all writers!" I pulled one specific student aside to work with him one-on-one. While he demonstrated resilience in his writing, he lacked

strategy and needed reassurance when attempting to take risks on words he was unfamiliar with. He stumbled over the word "submarine" in his piece. He stated several times "I don't know how to spell it, it can't sound it out, I don't know, I'm not a good speller". Instead of giving him the answer, I gave him options and set the expectation that he was capable! I reminded him of a book we had read together and hinted that if the book was about submarines, he may be able to find out the spelling of the word from using the text. The second option was a sounding out strategy, for which he chose. I told him, "You can do this! Sound it out and write the letter sounds you hear just like we did for the word "this". I left him to attempt the task independently, but stayed in close proximity for support. His result was "This is my sumarine. It carries beople.". We went over the mistakes together and I made it very obvious that he had all of the letter sounds he heard written on the line. It was evident by his hi-five and big smile that in that moment, he saw himself as capable and a writer! He looked proud and accomplished and we celebrated his approximation! Above methodology of expectations held throughout the duration of camp for each individual camper and the group as a whole.

Responsibility*:*

Cambourne suggests that learners have a choice about what to engage in or with. The learner ultimately decides the nature of this engagement. This was evident each morning when students had the option of games to engage with as well as at the days end with independent reading. One specific example is when a glyph activity was set up as an option for morning games. Learners had the opportunity to identify themselves with the glyph information. Children could see patterns and similarities among age, favorite color, animal and book. Depending on the age level and ability of the learner, each completed the activity with someone or some were scaffolded throughout. Learners were able to demonstrate their choice making

ability. Likewise, they were able to demonstrate direction following, reading and writing ability and interaction with text. Teachers have to give up some responsibility in this learning process and allow students to take independent strides toward wanting to construct their own learning and knowledge experiences.

Employment

Employment refers to the condition of use or the opportunity to practice what is being taught inside and outside of the teaching context. With many of our lessons in literacy students were able to employ their idea of reading outside of camp. I taught a lesson as signs being a text. Students were challenged at the days end, while waiting for their parents to arrive, to look for text in the environment. Bathroom symbols, room numbers, stop signs, traffic lights, street names, building names were all identified as text that they could read and it was evident by the smiles on their faces that they had felt accomplished. One specific student even continued his text interaction on his way home with his mother. The following day this parent approached me thanking me for showing her child that he could read. They even made a game out of it that continued throughout camp!

Approximations

Approximations refer to the child's attempt at desirable behavior where meaningful mistakes are necessary for learning to occur. A student and I had read the "I Like" book. He struggled on the word chicken in "I like chicken". Instead he used the word turkey. When I asked him why he thought it was turkey he said because it looks like a turkey in the picture. He also made some close approximations to words by using the pictures as a strategy to figure out unknown words. He stated smoothies for "shakes". Each of these mistakes while miniscule, were meaningful to this student learning how to read and finding strategies that worked when he faced a problem. If I as the teacher, pay attention to the conditions of learning, approximations in particular, I can increase the likelihood that students will engage and attempt to learn something

during our reading tasks. Therefore, appreciating approximations to the word and recognizing student efforts yielded greater confidence in themselves as a reader as well as in reading skills in general.

Response:

In order to receive a response, learners must first be able to represent their knowledge in some way. Through approximations, students create a "final" representation of their knowledge. Their next approximation is based upon the feedback of more knowledgeable others. The way in which students receive feedback will affect their belief in their abilities to improve upon their product. All learners require feedback in some way in order to reach a final or best product.

Teachers should provide immediate and appropriate feedback. This does not necessarily have to be by methods of traditional corrective feedback of acknowledging and correcting mistakes, but rather by exploring the product with the student, engaging with them, asking them questions about the process and comparing it to the model. While Camborne does not disregard the product, he believes the process of achieving an end product is more important.

Implication Two: Gee's Opportunity to Learn

Gee's Fourth Principle states "people have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences not just with texts, but with embodied experiences in a given semiotic domain that allows them to situate meanings for words and phrases in that domain" (Gee, 2003). Therefore, teachers of camp sought to create maximum opportunities for students to learn and gain information from an overall community of practice.

As the teacher, I provided my campers with a variety of experiences to ensure there were optimal opportunities to shape and mold learners. Embodiment activities and interaction with materials such as flying paper airplanes for which flight distance was measured, or dancing to songs and poems about transportation, occurred at least once daily. Opportunities to learn from peers were experienced in whole group and small group dynamics. As the teacher I was always looking for ways to increase opportunities to learn. We had even turned our transition times between classrooms into learning experiences. Students would line up as a form of transportation and we would make noises and act out how that particular vehicle traveled. Other times were filled with songs we rehearsed daily.

When attempting to answer questions from campers, I practiced Gee's suggestions of incorporating others views, perspectives, and opinions to ensure maximum opportunity to learn for my campers. For example, we visited the mineral museum on campus. Our mini lesson that day discussed what types of things we should incorporate in our own museums. We talked specifically about signs and labels so that people know exactly what they are looking at. Taking advantage of the learning opportunity at the museum I had my group point out each label that they saw in the museum and we read several together so that we could get an idea of how we could formulate words for our exhibits. Instead directly responding to questions of "what is a label" and teaching a lesson on what a label is, what it looks like, how to write it, I made use of an implicit event to instruct and make the task important. Direct responding only allows for one opportunity to learn. According to Gee, we want multiple opportunities to learn therefore incorporating others views, opinions, suggestions is necessary for learners to learn. Teachers should be aware of this in order to be most effective under this practice. Teachers need to create experiences for students to implicitly learn about everyday experiences. We need to provide

opportunities for self-exploration and discovery. As teachers we need to allow for creativity and imagination as well as the importance of making connections. Ultimately, interaction between materials, peers and teachers allowed maximum opportunities for students to engage and learn.

Implication Three: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development through interaction and reciprocity of a more knowledgeable other. Teachers need to utilize this practice to best support and scaffold students in their own reading tasks. As a teacher, one finds out what the student can do and supports the student in doing a little bit more. When reading with my students, instead of just simply giving them the unfamiliar word they were struggling with, I supported them and provided strategies for sounding it out or using clues from the page to decipher and make an educated guess or approximation to the unknown word. By doing this, students were able to make steps beyond what they believed they were capable of. While, teachers should utilize scaffolding of the learning process, students should still be held responsible for their own learning. The ZPD allows students to take risks with a more knowledgeable other, understand expectations and responsibility, and push beyond the "zone" with each attempt and additional support. Eventually these scaffolds are faded and students can complete tasks independently.

One particular example of good use of the zone of proximal development was my interaction with one particular struggling reader in my group. He himself held a very fixed mindset of his reading abilities. However, we worked together frequently during the last thirty minutes each day dedicated to reading and I was able to scaffold the reading process and facilitate the frustration of wanting to read more advanced text and truly being able to. I sat next to my camper and he followed along as I pointed to each word with my finger from the book "How to Train my Train". He was able to answer comprehension questions and understand what was

going on in the story. I asked him to pick among readable level books and he selected the book

"Trucks" a very basic level text. "Trucks carry…". He was able to identify the word *Trucks* on

each page but had difficulty decoding *carry* even though it was repetitive and had very little to no

strategy when he came to an unfamiliar word. He did refer to the pictures for clues when he was

stumped but not consistently. He more than often guessed using prior knowledge about what he

knew about trucks rather than using the multiple texts in front of him. However, instead of

focusing on the end product I used open-ended questions and tried to figure out his though

processes when attempting to read the story. I tried to engage in Vygotskys zone of proximal

development to scaffold and support him just a little bit beyond what he thought he was capable

of.

Summary of Implications

In summary, the three key implications demonstrated how to create an optimal learning

environment through the conditions of learning while inviting risk taking behaviors and increased

opportunities to learn as well as interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development as key

practices of the sociocultural theory.

Under the guidance of Dr. Shannon, I used this experience to utilize and implement

Sociocultural practices to shape the 2014 Summer Reading Camp curriculum and differentiate a

positive approach toward education particularly in literacy tasks. While at first, it appeared

unfamiliar and difficult to steer clear from traditional methods of education focusing on principles

of behaviorism, it quickly became something that myself and other teachers around me

appreciated as a different approach to learning and educating.

The students appeared to enjoy their time spent at camp and in the end got to display

what they had learned in a museum exhibition they had constructed. It was evident that by the

camps end all students saw themselves as dynamic learners capable of literacy tasks and competent in problem solving. They were artist, active constructors of knowledge and responsible for their own learning. They were proud.

Overall, the clear conclusions that were taken way from this study were how the conditions of learning, opportunities to learn, and interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development all merge together to form a cohesive idea for shaping a curriculum in the traditional special education classroom.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

My work has implications that suggest those using sociocultural practices have created an alternative approach toward use in education. This can shed light into incorporated such practices in the field of special education. It is evident that teachers have the abilities to use and implement these practices in their classroom to foster an encouraging a competent environment of learning. In shaping and implementing of a curriculum utilizing practices rooted in the sociocultural theory, yields a much-needed change in the negative societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities as well as can help shape experiences to create a positive differential approach toward special education.

Students are considered competent, able, and dynamic under these practices. Student strengths are celebrated and mediation within the zone of proximal development is encouraged. There is a great shift from traditional classroom lecture with an intense focus on deficits and student weakness to an interactive process where learners construct meaning rather than see it as a transfer between the teacher and student. The implementation of practices grounded in the sociocultural theory, could transform the field of special education toward a more inclusive model, not the full inclusion model, but rather inclusion based on positive differentiation in which the special education classroom can foster similar goals as those in general education.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although the sociocultural theory has proven its practices are useful in increasing the conditions of learning, opportunities to learn, and educational experiences for students to demonstrate abilities within the zone of proximal development, the field lacks firm research and

evidence in the application of these methods to traditional educational settings to determine if in fact they could be a solution or alternative to practices based on principles of behaviorism. Several concerns about the validity and effectiveness of such practices have surfaced in response to the opposition against pedagogy driven by principles of behaviorism. "Scientific validation and actual implementation are still to be seen" (Gindis, 1999, p. 339) therefore those who value and measure success against quantifiable data, which unfortunately is majority society, suggest that such practices are invalid and ineffective. More efforts to implement and document based on quantitative research are needed to prove this field is effective in teaching practices.

Future research is needed to lead to "teacher growth and improved student outcomes" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 300). Instead of remaining stagnant, teachers are encouraged to "focus less on extreme views and determine where paths cross and where commonalities exist" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 302) between the competing practices. As special educators we need to help "practitioners bridge the gap between research and practice" by "increase[ing] implementation among practitioners and researchers" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 302). Ultimately, it is our responsibility as teachers to strive to find a practice that offers opportunities for optimal learning for our students because "children who have always learned despite our paradigm shift, structural reforms and policies changes will continue to learn, and children who have always failed will continue to fail" (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998, p. 302).

Suggestions for Future Practice

Just as policymakers have the ability to create laws about the path of education students with disabilities will take based on definitions and contributing agencies, they too have the ability to shed light into different perspectives that allow teacher to construct environments that are most

conducive for student learning and that can provide optimal opportunities for experience, practice, and process.

However, policymakers are not the sole contributors in making a change. Practicing teachers can adopt sociocultural practices and techniques and apply them in their classrooms today. University teacher preparation programs can invite and encourage students to embrace and learn more about different pedagogies offering coursework through different educational perspectives. Incorporating disability studies into teacher preparation programs so that " "disability studies could provide teacher educators to scrutinize the way in which knowledge about special education disables." It could also invite teacher educators to ask, "What kind on knowledge do we want our teacher to have?" and to ensure student teachers are exposed to this knowledge and helped to examine it critically" (Bratlinger, 2006, p. 37).

We as teachers have the ability to change the field. We cannot remain idle while policymakers with traditional views of education, methodologies of traditional cookie cutter techniques, continue to delegate future regulations for teaching of individuals with disabilities. It is our responsibly to look at shaping a curriculum that offers alternative, encouraging yet challenging learning environments, recognizes students strengths over deficits, and ultimately allows the student to see themselves an competent, able and dynamic. As suggested by Valle, (2011) teachers should "try and engage with colleagues in an informal study group around disability studies, inclusion and ablism, connect with like minded colleagues, connect with even just one colleague who shares similar views to yours, and lastly aim to disrupt abilism" (p. 209-210). As teachers we need to act as advocates and raise awareness among faculty and even students so that we can truly delivery instruction to best meet the needs of our students and incorporate non-traditional practices and alternative approaches to help shape experiences to create a positive differential approach toward special education.

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ACADEMIC VITA
Gina Gonnella
gmg5115@psu.edu
215-801-6692

EDUCATION
The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College   **University Park, PA**
Bachelor of Science in Special Education – K-12 Option - May 2015
Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction – Reading Specialist Option - May 2015
Major: Special Education, Minor: Deafness and Hearing, Minor: Disability Studies
License**:** Pennsylvania Special Education, K-12, May 2015
           Pennsylvania Reading Specialist, K-12, May 2015
           Board Certified Behavior Analyst Certification, Anticipated 2016
Scholarship: John M. Shemick Scholarship in Education, 2011-2015
Research Abroad: The Pennsylvania State University, Paris, France, May 2013

PROFESSIONAL SEMESTER AND FIELD EXPERIENCE   March 2013 - May 2015
Student Teaching: Mount Nittany Middle School, State College PA
Student Teacher, Multiple Disabilities Life Skills Classroom, Grades 6-8, 5 students, January – May 2015
- Deliver individual and specially designed lessons using direct instruction programs and teacher generated lesson plans
- Produce and implement supplemental materials to assist students in reaching IEP goals in math, reading, writing, and communication skills
- Modify general education content to best provide the greatest access and participation
- Utilize technology (computers, iPads, communication boards, picture schedules, switches) in lessons both in academics and functional communication
- Create and apply behavior intervention programs driven by data
- Monitor progress using equal interval and standard celeration charts

Field Experience,
- *Mount Nittany Elementary School, State College PA, Autistic Support, Grades K-3, 4 students, September – December 2014*
  - Operated as acting Behavior Specialist, generated and implemented interventions and behavior management programs as well as data collection and ongoing progress monitoring
- *Mount Nittany Middle School, Academic Literacy, Grade 8, 80 students, September – December 2014*
  - Implemented instruction on enhancing motivation and reading strategies of non-fiction text
- *The Pennsylvania State University, Summer Reading Camp, Grade K – June – August 2014*
  - Instituted alternative informative practices to gather and respond to data related to literacy skills and student competence
  - Provided optimal opportunities to learn and view self as a competent reader and writer
- *Mount Nittany Elementary School, State College PA, Grade K, Gen. Ed, 21 students September – December 2013*
  - Cultivated screening and direct instruction implementation progress for math, reading, writing, and behavior using Precision Teaching and method of data collection and charting
- *Corl Street Elementary, Learning Support, Grades K-5, 7 students, March – May 2013*
  - Supported kindergarten student with Down Syndrome in general education classroom
  - Supplemented instruction with content specific assignments and direct instruction lessons

Research Involvement
- *The Pennsylvania State University, Paris, France – May 2013*

- o Investigated oral and sign language practices and collaborated on constructing a film as the final project
- *The Pennsylvania State University, Easter Seals, State College PA – Fall 2012*
  - o Assisted in coordinating activities to prove competence of students with disabilities via art expression

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EMPLOYMENT
AdvoCare
Independent Distributor/ Health & Wellness Coach   *December 2014 – Present*
- *Encouraged and promoted healthy living options for those looking for a healthier lifestyle*
- *Demonstrated strong leadership and communication skills*
- *Provided one-on-one coaching and expertise in regards to meal planning and exercise programming*

American Reads, University Park, PA   *August 2011 – Present*
Family Night Program Coordinator
- Produced interactive instructional stations based on related themes
- Delegated and oversaw team in implementing plans

Staff Training
- *Produced and trained staff on utilization of reading strategies and implementation in sites placements*

 YMCA , Fairless Hills, PA   *May 2011 – August 2013*
Assistant Director
- *Collaborated with directors and staff in achieving safe environments and functional activities for students diagnosed with multiple disabilities particularly autism and emotional behavior disorder.*

Camp Counselor
- *Worked in collaboration with staff in participating in activities with campers such as games, field trips, arts and crafts, and functional life skill training.*

HONORS AND AWARDS   **University Park, PA**
Deans List Standing
Schreyer Honors College
National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS)
Member   *June2011-2014*
National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS)
Member   *June 2011-2014*
Pi Lambda Theta
National Education Honor Society   *March 2013- Present*
Phi Eta Sigma
National Honor Society   *March 2013- Present*
Mortar Board
National College Senior Honor Society – Service Chair   *March 2013 - 2014*

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICE
Founder & President, The Pennsylvania State University, Disability Studies Student Group
Member, The Pennsylvania State University, Best Buddies Club
Volunteer, Special Olympics
Volunteer, The Pennsylvania State University, Dance Marathon
Volunteer and Coach, CrossFit Kids
Volunteer, Mission Kristie Cares
Assistant Track Coach, Queen of the Universe Track and Field